

**TEENAGE TRANCE
AS A CHALLENGE FOR PASTORAL CARE
IN CAMEROON**

**Thesis submitted to the School of Mission and Theology (MHS)
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(M. Th.)**

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Table of contents

| | |
|--|----|
| Acknowledgement | 2 |
| 1. Introduction..... | 4 |
| 1.1 The aim and purpose of this study | 4 |
| 1.2 Motivation for and relevance of this study | 7 |
| 1.3 Presentation of Method. | 8 |
| 1.4 Delimitation of the Study Project. | 10 |
| 1.5 Presentation of Thesis structure. | 11 |
| 2. Trance as phenomenon, and Trance in Cameroon..... | 12 |
| 2.1 Definition of Trance and related Terms..... | 12 |
| 2.2 Trance in Cameroon:..... | 13 |
| 2.2.1 Cameroon brief survey in context:..... | 13 |
| 2.3 Teenager Trance in Cameroon: Background History | 18 |
| 2.3.1 Origin. | 18 |
| 2.3.2 Effects on victims and family members..... | 19 |
| 2.3.3 Effects on the Community. | 23 |
| 2.3.4 Personal pastoral experience in dealing with victims of trance and their families 25 | |
| 2.3.5 Summary | 32 |
| 3. Listening to the Stories of the Victimized and other Involved Persons..... | 32 |
| 3.1 The Victim’s Stories as Expressed in Qualitative Interviews..... | 33 |
| 3.2 Parents’ or Guardian’s Stories as Expressed in Qualitative Interviews..... | 41 |
| 3.3 School Teacher’s Stories as Expressed in Qualitative Interviews:..... | 45 |
| 3.4 The Experience of Religious Leaders Offering Care to the Victims and their Families as Expressed in Qualitative Interviews | 52 |
| 3.5 Summary | 59 |
| 4. Interpreting the Findings gathered in Qualitative Interviews | 61 |
| 4.1 Analysis of the Causes of teenage trance from data | 61 |
| 4.2 Analysis of symptoms or manifestations of teenage trance..... | 65 |
| 4.3 Analysis of remedies or healing processes. | 67 |
| 5. The Cameroon Experience in the light of Relevant Literature-Medical and Anthropological. | 78 |
| 6. Theological Perspectives on the Phenomenon..... | 80 |
| 6.1 The phenomenon in Theological Literature..... | 80 |
| 6.2 The phenomenon as a challenge to Pastoral Care in Cameroon..... | 81 |
| 6.3 Guidelines for pastoral care on future occurrence of teenage trance victims and their families in Cameroon..... | 82 |
| 7. Conclusion | 85 |
| FIELD MATERIAL..... | 87 |
| BIBLIOGRAGHY | 89 |

1. Introduction

Teenage Trance as a Challenge for Pastoral Care in Cameroon

1.1 *The aim and purpose of this study*

The present Master's Thesis project aims at describing and interpreting past experiences of teenage trance in Cameroon from 2005 to 2007 and the care which was offered by religious leaders to the victims and their parents or families. The aim is to get a better understanding of the phenomenon and how it works and based on this insight to develop relevant guidelines for the church's future handling for victims and their parents with pastoral care in the event of reoccurring instances of teenage trance.

In 2005 a number of cases of teenagers falling into trance were reported in Cameroon. This hit the headlines in some of Cameroon's Newspapers such as *La Nouvelle Expression, Mutation, Cameroon Tribune, and Cameroon One* and others. Although there were reports on such cases in several of the provinces: the occurrence in the Littoral, the Central and the Northern provinces were highest and most of the instances more than a hundred cases occurred among pupils in secondary and high schools in the Adamaoua province. As a pastor of the Evangelical Church of Cameroon and stationed in this province during 2002-2006, I encountered the phenomenon in my congregations and was able to offer some pastoral care to teenage victims in the congregation where I served. Also other local religious leaders (Catholics and Muslims) had similar experience as mine. In the culture of Cameroon it is natural for people, when sick, not only seek medical assistance from hospitals, and from traditional healers, but also seek care from their religious leaders, as we experienced in this case.

Looking back on this experience, I find a number of questions as being vital but will focus on the following four:

- (1) How can the church and the society get a better understanding of the phenomenon of teenage trance?
- (2) How did the teenage trance victims, their families, teachers and counsellors experience the trance victimization?
- (3) How might the church and I myself have offered a better pastoral care and assistance to the teenage victims and their families?

(4) How may the church prepare itself better for offering adequate help and pastoral care in similar cases in the future?

In order to answer the latter questions, one need first to establish a fuller picture of the teenage trance phenomenon, what happened, what kind of care was given and how the people involved experienced the totality of the situation, including the care that was offered. Since there are no official medical report available this can only be done if one is able to approach some of those who were involved when the instances of teenage trance occurred, that is some of the victims themselves, their parents, their school teachers in the schools where they were enrolled, and the religious leaders who offered them care. Thus I was necessary to gather information from the involved parties. I have therefore made use of qualitative interviews with selected representatives from each of the four groups of persons who were affected. These are: the victims themselves and their parents, the school teachers, and the religious leader who offered care. Such interviews are the main source of my investigations and have made it possible for me to gather information about what the informants experienced, how it affected them, what they felt at the time, and how they came to grip with the situation and the care they gave or were offered. The interviews were conducted according to an interview guide (enclosed), and an oral consent from the informants was sought prior to the interviews taking place. The identity of the informants or interviewees will remain anonymous except to the researcher himself. Their information will remain anonymous in the thesis in order to protect their privacy. These interviews were conducted in accordance with the “Ombudsman”¹ recommendation for privacy in research.

In order to be able to handle the project, the focus in this study and the choice of the informants had to be restricted to the area of Adamaoua Province the province which had most occurrences.

Having gained the necessary information through interviews, and thereby established relevant understanding of the phenomenon, my next step was to interpret the findings and draw some preliminary conclusions are to be used for reference when the answer to the fourth question is sought. In order to be able to suggest relevant and adequate guidelines for pastoral care, the phenomenon of

¹ Ombudsman refers to the Authority for securing privacy in Research of the Norwegian Social Science Data.

teenage trance must also be studied in the light of medical, cultural-anthropological and theological perspectives. Based on the insight revealed by such studies and the study of past experience, it is possible to propose guidelines for adequate pastoral care in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cameroon in the event of future occurrences of teenage trance.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cameroon is a church which is challenged in its apostolic healing ministry by the trance phenomenon. This topic is therefore relevant to the field of missiology because it studies Christian pastoral practices in a specific cultural context, analyses them and then relates them to overall theological and missiological thinking and trying to answer how the church in its apostolic ministry may effectively and adequately minister to people's needs.

Trance is a strange and recent occurrence among young girls in Cameroon's secondary and high schools. It is considered to be a threat among these young pupils. The teenage group of any nation, country or state is a vital part of its population strata. This age group comprises children from thirteen to nineteen years old. The youth population of any country is also considered to be fragile because they need to be tendered, moulded or trained to become responsible future adults. Psychologically, this is an age group in life when the physical, mental, spiritual developmental and growth activities are most intensified in young persons and that is why they are considered as being fragile. Thus for any family, church, or nation to have a secure and meaningful future growth it must give a careful attention to how it should handle its youth population. Hence any threat or danger by a disease, illness mystical or witchcraft practice on this youthful population will normally receive an urgent attention from its adult population. As stated, teenage trance in Cameroon is a recent phenomenon which is known to have targeted pupils in the secondary and high schools in the age range of thirteen to sixteen years in the Province of Adamaoua. This is also where I carried out my field and oral interviews research. "Trance"² or "tomber-tomber"³ is the name given to this strange occurrence in the young victims. It is difficult to find an appropriate name for this because it is neither a western

² Trance is the English translation of "transe" in French. The phenomenon is called transe in French because it shakes its victim to the nerves and makes or render her violent (not the trance as in the Bible).

³ Tomber-tomber" is a direct description in French on how the occurrence pulls its victim to the ground. Case P. informant.

phenomenon nor is it identified with a name in any Cameroonian cultural context or language.

Teenage trance is the name I have decided to use when referring to the strange occurrence, because my informants used the name and also because it occurred only among teenagers in Cameroon secondary and high schools.

1.2 Motivation for and relevance of this study

I personally encountered a few cases of victims who were in trance while serving as a pastor in my congregation and observed how it affected not only the victims and their families, but neighbours and friends of the victims also. As a pastor, I was called upon to assist in some of the instances which I saw as a challenge to pastoral care. I was motivated by the dire need of these victims and their families as well as my pastoral calling to seek for adequate measures to address the issue of trance in my congregation, church, schools and wider society Cameroon. The experience of other religious leaders who encountered trance, and how they responded to this when they were consulted by the victims or their family members, left a desire to investigate the phenomenon. The stories of the victims about the phenomenon, the general view of its nature and effects should not to be looked upon with indifference even though it has had no medical remedy so far. It is gradually becoming nagging and a worry to families and society at large. Teenage trance is seen by many native Cameroon people as a kind of mystical illness or occurrence, caused by evil forces around with the aim to over-power its victim and have total control of the person. Since there is no medical treatment to this, Christian parents of victims see this as a spiritual problem that can be solve by pastors and devoted Christians through prayers. Also it is evident that prayers from Christians have resulted in temporal or permanent treatment or healing of the victims. However, the way these prayers and assistance are given to the victims and their families vary. Also there are no guidelines on how this can be done in order to arrive at the desired results, that is to render adequate help to the victims and their families. So it is haphazardly done by the different persons involved in the praying sessions, and the prayers can be repeated several times and often with little expectation of the victim getting healed. There is an urgent need therefore to carefully study the phenomenon and how the victims receive assistance in various ways and synergise this into adequate guidelines for pastoral care. I was invited in some cases

to assist trance victims as a pastor by members of my congregation to pray for their affected children to receive healing and I was requested to carry out teaching on how to prevent future occurrences in Christian homes and families. This I have embraced as a personal challenge to theologically and systematically reflect upon in order that the victims and their families may receive more relevant care and assistance.

1.3 Presentation of Method.

The trance phenomenon among teenagers in Cameroon Secondary and High Schools is a great Challenge to pastoral care because pastors and other religious leaders are called upon to assist the victims who are usually not only Christians but also Muslims. Although most of the victims whom I interviewed were Christians, the occurrence is reported to be mostly common among Muslim teenagers. In Cameroon Secondary and High Schools, both Christians and Muslims sit at the same desks or chairs and study the same subjects in the same classrooms. The schools offer a common meeting ground and an arena for sports activities for both Christians and Muslims pupils to interact as citizens of one nation and with a goal to acquire education. This is the first place where the phenomenon is said to have begun its attack on its first victims. I therefore identified this as a relevant area for me to carry out my field research, since there I had the opportunity of meeting with two categories of informants, the school pupils who were victims, and the school teachers who were eye witnesses of their pupils falling into trance. They saw the difficulties they faced and their subsequent reaction to the situation. The scene shifted to the victims' parents since they were incidentally brought to them either directly from the school or from the hospitals, where they were carried in search for medical assistance. When they got home their parents or guardians often took them to their religious leaders to seek for healing. Observing the various actions and interaction movements, I decided to use qualitative interviews as my main method for carrying out research since this was the only means by which I could secure relevant and accurate information. In the light of my theological knowledge I also wished to carry out some reflections on the subject of teenage trance based on the collection of data. Therefore I made use of an interview guide with semi open ended questions for my field research work. The resulting information from the interviews would enable me to describe,

interpret and analyse the phenomenon. And my thesis focuses on the interpretation of findings gathered in the qualitative interviews. The interpretation of the data material has been done according to the hermeneutic phenomenological methodology”⁴

The interpretation of the phenomenon is being carried out at three different “levels and contexts”⁵: (1) the informants’ self understanding, (2) a critical common-sense understanding (3) and a theoretical understanding. I have presented the informants’ point of view about the phenomenon as objectively as possible while trying to focus on his/her intended meaning. To do so I have taken special care during the collection of data. I also replayed some of the information of my informants so as to confirm that the information I give is authentically reflecting what he/she meant to say. Most interviewees signed the interview guided questionnaires to attest that what they have said and what has been recorded in my recorder were exactly what they meant to say. It is obvious that informants in the same category answering the same guided questionnaire gave different answers. These variations may bring in disagreement only as far as they experienced the phenomenon differently, but nevertheless contribute to the main themes and subject. But it is also used as a basis for proposing a guideline for pastoral care for trance victims and their families in the event of future occurrence. There is little or no knowledge about this phenomenon of trance existence in Cameroon before the year 2000. Therefore I was seeking new information from my informants so as to understand and lay a foundation for others to continue further systematic, theological, and practical theological reflections on teenage trance. The present lack of written sources about teenage trance additionally challenged me to reflect theologically on how pastoral care may best be rendered to such victims and their families. As an African pastor, I am aware of witchcraft and evil practices that are believed to take place in the society and community of Christians. The power encounter between the super- natural forces and the Holy Spirit of God is said to be an encounter between the forces of darkness versus that of light in an individual. It is therefore a combination of theological knowledge of experience

⁴ Hermeneutic-phenomenological methodology is a phenomenological method combined with hermeneutics (an art of interpretation and understanding) is used to describe people’s lived experiences or phenomena. Hans Austnaberg (2008:29) citing Hummelvoll and Barbosa da Silva (1998:262)

⁵ Hans Austnaberg in *Shepherds and Demons* 2008:31 distinguished and explained three levels and contexts of interpretation.

observing teenage trance, my field research data, and theologically related literature as well as the Bible which I will use in my attempt to propose adequate guidelines for pastoral care for teenage trance in Cameroon.

1.4 Delimitation of the Study Project.

My theological knowledge and knowledge in other cross disciplines are limited. I am not able to give a full medical explanation or analysis since there is no satisfactory medical diagnosis and name for this phenomenon. I would rather leave this area of lack of medical research for the people of health sciences to do. I cannot also fully discuss this phenomenon in the area of social anthropology so that too, I leave for the social anthropologist to do their research on. Also I had to carry out field research through qualitative interviews with a limited number of informants. This means that it is impossible to draw general conclusions based on my interview. At most one may be able to identify some common tendencies in the interview material. This I will of course look for and be aware of. Trance is a recent phenomenon with a major focus on teenagers. This has been my area of concern to describe how it occurs, affects its victims, friends and family members, what were the appropriate measures taken to assist the victims and how these measures may be ameliorated to assist the victims in a future occurrence. My field research was limited to four categories of informants, thus: The victims, who were mainly young girls of age between thirteen to sixteen years, their parents, their school teachers, and the religious leaders that were consulted during the trance.

This research work covers only one Province out of the Ten Provinces of Cameroon. The Adamoua province which I carried out my field research is where I have worked for the past six years and it is noted for the prevalence of this phenomenon in the Secondary and high Schools. All interviews and questions guide were carried out in the French language. This meant that, I had to translate all questionnaires from English into French in order to carry out the interviews and later translate and transcribe the information gathered in the data into English which we now have as the final document of my Thesis. I experienced lots of difficulties during the translation and transcription of the data material because I neither a linguist nor a translator. So there may be some shortcomings that I might

have over looked as a result of my limitation in both the English and the French languages which are my second and third language respectively.

1.5 Presentation of Thesis structure.

Chapter one: This chapter presents the aim and description of the project. Four important questions have been raised to indicate the principal area of focus which led me to go in for field research and the collection of data which served as the main sources of information and material for the thesis.

I also state the reason for the choice of this title, my choice of informants and research method. It was necessary to state the area covered by this research project which I have well stated in the delimitation. I could not cover all the provinces of Cameroon where trance occurred first because the method of research is qualitative and not quantitative and secondly, my training and knowledge is mainly theological. I also present the definitions of trance and terms related to trance.

Chapter two: I here present the historical background of trance in general and how it all started and where it was first experienced according to information that I gathered from my field research and other recent sources from newspapers reports. It presents also the effect of trance on its victims, their family members and the community. I also write about my personal experience on teenage trance when I was serving as a pastor.

Chapter three: This chapter constitutes all the stories about trance from four categories of informants that I interviewed. This forms the core of the empirical material about the phenomenon. It also provides the reader with answers to the second question, namely how the informants experienced the trance victimization.

Chapter four: This chapter is mainly interpretation of findings. As already stated in chapter 1.3 the interpretation followed the hermeneutical phenomenological methodology.

Chapter five: Chapter five brings in relevant literature which may assist in understanding the phenomenon of trance in Cameroon especially medical and anthropological perspectives.

In chapter six, I will make some comparison between trance in the bible and the trance experienced by the victims in Cameroon. These two cultural contexts of

trance have furnished me with a new way of understanding the phenomenon in Cameroon and inspired me to come up with a better interpretation. I reflect on the various interpretations given and the measures taken to combat trance by the different religious leaders in Cameroon. My personal experience about the phenomenon, my theological understanding and accounts from my field work data have all contributed as sources that have enabled me to write out some guidelines for pastoral care on teenage trance in Cameroon.

Chapter seven: This chapter serves as the concluding chapter, presenting the main findings of my research and their implications.

2. Trance as phenomenon, and Trance in Cameroon

It is important to introduce this thesis topic with some of the vocabularies that will be used to describe the phenomenon as it occurred to the victims and as they saw it happen and understood it. Therefore I have searched for words that are as close to the description of the phenomenon as possible, so as to vividly paint pictures that enable the reader to understand how it occurred in the life of the victims. I do not, however, take for granted that these words will be easily understood by my readers. So I see the need to seek for clear definitions of the terms I consider closest to describe the phenomenon. All the definitions of the terms cited above have been taken from *Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary of the English Language Unabridged*.

2.1 Definition of Trance and related Terms

“Trance”⁶ is defined in Webster’s Dictionary as: (1) a state resembling sleep in which consciousness may remain although voluntary movement is lost as in catalepsy or hypnosis. (2) A condition of great mental concentration or abstraction, especially one induced by religious fervour or mysticism.(3) A condition in which a spiritualist medium allegedly loses consciousness and passes under the control of some external force as for the suppose transmission of communication from the dead during a “séance”⁷ Other related terms are as follows:

⁶ Webster’s New Twentieth Century Dictionary of the English Language Unabridged, 1978: p. 1937.

⁷ Ibid Séance: meeting to speak with the dead (a meeting at which a spiritualist attempts to receive communications from the spirit of the dead)

(1) “Coma”⁸ is defined as a state of deep and prolonged unconsciousness often caused by injury or disease.

(2) “Faint”⁹ is defined as: (a) weak, feeble, languid, exhausted, and inclined to swoon as faint with fatigue, hunger or thirst. (b) Dejected, depressed, dispirited, unenergetic, timid, irresolute, obscure, half hearted, dim, pale faded, and inconspicuous.

