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# Religion and Human Rights Violation in History: The Women and Witch-hunts in Medieval Europe

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## Authors' contributions

*This work was carried out in collaboration between both authors. Author NOK developed the work and wrote the first manuscript. Author IOC read the manuscript, made corrections and made personal impute that enhanced the standard of the work. Both authors read the final manuscript and approved it in its present state.*

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## ABSTRACT

What constitutes human rights and its protections or/and its violation have re-emerged in all socio-political, legal and religio-philosophic discussions of the contemporary period. The interest in human rights is an outgrowth of the atrocities committed against humanity during the 2nd world war. Thus humankind having awakened from the nightmare of the war realized that all lives are facing threats of obliteration, if nothing positive is done, therefore the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) of 1948 was born to check

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further violation of all lives. The UDHR became a benchmark for all discussions on either human rights protection or its violation in the modern era. However, it is revealing to note that from the ancient Religious traditions, what constitutes human right and its protections was provided for in moral philosophy. The instrument of its maintenance was religious organizations, which then controls the powers of the state. In spite of the natural law provisions for the protections of all lives, it is discovered that several heinous crimes were committed against human beings. It was in this period that the church introduced 'Inquisition and Witch hunting' as a common practice to flushing the society of those considered social miscreant. The women, non-Christians and heretics became the victims of these instruments. This paper betook itself to do a critical study on the practice of witch hunting within this period, with the aim of discovering its nature, instruments and dynamics in the violation of human rights with major emphasis on the women. Historical survey and sociological interpretations are adopted as methodological paradigm.

*Keywords: Religion; human rights violation; women; universal declaration of human rights; witch hunts; inquisitions.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

According to Thomas Hobbes, life in the state of nature is solitary, nasty and short. Summarily, it is a state of war of all against all. (*Bellum omnium contra omnes*) (*Leviathan* chapter xiii-viv). Here human beings have no real worth, personality and integrity, thus not protected against any onslaught. This description seems to be a true picture of the period of witch hunt in European history. Accordingly, Stephen [1] captures Europe of the medieval period in stern terms thus, 'The history of the middle ages is generally known through the recorded accomplishment of wealthy aristocratic men. The rigidly stratified social structure allowed little or no chance for advancement, especially for the very poor. Therefore, the voice of the poverty stricken masses goes unheard or is simply drowned out by the ruling class' Stephen continues his elegy as he maintains that within the cry of poor people of the period that go unheard, the most pronounced were the voice of women, which even lacks a breath/strength to push it to be heard. Notably the women had a great role to play in the integration of medieval Europe and giving it a more civilized culture and yet the women were not given a space for self identity/expression within this period [2]. Dictated from the voice of the women was a salient cry whose importance was underestimated and undervalued both biologically, economically and socio-politically. Accordingly, women were simply valued in the medieval period but only as economic commodity. In this wise, Foulsham [3] notes that the status of women in this period was mostly that of subjugation as very few options were open for them and those that were, often resulted in a harsh treatment and of back breaking labour. However, even with such ill treatment, women were still an integral part to societal growth and stability, thus a woman's role was often narrowed and marginalized. The areas thought befitting to them were child rearing, manual labour, the convent or as wives. This system of social casting not only served to maintain the male status quo but also served to further the archetypal roles for women in medieval English society. In this period, women generally were perceived as mere commodity to be bought and sold. They were married off to consolidate riches or political contracts between men who were at liberty to use them virtually any way they wished. Thus in all public spheres, women occupied a subordinate role (see also direct essay.com on medieval women), to men in the clergy, in legal proceeding, even in domestic duties [4]. In fact medieval women could only be understood in their relation to men. They were what men were not; weak, feeble minded, domestic,

motherly and dependent. It was this low status of the women that made them most vulnerable and of course victims of the most noxious attack (witch hunts) within this period. In his description of the witch-hunt practice during this period, Robertson [5] notes:

Perhaps of the worst atrocities ever committed by any religion is the witch hunt that plagued from the thirteen to the eighteenth century. The death toll in Europe is hard to estimate, the various estimates varied from between one hundred thousand to two million people... bearing in mind the small population of those times, the number of deaths from witch-hunts... is well in population to Hitler' six million Jews ... If the merits of Christianity as a civilizing force are to be in any way determined by its influence in avoiding bloodshed, its record in the matter of witch-slaying alone serves to place it, in that regard, lower than any other creed.

