

THE UNHAPPY FATE OF GHANAIAN WITCHES

In Ghana, witches are real. At least, enough people believe they are for accusations of sorcery to be a serious thing. The lucky ones wind up in one of the country's six "witch camps," where village chieftains offer them safety from persecution, but even those (which hold around 800 women) are hardly idyllic sanctuaries. Here's what happens when women are branded witches:



WORDS AND PHOTO BY JULIA KÜNTZLE AND PAUL BLONDÉ

A woman is generally accused of witchcraft by her family or neighbors after someone contracts a disease, suffers a tragic death, or, sometimes, just has a bad dream. Awabu, a woman in the Gambaga camp, told us her daughter-in-law called her a witch after she dreamed Awabu was chasing her with a knife. A 2012 survey from the nonprofit ActionAid reported that more than 70 percent of the women in one camp were widows.

Accused witches have no way to prove their innocence, so they are beaten, tortured, banned from their villages, and sometimes lynched or even burned to death.

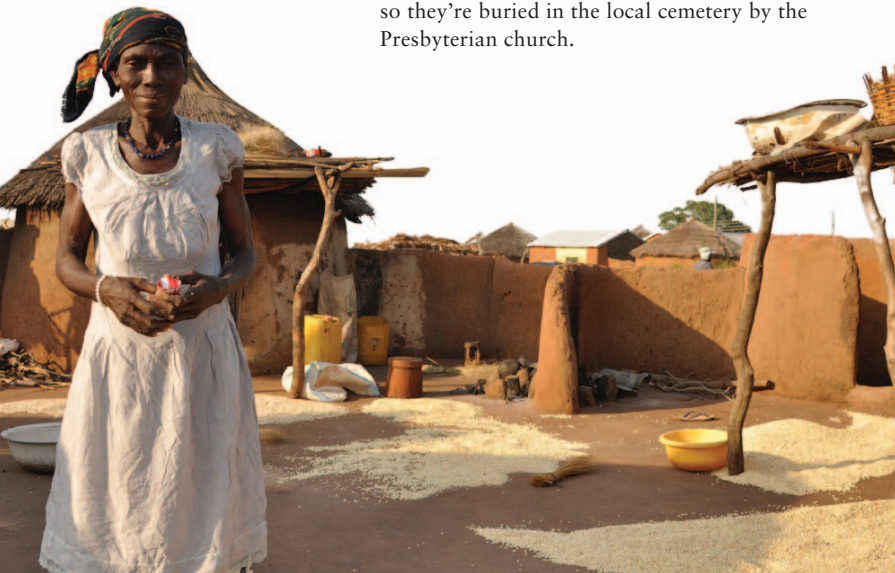
If they are banished or flee, like Awabu, the women find a way to the camps, some of which were established over 100 years ago. (One, in the village of Gnani, also accommodates male witches, a.k.a. wizards.) Once at the camp, a priest will perform a ceremony to determine a witch's guilt or innocence by throwing a sacrificed chicken at her feet.

If the chicken lands faceup, the woman is not a witch. If it lands facedown, however, the woman must undergo more rituals, like drinking chicken blood, to exorcise the witchcraft from her body. Either way, she needs to stay in the camp indefinitely under the protection of a village priest.

The huts in many camps are rudimentary and have no running water or electricity. The women strong enough to farm often work on their priest's land, giving him a portion of the crops they harvest. If they aren't well enough to work—many suffer from what the Western world would call mental illnesses—they have to survive by begging.

Once they arrive, the vast majority of witches spend the rest of their lives in the camps. In Gambaga, some who had attempted to go back to their former homes returned missing an ear or other valued body part. They are technically free to leave, but in reality are trapped by custom and superstition. The Ghanaian government has sporadically demanded that these camps be shut down, but nothing has come of that rhetoric.

When women in the Gambaga camp die, their families often refuse to take their bodies, so they're buried in the local cemetery by the Presbyterian church.



Your Baby Is Worthless if It Isn't a DJ



BY NICOLE JONES

Photo courtesy of Natalie Elizabeth Weiss

Hey, how's your baby doin'? What kind of music is it listening to? Kidz Bop? The Wiggles? Fuckin' Raffi and shit? Well, that might be fine for *some* people's kids—if they want them to crawl through life without taste or musical development. If you really loved your baby, you'd be dropping \$200 to send it to Baby DJ School.

The school was started up in September by Natalie Elizabeth Weiss, a composer and DJ from Brooklyn who has shared the stage with LCD Soundsystem and the Dirty Projectors and was recently a fellow with the Brooklyn Philharmonic. She's willing to teach tykes as young as three months old about "the wonderful worlds of electro, hip-hop, and house," according to her press release, which also promises that "little ones will be introduced to playing and handling records, mixing and matching beats, and creating fun and funky samples using modern DJ equipment."

While the idea of babies droppin' beats underscores just how easy DJs' "jobs" are, it's also a great way to introduce kids to creating music—after all, your baby probably can't play the piano, but it can produce some noise using a MIDI trigger.

If the trial class in mid-September, which was well received by babies and parents alike, is any indication, it looks like Natalie's project is going to be a roaring success. Soon, your non-DJ children will be ostracized by their terrifying, laptop-wielding peers, and eventually all music will be made for and by toddlers. I, for one, welcome this development and recently asked Natalie for some tips on how babies could hone their DJ skills. Here's what she said:

- "The most important thing about being a DJ is being a selector. If you don't match one beat, if you don't run it through one effect, if you don't drop one well-placed air horn, but you have cool tracks, that's all you need." She encouraged parents of baby DJs to "have them be active listeners when they're selectors," and offers instructional directions like, "Wow, do you hear that bubbly texture? I feel bubbles in my arms. Do you hear the bubbles? Where are the bubbles in the song?"
- "Having equipment that they can use easily" is also key. That means a laptop, a soundcard, and a MIDI trigger.
- "Keep the drinks far away. When adults are having drinks you want to keep the laptop far away, and the same is true with babies. Those sippy cups always spill."