(3) “Stupor”¹⁰ (a) A state in which the mind and sense are dulled, great diminution or suspension of sensibility as of the use of narcotic, and numbness. (b) Intellectual insensibility moral or mental dullness or apathy.

(4) “Hypnosis”¹¹ A sleep like condition, psychically induced usually by another person in which the subject loses consciousness but responds with certain limitations with the suggestions of the hypnotist.

(5) “Trauma”¹² (a) Trauma in medicine is an injury or wound violently produced the condition or neurosis resulting from this. (b) Psychiatry relate trauma to an emotional experience or shock which has a lasting psychic effect.

2.2 Trance in Cameroon:

Before I speak about the phenomenon of trance in Cameroon, I will give a brief presentation and history of Cameroon in Africa in order that; the reader may become familiar with the country in which the phenomenon is being experienced.

2.2.1 Cameroon brief survey in context:

An overview of Cameroon will comprise its location and boundaries, surface area and population, demography, history, major religions and culture.

Location and boundaries

Cameroon is located at the armpit and in the central and west of Africa, the Bight of Bonny, part of the Gulf of Guinea and the Atlantic Ocean, Cameroon share

⁸Ibid p. 360.

⁹ Ibid p. 657.

¹⁰ Webster’s Twentieth Century Dictionary of the English Language Unabridged, 1978 p.1809.

¹¹ Ibid p. 895.

¹² Ibid p. 1942.

boundaries in the west with Nigeria, north-east with Chad, east with the Central Africa Republic and to the south with Equatorial Guinea, Gabon and the Republic of Congo. Tourist literature describe Cameroon as Africa in “miniature”¹³

Area and population

Cameroon has a population estimate of about 18,060,382 people with over two hundred ethnic groups inhabiting an estimated land surface of about 475, 442/sq-km and a population density of 37 people per square kilometre.

Brief history and political overview of Cameroon

Early inhabitants of the territory included the Soa civilization around Lake Chad and the Baka hunters in the south eastern rainforest. Fulani soldiers founded the Adamawa Emirates in the north in the nineteenth century and various ethnic groups of the west and northwest established powerful chiefdoms and fondoms. Portuguese explorers reached the coast in the 15th century and named the area “Rio dos Came roes” meaning river of prawns¹⁴. Cameroon became a German colony in 1884. After world war one, the territory was divided between France and Britain as League of Nations mandates. The Union des Population du Cameroun political party advocated for independence but was outlawed in 1950s. It waged war on French and Cameroonian forces until 1971. In 1960 French Cameroun became independent as the Republic of Cameroun under President Ahmadou Ahidjo. The southern part of British Cameroon merged with it in 1961 to form the Federal Republic of Cameroon. The country was named the United Republic of Cameroon in 1972 and the Republic of Cameroon in 1984.



The map of Cameroon with its ten provinces

is referred to as Africa in miniature due to it has all major climates and vegetations of the continent: (Wikipedia, 2017). <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/cameroon> The climate zones are found along the coast lines of Cameroon.

Cameroon is divided into large administrative units known as province(s) each province is further divided into smaller units called divisions, subdivisions and then districts. The head of state and government is called the president of the Republic of Cameroon. At the level of the provinces he is represented by governors, divisional officers and heads of districts. The capital of Cameroon is Yaounde. Large cities of Cameroon includes: Douala, Garoua, Bamenda, Bafussam, and Kumba.

Demography

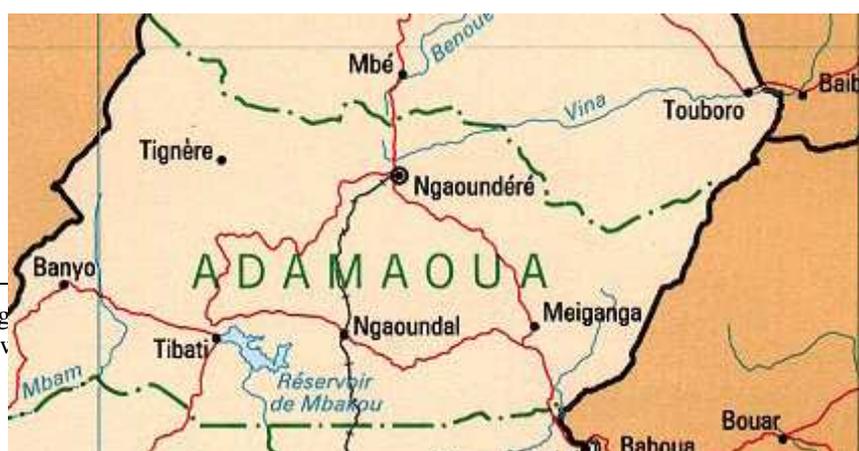
With an estimated population of 18.060382, over 41.2% are under 15 years and 96.7 under 65years. The population is principally young. Birth rates are estimated at 33.89 births per1000 people, while the death rate estimate is 13.47, life expectancy is 52.86years¹⁵.

Religion and culture

Cameroon has a high level of religious freedom and diversity. The northern people are predominantly Muslims, although some ethnic groups retain native animist belief and are called kirdi (pagan) by the Fulani.

I will like to briefly, and vividly present the religious situation in Ngaounde and the Adamoua province because it is the area of focus of teenage trance in my thesis.

Map of the Adamaoua Province



¹⁵ Back g
Htt://en.v

2007, p. 9).

Ngaoundere is the administrative headquarter of the Adamoua Province and one of the most Muslim populated cities in Cameroon. Islam is the first foreign religion that entered the province through migration from Yola-Nigeria in about 15-16th century¹⁶. Many Muslims in the province are mainly traders and transporters, professions that eased the rapid spread of Islam in all the villages in the province as well as to the other provinces of Cameroon. Nevertheless the recent rapid growth of multi-denominational churches in the province and the increase of Christian migrant population from the southern part of Cameroon seem to compete with the recent population estimated at 200,000 inhabitants (2005 estimate) in the city of Ngaoundere. About 60% of this population is Muslim¹⁷ and most are rather pragmatist with regard to religion observance. The 30% Christian population is of various denominations but the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cameroon and the Roman Catholic Church are the two dominant Christian churches in the city. However the recent upward movement of other Protestant Churches such as the Presbyterians, the Baptists, the Evangelical church of Cameroon and the Pentecostal churches from the southern provinces to the Adamaoua is gradually reducing the 10% population of African Traditional Religion or animist in the city. This is may be due to increased evangelization by the churches. Perhaps this recent Christians influx it is posing a threat to the traditional Muslim population. The city of Ngaoundere is like drown with large mosques with open loud speakers that seem to be in an arena of sound competition. Although the last 10 years has seen a radicalization of Islam in the city due to the influence of radical Muslims from the Islamic neighbouring State of Yola in Nigeria, there have traditionally been fewer problems between the various

¹⁶ Nyiwe Thomas, *La strategie missionnaire de l'glise face aux traditions musulmanes dans l'Adamoua*, (1988) 9.

¹⁷ [Htt://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cameroon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cameroon).

religions. This is due to the peace loving nature of Cameroonians even among radical Muslims. It is a very common tradition for either a Christian or a Muslim religious leader to invite each other in their religious occasions or ceremonies with mutual respect for the faith of each other.

The U.S Department of State claim that some Muslims discriminate against Christians and followers of traditional belief in the north. Southern ethnic groups predominantly follow Christian or animist beliefs or a syncretic combination of the two. People widely believe in witch-craft and the government outlaw such practices. Suspected witches are brought before the court for judgment.

Muslim centres and Christian churches of various denominations operate freely throughout the country. Approximately 40% of the population at least nominally Christian and 20% nominally Muslim, and 40% practice traditional indigenous religious beliefs. The Christian population is divided approximately equally between the Catholic and Protestant denomination. Christians are concentrated chiefly in the south and western province and Muslims reside in large number in every provincial city. Large cities have significant population of both groups with mosques and churches located near each other. The two Anglophone provinces of the northwest and south west regions are largely protestant and the Francophone province of the south and western regions are largely Catholics. In the northern provinces the locally dominant Fulani (peuhl) ethnic group is largely Muslim but the overall population is fairly mix between Muslim, Christians and animist, each of these often like living in its own community. The Bamaum ethnic group of the west province is principally Muslim. Traditional indigenous religious beliefs are practiced in rural areas throughout the country but are rarely practiced publicly in the cities. This is because many indigenous groups are intrinsically local in character. Missionary groups are present throughout the country. The constitution provides for freedom of religion and the government generally respect this right in practice. The government at all levels sought to protect this right in full and does not tolerate its abuse by government or by private actor. There is no official state religion¹⁸

¹⁸ United States Department of State Accessed 6th April 2007. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cameroon>

2.3 Teenager Trance in Cameroon: Background History

Trance among teenagers in Cameroon's secondary and high schools began in what one of my informants speaking in French said "annodine"¹⁹ that is, it began in such a simple and remote way that one could simply dismiss or neglect it as not being considerably harmful and of no importance to be seriously talked about.

2.3.1 Origin.

The origin of trance among teenagers in Cameroon Secondary and high schools can be dealt with at two levels. (1) When and where the phenomenon started or began. (2) The causes of the phenomenon.

The origin of trance: The origin of trance is a mystery. During my research of tracing the origin of trance, most of the people I interviewed, pointed an accusing finger to individuals, religious and sect groups as being the cause of the malaise aimed at harming the teenagers. A few cases attributed the cause to non respect of traditional rites by these youths but their explanations did not identify which traditional rites. In one instance, it was said to be the non respect of traditional sacred ground by youths, and in another it was the slaughter of a pig and eating pork on a forbidden mountain. Some informants attributed it to witchcraft and sorcery practices on youths. The public opinion and the newspaper report of November 22nd 2005-in the "Cameroon Tribune" and "Mutation"²⁰ said that the causes of trance were derived from-malaria fever, or hungry pupils who did not eat in the morning, asthma and dihypoglycemia. The report said a school teacher shied away from attribution of the cause to witchcraft and sorcery and instead snubbed at those who held this opinion as an old African mentality. Some of the victims in the papers' report accused other pupils, their teachers or their school authorities for being the cause of their malaise. One medical personnel whose identity remains disclosed said that in his emergency ward at the hospital, there was no significant clinical diagnosis of real illness from the victims of trance. Pastors, priests and Christians recognized the existence of various demonic practices on people as found in the Bible of which trance is only one type that manifests itself among teenagers. The target is young girls in secondary and high schools in Cameroon.

Early occurrence of the phenomenon was reported in 1995 at Lycee de Santchou Douala Littoral Province. Four years later some pupils in Lycee de Bertoua suffered

¹⁹ School teacher informant interviewed on May 28th 2007.

²⁰ Cameroon's major newspapers report on the phenomenon of trance in secondary and high schools.

from trance with similar attacks at Matomb secondary high school in Douala 2000. In 2003 it moved to the Government Technical high school Mora (CETIC)²¹ The phenomenon did not attract newspaper reports until it began to spread and be noticed with similar symptoms and occurrence as it gained ground in Lycee d'Akwa, Ngaoundere and other schools and provinces in 2005. Secondary and high schools pupils experienced trance, and in each case the victims who were taken to the hospitals were either given drips or laid on the floor or bed and were allowed to sleep until they recovered consciousness. Although sporadic incidents of trance occurred all over secondary and high schools throughout Cameroon, most cases were registered in schools in the following provinces:

1. Littoral province: Lycee d'Akwa-nord, Mbanga, CETIF d'Akwa, College Libermann de Douala, College Maturete, Lycee Technique de Douala Koumassi etc.
2. Central Province: Lycee Bilingue de Yaounde (Essos)
3. Adamaoua province: Lycee Classique-Ngaoundere, College de la Vina N'dere, College Mazenod, College Protestant and College Islamique Cheik Amhdam de Naoundere, CES de Meiganga etc.
4. Far north province: Lycee classique de Mora and CETIC de Mora.
5. Western province: Lycee de Foumban
6. Eastern province: Lycee de Bertoua.

I found it particularly difficult to collect accurate information with regards to the exact dates and places where teenage trance in Cameroon secondary and high schools originated. Recent information and articles published on the website in January and February 2008 enabled me to understand earlier dates than the ones I was able to record in my qualitative interview research data.

2.3.2 Effects on victims and family members

Trance among teenagers in Cameroon secondary and high schools has a wide range effect, not only on the victims and their family members, but on the entire population as whole. Although it is common among teenage girls, a few boys that were victims of trance never survived the attack. They can only be remembered as having passed into the world of the invisible or are of late. One of my informants

²¹ <http://centralepanafri.onlcfri/index.php?page=21>

herself a victim of trance told me she saw two of her school mates in the world of the spirits cultivating yams.²² It is known that these pupils she is referring to were dead. The effect of trance therefore has serious consequences on the victims and the society at large. The following effects have been registered among the victims of the phenomenon.

(1) *Interruption of pupil's studies.* The teenagers who are the target of trance are mostly students in their second or third year at the secondary school. Since they experience trance attack while they are carrying out physical education activities outside of the classroom or when they are studying in the class, these activities often come to a halt abruptly. The pupils are taken to the hospitals where they are expected to receive medical attention. Most often when they recover from this they are confused and feel embarrassed by the occurrence of trance so they refuse to return to the school where they experienced trance.

(2) *The violent nature of the attack on victims.* The horrible appearance of the people, they see in their state of trance is frightful, traumatizes and provokes the teenagers to run and seek for a place of refuge. They tremble in fear and are afraid of seeing unusual people that is, without heads dressed in red robes and forcing them to work tasks that they are not used to. The period before the trance ceases its victims is the time the victims undergo a kind of invisible transformation into the invisible world. The pupils suffering from trance are temporarily asked to be withdrawn from school until they have received treatment and cured. The school authorities and parents of trance victims are confused and do not know where to trace the origin of trance. When the school authorities ask parents of trance victims to withdraw their children from school and instruct them that they can only be readmitted after they have been fully treated, it seems as if they do not want to share the blame of having caused the trance. The parents of trance victims feel that their children left their homes for school healthy and that their children had the experience of trance at school. They therefore would want the school teachers to account for the cause of their children falling into trance.²³ This gives room for mix feelings on both sides and permits both sides to accuse each other. As already said before there is no satisfactory explanation of the causes and cure of trance on teenagers. This has added further confusion on how to handle victims

²² Trance Victim's story when I was counselling her as her pastor in 2005.

²³ The first school Teacher's story interviewed 5th July 2007.

of trance. It is believed that it is contagious and so it is easy to discriminate trance victims at school, fearing that they may contaminate the other pupils if they sit together in the same desks and share the same tables at school with non victims. These general feelings have left the trance victims more confused feeling ashamed to continue schooling, especially in the north of Cameroon where female education is not very much encouraged. The thought of going back to school and having the experience of trance scares the pupils and discourage parents to send their children to school.

(3) *The victims are sad to know that they were victims of trance.* The thought of what they saw, the pains and scars left on the body of some of the victims who received beaten from the strange and frightful spirits make them shiver with fear and tremble. Thus they would rather prefer to remain at home without schooling than to go to school and be a victim of such undesired experience. Thus trance is a scaring phenomenon and need to be taken seriously to seek for appropriate means of eradicating the phenomenon among youths.

(4) *The trance victims who return to school after recovery from the malaise need to work extremely hard to catch-up with the other pupils who have been regular in class.* Most often, the lectures and lessons they have missed create a big gap and it is difficult to catch up with their class programmes. Only a few pupils succeed in their promotion exams. The point here is not because the students are academically weak or did not work hard, but because trance caused them to be away from class lectures and lessons so they failed the exams. Failing in exams discourages the pupils to continue schooling because repeating a class disrupt the pupils' academic pursuit and repeating exams is like a waste of ones time, money and energy.

(5) *One of the trance victims I interviewed is believed to be mad. The father acknowledged that he is sure his daughter's madness has been caused by trance.*²⁴

²⁴ The fourth parent's story I interviewed on the 8th of July 2008.

(6) Trance killed two teenage boys.

Another trance victim whom I interviewed informed me of the two boys who fell into trance on the same day with her, none survived but that during trance she saw these two boys busy cultivating a large farm land in the land and world of the spirits.²⁵

(7) Trance victims require to be given special observation and attention. This is in order that trance may not cause them to harm themselves with sharp and dangerous objects such as knives, machetes, sticks or fall in dangerous places of fire or water.

(8) Some trance victims have sustained injuries during trance. They have fallen on hard object such as stones and were wounded.

(9) Social and psychological embarrassment. After recovery, the victims said they felt embarrassed by the experience of falling into trance and they have often asked themselves this question “why me and not someone else?”²⁶ They had wished it did not happen to them because they feel socially inferior to other pupils in school.

(10) Trance victims feel stigmatized at school. Other pupils pointed fingers at them to inform others that they were trance victims and sometimes they even lost contact with their former friends who feared associating with them since they did not want to be victims of trance. Some trance victims informed me that some of their classmates and friends have distanced themselves away from them even though they no longer suffer from trance and that their mates and friends say that they are not sure it is all over so as to never occur again.²⁷

(11) The general or public opinion is that of uncertainty and whether trance will never manifest itself again on its former but now recovered victims.

²⁵ Trance victim I interviewed during counseling in 2005.

²⁶ The first trance victim's story, interviewed 5th of July 2005.

²⁷ Ibid.

(12) *Strengthened Christian's faith.* The victims of trance who were able to seek assistance from priests and pastors of churches have become more committed in their Christian faith. And some who were formerly non-Christians have adhered to the faith because they were able to receive healing through prayers. Trance has also led a non-negligible number of people to denounce their former faiths and become Christians. Although these characteristics obviously have effects on the community also I will now turn my attention particularly to the community aspect.

2.3.3 Effects on the Community.

(1) *The phenomenon of trance has not only affected teenagers alone, it has caused various communities to panic and fear.* This has even resulted into violence and social disorder in some places where teenage trance has frequently occurred. Trance has caused conflicts in homes between parents of victims of trance. Some parents whose children or child is victims of trance have divided opinion on whether they should take their child to a traditional witch doctor or to a pastor or priest of a church. They know that the hospitals have offered no remedy to the victims of trance.²⁸ Here, the faith of parents of teenage trance victims has come into play or test. Some have given up their traditional beliefs in the powers of witch-doctors and their potions or herbs claiming to heal. And because they could not receive permanent help from such practitioners they now consider changing their belief.²⁹ Some parents who believe in traditional witch doctors and their treatment have spent large sums of money for their child's treatment but this has always resulted in conflicts with relatives that have been accused them of being the cause of trance on the victims. Most often, the victims are never healed and the conflict continues to grow and divide the family kinship. They quarrel and sometimes fight and continue to accuse and blame each other for their misunderstanding. When witch doctors cause such confusion and division in a family, they really seem not to mind if the parties fight or kill each other. Their aim is to make money for their own families and feed themselves well.