Witch hunt therefore provides one of the most powerful testimonies of the evils of the institutional religion and specifically the Christian church. Overtly, it was a period in history when a powerful Christian church kept humanity in ignorance and superstition, exercising tyranny over intellectual life that saw hundreds of thousands, if not millions of innocent women sent to the stake. It was a campaign of intolerance against indigenous pre-Christian religions, which was unjustly misinterpreted and viciously attacked by the church bureaucracy. Thus, through inquisition and its manual, the notorious "Malleus Maleficarum" the church blocked scientific investigation and progress, keeping humanity in mental world of superstition and magic. It was the Roman Catholic Church that was responsible for persecuting innocent people as witches in the medieval age and after the reformation, they were succeeded in bigotry and superstition by puritans, whose scientific ignorance and religious intolerance resulted in the brutal reign of Matthew Hopkins, the infamous witch finder general in Cromwellian England, the horror of the Salem witch-hunt in New England speaks eloquently in confirmation [6]. In this witch-hunting saga, women were the mostly accused and tortured for witchcraft. According to Hellen [7] women were considered carnal and as well as hindrance to spiritual development of mankind, hence the oppose God's demand on man to renounce sensual/physical pleasures, thus they become susceptible to witchcraft. Hellen further underscores the fact that within this period, women were considered to be imperfect creation, having been made from the bent rib of the man and as such the medieval Christians found fault with the female specie on all grounds of existence. Consequently, a Dominican priest defined women as the confusion of man, insatiable beast, continues anxiety, daily ruins, house tempest and a hindrance to devotion [8]. With this image of womenfolk, it did not take much to be a witch. Thus having a female body was a sure sign of being a witch [9]. In fact, within this period or even today, male witches do not exist; instead they are referred to as warlocks/wizards. Following this arguments, women were considered as the main source of witches/ witchcraft. It is against this background that this paper is dedicated to considering the relationship of the religious traditions with human right violation in history, making a case for the women.

## **2. SOME HIGHLIGHTS ON THE IMAGE OF THE WOMEN IN MEDIEVAL EUROPE**

It was Rousseau who observed that man was born free but incidentally, he is everywhere in chains. Rousseau used the term 'man' in a generic sense to include woman. However, it could be observed in contemporary times that man as a male referent is not at all in any chain. Therefore it becomes pertinent to restate Rousseau's assumption in relation to modern experiences, thus, 'woman was born free but she is everywhere, in marriage, in

school, in office, in synagogue, in the mosque, in the church and even at home in chains [10,11]. The women who occupied a central position in the socio-political and biological arrangement of the society have suffered inferiorization and avid neglect in all the spheres of life, even in academic circle. Thus, Unger [12] notes with great misgiving that even in the field of psychology that women have been either neglected or ignored. According to him, the women have been considered a special group of people by the psychologists. The specialness attributed to the women in the words of Unger [13] is not a positive one; hence he asserts further "It cannot be argued that psychology has totally ignored women. Therefore the place of women in the socio-political structure has become a matter of controversy, that even when the field of psychology pick interest as an afterthought in the study of women, they entered it with bias, hence Unger (1979) writes some researchers (in the field of psychology) were convinced that they could distinguish male and female brains in terms of differences in gross structure... The location of the differences varied according to the theoretical framework that was in vogue at the time. When it was believed that the frontal lobe was repository of the highest mental capacities, the male frontal lobe was seen as larger. When however, the parietal lobes came to be seen as being more important, a bit of historical revisionism occurred, females were now seen as having equal or larger frontal lobes but smaller parietal lobes than males [14]. In the same line of controversy aimed at subjugating the female folk, researches were attenuated to speaking the language and minds of the culture which aimed at inferiorizing the women. Thus Shield (1974) writes: 'When the size difference in mental structure became difficult to document, a heated debate began over the difference between female and male variability [14]. Beginning with Darwin, it was noted that male had greater variability-an advantageous characteristic, since variability enabled species to evolve [15]. Notably the variability theory was used to explain why there were so many men than women with high intelligence. According to Shield (1974), the implication about sex differences in perceptual-motor abilities and emotionality were also derived from this theory (hypothesis). The greater danger of such hypothesis lay not in the possible validity but in educational and social policies. For if this tendency to mediocrity was natural to women as variability hypotheses would hold true, then it would be wasteful of public and private resources to train or encourage women in high level of achievements [16]. Therefore the tendency to use scientific information about women to formulate a social policy that would be detrimental to them is evident in the earliest instances of the study of women as individuals separate from men. Therefore, Okoro and Umezuruike [11] note with misgivings that the inferiorization of the female human species as we see it from the earliest times till today is the consequence of a hierarchical and patriarchal traditions. This type of culture defines relationship between one another, more especially between the opposite sexes in terms of competition, subjugation and inferiorization [17]. Hence the inferiorization of the woman is a conscious, deliberate and systematic process to derogate, demean and relegate them to a second class position. Against this backdrop, [18] spotlights this process of dehumanization of the woman in his definition of the term "feminine" in especially classical ascetic culture to portray the image of lower self and world, while the male folks symbolize the autonomous social selfhood of the society. The image of inferior status affected almost every culture from Asia, Africa and Europe. Starting from Asian culture, we note that in Indian culture as expressed in Hindu tradition, the women have few rights. The code of Manu, which is the complete expression of the Hindu sacred law, defines the roles of women thus: "To humbly serve the men [19]. Accordingly, Manu V. 148-149 clearly elucidates on the inferior status of the women thus: In childhood, a female must be subject to her father, in youth to her husband, when her lord (husband) is dead, to her sons. A woman must never be independent. She must not seek to separate herself from her father, husband and sons. By leaving them, she would make both her own and her husband families contemptible [20] In fact a faithful Hindu woman must engage herself primarily with domestic responsibilities.