(2) *Trance has caused violence in some schools.* This has resulted in youths or pupils become angry and either break the windows, tables and chairs in the schools where

²⁸ The third parent's story interviewed on the 11th July 2007.

²⁹ The fourth parent's story interview conducted on the 8th of July 2008.

trance is frequent. There were news papers reports³⁰ about proprietors of secondary schools whose car and school were set aflame by angry school pupils and a crowd. They accused the proprietor of witchcraft practice when trance occurred in his school. His home was threatened to be burnt had there not been quick intervention of the forces of law and order and of the police. The proprietor was forced to close up the school whose building was partially or completely reduced into ashes. This was a great loss in property and in addition the students lost an entire academic year. This was also a loss to the government as whole because of the chain connectivity between the state economy and individual enterprises that play an important and a non negligible role in the entire state economy. Trance is not only a menace to school pupils but it has spread its effect to a wider part of people of different sex and age range.

(3) Both school teachers and school administrators have experienced the bad effects of trance in their schools when the pupils portrayed poor academic performance as a result of trance.

(4) Sometimes parents of trance victims have accused the school teachers or school staff as responsible for the cause of their children falling into trance. Most often the accused have been threatened to be lynched by angry parents and family members of a trance victim. The result is that, the accused has to be under police protection as long as possible until they are transferred to work in another region far from his former city.

(5) Undue transfers. Undue transfers of teachers or school staff has a repercussion in the school system because the staff or teacher is not duly replaced and so the school faces the problem of lack of teacher(s) in a certain discipline, which will in turn affect the students who have to study that discipline all alone if they are to pass their official exams or the school suffers from incomplete staff members which also hinders the smooth running of the school.

³⁰ <http://prisma.canalblog.com/archives/200.../20/2008> The Newspaper “Prisma International” reported on the reaction from a crowd against trance occurrence in one private secondary school.

(6) *The effect of trance has ruined some families.* Some families have been ruined because they have spent huge sums of money to get treatment for their trance victim children. Sometimes the money is spent on traditional doctors who have never provided any permanent treatment for the victims and this has further brought frustration for families.

2.3.4 Personal pastoral experience in dealing with victims of trance and their families.

This account consists of what I saw and did as a pastor to assist the victims of trance in my congregation and beyond. It was on these occasions I came in contact and had a personal encounter with the victims at the time they were in trance and they shared with me their experience of being in trance after they had recovered from the malaise. Although not all of those that I assisted during their state in trance shared their experiences with me, I was fortunate to have two victims who were willing to share their strange experience and story of trance with me. These two and their parents were members of my congregation.

I had just been recently transferred as the director of one of our church district with about twenty two small congregations with an average attendance of about forty-five Christians every Sunday service. The congregation where I served as a regular pastor was the mother congregation of the district and was situated in the administrative head-quarter of one of the divisions in Adamoua province. It was as if the phenomenon of trance was waiting for my transfer in that town. The week I entered the town to take service in the church, I was confronted by the news of trance among youths in secondary school by members of my congregation. In my heart I said I hoped it will not embarrass me since I have no idea of what it was all about, and I wished that non of my member will ever be a victim that may require my assistance. This was because I felt I was afraid and the news scared me as a new pastor of that congregation. I thought I should have been transferred elsewhere. However, I could not do otherwise but to imagine myself in the situation where the members were happy to have a new pastor and have anxiously been waiting for me to come and take up duty. Now that their hope was met they wasted no time to tell me what they considered as a spiritual menace to their children at school, and which had affected many homes and families in the town. What could I know about trance that I in order to be of help to the victims and their families? This was my first question I asked God.

I had no answer anywhere but I thought the answer must come from God and perhaps it is blowing in the wind. I needed a silent moment to listen to the winds and to hear it in a small still voice. Then I thought I should not frustrate myself before the moment came, and I said whenever that will be I will pour out my weakness to the Lord and ask Him to do His will. If he would want to carry the shame of not being able to heal the victim of trance before an anxious family waiting to see miracles happen, I said “who am I to put pressure on God before He does his work?” After two weeks in that town I was told by the evangelist of my congregation that some school pupils fell into trance and that one school teacher was accused by the trance victim’s parent for practicing evil on their children. As a religious leader, the evangelist was expecting me to come out with a quick response to this. He was surprised when I turned and asked him, what he thought we could do about the situation before it spread to youths in the church. He said perhaps we have to conduct some prayers with the pupils at school. This was agreed between us, and the next day I went to take contact with the school authorities, asking them to permit us to conduct prayers with the Christians youths at the school premises. Then that same day I met with the priest of the Catholic Church and asked him if he would like to join us in organising a combined sessions of prayers at the school. We all agreed on the date and later informed the school authorities who also informed the students and informed us on the appropriate time to come for the prayer. However I did not assist in the prayer session because I had to attend another Church meeting at the regional level for all district directors. So I missed this occasion to pray for trance victims but I took part in its partial preparation with the evangelist, who represented us to lead our church delegation for the prayer session. When I returned from the regional meeting, the evangelist gave me a feedback on how the prayers were done and we all were happy to have performed that service and asking God to protect the school children from trance and all other malaise.

Cameroon by its constitution is a secular state with multi-regions and freedom of belief. The town to where I was transferred as a church district director is principally dominated by Islam. It was therefore a Muslim population that was the majority of citizens. So when they learnt that Christian leaders had led prayers to protect the pupils from trace attacks, they also decided to carry out some Muslim rites and prayers in the school. The lamido of that town (that is the traditional ruler in a Muslim

community) sent some marabouts³¹ to the school to carry out divinations in the school premises and later organise prayer rites and sacrificed a cow and shared the meat to every person who attended and believed in the rite to eat. The marabouts kept the result of their divination a secret and only asked that a cow should be slaughtered to appease the agents of the trance malaise among the youths. I observed that from the time the church carried out the prayers in that school, trance did not occur for about a period of six weeks. But after the Muslims rites of sacrifice and prayers, trance resurfaced in the school within two weeks. This observations and challenges posed by the trance phenomenon partly contributed to inspire me to carry out this research work. When trance resurfaced in the school, it came with a greater force and attacked several teenage girls, as if it had been provoked by anger; it attacked two teenage boys who later died. Most trance victims are young girls at their puberty age. The only instance I have come across or heard of boys being victims of trance has been in this town and the boys never survived the attack. The fear of having trance victims in my congregation had disappear in me because I heard from a some Christians that trance victims can only recover from their malaise when prayers are effectively made. A Catholic Church priest who has been assisting some trance victims affirmed that it requires continuous prayers to keep the victims from falling into trance.

One night after a nice supper, I had gone to bed at about 10: pm. After about an hour of sleep, I heard a hard knock on my door. I asked who it was. One of my Church elders answered and said they needed me urgently to assist them in prayers since there was a case of trance in one of our Christians' home. They have been praying for this girl who fell in trance for the past twenty four hours to no avail. I woke up from bed and I cried "Oh God! This is a moment of challenge in your ministry and I cannot do anything by myself, except to obey and carry out your will. Please God I said in my heart, don't let me down in shame. I know that you are able to heal this child through the power of your Holy Spirit, lead me on to the scene". I asked the elder to go and call the church evangelist and catechist to come so that we could work together that night. After dressing up in my pastoral shirt, I put the robe in my bag to wear it only when I got close to the house where the child was lying on the floor. I selected one of my study Bible versions the NIV and got the church hymnal which was in French, and I and the evangelist selected some hymn of praise and worship about five of them." I

³¹ Marabouts are traditional Muslims teachers, diviners and healers in Cameroon.

personally selected two hymns of invitation to confessions of sin and forgiveness that I will sing alone in English since they do not know them. I also selected some hymns that summon Christian to a spiritual warfare such as. “Onward Christian soldiers marching as to war” and “Stand up stand up for Jesus” I felt these songs were good enough to frighten and lead to the defeat of an enemy in a spiritual warfare. To each of these groups of songs I assigned special prayers to be made after reading some selected texts from the Bible. So when I got to the scene where the trance victim was lying on the floor, I was full with courage and I think the Lord armed me with words of wisdom and his Spirit to lead the session. I can still recall and see the event in my mind’s eyes. We started with praise singing and worship songs, and after invocation of the presence of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, I led the opening prayers and read the first set of scriptural texts that we had selected. This also led us to confession asking for forgiveness of sin, and the evangelist led us in a prayer asking God to forgive us our sins. The first set of scriptural readings was from (Matthew 7:7, Rom 8:28-32). I carried out an exhortation of these texts duelling on Jesus’ teachings on asking, seeking and knocking at God’s door as well as the promises, hope and assurance Rom.8:18, 26-32. After the exhortation, there was about half a minute of silence as I observed the trance victim lying on the floor and breathing with a lot of difficulties, as though something obstructed her breath. Many onlookers, mainly Christians, and some family members, were afraid of the way she was breathing. I tried as much as possible to maintain a calm countenance and confidence in the procedures of the prayer session. I turned to the parents of the girl and asked them when the trance launched its attack on the child. I was briefly informed, and after another minute of silence, I turned and moved close to the trance victim and called her by her name three times without response. I turned to the evangelist to intone us a hymn that would lead us to carry out the first set of prayers of thanksgiving and adoration to God. We had already carried out prayers of confessions and forgiveness of sin to establish a direct communication line with God and the Lord Jesus so that our prayer would meet no obstruction on the line established in our prayers with God. It is an interesting experience to start prayers with confession of our sins and asking God to forgive us the sins we might have committed known and unknown, then thanking God for the gift of life, His abounding love and grace through his dear son and adoring God and the Lord Jesus for whom He is. After this set of prayers, I motioned a few selected Christians to form an inner

circle to surround the victim and the second set of hymns singing began followed by a second set of scriptural texts from Luke 4:33-35; 10:19, 8:28, 29-33. The message focus here was that of our right as Christians to claim the power and authority we have in Christ Jesus over demons. With this power and authority given to those that walk according to the will of God it is possible to boldly command the demons to come out of a medium they have taken possession of and by using Jesus name without fear, they (demons) fearfully obey not us, but the name of Jesus. It is necessary to make it clear to those that stood in prayers with me to get ready for a spiritual warfare and if there were some Christians that could not engage in such prayers they were told that they were free to leave the scene. So some left and went home. We now started praying; interceding on behalf of the victim and supplicating the power of the Holy Spirit to assist us and take total control of the situation and give healing to the trance victim. After these prayers we got into the last phase of prayers, first with the singing of hymns that led us into the spiritual battle and then we read from Eph.6:10-18. After a short exhortation from this text we sang another hymn to lead us into prayer. As I fixed my look on the trance victim lying on the floor, I observed that her manner of breathing has started changing as we continued to sing and pray. When I led every body into the Lords prayer, the girl whose eyes were closed before we began the session of prayers were now opened and she had retained her normal breathing rhythm but she could not speak out. When the prayers session ended, I called the trance victim by her name and she answered but was too tired to speak. All of us had spent a lot of energy and I felt exhausted. I asked the mother to give her some water to drink and food to eat. Since it was already about two o'clock in the morning, I thanked all those that assisted in the prayer session and asked them to go home and have a rest. I took the father of the trance victim aside and told him to ask his daughter after she had eaten to recount to him what she experienced while in trance and I also went home to have a rest aiming seeing them at day dawn. That was the first experience I had in my encounter with a trance victim while she was in a state of trance.

Part two of this encounter consists of the victim's story that is, her experiences while she was in a state of trance.

It followed that, the next morning, I paid a visit to the family of the trance victim. She had fully recovered and appeared to be in good health and sound mind. After a short

conversation with her parents, I asked her if she would willingly tell me all that she experienced when she was in the state of trance. She accepted and so I asked her to come at the church presbytery at 3 p.m. So when we met, the first question I asked her after a short prayer with her was, “what happened with you yesterday?” She said she fell into trance. “What is trance?” I asked. She said in French “la maladie de tomber-tomber” which means an illness that throws its victim several times or repeatedly on the ground. Some people use the French slang to mean that it throws several pupils (victims) on the ground at the same time and moment. I asked her what she saw and how the things she saw did look like, and I told her to narrate the full story to me. It was easy for her to simply recount everything she experienced but when she could only say a few things now and then I wasted no time to improvise new questions at each pause. This technique enabled me to gather sufficient information that is now useful for reproduction. She said she was lying in her bed in the room when suddenly she saw three people at the threshold of her door. They appeared to be wearing red gowns but she could not see their faces, because they had no heads, and so they were very frightful to her. They finally stepped forward in her room and began to pull her out of bed. She screamed to no avail and because nobody came to assist her, they succeeded to take her out of her room that day. This was the second time she has seen these strangers. The first time she saw them was in school after her physical-education (sports) practice when she went to drink some water by the school tap. These strange people chased her and led her to fall into trance. When she was taken out of her room she was strongly resisting and refused to go with them where they were taking her. So they decided to tie her hands, forcing her to walk along. And as she continued to resist them, they began to beat and torture her. They succeeded to take her out of the compound and led her to a road she could not recognise, and to what she imagined was a European city. They took her over a large and high bridge she had never seen before and threw her over it and into the river. She struggled hard to swim out of the river, and when she came to the river shore, she met again with the people who led her to a large farm land, where they asked her to cultivate the land together with two class-mates whom she met in the farm. These classmates she told me were already dead from the first trance occurrence in that school. These were the only cases of trance among teenage boys, and they never survived. She ended her narration by saying that she was in a different world and that she hated the experience. However she added that there is a Muslim boy whose presence is feared by these strange

people. And that whenever these people come to take her away, and as soon as they see this boy, they will run away. So she has asked her parents to call this boy to always be by her side in order to keep these strange people away. This boy accidentally is their neighbour at home and a senior student in her school. At the time I was interviewing her, the boy was lingering outside, waiting for her to lead her home after the interview. Inquiring to know how and why this boy's presence beside the girl could be scaring to these people considered to be demons, I realised the deep affection and love existing between them to the point that, the boy had already promised to marry this little teenage girl. So the trance phenomenon has worked a long way to cement their love relationship Vis a Vis their parents giving the boy an open and public protective role in their relationship, which hitherto was a hidden affair. This was a very embarrassing part of the story revealed to the parents of the victim by the event of the trance. The girl's parents were faced with two choices to make. (1) To invite the boy to constantly be with their daughter, even at night in order to keep the people away and avoid their daughter from falling into trance or, (2) To send the boy away from their daughter and permit the trance agents to visit their daughter and cause her to fall into trance. In Christian ethics when one is faced with the difficulty of making a choice from two evils, and you are obliged to choose one, you have to weigh both to see which evil is the lesser. This was the kind of situation they were facing. Their daughter is a Christian and only fourteen years old, and the boy is a Muslim and twenty years old, and both are students. Before the prayers sessions were carried out for this trance victim, the boy had been assisting the girl at home each time she saw the trance agents coming to take her away. When she noticed the demons' presence, she immediately asked that the parents must bring that boy to sit beside her to keep these demons away. I tried to find out from the boy if he was wearing any charm that kept these demons away, but he said no and that he was also surprised that his presence kept the trance agents away. But he also said that his love for the girl urged him to do every thing in order to help the girl and the family come out of the situation and therefore insist on marrying the girl even though he was still a student. They all acknowledge that the prayers that were carried out that day have permanently sent away the trance agents from visiting the former victim. But the victims' parents were afraid to ask the boy now to leave their daughter. They still nursed a fear that the people may eventually come back and who knows if they might even kill their daughter. When I went for my research on this project, the boy was still

a protégé of the girl, even though there had been no sign of the trance agents in that house and no new reports of trance victims in that school.

2.3.5 Summary

In a nut shell the causes of trance phenomenon remain a mystery and have no medical treatment or cure as of now. The causes are therefore mystically attributed to witch craft and magical practices also identified as evil and demonic. The unusual people and circumstances that the trance victims find themselves among, these invisible people and the landscape they see and live with in their trance state, can only be referred to and described as a mystical world of demons and evil spirits. The consequences and effects of trance stretches from the victims to their families and then covers a cross section of the community where it occurred, affecting the entire society. The pains inflicted on the victims, the confusion it brings in the family, the costs, the accusation and counter accusations on friends and family members, and the fears and panic the population have on some occasions led to public disorder and violence with destruction of properties and evil plans of killing suspected and accused individuals through public mob action. This has resulted in a chain effect whereby government workers and officers have asked for unplanned transfers and when the government has transferred many people without any plan for transfers. This has also resulted in instability both in the public and private service sectors. Such a wide range effect is of course undesirable to any community that loves peace and stability for the betterment of human life and progress.

3. Listening to the Stories of the Victimized and other Involved Persons.

In the following I will proceed to recounting the stories of the victims of trance, and of the various categories of persons interviewed during my research. It gives the content of what they said what they did and their understandings of the phenomenon of trance among teenagers.

During my data collection, I interviewed ten trance victims, who are generally referred to here as school pupils or students. I will present the stories of seven of them who were able to give reasonable information about their experience of

trance for a better understanding of the phenomenon. Then I will include the stories from five parents or guidance of trance victims, five school teachers in schools where trance occurred and five religious leaders who assisted some trance victims and their families. Totally twenty-five people interviewed for this qualitative interview data collection.

3.1 The Victim's Stories as Expressed in Qualitative Interviews.

These are school pupils who suffered directly from trance attack and have lived to experience the phenomenon and its effects either temporarily or during a long term occurrence. Their stories were very vividly narrated as they revealed through their narration the invisible people, and the terrain they saw, and traversed, and the work they did or refused to do for their “bosses” or “patrons/matrons”. They tell of being transported into a different landscape and world through trance.

It should be noted again here that none of my informants will ever be identified by his or her name but by a general name such as school pupils or trance victim(s) or simply as student(s) as in case one. And they are referred to also as first victim, second victim and so on. I first give an account of the stories of my trance victim informants.

The first victim's³² story

It was one Wednesday morning at about eleven o'clock they have just resumed classes after their ten o'clock short break. She added “it wasn't an illness as such” it began with a Muslim girl in form two and later spread to the Christian girls of that class. While she was standing on the veranda of form two with her Muslim class mate, suddenly her classmate fell on the ground. Since she was having this informant's school bags with her she went to collect it from her and that is when she also fell. Asked what made her to fall, she said some strange and unidentified people pull her down and closed her mouth to prevent her from shouting. She found herself in darkness and could neither see nor speak. She heard nothing but she thought she sensed the presence of evil spirits. When she recovered she heard from other victims recounting their own experiences of trance that, they saw snakes, other said they were beaten with sticks, and they showed her the prints of sticks or scars on their bodies, while others said the strange people removed or

³² The following information was gathered in interview with victim one on the 5th of July 2007”

took away some blood out of them. She was taken to the hospital and was given an injection prior to her recovery but she attributed her healing to the pastor's prayers because the injection did not help her open her eyes or to speak until the pastor came and made prayers. According to this trance victim, teenage trance is caused by some school pupils' grand parents who give their grand children charms and talismans, magic potions or "gris-gris" and these children bring these to school using them there. She said that while conversing with her Muslim friend, she was told that their grand parents give them these things to make themselves rich. The malaise, she said, is contagious because as soon as the trance victim person touches the person nearest her, she too gets contaminated and immediately falls into trance as well. So this can form a chain reaction if there are many girls standing or sitting close and touching each other.

*The second victim's story*³³

She was first sick of malaria fever and while she had still not recovered from this, the trance phenomenon coincided with malaria in her. She felt a violent headache, became tired, and then fell down. In her state of trance she heard strange voices of people calling her and other students. She saw that they were whipped until blood oozed out of their bodies, and as they struggled and ran to escape, they ran after them and caught them and engaged them in a fight and some pupils were shouting in a terrifying way. The estimated time when this started coincided with that of the first trance victim and this was on the same day. Two girls fell in the same class and almost the same moment, and when other girls came close to these girls to assist them, they also fell. When I asked her for the second time what she really saw when she was in that state, she said what she is saying is not only what she actually saw a lone but also what her victim friends said they saw. These were human beings without heads, dressed in white robes seeking to take them along to where they did not know. Some of the trance victims said they heard ghost voices, and others said these voices resemble those of wild animals in the forest, and that these strange creatures tortured and tormented them in strange ways. Asked what assistance she received, and by who, she said that pastors fasted and prayed and that these prayers helped them a lot. She added that those trance agents hate

³³ Ibid (victim two).

prayers and are angry when God's name and the name of Jesus were pronounced at prayer sessions. They instructed the trance victims to block their ears when pastors were praying. These people threatened to kill them if they continued to call for pastors to carry out prayers for the trance victims. The trance agents forbid them to call the name of Jesus and God, saying that they hate to hear these names. Each time these names are called they received torture from the people (the trance agents). Asked to speak about her feelings, she said the experience she had gone through was frightful and made people afraid of her as a trance victim even though she had recovered. She felt very much hurt because people avoided her and because some say that she herself was possessed by her personal demons and witchcraft practices. She felt humiliated among some people who look at her with mocking eyes even though she is very normal and fine in health. She felt that the pastors' prayers had healed her and that the pastors had advised that she and all her family should keep on praying morning and evening without ceasing, to keep the trance agents away from her. They should cling to their Christian faith and believe in God almighty, and in Jesus Christ as the saviour of mankind. Since the mystical people are afraid of God's name and that of our Lord Jesus Christ they shrank whenever these names were called, they cannot resist because they are God's enemies. Her parents, who have been praying not only for her alone but for all other trance victims encouraged her to continue to pray without ceasing. She said she thought that because of these prayers, she did not experience as much suffering from the torture of the strangers, as her friend did.

*The third victim's story*³⁴

The phenomenon started when she and other students were outside doing their physical education (P.E) at the sports ground. She was running on the sporting ground during a sport activity. Just before she got at the point of discontinuing her running she suddenly saw someone standing in front of her with a face that looks like her late mother. Later the face looked like that of their school principal and later again changed and became a human's body without a head. She found herself in a different world and the dominant colour there was red. She saw a large farm land which the trance victims were being forced to cultivate. This informant called

³⁴ The information was gathered in an interview with trance victim on the 8th of July 2007.

the strange people in French “la chose (singular) and les choses” (plural) this means “the thing” and “the things”. She called the strange people that because she could not see their faces and heads but saw human trunks and could hear them speak. She was offered money, gold, diamonds and jewellery. However, she refused to take because they said anyone who accepted their gifts was bound to stay with them. She said these things were demonic forces because they offered money to young girls. In that strange world the things or people according to my informants had a woman leader called “la reine mere.”³⁵ She tortured and menaced the young girls who refused the gifts she offered them. When they arrived in that new world they forgot about their faith and were unable to remember the name of God or to called upon the name of Jesus Christ. While she was in her trance state and world her classmate whose father is a pastor started praying for her, she was unable to remember or pronounce the name “God” or “Jesus.” She felt she had lost her memory and perhaps those things have contributed in hypnotising her. When I asked who assisted her during her state in trance, she said that her parents seek for assistance everywhere, including from traditional practitioners, hospitals, priests and pastors.

Traditional treatment was administered to her by a traditional doctor but she refused to reveal his identity to me. She said the traditional doctor asked the parents to bring a cock as one of the items to compose his medicine for her treatment. The traditional doctor slaughtered the cock and used the blood to bath her with, and then she was given a powder-like substance that had to be burnt in a clay pot in such a way that, smoke and odour were produced to chase away demons and evil spirits. But it seems to her that, instead of sending away these things which caused her to fall into trance, the smoke and odour attracted or called them to come. But when these people heard Christians or a pastor’s prayers, they ran away. She was also assisted in prayers by her local Roman Catholic priest who she said first asked her parents if she had her membership card. Because of this he delayed to come for the prayers they urgently desired. When he finally came he gave her a rosary. After praying for her, he left the rosary with her and instructed her to use it during her prayer sessions. She attributed her healing to prayers and not the traditional medicine or medical cure. She added that the trance agents

³⁵ Reine mere in French. English meaning is the mother queen.

asked her and the other trance victims to give their blood to them, offered them calabashes to sit on and ordered them to send out blood by way of urinating or making out stool. She said her, menses had just started flowing that day when the trance phenomenon came to her, but that it stopped the following day and it was only when she had recovered or healed from the trance that she began to see her flow again. This was quite strange and frightening to her. At another moment they brought a serpent or snake to her and asked her to have sexual intercourse with the monster. They also asked her to get married there. In all of these torments, she refused and the people became furious with anger. They beat, tormented, tortured, and threatened to kill her as she continued to resist them. She fainted several times for duration of five minutes each. This explains the reason why she was more violent, aggressive and spoke many unreasonable things while she was in the state of trance. The people accused her of being stubborn and rebellious to them. They asked her to stop prayers and calling Christians and pastors to pray for her. But she violently refused and continued to resist them and led the other trance victims also to resist them. Two boys who were attacked by the trance agents were attacked because they considered the boys dangerous and in some ways preventing them to carry out their evil when they prayed. These boys were protectors and so they considered eliminating them first. She told me to visit the boys if I would like to see that one of them has a big scar left on his back from the beating given him by these trance demons. She believes that prayers said to God on their behalf gave them the power and force to resist the people and that it was these that healed them. So she advised and encouraged Christians, pastors and priest to continue to pray for any case of trance because this is what healed her and scared away the agents of trance or the trance demons.

*The fourth victim's story*³⁶

This student was in the classroom doing her evaluation exercise in physical education with her classmates. She was almost at the end of this exercise when she suddenly heard pupils from the other classes shouting repeatedly and saying in French “chest le tomber-tomber” referring to the strange occurrence. Suddenly the whole school was in panic, the school teachers tried to calm down their students in

³⁶ This information was recorded in an interview with victim four on the 8th July 2007.

various classrooms but to no avail. The students were rushing from every direction in a mixed confusion of purpose. Some left their classrooms to the scene where some female students had fallen on the ground while others ran to collect their school belongings to go home. So from all directions pupils were running and shouting causing fear, confusion and panic in the whole school. She also went out of her class to collect something from her friend in another class. She refused to disclose what she went to collect from her friend. While collecting it, her friend fell in trance, and that is how she also fell. But before she fell she sensed that she was not normal and started saying the Lord's Prayer which is the prayer that she knows how to say. But before she had completed the prayer she could not remember any word from the prayer. One other friend close to her asked her if she was normal. That was the moment that she fell to the ground. When she fell in trance, the people said to her "you are the one trying to save your friend from us, but who are you?" Then they began to beat her and torture her. When I asked her who these people were. She said the queen mother with long hair and a man dressed in a suite and who wore a cowboy's hat, and also others in large and long traditional gowns, called "cabah."

*The fifth victim's story*³⁷

This pupil said she was in her classroom studying mathematics when she heard other pupils shouting outside and some said they have violent headache. She wanted to go out but the door was barred by strange people whom she described as having bodies but without heads and who were dressed in black suits. She wanted to run away but they had barred the way so she could not. Suddenly she started shouting and felt a violent headache and she was dizzy. She saw "the queen mother" who hit her with a hammer on the head and then she fell on the ground. I asked her to describe "the queen mother." Here is her description: she was a woman from head to the buttocks but in the place of legs there was instead a long fish tail. She had a very long hair, wore a gold chain on her neck and bracelet round her hand. When she was hammered on the head by this woman, some men were also standing, so that as she fell down, they transported her to their world. The queen mother welcomed her there when they arrived and said to her "you

³⁷ Ibid.

thought you were going to escape?” Then they put some popular youth music and asked them to dance. Then they started dancing and if any of them refused to dance, they started beating and maltreating them. Later when they stopped the music, they were told to go to work and each pupil was assigned a particular and different task from the other. She was sent to wash all the pots in their home, others to mould bricks, and others were assigned to cultivate large farmlands, wash dishes and plates to wet and dry clean the floors, and do other house hold chores. She said she was totally confused and did not know what she was doing because everything was odd to her there. So she told them that she must find her way out from that milieu. The queen said that as long as she is the queen of that place, she would not allow her to leave the place. At the time I was interviewing her, she emphasised that even up till that moment she was still washing her pots there. When she started to pray the queen came and closed her mouth and stopped her from praying. Then she took a whip and whipped her with and that was very painful. Since then she is still suffering from the pains and scars on her body.” I feel pains at my joints and articulations” she said. When asked who assisted her to get away from the queen’s world she said the pastor’s prayers helped her a lot and that when these people heard the pastor praying, they ran away, and that this gave her the opportunity to escape and find hers way back to us. She said the trance phenomenon had affected her much. Presently she was unable to sing with her choir group or read her Bible because of a violent headache that resulted from the trance occurrence. Before she suffered from trance she loved going to the church and carry out her Christian activities, but presently she was not as committed as before. The trance agents frightened her and said that if she escaped from them and no matter how intelligent she was, she will never pass any written exams. She had a strong felling that prayers from Christians and pastors had temporary healed her and hoped for a permanent healing through prayers. This victim still experiences trance from time to time and I think that her situation was made difficult to be healed by prayers because of complicated procedures she underwent in traditional treatment. She was forced to sign a blood pact or a contract with these people, using animal blood. She concluded in her interview that up till today, she was still washing her pots. It means that from time to time she fell in trance her job in the trance world is washing of pots.

*The sixth victim's story*³⁸

She was lying in her room and like in a dream, she saw her late mother. She was filled with fear, and as she shouted she fell in a coma. In her state of coma, she saw an Angel dressed in a white gown. The Angel went to her late mother's tomb and forbid her from coming out of the grave and troubles her children. Then she heard the Angel's voice telling her to go home and ask for either a priest or pastor to pray for her. She was instructed further to wear a white gown before the prayers were said and a family friend, whose identity remain disclosed, was designated to read (Acts 16:18). The Angel told her that if these instructions were observed the evil spirit in her would run away and she will be healed. So the father had to buy her a white gown, and invited his pastor. The family member was duly informed to read the prescribed biblical text, before the prayers were said. She testified that after these prayers she had never fallen again in trance nor had she seen her late mother.

*The seventh victim's story*³⁹

This victim did not speak a single word to me. She refused to speak to me throughout the interview. She nodded her head to answer yes and no on two occasions. The first instance was when I asked if she would like to tell me all about her trance illness. She said "yes" but of all the questions I asked her from the interview guide, she answered none. Then I asked her if I should go away from her and she nodded her head to say "no" This trance victim was one of the most affected by the phenomenon and to the extent that, the father told me, her daughter was mad. He has spent all that he had for her treatment but this has yielded no fruits. For the last five years he has been suffering with her in this state of illness an now he didn't know what else he could do for his daughter to get healed. The story of this victim will be completed when I will present the stories of parents interviewed. I turn to these accounts now.

³⁸ The account of this story was recorded during an interview with the victim on the 8th of July 2007.

³⁹ Ibid.

3.2 Parents' or Guardian's Stories as Expressed in Qualitative Interviews.

Some parents or guardians of trance victims were present and had witnessed how the strange occurrence attacked their children. Others had never been present to witness this but have been told how it attacked their children. Their stories therefore consist of what they witnessed or what they had been duly told happened to their children at school or home. As parents or guardians they had reacted in various ways when seeking for their children's healing.

The first parent's story⁴⁰

This parent told me the trance phenomenon started in school, and that she was surprised that her daughter was one of the victims. She was at home when she saw her daughter carried to the house by her classmate. She was like fainted and in a state of convulsion. And at one time she thought her child was dead because she was in a coma and she was afraid that her daughter might bite her tongue like one of the cases she had witnessed. She linked the trance phenomenon to epilepsy. She took her to the hospital and there the nurses gave her an injection to re-animate her, but the hospital did not give her any treatment against trance. She remembered her daughter advising them to pray much for her in case of re-occurrence of trance. She has fallen in trance three times and each time they have said prayers before she regained her consciousness and normal state of health. Throughout the period her daughter was suffering from the occurrence, she lost appetite and weight. She and her husband invited many Christians, church elders, pastors and Christian groups to pray, not only for their daughter but for other school pupils who were trance victims. She believed that several prayer sessions brought healing to their daughter and she advised that her daughter should keep on praying three times a day so as to keep away the evil practised on her by unidentified people. She testified that trance has indirectly affected some people financially. There are some women who derive their income from sale of cooked food at the school canteen. When they bring this food, hoping to sell and earn some money when suddenly trance occurs in that school, they return home without having sold anything because the pupils were sent home by the school authorities. But most often they had lost their appetite or could not buy food to

⁴⁰ Interview with this parent was recorded on the 5th of July 2007.

eat, since they had to go home earlier. The fact that they also had concern over their friend's state of health and they feel unhappy about the strange occurrence caused them to fear and be afraid even to eat. Some abandoned their lessons in class to accompany their friend who was a trance victim either to the hospital or to their friend's home. The women carried their food home and were bound to eat it themselves and throw the rest because they lacked means of conserving it for further use. Asked to speak on what she thought to be the cause of trance, she said it is came from evil spirits who seek for young fresh girls who are quite ignorant about themselves growing into their puberty state. The evil desires of these people are to suck out fresh blood from the young girls. She could not identify these people but she thought that they are real demons who carry out all kinds of evil in the society.

The second parent's story⁴¹

She called the trance phenomenon "tomber- tomber." This parent was completely frustrated when her daughter fell into trance. She was frustrated because they could not find a solution or treatment for their daughter. The daughter kept on falling from day to day despite all the prayers that were said. It took a long time for her to cease from falling into trance. They were obliged and committed to take their daughter any where they were told she would be healed. So they carried her to a marabou (traditional doctor) who asked them to bring a cock which he would use as an item to prepare medicine for their daughter. They took the cock to the traditional-practitioner who slaughtered the cock and mixed the blood with other liquids or potions to bath their child with. This family was not a Christian family except their daughter. There was still not much improvement at the time I carried out the interview.

The third parent's story⁴²

This parent said that his daughter's illness started at school when he was at work. Suddenly he saw his colleague rushing to inform him about his daughter falling into trance. She was brought to the hospital. After consultation, the doctor examined her but found no illness in her. He asked that she should be taken home

⁴¹ This interview with this parent was recorded on the 8th of July 2007.

⁴² This story was recorded in an interview with the third parent on the 11th of July 2007.

and be allowed to sleep until she woke up herself. No medicine was given to her, nor did the doctor write any prescription for such. His daughter had continued to suffer from trance because she had not received any proper treatment. According to this parent wherever he was informed that the illness could be treated, he took his daughter there. So the daughter had received treatment from different traditional doctors who claimed they could cure trance. He said this has troubled him a lot. Therefore he did not care about his faith as a Christian which required him to avoid making sacrifices to ancestors and consulting the spirit-medium. During these consultations he said, the priests of the traditional gods had asked for various items to be brought, so that they could use them to prepare medicine for the victim. He said he was obliged to buy these items and bring along because he was desperately seeking for his daughter's healing. Sometimes he added the "marabouts" didn't ask him to bring anything, but he thought he should give them something because of their endeavour to cure his daughter. He had also continued to ask for prayers from his church and pastors. However, the daughter finally received healing when she dreamt and saw an angel who told the trance victim to ask for a pastor to come and pray for her, and cited a biblical text that had to be read by one of their family friends. So he called for his pastor and informed the family friend who came and carried out the prayers. The result was that the daughter got healed from trance. He told me that he now truly believes that the prayers heal and that these healed his daughter and not the traditional treatment. He thought that the marabou treatment only calms the trance on the victim but cannot guarantee full treatment.

*The fourth parent's story*⁴³

He said the daughter went to fetch water from the tap and somebody tackled her legs from behind and there she fell into trance with the water. She said she saw a white man standing at a road junction in a roundabout, and shouted "that is the man!" pointing under a mango tree a few metres away from the house. He told her that he himself had seen nobody there but she insisted "that is the man there!" She was the only one who saw the man. They saw nothing except a mango tree. Then she said "I see evil surrounding the whole place, and there is a man who

⁴³ This information was gathered in an interview with this parent on the 8th of July 2007.

says he wants to marry me, but I cannot marry an evil-man, a demon,” and asked that she be allowed to go and bring the man. She was allowed to go, as requested, but she returned with a stick in her hand showing them the stick in her hand and repeated, “this is the man!” later she looked sad, and the next day she became dumb and could not speak for two days. This trance victim was among the first cases of trance in that school. Other trance victims had received healing through prayers but her situation has gone from bad to worse. He has taken her to priests and pastors of different churches and many prayers have been said but to no avail. One pastor of a certain church said a prayer for her, and after that, wrote the prayer and sew it in a small sack and gave to her to wear like a chain round her neck. This parent had also consulted the marabouts who said that, the illness was caused by demons and that it was someone who had inflicted a demon in his daughter. It was sad to hear what this parent revealed. The daughter did not even take care of herself when she menstruated. Even when going to toilet, she would just send out stool where she was sitting and show no sign of worry or concern even in her bed. He bathes her like a baby. She spoke and laughed alone and sometimes ran wild and violent. Since her mother is dead, his second wife has refused to assist her in hygienic matters. So he as the father had to assist his daughter even on such female issues which are a taboo for a man in an African context. This parent had a strong feeling that his daughter has become mad. This family has a complicated trance case which has resisted prayers for the past five years. They have searched everywhere to take their daughter for healing, and presently he has little or no means left with him to take care of their feeding and other needs for the family. This family was not a Christian family but accepted prayers said by Christians for healing sake.