She must respect, obey and worship her husband, even if he is unfaithful and lacking in all good qualities. In the Hindu tradition, a faithful woman is not to hold property and as such she is entirely dependent upon her male relatives. Her function in life is to marry, have children and bring them up. In this culture the life of a woman is simply an appendage to her husband's life. The Hindu tradition which encourages child-marriage does not permit a widow to remarry, her age at the point of the death of her husband notwithstanding. The widow's life in Hindu tradition is considered to have ended at the death of her husband [21].

In the Greco-Roman tradition, the status of women seems to be worse. Here the male represented the dominion of the rational over the carnal or the material principle essential for order and peace. Consequently, Aristotle defines women biologically as "misgotten males" who lack full rationality (Reuther 1974:4). Accordingly, Clement of Alexander, one of the revered medieval church fathers, had a low image of the women as shown in these words, 'every woman should be filled with shame by the very thought that she is a woman'. This was echoed by another church father, Tertullian, when he reiterated thus:

Woman, do you know you are Eve? The sentence of God on this sex of yours lives in this age. The guilt must necessarily live too. You are the devil's gate way. You are the unsealer of the tree. You are the first deserter of the divine law. You are she who persuaded him whom the devil was not valiant enough to attack. You destroyed so easily God's image, man. On account of your desert – that is death- even the son of God had to die (See also [http://www.thenazareneway.com/dark\\_side\\_of\\_Christian\\_history/htm](http://www.thenazareneway.com/dark_side_of_Christian_history/htm))

Against the backdrop of the prevailing thought flow Boethius, a medieval Christian philosopher, described women as a temple builds on sewer. This general low imagery of the women in this era made the Lutheran convention that gathered in Wittenberg to spend a whole session debating whether or not women were really human beings, while the Orthodox churches held woman responsible for all sins. In the high middle ages, when public opinion and legal system were controlled by the church and the aristocracy, there was general aphorism that women should be placed as subservient to man and thus the law did not see the women as an individual in the same sense as it saw the men [22]. In this tradition, women were objects to be bought and sold. Girls were punished for reducing their value by losing their virginity. Here could be an apt summary of the medieval image of the women. A woman is more carnal than man. Defective information from the onset – the bent rib, bent in a contrary direction to the man, therefore she is an imperfect animal, and she always deceives. It is not good to marry (Hibert, 1987:28). What else is a woman, but a foe to friendship, a natural temptation, a desirable calamity, a domestic danger, a delectable detriment, an evil of nature, painted with fair colours ... all witchcraft come from carnal lust which in a woman is insatiable ([23] see also [http://www.gendercide.org/case\\_withhuntshtml](http://www.gendercide.org/case_withhuntshtml)).

Summarily, it is worthy of note that medieval period was a time in which both the legal pillars of Roman society and the technological knowledge of the ancient people had been lost, all that remained that could legitimately be termed "Roman" was the form of religion that was practiced [13]. Christianity and in particular Catholicism had survived the fall of the Holy Roman Empire in west. However, its ideals and moral codes of conduct were eventually augmented by European society to more suitably complement the feudal system. Essentially, Christianity was in theory egalitarian in respect to sex as to race and class, although of starred echoes in later sermons and texts equality, whether between man and man or between man and woman was never a medieval doctrine [24]. So despite the inclusive idea that men and women were equal in social and humanistic status, the female in

medieval society was to a large extent perceived as being merely a commodity for merchandize. In all public sphere women occupied a subordinate role to men. Hence Gies (2010) notes that within the period, the Germanic women were considered incapable of looking after their own interest, noting that the Lombard code regarded women as perpetual minors, under the guardianship of a male relative, whose permission was needed for any transaction involving property [25]. With this kind of image of the women in all the religio-philosophical traditions, it becomes evident that women's rights were avidly violated from the beginning of history. In fact, from the ancient period, women personality has been shrouded in mystic controversies, which they have not wriggled out fully even in the contemporary times. This social domination of the women by the patriarchal society was made manifest in the medieval period through witch hunting. Before going on to consider the magnitude of the human right violation, we shall first consider the nature of human rights as contained in several instruments, conventions, covenants and declarations.