*The fifth parent's story*⁴⁴

This parent said her daughter was suffering from an illness popularly called “tomber-tomber.” She was selling at the market when some school children came to inform her that her daughter has fallen in school. When she got there, they had already carried her to the hospital where the mother found her together with other trance cases. The doctor and medical personnel gave no treatment to her or the

⁴⁴ The fifth parent's story was recorded in an interview with her on the 8th July 2007.

other trance victims. She took her daughter home, assisted by her classmate. The daughter was agitating at one moment, and in another she was calm. Some other time she would shout in a loud voice, saying “they are coming!” or “here they are!” three times. Struggling to free herself from the people who held her firmly, then she became violent and aggressive. When she broke lose from their firm grip she would run wild to any direction and they felt that if they allowed her to go far-away from them she may harm herself. So they will run after her until they caught her and keep her under a firm grip until she was calm. They had taken her to a priest and their pastor for prayers, and several times they had prayed but to no avail. So, being tired of prayers without healing, they decided to take her to a traditional healer or a marabou for treatment. The marabou asked them to bring a goat as one of the items he would use for composing the medicine. She confirmed that the marabou used the blood of the animal to prepare the medicine he gave to them. One part was to be eaten and another mixed with the blood of the goat, was to be put in the bath of the trance patient to bath with. When I asked her, which of the treatment she thought healed the daughter she said that whether they were prayers from Christians or medicine from the marabou that heals, all comes from God. She added that even the marabou said prayers to his medicines before he gave it out to the patient. So to her it does not matter from where healing came, but she believes all comes from the same God. She added if we are in the church we can say prayers, and when we come back home we can see a traditional doctor or medical doctor who can assist. She concluded that “all is God who gives the power to heal.” What is important for her is to have the child healed.

3.3 School Teacher’s Stories as Expressed in Qualitative Interviews:

The first school teacher’s story⁴⁵

The first two cases of trance in their school started when the students were carrying out their sports activities. The first trance cases were considered as being natural and normal because the teachers thought the students were either hungry, thirsty or tired from running and so they fell. Their classmates were asked to carry them to the teachers’ reception room where they were allowed to rest for about

⁴⁵ This information was gathered in an “interview with a school teacher” on the 4th of July 2007.

half an hour before they were taken to the hospital. The doctor said there was nothing wrong with them so they called for their parents to come and collect their children and take good care of them. They thought it was all over but the same incident reoccurred with other students within a few weeks. This time it was not only limited to the sports ground but also extended into the classrooms. When the first victims fell in the classroom the whole class was shouting and the students were panicking, which created confusion in the other classes. So many students fell on that day out of fear and panic, the teachers thought. It was a situation that caused an alarm and embarrassed the whole school. Their classmates, who were not affected, helped to carry those that fell to the staff room where they were allowed to lie down for half an hour. When the phenomenon repeatedly occurred, ninety percent of the victims were Muslim students in the school. As it continued to occur, it began to contaminate other students, including also non Muslims. They realised that when one student in a class fell, any student who stood close to her or touched her was immediately contaminated and also fell next to the first. He added that it was leading to a kind of chained reaction to the junior pupils of the school-13 to 16 years old. When it became so frequent, the school authorities decided to invite the parents of trance victims for a comprehensive dialogue about the strange occurrence in the school among teenage pupils. The joint decision arrived at, was that the parents of trance victims should temporarily withdraw their children from the school, and that when they had received treatment and were in good health, then could they return to the school, based on the already paid tuition fees. Some students who were withdrawn returned to school after one academic year but they were still falling in trance. The school staff and authorities noted that these pupils were not cured or healed from trance when they were withdrawn from the school and that most probably there was no medical treatment for trance. Parents, who were non Christians, took their children to various traditional doctors and spent their money without their children receiving any effective healing, he said. The traditional doctors could only manage to calm the occurrence for a moment, and later it would resurface, he added. However I remember that even among Christian parents that I interviewed there were some parents who took their children also to the traditional doctors and their children's healing had by prayers been difficult.

Manifestation of trance as observed by this school teacher in his school:

The situation, he remarked, became dangerous on the day they registered nineteen cases of trance victims. When the first victim fell that day in the classroom, the students of that class scattered and were running left and right in fear and panicking. Some pupils were shouting “tomber-tomber,” and as they shouted and trembled so they fell as if they were being contaminated. The more they shouted, the more they fell into trance. This created a general panic and the atmosphere in school was foulish. Both the students and teachers were confused by the uproar of students in the different classrooms. Some victims had fallen in a coma, others in a stupor while others were calmly lying in deep sleep. Others were running madly in different directions. It was difficult for the teachers to handle the situation, even with the help of senior students who came to assist them in the situation. There were victims who manifested violent resistance and demonstrated a lot of energy to overpower those that came to stop them from running wild and who even hurt themselves. He thought that when trance attacked its victim, it rendered her nervous, more powerful and violent. Some of the victims when they fell crawled like snakes and hit their heads on the ground like epilepsy patients. Some victims before they fell into trance they saw some white people who chased them in order to catch them and so this made set them start running in every direction. Then in that state of motion they would fall without any opportunity to defence. One trance victim abandoned her Mathematics exercise that she was doing in the class. Like being hypnotised she started drawing some strange and senseless pictures of people and snakes. In her drawing she connected the demon like people and the serpents with a chain, pulling each other in tug of war. When her class teacher observed that she was busy drawing something instead of writing her exercise, he went close by to see exactly what she was drawing. Immediately when he came close to her, and as if in a kind of seizure and like by current, she collapsed into trance.

I understand that in a school environment some teachers play an important role of liaison between parents and school authorities and between students and other students, and between teachers and the general public. This vital and intrinsic role provides an opportunity for research work. I incidentally came in contact with one of my informants, a school teacher who by his nature of service played that role of a liaison officer. He had much information about trance from his students who

were trance victims and their parents. He was able to provide me with information regarding the causes of trance as they had been related to him by some trance victims and their parents. But this information is not enough so as to establish as reliable causes of trance among female teenagers in secondary schools in Cameroon. He narrated a story about one of the trance victims who frequently fell into trance and attributed the cause of her trance to her grand-father who administered to her a potion or a liquid drink, which she drank everyday, when she returned from school. Many prayers had been said in order to heal her from trance, like it had been done to her classmate, but her situation remained helpless and hopeless. Some trance victims' parents had come to the school and asked the school authorities and teachers to account for the cause of trance in their children. The school authorities and staff had no tangible explanation to offer to them. The only thing they said was that they did not know the causes of the malaise since the victims were taken to the hospital and the doctors offered no medical treatment because their diagnoses showed no sign of any diseases on the victims. Therefore they thought that trance is a mystical occurrence in the school. Since then the parents, the school teachers and the victims of trance have learnt to live with trance victims and its occurrence. This has provoked the different parties involved to seek for means of healing victims rather than seek for the causes of trance. Since the school is a Christian based mission school, the pastors of this church, and the school authorities, in an organised reaction against the strange phenomenon decided to combat it with prayers. They believed if this was caused by demons they can chase away the demons through fervent prayer sessions in all the classrooms and school offices, where the demons and evil spirits make their hideout. This part of the story is inclusive in the experience of religious leaders offering care to trance victims in school where trance was frequent.

The Bishop of the EELC considered this a spiritual challenge not only to the schools where cases of trance were registered, but a challenge also to all the clergy and especially the healing ministry of Jesus Christ. He and other clergymen went to the mission school where trance had seriously and frequently occurred. They agreed to carry out fasting and in two prayer sessions prayed against the phenomenon and for the healing of the student trance victims. For a period of two days the bishop and his pastors walked around in and out of every classroom in the school. They prayed fervently and anointed both the students and their

classroom with anointing oil. When the prayer sessions was over it was as if the demons were wounded. They launched a very serious attack on the students, and for two days the number of trance victims increased. This time it was more violent than before but lasted only a short period, and since then there has been a general calm in the school. Since then and until they went on the long vacation they had not experienced any trance re-occurrences in the school. So they hoped that God answered the prayers and chased the demons away from the school and that he has provided protection against re-occurrence on the students if they believe and continued to pray. The demons might have returned more powerful to re-occupy their former hideout after the prayers were said by the clergy, but their greatest dismay was that their hideout had been dismantled and destroyed by the power of the Holy Spirit. The demons, he said, wanted to possess the students and the entire school but the Holy Spirit overcame the demons and they had disappeared and he believed that they would never return to the school. This would be good news for the entire school when their classes are resumed in the next fall.

*The second school teacher's story*⁴⁶

The first trance cases were registered in his school in the year 2004. This started with two female students of form two during their physical education activities. The students were on the sports ground running and then they suddenly fell into trance. The victims were brought to the staffroom, where they were allowed to rest for about twenty minutes. Later, after they had recovered they were taken to their respective homes by their fellow students. It was later reported that some students who went and visited their class-mates victims of trance also fell into trance at home. Gradually the number of trance victims began to increase in his school and they were all Muslim pupils, in the school about ten in number. Since the hospitals offered neither treatment nor cure, the school authorities invited the parents of the trance victims in a meeting where they all agreed that the victims should temporally be withdrawn and return to school after treatment. The parents did so but to their surprise the same children returned to school after a year without having been healed. As they continued to fall into trance the phenomenon

⁴⁶ This information was collected in an interview with a school teacher on the 5th of July 2007.

now began to spread widely in the school and affected other pupils of the same age range. During the second term of the year 2005 the situation increased to an alarming rate. Each day was spectacular in the school because the occurrence became frequent and created a general worry to all the parties concerned. Students could not longer concentrate on their studies in classes, and the teachers were troubled. So the school authorities suspended classes for about two weeks in order to relax the tension created on the junior students whom the phenomenon targeted. By this administrative decision the school authorities intended to calm down the tension raised by the trance mystery. Other measures included the invitation of pastors to pray for the victims, and for the protection of non victims against trance. However the prayers that were said in school were limited to protect the Muslim trance victims in school since the pastors and other Christians could not go to the Muslims homes to say prayers there, except by invitation, which hardly came. The college chaplain was on a few occasions invited by some Muslims parents whose pupils were trance victims, for some discussions and in some instances allowed to pray in the Muslim home for the trance victim to receive healing.

Asked to speak about the causes of the phenomenon in his school the teacher said: The fact that the phenomenon targets essentially young female students of a particular age range was an indication that there were evil forces trying to harm these children. He tried to trace other schools where this has occurred and said “when it occurred at the government High school Figile the students and parents accused the school headmaster. The headmaster of the government secondary school at Meiganga was equally accused for carrying out evil and demonic practices on the school pupils. In the government high school Tignere similar accusations were directed at a school teacher. In all these cases of accusations the accused had been promised death and were actually threatened to be killed by both trance victim pupils and their parents. But here in my school we thank God that no teacher has been accused. Some parents have taken court cases against some school teachers whom they suspected and accused of foul or witchcraft practices on their children.” He concluded that all the schools in the city had experienced the same phenomenon, and that in every school different people had been accused for being the cause. Sometimes the accusation was made among the trance victims themselves and sometimes it was made among their parents. So it

was difficult to trace out the cause because it is a mystical practice. The best solution was to surrender everything and count on the power of God alone to give healing.

*The third school teacher's story*⁴⁷

The students were carrying out their sports activities when suddenly one fell and the others started screaming and fell beside the first victim. When other students heard their classmates scream they went to assist them and as they come in contact with the victims they also fell. When the first trance victim fell, they thought that she was tired from doing sports, so she was kept aside to rest hoping that she would recover. But when the others started screaming and falling we thought something wrong was going on with the pupils and so they were taken to the hospital. The way trance manifested itself in the victims was frightful and instilled fear and panic among onlookers. The victim became aggressive to every one and said strange things that were unreasonable. When trance was launching its attack on its victim it was like an electric current running through a cable. One did not see it running through but gave light to the bulbs. The rate of female pupils affected by trance in this school was alarming. In just about two weeks more than twenty students fell into trance. The school authorities became worried as parents accused the school principal and other staff members of the school. A meeting was called that summoned members of the ministry of education administrative authorities, as well as traditional and religious leaders. A report was written and sent from the meeting through the governor of the province to the minister of secondary education in Cameroon. Parents of trance victims in the school were asked to temporarily withdraw their children from school and have them treated before they were allowed to return to school for studies. This was a ministerial decree that was issued for school trance victims. In the meeting religious leaders of Christian faith resolved to continue to pray for trance victims and their families for healing. The Muslim religious leaders took a similar stand and the traditional leaders resolved to carry out some sacrifices to their ancestral spirits and gods on the mountain. They accused the youths of having provoked the anger of their gods when they went to the mountain for a picnic and slaughtered a pig and ate there.

⁴⁷ This interview with the third school teacher was gathered on the 8th of July 2007.

Some parents accused government officers and ministers who belong to sect groups to be the cause of trance on the female teenagers in schools.

I have interviewed two pastors as my informant that served a double role. In schools they served as teachers and in the church as spiritual leaders. So I have decided to integrate their story as school teachers with their experience as religious leaders. I now turn to the stories of religious leaders who offered care to the victims.

3.4 The Experience of Religious Leaders Offering Care to the Victims and their Families as Expressed in Qualitative Interviews

It was important for me to get information from all the three religious leaders that had experienced and offered care to trance victims and their families. Unfortunately I found no traditional religious leader during my research, or an African traditional religious leader who offered care to teenage trance victims. I think that this has to do with my being a pastor. Even some of my informants who took their trance victims to traditional healers refused to take or direct me where I could meet with an African traditional healer they have consulted.

I have earlier presented my own experience as one of the religious leaders offering care to victims of teenage trance. I will now present the experiences of other religious leaders offering care to trance victims as they were recorded in my interview data.

*Experience of a religious leader offering care, case one*⁴⁸

This religious leader is a chaplain of one of the secondary school with teenage trance victims. So his experience as a clergy also includes part of the school teachers' story. He observed fear and panic in the trance victims in his school, no matter where they were before they fell. Most children who were afraid of the occurrence start shivering with fear on hearing that one of their school mates had fallen. They immediately started shouting and running and that is how they tremble and later fell.

Manifestation of trance on its victim:

⁴⁸ This information was gathered in an interview with a pastor offering care to trance victims, on the 5th of July 2007.

The victims of trance become unconscious and start running, shouting and saying that some people were beating or flogging them with a cane all over the body. They saw mystical people or spirits that other people do not see. They see themselves in a different world with different people and were given tasks to carry out. While we saw them in a state of unconsciousness, they claim to be conscious and active with the trance agents in the world of the spirits.

As a pastor and chaplain of a school where trance had occurred frequently many trance victim parents have visited him and invited him to come and pray for their trance victim children at home. He always accepted their invitation and carried out prayers with the trance victims and their family members. But before he engaged in a series of prayers with the victims who usually were teenage girls, he always asked them a series of questions to understand what might have brought the victim to experience trance. First he asked them if they had a good relationship with God and the Lord Jesus Christ. The second question was “do you read horoscopes, or consult spirit mediums?” Thirdly he asked “have you ordered any ring, necklace, chain or magic (potion, pen) from someone in order to pass your exams in school?” He received no positive answer to any of these questions from the victims, except one who informed him that, she and her parent went and consulted a traditional doctor when she fell in trance. But now he does not know if the victim received healing from the traditional doctor because she went for vacation to another town. Many of the trance victims the clergy prayed for had not shown any manifestation of trance since then. However he thought that the result of all these would be fully known when the students resume classes. The chaplain said that he thought that if any parent or student had engaged in an evil practice it would renders the case more complicated for healing by simple prayers. Such kind of case would then require that fasting and prayers be done before healing might occur. Such a case might require two to three months before effective healing could take place. It would also require that the victim revealed to him everything she thinks or felt about trance before he would be able to pray for healing to take place. If the victim had an amulet or (gris-gris), talisman, calabash with some mystical potions she must first surrender those items to him before the prayers could be said. If the victim is afraid of prayers the clergy had to encourage and comfort her first to stand firm and willingly offer herself for prayers.

Procedure in prayer: He had no fixed role or regulation in his prayers. But he sometimes began with (1) *invocations of the presence of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit*. Then would follow such as praise worship, confession and absolution from sin, and the reading of a biblical text relevant to the person's situation, exhortation from the text(s) and the rest may follow any order. He added that as he prayed he believes that he is on a battle waging war against his enemy so these prayers must cover or include his family. He felt tired and exhausted after such prayer sessions.

*Experience of religious leader offering care, case two*⁴⁹

He is a “modibo”⁵⁰ a Muslim who leads prayers in one of the mosques. This religious leader told me one victim of trance was brought to him for prayers. He used simple prayers of Islam to heal the trance victim, he said. He first said a prayer of absolution for the victim, and then he read both sura one and two in the Koran and then prayed. In my research upon what this informant told me healed the trance victim. In sura one, the Koran verses read as follows:

Sura 1 (Fatiha)

1. In the name of God,
Most Gracious, Most Merciful.
2. Praise be to God.
The Cherisher and Sustainer of the Worlds,
3. Most Gracious, Most Merciful,
4. The Master of the Day of Judgement.
5. Thee we Worship,
And Thine aid we seek.
6. Show us the straight way,
7. The way of those on whom
Thou has bestowed Thy Grace,
Those whose (portion),
Is not wrath,
And who go not astray.

⁴⁹ Interview with this religious leader was recorded on the 11th of July 2007.

⁵⁰ A modibo is a quarter chief in Fulani language in Cameroon. Sometimes the word is used to include a religious leader in the quarters.

I read through sura one of the Koran and scanned through sura two and three to find the verses which he said to be healing verses. Also I did not find any words connected to what he said they were connected specifically to healing and casting out of evil spirits, which he claimed they did. He also told me the story of King Solomon and Habiba in the Koran, but how these two people were related to my themes and interview question guide I was unable trace. He talked about magic and angels and spoke about divorce in a way that was unrelated to the interview guide questionnaire. I have reflected over this several times and now I think that he just wanted me to read the Koran.

Experience of a religious leader offering care, case three:⁵¹

This religious leader is a priest from the Roman Catholic Church who offered care to many trance victims in his dioceses. Many parents whose children fell into trance came to him and asked him to offer care to their trance victim children. He told me his procedure or method was simple. When parents brought their children to him and they were still in their trance state, some victims in a stupor, and some restlessly fighting to get themselves loose from the hands of those who were preventing them from harming themselves, others again were unconsciously sleeping and others just weak and sometimes their eyes were open but they had lost their speech. In each case he would pray for the victim and then put her to lie down in his office for as long as the victim could stay there until she became conscious of herself before he prayed again. He also taught the victims to pray, using the rosary and gave them holy water to use at home to keep away evil spirits and demons. Some victims were healed, he told me while others continued to experience trance. He hoped that one day they too would be healed. He had always advised victims and their family to continue to pray even after they had received healing. He cautioned them to avoid consulting spiritual mediums when their children are sick.

Experience of religious leader offering care, case four⁵²

This leader also served as a teacher in a secondary school where trance was frequent. He had been a pastor in the school for the past two years when trance was causing havoc to the children who were brought to him not only in school where he teaches

⁵¹ This information was recorded in an interview with the priest on 10th of July 2007.

⁵² Ibid, 8th of July 2007.

but also at home. The number of parents that had contacted him was above twenty. On a close examination he saw this occurrence to be super-natural and that it could not be explained or cured in the hospitals. He stated as follows:

You would find the victim sick, but when medically examined, no illness is discovered in her. It is an odd phenomenon which the victim may be said to be suffering from cerebral malaria because of its violent nature and manifestation but the victim does not have any malaria. It may be said that it is a kind of spiritual illness or of demon possession of the victim.

It began in the year 2005 in the schools in the town where he lives and works but they heard about the occurrence in other schools in the different provinces of Cameroon in 2004. Before the occurrence in he had heard about this in the media (radio and television) that it was happening elsewhere in Cameroon. But now he has come to experience it and was asked to assist the victim. He believed that God who called him in the ministry must equip him for the task in order that he could face the challenge as his servant. This was also part of his prayers when he was called to pray for the first victim.

Causes of trance according to the thoughts and reaction of a cross section of people in the city.

The traditional authorities put the blame on the school pupils who trespassed and abused sacred grounds. They said school children had slaughtered a pig, cooked and then ate on the mountain, thus disturbing the tranquillity of the mountain god. Therefore he had sent the illness to avenge on them. But a relevant question here is why the attack only on the teenage girls and not the boys also? The answer to this important question is blowing in the wind. The city which is made up of both Muslims and Christian can be sensitive over religious polemics. In this issue of trance, the Muslims accused the presence of mushroom churches with different names and denomination to have brought about sects and the strange occurrences, and that they were practiced on youths so that they could demonstrate their powers. The mountain gods needed to be appeased they said. So the Lamido who is the custodian of culture and the traditional chief sent a delegation to the mountain to perform rites and make sacrifices to appease the wrath of the gods of the mountain. After the rites

and sacrifices people and especially parents that believed in African traditional religion, were expecting trance to disappear from the school and therefore recovery for all the victims but this never happened. So they turned to lay accusations later both of the school teachers and the school principal. This informant, who is also a spiritual leader, said that when he started prayer for trance victims and they received healing they (the city people) turned and accused him of being the cause so and that he wished to attract more members in his congregation and in the church. Who knows if it is not the pastor who is practising magic and witchcraft on the pupils, so that he can win them for the church, they asked.

Informant's description of trance as it manifested itself on victims:

The victims prior to trance occurrence started by saying that they feel cold and desire to warm their bodies in the sun since there are no heaters in the classrooms. The early morning sunrise of nine am attracted the pupils to bask on it and since this occurs earlier than their short brake at ten am the pupils itched to go out in order to warm them in the sun. Those that trance will attack would start saying "they feel cold" and repeatedly, would say this about three times and then they would begin to shout loudly. Those that were close to them said the same thing and shouted as well. Then very soon a horrible noise from the pupils shouting and would fill the air and as the first child fell on the ground the others would follow just like a cord or rope that is being balanced in the air or an electric current that had electrocuted them at the same time. One victim would run here and there another would be dancing and others would be talking ceaselessly. So they had to run after those that were running so as to prevent them from falling into water such as in lakes or fall into fire because at that state they do not know where they were going or what they were doing. They were confused and ran like mad people without direction and could not reason with anybody. "Some would be saying *I will not come, leave me alone*" while others would say "you cannot kill me" and the others would say "wait for me." They did not see the people whom the victims were communicating with so it was a fearful experience to onlookers of trance victims. He courageously called one of the victims by name at the time of the manifestation of trance and he shouted "eeh-eeh-eeh they have split my head with a machete; are you not seeing blood flowing out from my head?" They could not see the blood or the people they were talking with but could see some traces of a wound on the spot they showed. The more the children saw this kind of thing, the

more they became afraid and tremble. Some fell into trance out of fear and trembled when watching the victims.

Measures taken to assist trance victims and their family

Four meetings were organised by the school authorities and my informant attended all of them. The administrative, traditional authorities, both the school and religious authorities, and parents of trance victims were there to look for possible ways of giving assistance to trance victims and their families.

As a pastor he understood that the Bible recognizes the presence and existence of evil spirits and demons and demon possession in the world. However the evil spirits and demons will recognize the power and authority of Jesus over them. Demon possession of people and places exists in different forms according to African belief. Demon possession is not far from the church. There are evil spirits that surround us and try to infiltrate our daily lives when one gives them the opportunity. They can be chased away from their mediums through prayers by believers, and by the power of the Holy Spirit in the name of Jesus. Jesus demonstrated this power and authority in Mt 9:28-33 and 8 Lk.10:18-19. His presence in these meetings was important because he suggested to the assembly that prayer is effective in healing the trance victims. So parents accepted taking their trance victims to the clergy for prayers. He organised prayer sessions not only in school where he was teaching but also at homes of trance victims and in the church. Prayers became a spontaneous answer to deal with trance victims and other people who were just sick. The prayer he was carrying out for the healing of trance victims was identified as “exorcism.”⁵³

Prayers for the healing of trance victims:

According to my informant he has no liturgical procedure that was given him by the church to carry out this service. He had his own way of proceeding in the prayer session for exorcism. He usually carried out special and personal preparation before his meeting with Christians to pray for the healing of trance victims. He selected special songs from the hymnal. For he understood that singing praises to God would provoke the trance illness to increase. So with a group of voluntary Christians who wanted to assist the victims they would sing several hymns of praise to God before

⁵³ Exorcism is the act of expelling evil spirits by certain ceremonies.

the prayers started. As they sang and prayed, sang they created tension upon tension in the victim until reaching a peak. By doing this they created an unfavourable and uncomfortable atmosphere for the demons that had taken possession of its victim. When he sense that they had become uncomfortable in the victim, he would raise up his voice and then say “in the name of the Lord Jesus, through whom the word of God was given to me, we begin now to order the demons here to go out.” A kind of dialogue was now established with the victims so that he could hear a different voice, other than that of the victim speaking to him. He would then say, “I take power and authority and command you to come out in the name of Jesus.” Then the demons would tremble in the victim and shout in pain, “ah-ah-ah!”

“Jesus deliver us this child.” ah-ah-ah, waah-waah-waah! Where should I go?, the demons asked. Then he said, “Go to the abyss, go to hell.” They would say no choose one person here and show us to enter in. He will repeat “in the name of Jesus I command you to come out and do not enter into anybody here.” “Yeah-yeah-yeah!” As they went out they left the victim lying on the ground, tired and exhausted. He would then ask some Christians to help the victim to stand on her feet and later sit down. He administered anointing oil on the victim’s head and advised her to continue praying together as a family. He would then give the victim some water to drink and food to eat if the prayers took place in his home. But if it was in the victim’s domicile he would ask the parents to give some food and water to their child. Then when the victim was healed he sometime asked them some questions such as “where were you? What and who did you see?” Some would say that they were in the sea, in the air or in a tree. And they saw strange people without heads, or they saw monsters with human faces. These were horrible experiences for teenage girls who were undergoing physical and bio-chemical transformation as they were growing to adolescence state. He said that it was a complicated process to temper with a mystical phenomenon such as trance, and thanked God that through fervent prayers, the victims were able to receive healing.

3.5 Summary

A recapitulation of what my informants told me according to my research data show that the following themes were covered:

(1) *The causes of trance:* Both individuals and public opinion attribute the causes of trance on teenage girls in secondary and high schools in Cameroon to be a mystical occurrence. It is witchcraft and sorcery practises from evil people with the desires to harm others. No matter its origin, it is super-natural and beyond medical or scientific explanation. It is not only undesirable, it is evil and demonic. A cross section of people in the various communities had been accused for being the causes of teenage trance.

(2) *Symptoms or manifestations of trance:* The victims of teenage trance in Cameroon did not only portray trance symptoms as defined in chapter two of this Thesis. Their trance manifestations also extended to cover all trance related terms defined in the chapter. This leaves us with a doubtful desire to called the mystical occurrence “trance” or give it a different appellation altogether. That is to say certain teenage trance victims showed symptoms of “trance” as defined but others showed symptoms of trance related terms. Most often the trance victims had experienced different manifestation of symptoms. For example some victims portrayed symptoms of malaria fever like in the case of the second victim’s story. While we read of fainting and convulsion symptoms in the first parent’s story, we may be surprise when we read symptoms of madness in the fourth parent’s story. So the symptoms vary from one victim to another. You may read the detail definition of trance and its related terms in chapter two of this Thesis.

(3) *Healing processes and remedies.* So far, there is no medical treatment of trance victims because the phenomenon is still a mystery in the medical field. Some African witch doctors not only claimed to have cure for teenage trance, but promised parents of trance victims’ remedies. They however failed to administer adequate and permanent treatment to victims of teenage trance. Their procedures are difficult to trace or outline because their healing practices are a secret and cannot share their experience with other people. The second and third parent’s story portrayed that trance victims were not healed by African traditional doctors. Trance however had been identified as demonic practises on young girls which can only be treated or healed through fervent prayers called exorcism or the act of expelling demons from their mediums. Many trance victims received healing through prayers from the clergy as evident in the first and third parents’ stories, the school teachers and the experiences of the clergy who offered care to trance victims.

Their healing processes, when summed up, consist of the following:

- Singing of hymns
- Reading of relevant texts from the Bible
- Sessions of prayers
- Exorcism
- Anointing with oil
- Use of Holy water
- Counselling of trance victims with their families.
- Follow up cases if there are re-occurrences in the same victims.

We shall fully understand in details the points mentioned in the summary as we read the interpretations and analysis of trance in chapter four.

4. Interpreting the Findings gathered in Qualitative Interviews

4.1 Analysis of the Causes of teenage trance from data

From a general point of view the causes of teenage trance as already pointed out are mystical, and so it is very difficult to trace them through empirical proceedings because there are no possibilities to condition any mystical elements under laboratory tests and analysis. Yet, medical research is still needed in order to sort out whether there are also psycho-somatic causes for the occurrences of teenage trance. However, the tools of interpreting data from qualitative research has provided me with means of analysing social processes and interactions based on values, attitudes, motives, and intentions. In analysing the causes of teenage trance, I have the following questions in mind:

1. Why is teenage trance a “mystical”⁵⁴ practice? I understand that anything mystical, is something that is obscured, and above human understanding or explanation. Looking back at the effects of teenage trance on the victims and family members, it is clear and right to denounce the propagators of teenage trance as ardent criminals and the practice itself as a criminal and a public offence punishable by law. However those people practicing this have made it extremely difficult to identify them. To do this they use mysticism so that nobody can directly prove their involvement in this

⁵⁴ According to Chamber’s Twentieth Century Dictionary, The word mystical is an adjective related to mystery or mysticism which means secret rites or practices made known only to the initiated. A secret or sacred meaning hidden from the eyes of the ordinary person, only revealed to the spiritually enlightened mind

evil act on children. By using mysticism they can continue to operate their evil and go unpunished by law. Nobody can identify them and bring them legally before the court for judgment.

2. *What are the mystical elements used to practice teenage trance?* To identify these elements does not require any special knowledge in the mystical field. It suffices that one shares a common world and cultural view with the people where these practices occur. The elements used in the practice of teenage trance are witchcraft and sorcery, magic, amulets, occults, evil spirits and demons, talismans etc. It was possible for me to identify these elements through interviews with my informants. I also understand and believe that these things exist and are real in the world.

3. *What are the benefits derived from teenage trance practice?*

Teenage trance is said to be practiced on young girls for the following reasons:

- Feeding on new, fresh, and uncontaminated blood prolongs ones life. In the first parent's story my informant said that, one of the reasons for trance practise on teenage girls was the thirst to "suck fresh blood"⁵⁵ from the young girls that are virgins. It is generally believed in Cameroon that those who practice witchcraft, sorcery or occultism wish to live a healthier and longer life than that which God naturally provided them. Teenage girls can provide this life found in their monthly blood flow during menstruation, so it is believed. The only accesses for those who desire to drink this blood are to pass through the phenomenon of teenage trance. They are able to have free access to the victim without being identified. There are other phenomena such as serpent possessions living in their victims' toilets in order to suck out women's blood flow. This is known to render the victims sterile. Another similar example is the unexplained and frequent accidents on particular places in the highways of Cameroon. People who practice occultism are accused for the causes of such accidents in the highways. They do so in order to drink the blood from the wounded victims of road accidents. Therefore we can relate our understanding of teenage trance occurrence as being similar to these examples cited above. The trance agents asked the victims to "give them blood by way of urinating

⁵⁵ This information was gathered in an interview with a parent of trance victim on 5th of July 2007.

or sending out stool”.⁵⁶ This sounds odd but that is the spiritual world which cannot be understood with our ordinary senses.

- Acquisition of extra energy and powers. Those who practice this evil on young girls intend to acquire new and fresh energy from their victims so that he or she would remain strong and powerful in the society.
- Labour force. The trance victims found themselves in a different world where they were forced to labour tasks. The idea here is that, they were exploited in the services they were carrying out there without due payment.⁵⁷ If they were practicing this ordinarily, they would be charged or indicted for the abuse of children’s rights and for exploitation. Therefore carrying out the practice mystically conceals their identities and nobody can charge them for such criminal offences.
- Wealth. People who are considered wealthy due to their business activities in Cameroon are those accused most often of evil practices such as occultism and teenage trance. The News paper *Prisma International*⁵⁸ carried the headline “The phenomenon of trance resurfaced”. This News paper report also portrayed the picture of a wealthy proprietor’s secondary school set ablaze by an angry crowd and students who accused him for the cause of trance in the school. Concluding its report on trance in Cameroon secondary schools, the News paper said that, “the government of Cameroon must look into this issue seriously and take adequate measures otherwise evil spirits will continue to misuse our children to increase their wealth”⁵⁹ I also understand that in Cameroon culture and society there are ethnic groups that practise what is known as “nyungu”⁶⁰ in Ejagham language or “nfamla”⁶¹ among tribes in the western province in Cameroon. These are only parallel examples because teenage trance has unique manifestations and strange occurrences that has never been experienced before the year 2000.

⁵⁶ Information from my informant, the third victim’s story

⁵⁸ <http://prisma.canalblog.com/archives/200...20/022008>.

⁵⁹ Ibid .page 2.

⁶⁰ The Ejagham tribe of the south west of Cameroon use this word to refer to a mystical practice of witchcraft and sorcery whereby a person is actually dead and buried in our physical world but it is believed that he/she was killed mystically by someone to live and work for that person in another world to make the person rich and wealthy.

⁶¹ This word is used in the same context as nyungu among the Bamilike tribes of the western province of Cameroon.

- Sex and Marriage. There are virgins among teenage girls, especially those that have just begun experiencing their menstrual flow in the junior classes of secondary schools. Most cases of teenage trance have been recorded in the junior classes of form one, two and three during my interviews and research because these young girls are virgins and are between the age ranges of 14-16 years old. They are the targets for these evil spirits or demons because the girls are energetic; they are sexually undefiled by men and free from sexually transmitted diseases and especially HIV Aids. Since the evil spirits or demons' aim is to live longer lives, they would not seek for matured women who may contaminate them that is why their target for sex and marriage is the "fresh-fresh girls" citing the words of my informant.

The causes of teenage trance may not be from the violation of sacred grounds during the youth picnic or the breaking of taboos by the youths. I have dismissed this as a cause of teenage trance. The reason being that after the rites for the violation of sacred grounds were performed according the requirements by the custodians of tradition, it was expected that teenage trance would cease to occur in those schools where youths were accused. But it did not stop and no explanation was given to say why. The accusation on religious sects in the country is a cause that is left to be verified, and which religious sects need to be identified. I do not believe that any genuine religion that is meant to save the lives of people can ironically work to destroy or hurt them. I believe that Christian prayers healed many teenage trance victims therefore no Christian group praying against evil can be the cause of teenage trance. Jesus said in Mt. 12:25-26, "Every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and every city divided against itself cannot stand. If Satan drives out Satan, he is divided against himself. How can then his kingdom stand?"⁶² The Muslims accusations of Christians and church sect groups as being the cause of teenage trance according to information gathered from informant on experience of religious leader offering care case four, I have also dismissed as unfounded. Pastors and Christian groups that pray for the healing of teenage trance victims should actually be encouraged to continue to assist the victims and families.

⁶² The Holy Bible, New International Version, 1992.

4. 2 Analysis of symptoms or manifestations of teenage trance

I have identified three different phases to analyse the various symptoms of teenage trance occurrence.

The first phase is the immediate period before trance attack the victim(s).

The first teenage trance victims experienced trance during their sports activities. Some of them were attacked when they were in a state of motion or were involved in a mental activity in the classroom.

When someone is in a state of motion, he or she easily loses control or balance in himself/ herself when obstructed with a least touch. Some of them suddenly felt dizzy and others were mystically tackled to fall on the ground. While others had a violent headache and felt they had malaria fever, they breathed an odd odour in a foulish atmosphere which choked them and made them fell to the ground and fainted. I have observed that trance attacked most of its victims at the time when they were involved in either a mental or physical activity which requires a high concentration of all the five senses. I have decided to call this period "*the initiation stage of teenage trance*" this is the period the victim is being transported into a different world, the spirit trance world. The victims see strange and unidentifiable people, so they agitate and struggle to free themselves from the trance agents' grips. My informant's experience (a religious leader offering care, case four) of trance as it manifests, itself on victims, said that some of the victims, before they fell, ran wild and said things as if in a dialogue with someone such as: "I will not come," "leave me alone," "wait for me" or "you cannot kill me" when the trance agents had succeeded to transport their victim, she becomes unconscious in our physical world but conscious with them in the trance world. At this state, the victim is in her second trance stage; the manifestations are different.