### **3. CONCEPTS, NATURE AND PROCESS OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEVELOPMENT IN HISTORY**

Human rights "are commonly understood as inalienable fundamental rights to which a person is inherently entitled simply because he or she is a human being" [26]. Thus Human rights are considered also as universal (applicable everywhere) and egalitarian (the same for everyone). These rights may exist as natural rights or as legal rights in local, regional, national and international law. Therefore, Alston (1999) asserts: Human rights are international norms that help to protect all people everywhere from severe political, legal and social abuses. Example of human rights are rights to freedom of religion, the right to fair trial when charged with crime, the right not to be tortured and the right to engage in political activity [27]. Human right is therefore, a doctrine in International practice, with international law, global and regional institutions, in the policies of states and in the activities of non-governmental organizations and has become a benchmark of public policy around the world [28]. Beltz further maintains that if the public discourse of peaceful global society can be said to have a common moral language, it is therefore that of human rights [29]. Notably, most of the germ ideas that necessitated the human rights movement came up as an after effect of the Second World War and the atrocities of the holocaust, which lead to the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in Paris by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948. According to Okon [30], It was in 1948 that the United Nations established the Human Rights commission with Eleanor Roosevelt, the widow of President Franklin Roosevelt as the chairperson, with the mandate to prepare a Universal Declaration of Human rights as the first element in the International Bill of rights (see also [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/human\\_rights\\_violation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/human_rights_violation)) This was a great milestone in the definition and development human right in modern history, however, [31] spotlights that modern human rights history had its antecedents in the ancient world. In his own words,

The true forerunner of human right discourse was the concept of natural rights which appeared as part of the medieval natural law tradition that became prominent during the enlightenment with such philosophers as John Locke, Francis Hutcheson and Jean-Jacques Burlanaqui and featured prominently in political discourse of American and French Revolutions.

Notably, it was during the medieval period that what now constitute the foundation of the modern human rights discussion was born. Though in its nascent stage, it enunciated the germ of human right as provided by the natural law. The document states inter alia,

'Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and equality and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world ([32] see also <http://www.slideshare.net/fahadnakadehistorical-development>). However, Donnelly [2003] maintains that the ideality of human right is as old as human history. He asserts therefore that the ancient world and traditional societies have elaborate systems of duties, conception of justice, political legitimacy and human flourishing, all these according to him aimed at realizing human dignity and independent human rights [33]. In another direction, Ishay [34], taking a critical survey of the nature and development of human right in history opines that modern human right ideality had its underpinning in the three epochal events that gave birth to renaissance Europe. These he enunciates as. 1. The protestant reformation, 2. the disappearance of the feudal system, and 3. the disappearance of the religious conservatism that controlled the medieval period.

By inference, the development and discussion on human right came incidentally as an outgrowth of the efforts of the scholars, the intelligentsia and the common masses to form a secular society. However, the most commonly accepted view is that the human right ideality emanated within the traditions of the Western Europe, although earlier developments had important ethical model, they lacked concept of human rights in its modern form. It is against this backdrop that McIntyre [2013] argues that there was no word for right in any language before 1400 AD. Accordingly, the medieval charter of liberty such as the English magna carter were not actually charter of human right rather foundations of political and legal agreement addressing specific political circumstances ([35] see also <http://www.slideshare.net/fahadnakade/historical-development>). Notably, one of the oldest records of human rights is the statute of Kalisz (1264) which gave privileges to the Jewish minority in the kingdom of Poland, such as protection from discrimination and hate speeches [36] (see also India council of human rights) Against this backdrop, we note that the fulcrum of most contemporary legal interpretation of human rights is contemporary European history, hence the Twelve Articles of 1525 became the foundation of all human right discussions in Europe. The Twelve articles were part of the peasants demand raised towards the Swabian league in German Peasants war [36]. The first articles echoes Martin Luther's tract "on the right and authority of Christian Assembly or Congregation to judge all doctrines, to call, install and dismiss (Theological) teachers as laid down in the scripture (1523). Luther's doctrine of the priesthood of all believers gave laymen the right to elect their ministers. The twelve articles were clearly inspired by the Reformation movement [37] Besides their social and political demands, the authors of this document claimed freedom of conscience, which therefore became the centre of human right debate of sixteenth century, when the term 'right' did not exist yet. The struggle started in a dramatic form when Luther refused to recant his belief before the Diet of the Holy Roman Empire at Worms in 1521, unless he was proved wrong by the Scripture [38]. According to him, faith is the free work of the Holy Spirit and therefore cannot be forced upon a person. Consequently, the persecuted religious minorities, the Anabaptists and Huguenots demanded freedom of religion [39] In the early seventeenth century, Baptist Theologians like John Smyth, Thomas Helway and Roger Williams published tracts that defended freedom of conscience and as such influenced John Milton's and John Locke's stand on religious tolerance. In the same vein, the protestant Settlers in Rhode Island (1636), Connecticut (1636) and Pennsylvania (1639) combined democratic constitution with religious freedom. These colonies thus became safe havens for persecuted religious minorities including the Jews. The United States Declaration of Independence, The United States Constitution and the American Bill of Rights with the Fundamental Human and Civil Rights made this tradition permanent by giving it legal and political framework. The strongest link between American and the French Revolution was Marquis de Lafayette, an ardent supporter of American constitutional principle. The French

declaration of the rights of man and the citizens was largely based on Lafayette's draft and the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights also has clear echoes of the American revolutionary documents [40].