The second phase of manifestations or symptoms

I call this stage "*the victim's experience in a trance world*"

I observed when I was called to assist a trance victim who was at this stage, that the victim was unconscious, and this can extend into a coma. Her respiration was slow and irregular. At this state the trance victim could be carried to anywhere or anything could be done to her and she would not know. That is the period she is said to live in the trance world and family members would think that their child is dead and would be crying. While the victim appears dead and inactive to us, she is

really alive in the world of the spirits and interact with them in several ways. She is either collaborating with the trance agents by doing their work tasks or rebelling against them. They have activities that they assign the victims to carry out such as moulding of bricks, cultivation of farmlands washing of dishes, plates and pots, general laundry and other cleaning services. They force them to sign blood pacts, have sex or marry with the spirits. They see the full or complete forms of the people there and can give a full description of them but they are unable to identify them by names in our world and could not say this or that person I saw. Sometimes the victims are rendered confused and cannot remember anything they saw or what happened to them. The description of the queen mother given to us by the fifth victim's story portrayed a beautiful woman from the head to her buttocks she was a human being. But where the legs were supposed to be, instead there was something like a fish's tale. This picture of one of the spirits is an indication that the spirit was a monster. The legs that look like the tale of a fish portray that the monster is a spirit adapted to aquatic life and most probably live in the sea. One can therefore say that this is what we call mammy water"⁶³ or a mermaid. Some tribes like the Bakweri, the Douala and others of the South West and Litoral provinces respectively are believed to possess the mammy water in their cultures in Cameroon. They share a common cultural heritage and are called the "SAWA."⁶⁴ It is interesting and surprising to hear the stories revealed by the victims of trance. Within the short period that they live in their spirit trance world much experience is gathered. I sympathised with the trance victim of the fifth story when she said during the interview that up till today she is still washing her pots. This means she is still under the influence of the trance agents who have total control over her. I would say that, in her trance state she is hypnotised and used for this service of pot washing. Trance victims in the second phase were either allowed to sleep quietly until they regain their consciousness or prayed for healing. When they recover from the second phase, they enter the third phase in which the following symptoms are manifested. Some victims who were suffering from dehydration were re-hydrated in the hospitals but still showed or manifested

⁶³ This is a spiritual or a mystical woman that lives in the sea and is believed to provide her lovers with money and wealth. She is believed to own charms and can transform into every type of serpent.

⁶⁴ Tribal people living along the coastal regions of Cameroon.

symptoms such as fatigue, physical weakness and exhaustion when they immediately recovered.

The third phase of symptoms or manifestations

- Physical weakness: this was an indication that they had exhausted their energy in one or more activities. This confirms what they reveal in their stories about forced labour going on in the trance spirit world.
- They look tired with fatigue and feel hungry and thirsty and that is why both school teachers and medical practitioners would say the victims portrayed signs of pupils who did not eat well in the morning before they came to school. Where as there can be some truth in that but it should be understood that the trance victims were often involved in intensive activities that made them feel hungry and thirsty. Other factors that obscured our understanding is that, some trance victims had other illnesses that coincided with trance and they could easily be identified or diagnosed and said to be suffering from such illness.
- They are traumatised: the beating and torment they received from the trance agents leave scars on their bodies fill the victims with fear and were often shocked by the experience they had passed through.
- They forgot many things because they had received mental torture and were trouble minded, dispirited and depressed.
- They feel embarrassed humiliated to have gone through such strange experiences and might not like to talk about it.

4.3 Analysis of remedies or healing processes.

There were three categories of people that had been contacted to assist the teenage trance victims during or after the occurrence.

- *The first were the medical practitioners or core.*

Neither the nurses nor the doctors have been able to diagnose the causes of trance medically. On the other hand there were some trance victims that had been patients suffering from anaemia, asthma, malaria and cardiac diseases. Eventually when they became victims of trance and were taken to the

hospitals, they portrayed diagnosis of those illnesses in them. “Newspaper report of 23rd November 2007”⁶⁵ “*pathologies: Deux nouveaux élèves en transe a Douala*”⁶⁶ the paper spoke about two additional trance victims in the Government high school Deido in Douala. These victims were reported to have suffered from anaemia and asthma according to their pathological analysis. It was therefore possible that the nurses or doctor prescribed medication for their malaise but this would not include treatment for trance which needed to be spiritually addressed. I do not know if such victims were healed from trance when they administered these medications and treatment pertaining to anaemia and asthma respectively. The hospitals and even some school teachers had talked of some school pupils who came to school without eating sufficient breakfast at home and have fallen into trance due to hunger. These were only comments without verifications to know the truth. The remedies for such cases, was of-course food and water. This could be understood from the fact that when the victims of trance have recovered or gain consciousness, portrayed symptoms of fatigue, hunger and thirst due to intensive activities in the trance world and not because the victim did not eat at home before coming to school. If their explanation was right what would they have said of victims who ate well at home and yet fell into trance? However, there were some cases of physical weakness, fatigue, menstruation as well as psychological and psychiatric causes that might have influenced trance on which these youths are taken victims. But because many parents, victims and family members were not satisfied with such diagnosis and remedies provided in hospitals they were forced to seek for remedies elsewhere. No parent ever testified to have had treatment for their trance victim child at the hospital. However there are at least some psycho-somatic bearings in the phenomenon which prompts for further medical research as well as close cooperation between the doctors, medical personnel and the religious leaders in coping with the phenomenon. This is a real challenge to medical researchers in Cameroon.

⁶⁵ <http://www.cameroon-info.net/cin-reaction.php?>

⁶⁶ News paper headline in French language translated as (Two new pupils who fell in trance in Douala)

The second category was the traditional doctors. I did not interview any traditional doctor or healer because I knew none that assisted the trance victims where I carried out this research. This was not because they do not exist in the area but because my informants refused to take me to them or give adequate information in regard to where they lived. However there was neither a victim nor any victims' parent who testified that a victim had received complete healing from traditional doctors. All the victims who went to traditional doctors only still complained that they received a healing which they considered to have only calmed down trance and so they still experience trance re-occurrence.

Sacrifices to appease the gods of the mountains and other sacred grounds believed to have been desecrated by the youths did not heal the trance victim. So I can conclude that there was no effective remedy from the traditional perspective and religion.

The third category was the spiritual leaders of Christians and Muslims. Only one Muslim spiritual leader accepted to be interviewed on the issue of trance during my research highly concentrated Muslim area. He testified that he assisted one trance victim who received healing through Islamic prayers according to the Qu'ran. He cited chapter one and two but on verification, I did not find any verses referring to healing as he claimed. Therefore analysing this without healing facts gathered might not be objective. I will not do justice to myself and to their holy book of faith. I therefore leave out this to move to the Christians spiritual leaders.

The Christians and clergy process of healing trance victims

Out of the 25 people interviewed in relation to the healing of teenage trance, 22 accepted that Christian prayer brought relief and healing to trance victims. This is about 4/5 of people who believed that Christians and clergy prayers brought healing to trance victims. Their testimonies are therefore of great hope to those that believe in God and that the Lord Jesus Christ heals in answer to prayers. There is therefore a need to analyse some salient elements observed or which were implicitly present in the prayers that were said for the healing of teenage trance victims. Most often, the people who were consulted to assist trance victims were taken unaware. That is, they were not informed before in

advance that they would be needed to assist teenage trance victims. When suddenly they were met with such a case prior to any preparation it was like an embarrassment to them. That was the only moment for them to reflect on what action to be taken. So whatever decision they arrived at it would be the result of a decision made spontaneously. This accounted for as one of the reasons while some victims were not healed after prayers. The prayers were hastily prepared and said without much concentration. Sometimes those who said the prayers had no confidence in what they said in their prayers and sometimes others were afraid of becoming victims of trance as they prayed for victims. Little faith in God and his power to heal can account for a greater number of victims that did not receive healing through several prayer sessions. Worse of all, if the victim has signed blood pact through animal sacrifices before prayers were said. Such cases would require special prayers from an exorcist. The process to heal teenage trance victims is not like in medicine where once the illness is diagnosed by the doctor or nurse, then a prescription would be given to the patient. When an illness is spiritual, only spiritual treatment can heal that patient. The most effective healing of spiritual illnesses or casting out of demons is prayers. Prayers for healing are not prepared and said hastily. It is not man's will that God obeys. It is the direct opposite- man should obey God's will. So when we pray for healing, we need adequate preparation to communicate effectively with God soliciting to move his will to assist us in whatever situation we find ourselves. It is not often that we deserve God's will to assist us but he loves us and has promised to come to our aid whenever we need him. This is God's act of grace towards humanity. He has given us assurance of His grace in Mat.7: 7-8. "Ask and it will be given to you, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, he who seeks finds and to him who knocks, the door will be opened."⁶⁷ The hope of every Christian praying for any kind of reason is based on this passage in the Bible. These verses of the scriptures are often quoted or cited in both the general and specific prayers by most Christians in Cameroon. Information gathered during my field research from my informants portrayed two categories of prayers that were said by two groups of people.

⁶⁷ The Holy Bible, *New International Version*, 1992.

The first category of prayer could be termed general prayers. These prayers were said by a Christian group or an individual (lay or clergy). In this category of prayers I would not examine or analyse the content of what is said specifically. But as a pastor, I have observed that many things are said during a prayer session by a Christian prayer group to meet the needs of many people both in and out of the group. Some groups say prayers in a disorderly manner. We should understand that, our God is not a disorderly God. He created every thing in an orderly manner. God's creative act in Genesis chapter one testifies His orderliness in His creation of the universe and all its content. Prayers without focus are like targets shot without focus, and the probability of missing the target is wide. All Christian prayers are directed to God through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. But it is not every prayer that receives positive answer or desired results. There are many reasons why some prayers do not seem to have been answered. God is not obliged to answer prayers according to our desires. He may do so when His will is fulfilled through our desires. To pray effectively as a group or as an individual, requires adequate consecration and concentration. Only a few people and sometimes even none may possess these qualities in some prayer groups. This can explain why some prayers may receive positive answers and others not. Consecrated Christians are those who have set themselves aside for the work of God and away from the worries of this world. Because they have consecrated themselves to do God's will, they are devoted and are able to concentrate on spiritual matters like prayers and live their lives as in Mat 6:33. "But seek first for his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."⁶⁸ Such Christians seek to do God's will for man's salvation and not man's will or desires.

The second category of prayers is an individual praying for one or more person(s). Spiritual leaders (the clergies) fall under this category although some Christian laity may be included into this category. This would be due to their devotedness and piety. While many Christians and even unbelievers

⁶⁸ The Holy Bible, New International Version, 1992.

desire to be prayed for, a few people accept to pray for others. Some Christians complain that they do not know what to pray for or how to pray for what they know. For most Christians who do not know how to pray, one may say this could be due to lack of devotedness and concentration to communicate their minds to God, or due to lack of faith or little faith in God; Mat 17 : 20-21. Jesus' disciples were unable to heal a boy with a demon due to the fact that they had but "little faith." In my personal understanding, this is the type of faith that is insufficient to move God's special grace in favour of a believer's need. Individuals praying for one or more or person(s) usually have a focus to intercede on behalf of some other person's prayers request and that person's need. Priests and pastors are Christians consecrated to devote their life in serving God for the salvation of others as well as themselves. They ought to concentrate in their service in order to effectively communicate with God so as to understand God's will for mankind.

Be it a prayer group or an individual's prayer, both share or have a common objective that is to have the prayer(s) requested for, answered by God. On the whole prayer groups or individuals praying for any reason turn to follow a certain prayer structure or pattern knowingly or ignorantly. Synergising all that is said in most prayer sessions, I would like to group the prayers in the following structure or formula: A.C.T.S.I. I am not trying to state a standard rule for prayers. What I am presenting is a synthesis of the content of prayers for prayers in a healing context as experience gathered in my data. The form or structure presented here is not a standard rule prescription for groups or individual prayers. I however observed that it was effectively used and one can apply during prayers so as not to wonder in the mind and thought at this important moment.

- *Letter "A"* stands for Adoration and praise of God's name and his holiness. Holiness is one among God's several attributes. God created man in "His own image" in order to have fellowship with Him Gen.1:26. In this fellowship, it is God's desire that man should worship Him with praise and adoration because it is pleasing to God. God's need is that man should continue to praise and worship him on earth as it is done in Heaven by his Angels Isa.6:3 "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory." Jesus taught his disciples to pray that, God's name be hallowed (be praised) and his will be done on earth as it is in heaven;

Matt.6: 9-14 the scripture says God has called and commanded man to be holy as he is holy. Levit.19: 2 and 20: 26. That is why in Christians' prayers we need to praise God's name in songs and adoration in order to arise his desires to listen to us and intervene in our situation. When Christians engage themselves to pray for healing to take effect, they should first select a good number of hymns of praise songs about God's holiness and His great art and acts of creation, Psalm 8; 100; 103; 104; 149; 150. These songs of praise of God's name and his holiness are exactly what the demons hate to hear. They cannot bear hearing God being praised because they also desire to be praised. Lavishing God's name with praises for his holiness and acts of creation dislodge demons from their stronghold to seek refuge elsewhere. Singing and praying invokes God's power and through the Holy Spirit, discern from his throne and assist the supplicant. The believer needs to surrender the self to God and depend totally on God's intervention in his situation. Paul and Silas were singing and praying to God in prison. Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundation of the prisons was shaken, Acts 16:25-26. God's power is above all other powers that be in the universe. Anybody who is able to move God to act on his side through songs, praise, and prayers overcomes his enemies through the power of the Holy Spirit of God.

- *Letter "C" stands for confession of sins. Confession and repentance from sin go together. Psalm 25: 7, 17 Confession is the recognition or acceptance that one has sinned and repentance is to ask for forgiveness of one's sin, 2 Samuel 12: 13. "Then David said to Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord." Ezra 9: 6-15. All forms of sins separate man from God. All sins are an abomination to God, Pr. 6: 16-19. God hates sin and therefore does not listen to or give answers to prayers said by sinful people. This is illustrated by our Lord Jesus in a parable of the Pharisee and the publican in Luke 18: 9-14. The Pharisee boastful of his religious duty as he prayed was a sin. His prayer indicated pride in himself. God was not pleased with him. Where as a tax collector known to be a sinner in the Jewish society prayed to God confessing his sin, God was pleased with him and forgave him his sins. The Bible says "For all have sinned and fall*

short of the glory of God,” Rom.3:23. A sinful man however can be granted forgiveness of sins if he confesses them and stops sinning. Since nobody is righteous before God and the prayers of a sinful person cannot reach God due to separation from him by sin, we must confess our sin to God in order that our prayers be heard and answered. Confession of sin therefore is vital if we desire God to answer our prayer for healing. It takes away the sin that bare us from God so that as we receive forgiveness, our communication link with God is wrenched open. Sins in thought, word and deeds must be confessed during prayer. Most Christians shy away to confess their sins and their prayers do not get to God. This would have a repercussion on the group’s prayer.

- *The Letter “T” represents thanksgiving.* Psalm 105; 106; 107. Although the acts of God are so great and many, he require us to thank him in whatever he does to us. To thank God means to acknowledge what he has done for us, what he is doing and what he will do in future. A token of appreciation of God’s dids in our lives is very important to enable him do more whenever and whatever you ask in prayers. Jesus required the ten men healed of leprosy to come and give thanks to God for the healing they received. He was dismayed to see only one who returned to give thanks and praise to God in Luke 17: 11-19. If we as humans feel delighted to receive thanks from those we have assisted on little things. How much more would God be delighted if we thank Him for all His goodness? Our prayer should at all times include thanks to God in everything.

- *Letter “S” is supplication.* I understand this word in this context to mean negotiations with God to receive His favour. When we seek for God’s favour we go to him in humility, respect, love and awe. Psalm 90: 13-17, 2 Samuel 7: 17-29. The content of this portion of prayer depends on the needs and desires of the person praying.

- *Letter “I” represents Intercession.* Intercessory prayers are the prayers that are said on behalf of others. When people ask us to pray for them, we

interceding on their behalf. Jesus' intercessory prayers for his disciples and for all believers, John 17: 6-19 and 20-26.

The session of prayers is interspersed with singing of hymns and reading of selected Biblical text relevant to casting out of demons and evil spirits. Demon possession of people existed even in the time of Jesus. This was part of his healing ministry, Luke 4: 33-35; 8: 27-33; 13: 10-13; Mark 1: 21-26; 2: 34; Acts 5: 16; 19: 11-19. There are many healing texts pertaining to Jesus healing of people suffering from different illnesses. The few texts cited here are those pertaining to exorcism or casting out of demons in victims.

- *Exorcism.* To dislodge demons or evil spirits from their medium is not an easy process. This requires adequate preparations as in a battle where there is no element that the warrior minimises. So the clergy or laity involved in these healing aspects must be well armed as the Apostle Paul advised all Christians in Eph. 6: 10-20. Adequate preparation in exorcism requires individual's prayers and fasting prior to the encounter with the trance victims for deliverance; Matthew 17: 14-21. "However this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting."⁶⁹ It could be very dangerous for those praying to cast out demons or evil spirits from their medium if they were not adequately prepared before they confront the demons as in the case of the seven sons of Sceva in Acts 19. These men tried to cast out evil spirits in the name of Jesus from a man possessed of demons as Apostle Paul did; instead the evil spirit answered and said, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know, but who are you?" The evil spirit leaped on them and overpowered them so that they fled naked and were wounded. It must be noted that the demons are violent and are not prepared to leave their victims they have gained possession. They are prepared therefore to defend themselves in order to maintain their stay there. One of my informants on experience of religious leader offering care case four told me he was violently attacked by the evil spirits. As he was praying for the victim, she suddenly got up and buttoned him by his neck, shook him to suffocation but with the quick

⁶⁹ The Christian Life New Testament; the New King James Version.

intervention of those who were assisting him in the prayer session, he was able to tear off his shirt to free his neck from the suffocation. This was a real bitter experience for him even though he prepared well before the encounter. There was also an instant when the demons had to speak to the exorcist and inquire where they should go when they leave their victim. It can be very frightful to listen to the demons or evil spirits speaking to you. Such moments are very decisive for all the parties concern. That is to say the victim who is being delivered, the exorcist, those assisting him and even the onlookers. The right decision must be taken to deliver the victim as well as to protect all parties concern in the delivery process. My informant, experience of a religious leader case one said he had to fast and prayed that his family members be protected before he went to pray for deliverance because after dislodging the demons from their medium, they may haunt you at home and trouble your family members that are weak in faith. So it is proper to say prayers that would cover everybody before you dare go to deliver someone from demon possession because it is a very delicate issue. Otherwise you may instead direct the demons to harm you yourself or one of your family members. The exorcist cast out demons or evil spirits not by his personal power, but by the power of God through the Holy Spirit and in the name of Jesus who has in turn authorised his followers (Christians) to carry out this practise, Luke 10: 19-20. When demons begin to speak to the exorcist and ask him where they should go or that he should show them the person they could go into, it should be understood that they have acknowledged defeat but want to trick the exorcist in an error so that they may rob him of the battle and defeat. And when the exorcist said “in the name of Jesus I command you to come out,” the demons were actually tortured in the victim that they cannot resist any longer. In the process of coming out of the victim and going out to be destroyed they yell in an agony ah-ah-ah!! Waah-waah-waah!! So protective measures must be assured before you and others engage in exorcism.