However, Hurst [41] maintains that it was in relation to the examination of the rights of the indigenous people by the Spanish clerics that the issues of universal human rights took its conception. He made a particular reference to the debate made in Valladolid, between Las Casas and Juan Gines de Sepulveda. Here Juan, a Spanish middle class clergy and a philosopher, who being influenced by Aristotelian classification of humanity into superiority and inferiority status, resisted Casas's notion of equal rights to equal freedom from slavery for all human being, with no consideration of race or religion. In another development, both the English Bill of Rights and the Scottish Claim of Rights of the 17<sup>th</sup> century invalidated several range of actions considered as oppressive to humanity. A more advance step was scored notching a universal human rights ideality in the 18<sup>th</sup> century with two major world revolutions that took place in United States and France. The consequence of these therefore was that the United State made their independent declaration and France declaration in favour of all humanity, whether a citizen or not. These two instruments became a benchmark for the establishment of certain legal rights that is applicable to all humanity everywhere and under every condition. It is against this backdrop that the Virginia declaration of rights of 1776 made explicit certain fundamental civil rights and civil freedom that can attract legal actions in the states [see [41] see also [http://www.en.human\\_rights\\_violation](http://www.en.human_rights_violation)] Consequently, French National Assembly in August 26, 1789 approved a set of documents considered to be a declaration of human rights and citizens rights. The document read in its preamble thus: We hold this truth to be self evident that all men are created equal: that they are endowed by the creator with certain unalienable rights: that among these are life, liberty and pursuit of happiness [42,41]. These initial moves towards universalizing human rights in the 19<sup>th</sup> century ended in the state of inertia that had so long bedeviled every discussion on human rights and equality. The consequence of this new development is that scholars and philosophers came to the centre stage of the discussion and made it not only an academic matter but also and more importantly social and legal issues. Here Thomas Paine, John Hurst Mill, G.W.F Hegel featured prominently in the development of human rights ideality of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

According to Hurst [41] the term human right came into use between Paine's work titled 'The Right of Man' and William Lloyd's work titled, 'The Garrison' published in 1831. In this work, William claimed he was enlisting his readers to fight the great cause of human rights. Against this backdrop, the reformers like Wilberforce in Great Britain, made human rights, in relation to slavery, a central concern of all their actions. Their actions yielded great dividend. Some of the gains were the British slave act of 1807 and the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833. These practical moves in the continents had immediate effect on the Northern States of United States of America that they finally brought an end the institution of slavery between 1771 and 1804. Notably, the reluctance of the Southern States of United States of America to abolishing slavery was in part the reason for the secession and consequent American civil war. However, the American civil war brought the evils of oppression to the limelight and as such serious amendments were made in the existing North American States constitutions. Prominent among these amendments included the remarkable 13<sup>th</sup> amendment. This instrument banned slavery and criminalized its possession. 14<sup>th</sup> amendment secured the full citizenship and civil rights of all people born in the United States and 15<sup>th</sup> amendment guaranteed African Americans the right to vote [43,41].



20<sup>th</sup> century thinkers and human right activists built on the gains of the previous century and also made a further up thrust in widening the horizon of human rights. Here both in Europe and North Americas, Labour Unions initiated laws granting workers right to embark on industrial actions as it also established minimum work conditions and also forbade child labour. In this same direction, the women rights movements secured voting rights for many class of women in Europe and Americas. The National liberation movements in many countries scored a milestone as they drove away the colonial powers [see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/human\\_right\\_violation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/human_right_violation)]. Mahatma Gandhi's movement gained her prominence within this period for her activities in gaining Indian independence from the British Colonists. Colloratory to this, many civil rights movements, including the African-American Civil Rights Movement and other minority and gender based movements particularly in the United States emerged and scored points in their freedom fight project. In another development, the currency in the discussion of human right received proclivity through the establishment of the following international bodies and organizations, namely: International Committee of the Red Cross, the 1864 Lieber Code and the First Geneva Convention. [see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/human\\_right\\_violation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/human_right_violation)]

The two world wars and the huge losses of human life and property necessitated the overt action of the establishment of modern human rights instruments, such as the League of Nations, which, was born in 1919 with the aim of discussing the treaty of Versailles. The league was charged with the responsibility of 1. finding ways and means to disarm powerful nations of the world, 2. prevent further wars through collective security and 3. settle disputes between and among nations through negotiations and diplomacy and 4. improve global welfare. The league should also be committed to ensuring the promotion of the many rights that were later included in Universal Declaration of Human Rights [see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/human\\_right\\_violation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/human_right_violation)] However, it was in 1945 at the Yalta Conference that the Allied powers took a consensus to create the United Nations to take over the responsibilities of the League of Nations [see Kalitz 2006]. Notably, the United Nations since its birth has play enormous roles with regard to International Human rights Law and International humanitarian Laws [see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/human\\_right\\_violation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/human_right_violation) and <http://www.slideshare.net/fahadnakade-historical-developmet>]

#### **4. HISTORY AND CONTENT OF UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS (UDHR)**

The Human Rights Declaration internalized the concept of man's right and also set a minimum standard for the world to follow. As a code of universal moral rights, the declaration was stated in universal terms without any consideration to cultural diversities and peculiarities of individual people and communities [44]. It is against this background of both the universal and historical imperative of the (UDHR) that the former UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros--Ghali affirms: To be sure, human rights are product of history. As such, they should be in accordance with history and should evolve simultaneously with history and should give the various peoples and nations a reflection of themselves that they recognize as their own. Yet, the fact that human rights keep pace with the course of history should not change what constitutes their essence, namely their universality (June 14, 1983. Opening address). The UDHR has become a manifest instrument created in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and universally accepted to contain the basic elements of human right in modern history. The content of UDHR is based on the human experience of past history which is littered with conflict, crisis and dehumanization of humanity by his fellows and as such to strive to create

in principle and practice the basis of living in dignity and peace for all humankind. Here Bailey [45] gives a detailed historical antecedent of the development of the UDHR' in his own words, 'As the Second World War began to close, the world climate was ready for a great leap forward in the recognition and observance of human rights'. In consequence of the shift, the representatives of the then four major powers [stakeholders] met in 1944 at Georgetown, Washington DC to reconsider some critical issues that caused the world to have fought two major wars within an interval of thirty years. The two wars have demonstrated the grave cruelty of man against the other as shown in atrocious murdering of the Jews in Europe, the unruly dealing with the prisoners of war in Europe and Asia and worst of all enormous destruction caused by atomic bomb in Japan [46] Having seen that humanity was heading heedlessly towards self destruction, the world leaders, being guided by reason noted that there could be a more civilized way for the world citizen to sought out their differences, settle their scores and live in peace than the use of force and naked powers, which are akin to the beasts. The outgrowth of this meeting was the creation of the United Nations.

However, it was in the meeting of 1945 at San Francisco that the United Nations was created and her charter made. Field Marshall Smiths, the great South African pre-apartheid leader played important role by convincing the leaders gathered at San Francisco to include in the preamble of the UN charter a reference to human right. Hence the preamble reads thus, 'We the people of United Nations are determined to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in dignity and worth of human persons, in equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small' (See [45] and also <http://www.universalhumanright.net>.) Besides the inclusion of seed of human rights in its preamble, the charter according to earlier reports contained other six references with in-depth content on the meaning and nature of human rights and fundamental freedom of all human beings. In another development, the non-governmental organizations [about forty two of them] based in United States of America pressured the world leaders to include article 68 in the charter. The main content of this article was the necessity for the economic and social council to include as its ancillary arm, a commission for human rights, economic and social fields. Consequently, the human right commission was established. The commission was therefore empowered to draw authority directly from the UN charter. In consequence therefore, Mrs Eleanor Roosevelt was made the head of the provisional group of nine members to chart a way forward out of the quagmire of global crisis and war and chart a new path of world peace. Having being appointed in April, 1946, she plunged herself with her members into the work with committed dexterity that by June of the same year, just about two months after, they had drawn strategies and consequently recommended to the UN headship the need to create another commission whose responsibility shall be to develop as a matter of urgency, an International bill on of human rights.

In response to the recommendation, the UN headship created the new commission of Eighteen members later that same year with Mrs Roosevelt at the head. The membership was spread to represent somewhat a continental/world powers in character. Thus Mr PC Chang represented China, Rene Cassin a Frenchman represented Europe while Dr. Charles Malik came from Lebanon. The new commission had their first meeting in January, 1947 and considered several critical issues that impinge on world peace and took decision that had positive effects on the development of human rights instruments and statues. Part of the critical decisions was that it shall develop a declaration rather than global treaty. It also decided that the declaration should contain civil, political, economic and social rights.