Anoint the victim with oil after deliverance from demonic possession is a religious ceremony that grantees or assures the person of God’s healing, blessing and protection. This ceremony was performed in one of the

schools where trance occurred frequently. A team of clergymen led by the Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cameroon went to the school and prayed for two days and anointed the pupils in their classrooms. The prayers and anointing that was carried out there had a positive effect. The phenomenon of trance was reported to have ceased its frequent occurrence in the school. It also reminds the anointed of his sacred commitment to serve God. It is a symbol of God's authority with the one anointed as when David was anointed king in 2 Samuel 2:2-6. On this ceremony the anointing assured both students and the school teachers God's protection from trance and other evil spirit.

Holy water was given to the victims after recovery by the Roman Catholic Church priest. This is believed among the Roman Catholic Christians to chase away demons. Also the rosary was given to victims to remind them of the different prayers they were committed to say in the different periods of the day with the aim to keep the victim safe from the evil spirits. The amulets, charms, magic rings, talisman and potions contain supernatural powers and are the vectors which the demons and the evil spirits were said to pass through. Individuals in our societies are said to carry these objects with them with the aim to use them against their enemies whenever they desire to harm. Exorcism is an effective spiritual weapon or practice to destroy the powers of these evil spirits and their agents and have them dislodged from their hideout or destroy them completely.

- Pastoral care/counselling. This is a tool used by the clergy to understand the problems of Christians in order to guide them in their spiritual life and faith. The clergy has to listen carefully in order to understand during consultation with the faith adherent. Information gathered during consultation would be used to guide the client to grow in his or her spiritual life. The counsellor may find the best way to advice the counselee against the use of object discovered during or after consultation such as talisman, amulets, fetish, magic potions etc. Youths are easily deceived with these objects when they are told that to buy and keep them could make them pass exams, or be more intelligent than others, protect them from evil spirits or give them money or make them more powerful than the other youth. The general fear of these evil forces may provoke some pupils

to look for supernatural powers and use for self defence. Mechanisms for auto-protection may also develop within the youths when they live in constant fear of evil spirits or of human enemies. This may also facilitate trance to occur in children in such situation

5. The Cameroon Experience in the light of Relevant Literature-Medical and Anthropological.

Cameroon has about two hundred and eighty ethnic groups and tribal languages which reflect a wide range of cultural diversity and world view. The greatest part of these cultural views and world perspectives exist in oral forms. These present a favourable environment and resources for anthropological research. With regards to the phenomenon of trance in general, two types of trance can be identified but not related to teenage trance in secondary schools. These types of trance (trance dance and speaking in tongues) are imbedded in a cultural and religious dance during initiation rites in most Cameroonian cultures and traditional dance groups. These can be said to be consciously organised activities without negative effects on the participants or members. Among the Ejagham, the Bakweri, the Bayangi and the Bakondo of the South west provinces, the initiation rites of new members into the “Ekpe society”⁷⁰ or the “Malay dance”⁷¹ is done in a kind of “trance dance”⁷² and speaking in tongues.

There is a general believe in witchcraft practices, sorcery and the existence of demons and evil spirits in Cameroon. The use of talisman, fetish, amulets and the practice of divination is common among many tribes that Christianity has not yet stamped a great influence in the people’s lives. A good example is the Dii tribe and the Gbaya tribes in the Adamaoua province where I carried out my research.

⁷⁰ This is a social rank group that attributes special respect and honor to members according to your grade in the group among the tribes cited above.

⁷¹ This dance pertains to the Bakweri tribe of the south west of Cameroon. A typical masquerade dance which portray elements of mysticism of power possession and manifestation of elephants’ characteristics by the dancers. E.g. the eating of raw plantains.

⁷² A style of dance that the dancers performs using sign language and sometimes speak in tongues among members so that he they need an interpreter. The trance dancer trembles as he carries out this performance with bare feet. He said to be communicating with the spirits of the ancestors. Among the Ejagham and Kenyang tribes, the Obasenjom (masquerade) performs a trance dance in which he reveals the names of the propagators of evil in the village denounce their acts and ask them to confess their evil and appease the gods of the land if they value their lives.

Examples in order provinces of Cameroon abound where people believe in demons, evil spirits, and ghosts of dead people. The Ejagham and the Bayangi tribes believe that when evil people die, their ghost remain haunting and frightening people at night mostly.

Symptoms of demonic and evil spirit practices in Cameroon The victim may manifest various symptoms.

- Physical symptoms. Most demoniacs suffer illness when they are under the control of an evil spirit. In the New Testament, demons are believed to cause muteness (Matt.9:32f; Mark 9: 17; Luke11: 14), blindness (Matt.12:22), self inflicted wounds, (Mark 5: 5), fever, headache, and stomach aches or give one the ability to ignore pains or feel pains with no physical causes. These illnesses have no medically discernable cause and do not respond to medical treatment.
- Psychological symptoms. ⁷³”These include unnecessary fear by victims, unusual dreams or hallucination, frightening and mental problems that do yield to normal treatment such as depression, extreme sexual perversion, unnecessary self accusation, hearing sounds (footsteps, noises and commands) that no one else hears, especially overwhelming fear of evil, extreme confusion, cloudiness of thought and unusual or inappropriate emotional reaction such as laughter, sadness, crying, anger.” All forms of exaggerated passions addiction to commit sin, anger temper, quarrelsomeness and domineering personality.
- Super natural abilities. The demoniacs may have the ability to predict events before they occurred or know facts that are unknown to every other person or speak in a language they have not learn or heard, posses extraordinary strength, change of voice and breathing as if suffocating.
- Spiritual symptom. This category of deionization is known to react against the name of Jesus and Christian prayers. The victim may loss spiritual growth or the ability to concentrate on Scripture and prayers. Manifestation of self righteous, visions directing a person to commit sin and go against God’s will.

⁷³ Deliver Us from Evil, *An uneasy Frontier in Christian Mission*, pg. 96.

Medically the Cameroon government through its health ministry is on a general awareness and alert of the danger the phenomenon is causing on its youth population. Medically a few teenage trance victims who manifested other illnesses while in trance received care and treatment of the diseases at the hospitals but not of trance. It is therefore not enough to stop at this level but to organise and carry out adequate medical research on teenage trance. The government and other non governmental or private sectors like the church, schools and paramedical organisation in the country need a joint initiative to combat this teenage trance phenomenon.

Healing the victims: The victims of demon possession are healed by prayers. In Cameroon exorcism is not popular because even among Christians and churches, many believers do not consider it to be genuine and ethically Christian. However a few churches like the Roman Catholics have trained and established the services of exorcism in their dioceses. Other churches need to emulate this example as greater needs for the services become high in demand.

6. Theological Perspectives on the Phenomenon

Theologically the phenomenon of trance exists in the Bible and has its roots and origin from the Pentecost event where the Holy Spirit sent by God, is believed by Christian churches to have descended upon Jesus' disciples and taken possession of them in Jerusalem. The book of Acts chapter two is a narration of the Pentecost story. This type of trance is recognised and is a common practice among the Pentecostal churches. However the Bible also recognises the presence of demons and evil forces and spirits possession trance in the world that are opposed to the Holy Spirit of God. Man is at the centre of contention between God's Holy Spirit on one hand and Satan's evil forces on the other.

6.1 The phenomenon in Theological Literature

“Possession trance is interpreted or believed to result from the entry of a spirit(s) or power into the affected person.”⁷⁴ When a person is possessed by a spirit or a

⁷⁴ Trance, Healing, and Hallucination. *Three Field studies in Religious Experience*, p. 3.

demon in the New Testament, the illness is called an infirmity. There is a number of cases of infirmities pertaining to spiritual or demon possession in biblical literatures that were healed by Jesus: Matt.15: 21-28, 9: 32; 12: 23; Mk.9: 14-29; Lk.13: 10-13. The New Testament does not contain the word “exorcism” which is theologically applied to the practice of healing the demon possessed in the Bible. Apostle Paul never made reference to exorcism in the Pauline literature but the word is attributed to him in the book of Acts. The reason could be that the context explains the content. “That is to say, perhaps there is no mention of exorcism in the letters because there is no evidence that exorcism occurred inside the believing community, while Luke’s account of Paul focuses on Paul’s missionary journey outside the believing community, where exorcism occurred.⁷⁵” We can conclude that exorcism occurred in the New Testament mostly in a missionary or evangelistic context. Exorcism is an effective response to cases of spiritual or demon possession. Demon possession or infirmities in the New Testament does not indicate or portray any application of medicine as adequate to cure or healing of the victims except in the case of Timothy in 1Tim.5:23. The use of medicine can not however be ignored in response to infirmities. This single example from the New Testament Scriptures should not weaken or reject the use of doctors or medicine as a response to teenage trance in Cameroon secondary schools. Rather it should be considered as a positive contribution from doctors and medicine to collaborate with the clergy and together seek for holistic healing of the entire victims of trance because it is most often difficult to discern or diagnose if an infirmity is natural or spiritual. So the healing of victims may be complete only when the person receives holistic treatment and cure. It is both the physical and spiritual aspects of healing that brings total recovery to the patient. So the New Testament text emphasized this with a single example.

6.2 The phenomenon as a challenge to Pastoral Care in Cameroon

Teenage trance is a real menace not only to the victims who need adequate assistance from family members, the hospitals school teachers and the government, but the church in particular because the church has an important role to play in the spiritual life of the entire community. It is the church that has been

⁷⁵ Deliver Us from Evil, 2002 p. 47.

given the privilege as an instrument in God's "missio Dei."⁷⁶ That is God's activities which embraces both the church and the world. It affects all people in all aspects of their lives. Jesus' ministry of salvation includes man's integral life that is the soul and the body. The priests, and pastors or clergy who are today the representative of Christ in Apostolic order must continue the missio Dei not only in the church, but in the entire society. They have to carry out God's mission in the world and seek to address problems of all people in areas such as: poverty, misery, sickness (both physical and spiritual), criminality and social chaos. Teenage trance therefore is only one aspect that requires pastoral care and attention from the churches in God's "missio Dei" in Cameroon. Churches and the clergy have different or divergent views on to combat the issue of teenage trance. Some churches do not share the idea of exorcism as a response to teenage trance in Cameroon. Others are sceptical about training their pastors as exorcists. They consider exorcism as a kind of magic and therefore is in itself an evil practice. So there are few pastors who can actually accept to participate in prayers of deliverance from demon possession. The fact that the churches have not yet come together to address this issue and bring relieve to victims and their families represents a major challenge to pastoral care on the phenomenon in Cameroon.

6.3 Guidelines for pastoral care on future occurrence of teenage trance victims and their families in Cameroon.

This guidelines for pastoral care on future occurrence of teenage trance consists partly, my own personal experience in pastoral care on teenage trance victims and their families, partly the experience of other pastors on the phenomenon as well as ideas from literature on pastoral care. Much has been extracts from the Roman Catholic Ritual for Exorcism the book "Deliver Us from Evil" pages 80- 81. The guide is for both the clergy and laity.

Prepare yourself fit for each day's task. We may desire to do so much in a day but God knows and determines how much one could do according to the ability and strength he has provided us with. God is the source of all strength, power and ability to achieve what he has for us on a daily bases. It is therefore important to

⁷⁶ Transforming Mission, *Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*. P. 391.

begin each day with prayers just as our Lord Jesus began each day with prayers. Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place where he prayed, Mk.1: 35. It is very important for child of God or Christian to start the day with prayers offering or committing yourself and all that day's activities into God's care. This portrays a total dependence on God and his intervention to assist you in difficult situations. This also gives you the opportunity to have constant communication with God to know his will for you. If in the course of the day you are called as a pastor or priest to assist someone held to be possessed, or tormented by demons, you must not decline but go there and investigate his condition and pray calling upon God to yield the sick according to the duty of the office, in the name of the Lord.

Consultation with teenage trance victims: The pastor together with doctors and other pastors in the area evaluate the case whether it is a natural disease or the person is bodily possessed by the Devil so that he rules and governs the whole body and all its members as was in the case of the mute in Luke's gospel 11: 14. If we seek for God's guidance we will be able to discern the spirits and know if they have conquered their victims, and then test the case on the word of God. Demon possession can either be caused by the possessed themselves, if they have made a pact with Satan or voluntarily given themselves by sin or ungodliness or it can be undeserved. The Catholic church distinguishes between "diabolical obsession" which is a hostile action of the Devil or an evil spirit besetting anyone from without" 2Cor. 12: 7-8 and a "diabolical possession" which is "the state of a person whose body has fallen under the control of the demon."⁷⁷ Such cases need the prayers to be said by an exorcist.

Qualification of an exorcist

- The exorcist can be a pastor or a laity who has been trained in this ministry. He or she should be characterized by piety, prudence and personal integrity. He should not just trust and rely on his own power, but rely on the power of God.

⁷⁷ Deliver Us from Evil, 2002 p. 79.

- Be able to discern spirit possession of people. He has to know the signs that make him able to distinguish between those who are possessed and those who suffer from physical disease. As already mentioned the physical strength that goes beyond the age or ordinary condition of the possessed is one of among others.
- He /she should be aware that the evil spirits use lies and deceit to lead the exorcist astray. They can only manifest themselves under pressure and let the person who is possessed look like he is not possessed to bring the exorcism to a halt. The exorcist should not give up until he sees signs of deliverance.
- Moral considerations. If the exorcist is a man, he should have well reputed women present who may serve to hold the teenage girls when they are tormented and convulsed by the evil spirit. The women should be patient and belong to the family of the possessed
- Dangers to avoid during exorcism. The exorcist is warned against leading conversation with the evil spirits asking unnecessary questions. He should not believe the spirits if it claims to be the soul of a saint or dead person or a good angel. The spirit should be treated with contempt. He should avoid the risk of scandal by refusing to say anything that may harm him or others. He should avoid the use of his own words and other people but rather use the words of the Bible. He should give no medicine to the victim. That is the role Doctors.
- Other things vital to be done are: the exorcism itself should be carried with a command with authority, great faith, humility and eagerness. He should command the spirit to admit if it occupied the possessed because of any magic, or sorcery symbol or occult. If the exorcist finds anything like talisman, amulets or other object of evil, they should be surrender them and be burned
- If the victim is delivered from the evil spirit, she should be advise to turn away from sin otherwise she may give the evil spirit an opportunity to return and possess her anew.

The laying of hands and anointing the delivered victim(s) with oil could be applied by the end of the session with a benediction.

7. Conclusion

In my conclusion I would first acknowledge that teenage trance was what I identified and described the phenomenon principally occurrence among teenage girls in Cameroon secondary and high schools. I have been able to answer the questions which inspired me to carry out my field research in this Thesis topic. I have also given an adequate description and explanation as close as possible to the way my informants knew and understood the phenomenon to exist. I analysed all the elements and facts that I gathered in my field research as well as translated and interpreted the data material from French into English for a better understanding.

The causes of teenage trance as already mentioned are mystical and are attributed to evil and unidentified persons practicing witch craft and sorcery by evil spirits or demon possession. It is not known whether the demons possessed the people or vice versa.

The hospitals are yet to provide medical explanations in regards to the causes and treatment of teenage trance. This is a challenge to medical research in Cameroon.

The situation also requires research in social anthropology to give full description and add meaning to the understanding of the phenomenon.

The Cameroon government is required to step up appropriate measures on how to deal and cope with the phenomenon in its secondary and high schools. Both the school teachers and pupils are embarrassed with such occurrence in the schools.

The effects of teenage trance covers a wide spectrum in the society and has been leading to both individual harassment and public disorder with damage both private and public properties.

Teenage trance needs the collective and join efforts from Cameroon government, schools, the church and paramedical co-operation to combat the situation.

The Evangelical Church of Cameroon (EELC/ECC) should initiate a project on teenage trance in its diaconal ministry. Here some pastors or laity may be trained as exorcists and establish the services of a consultant or counsellor who may advice other pastors on mystical issues. He may work together with medical personnel to establish a clergy-medical clinic for both physical and spiritual illnesses. This will assure the fulfilment of a holistic health ministry.

The EELC/ECC as a missional church may in its ecumenical agenda organised join sessions with other churches with an aim to establish a unique liturgy for teenage trance pastoral care and other mystical phenomena.

FIELD MATERIAL

I have agreed with my informants during my field work to keep their identity anonymous in regard of the information they give me. I also signed an agreement with Ombudsman that is the Norwegian Social Science Data for Privacy in Research, to make reference to the informants only with general names to conceal their identification. Therefore, I have used the following names to refer to my informants:

1. Trance victims
2. Parents
3. Schools teachers
4. Religious leaders

1. Victims stories

| Number | Date | Place |
|-----------------|---------------------------|--------------|
| 1 st | 5 th July 2007 | Ngaoundere |
| 2 nd | 8 th July 2007 | Meiganga |
| 3 rd | 8 th July 2007 | Meiganga |
| 4 th | 8 th July 2007 | Meiganga |
| 5 th | 8 th July 2007 | Meiganga |
| 6 th | 8 th July 2007 | Meiganga |
| 7 th | 8 th July 2007 | Meiganga |

2. Parents stories

| Number | Date | Place |
|-----------------|----------------------------|--------------|
| 1 st | 5 th July 2007 | Ngaoundere |
| 2 nd | 8 th July 2007 | Meiganga |
| 3 rd | 11 th July 2007 | Tignere |
| 4 th | 8 th July 2007 | Meiganga |
| 5 th | 8 th July 2007 | Meiganga |

3. School teachers' stories

| Number | Date | Place |
|-----------------|---------------------------|--------------|
| 1 st | 4 th July 2007 | Ngaoundere |

| | | |
|-----------------|---------------------------|------------|
| 2 nd | 5 th July 2007 | Ngaoundere |
| 3 rd | 8 th July 2007 | Meiganga |

4. Experience of religious leaders offering care

| Number | Date | Place |
|-----------------|----------------------------|--------------|
| 1 st | 5 th July 2007 | Ngaoundere |
| 2 nd | 11 th July 2007 | Tignere |
| 3 rd | 11 th July 2007 | Tignere |
| 4 th | 8 th July 2007 | Meiganga |

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