Their thought was that the declaration should be relatively short, inspirational and energizing document that the common people of the world will understand and use. The document should also be the foundation and core instrument for the international bill of human rights ([47] See also <http://www.universalrights.net/main/creation.html>). Furthermore, the commission named this document, 'Universal Declaration of Human Rights' [UDHR]. The main emphasis of UDHR is on setting the canons of rights for all global citizens, anywhere, anytime, any gender, any race, any faith and any social class [48]. This ideology was so reflected in the prelude to the UDHR thus, '...In recognition of the inherent dignity and equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family...and through that recognition provide the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world Here article I reflected the inspirational nature of the project. It proclaims in vivid terms that: "All human beings are born free and adequate in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in spirit of brotherhood (UDHR Article 1) The reason behind the inclusion of the idea in the main text rather than the preamble is that it might explicitly state that the basis of all human rights, the rationality of all persons and their obligation to deal fairly with everyone one else, regardless of race, sex, wealth and so on. Article 7 follows up the theme by stating that all are to be equal before the law and have a right to protection against any form of discrimination. Again articles 3 and 27 are probably the core of the substantive provision in the declaration {See UDHR of 1948}. Both give every human being the right to life, to liberty, to security of persons (Article 3) and to adequate standard of living (Article 27). The first three (3) elements are the core civil and political rights, the last an economic and social rights. Notably the right to an adequate standard of living is interesting in that it specifies as part of the right to health and well being not only of a person but of his or her family and also the right to necessary foods, clothing, housing and medical care and the right to social security (Art 22) (Curtis 2006:110). In a knack summary of the content of UDHR, Glendon [49] writes: ...The documents was structured by Cassin to include the basic principles of dignity, liberty, equality and brotherhood in the first two articles, followed successively by rights pertaining to individual: rights or individuals in relation to each other and to groups, spiritual and political rights and economic, social and cultural rights. The final three articles places, rights in context of limits, duties and social political order in which they are to be realized. Humphrey and Cassin intended the rights in UDHR to be legally enforceable through some means as reflected in the third clause of the preamble [ See also Nickel 2010 in Wikipedia) The third clause so referred to, states inter alia: 'Whereas it is essential, if man is not to be compelled to have recourse, as a last resort to rebellion against tyranny and oppression, that human rights 'would be protected by the rules of law [preamble to Universal Declarations of Human Rights, Dec 10, 1948). In his own summary Bailey [45] writes, 'Overarching all the rules of law, particularly are articles 28 and 29 [there are 30 articles in the Declaration of which 17 could be regarded as relating to civil and political rights and 8 to economic and social rights (see also <http://www.universalrights.net/main/creation.htm>).

Following these backdrop assumptions we echo with Osler and Starkey (1996), who identified four basic pillars of Universal Declaration of Human Rights thus: Personal Rights: (life, freedom, security, justice). These could be found in articles 2 to 11. Rights regulating relationship between people (freedom of movement, right to own a family, asylum, nationality, property). These are included in articles 12 to 17. Public freedom and political rights (thoughts, religion, conscience, opinion, assembly, participation, democracy), these are enshrined in articles 18 to 21. Economic, social and cultural rights (social security, work, equal wages, trade unions, rest and leisure, adequate standard of living, education and cultural life). These are found in articles 22 to 27. However, to cap the edifice (articles 28-30) is pediments of all [50]. Here we accentuate that international order essential for the

realization of the rights and the understanding that rights imply duties to the community and freedom do not extend to those actions which jeopardize the rights of others. Notably, articles 28 and 29 which did not fall into our categorization above have not received much discussion and as such have not been received in the covenants. Nevertheless, they are quite significant in any human rights discussions. Article 28 calls on the whole world community to create a platform that will encourage and sustain civil, political, economic social measures that will promote the full realization of human rights. Article 30 underscores the need for all world citizens to have and live in a community [see <http://www.universalrights.net/main/creation.htm>].

## **5. WITCHCRAFT AND GENDERCIDE: AN EXAMPLE OF HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATION IN THE RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS**

The reformation did not convert the people of Europe to orthodox Christianity through preaching and catechism alone. It was the 500 years of witch hunting from the thirteenth to eighteenth century. What Robbins called, 'the shocking nightmare, the foulest crime and the deepest shame of Western civilization' that ensured the European abandonment of belief in magic. The church created elaborate concepts of devil worship and used the persecution of it to wipe out dissent, subordinate the individual to the authoritarian control and openly denigrate women ([51] see also [http://www.thenazareneway.com/dark\\_side\\_of\\_history.htm](http://www.thenazareneway.com/dark_side_of_history.htm) and [http://www.bibliotecapleyades.net/vatican/esp\\_vatican29.htm](http://www.bibliotecapleyades.net/vatican/esp_vatican29.htm)).

In his own vivid account of the European history within the medieval period in relation to witch hunting and human rights violation, Jones (2002), asserts that 'within three centuries of early modern history the diverse societies were consumed by panic over alleged witches in their neighbourhood' ([52] see also [http://www.gendercide.org/case\\_witchhunts.html](http://www.gendercide.org/case_witchhunts.html)). Notably, the European witch-hunt took place against the backdrop of rapid social, economic and religious transformations. It is on record that the church before this period of witch craze attempted to eradicate all older religious traditions by simply denying the existence of witches and magic outside the church. Here we notice that the canon episcopo, a church law which first appeared in 906 AD decreed that belief in witchcraft was heretical. The text declares thus, 'For an innumerable multitudes, deceived by this opinion, believe this to be true and so believing, wanders from the right path and are involved in the error of the pagans, when they think that there is anything of divinity or power except the one God' [52]. The Christians' view of witches and witchcraft was that it was an illusion. Accordingly, people might accept that they were witches, but the church never considered the authenticity of such claims to be genuine. Therefore those who believed were either fooling themselves or were being fooled by the devil. The church authorities think that even if they were witches, they could not really do any havoc to anybody. However, ardent churchmen and seasoned theologians advanced several arguments and engaged in several debates in order to make the church reverse her stand on the initial position of non existence of witches within this period. Thus reversing its policy of denying the existence of witches, the church began depicting witches as slaves to the devil. Witches/witchcraft were no longer associated with older pagan traditions. Within this period witches/witchcraft were no longer to be considered as benevolent healer, teacher, wise woman or people who possessed access to divine powers [53]. The witch is thought of as an evil satanic agent. According to Helen (2011), the church began to authorize frightening portrayals of the devil in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries [54]. She also portrayed the witches with the same images so frequently used for heretics, 'as small clandestine society engaged in anti human practices, including infanticides, cannibalism, bestiality and orgiastic sex' (Helen 2011:1-7). Against this

backdrop, the church singled out a group of people as responsible for witchcraft practice. Spotlighting on this group, Helen (2011) writes, 'Witch hunt was an eruption of orthodox Christianity's vilification of women, the weaker vessels in St. Paul's word' [64]. The next logical question would be why women rather than men or both.

## **5.1 Women: The Target of Witch Hunts. Why?**

### **5.1.1 Just being a woman**

By medieval standard, it did not take much to be a witch. Having a female body was the factor most likely to render one vulnerable to being called a witch (Barstow, 1995:16). *Malleus Maleficarum*, written by two Dominicans in 1486, recorded that witch-hunting is explicitly linked to the inferior perception of the women nature. Sprenger and Kramer (1948) the authors of the famous *Malleus Maleficarum*, explicated on the above assumption thus:

'... Since women are feebler in both mind and body, it is not surprising that they should come under the spell of witchcraft. For as regards intellect or understanding of spiritual things, they seem to be of different nature from men. But natural reason is that she is more carnal than man as it is clear from her many carnal abominations. And it should be noted that there was defect in the formation of the first woman, since she was formed from the bent rib, that is a rib of the breast which is bent as it were contrary direction to man. Moreover, since through this defect, she is an imperfect animal. She always deceives' [55].

In this direction, Jones (2002) notes that witch hunting are to be considered as a case of genderized mass murder [56]. To Kalz (1995), the overall evidence makes it plain that the growth – the panic- was part and parcel of general hatred and stigmatization of the women. Katz thus maintains that the low profile status bequeathed on the women was as a result the continues trepidation of the mystic/mysterious powers attributed to female specie of humanity and as such association witchcraft with femininity became a social given that even women themselves suspect each other [57]. However, Jones [2002] records that they were nonetheless male witches but the witch hunters of 1500 AD set the women as their target and chief victims. History generally records the development of witch hunt into mass hysteria became prominent with the women being its primary victims [58].

Though a number of males were accused of witchcraft, however, most of them were accused on the grounds of their relationship with women, who were already convicted of some form of sorcery – they may be their husbands, sons or grandsons. Therefore men in whatsoever degree were not considered as originator of witchcraft. In any case, men who were not related to convicted women and were accused, might be one of those who had had criminal records, such as theft, murder, heresy or sexual crimes. For these men, witchcraft was merely added charge to those for which they were already on trial. When brought into court or charged with witchcraft, men were let off with lightest sentences than women. Laws of the period favoured the men, for examples, when the rulers of Flanders decreed no death penalty for prepubescent witches, boys benefitted more because they were seen as minors until the ages of 21 whereas girls became adults at the age of eighteen. Also women traditionally did not know much about the law, much less how to use the court system, so many times in which an appeal could have been made, the accused woman were not able to use them in order to spare their lives.

### **5.1.2 Being independent and outspoken**

In some cases, it would be the more outspoken and independent women in the towns that were accused. Jones (2002) gave an explicit reason for spotlighting the women as the agents of Satan as he writes: The medieval conception of women share much with the corresponding medieval conception of the Jews in both cases, a perennial attribution of secret, bountiful malicious powers is made. Women are anathematized and cast as witches because of the enduring grotesque fear they generate in respect of their putative abilities to control men and thereby coerce them for their ends -male dominated Christian society ([59] see also [www.gendercide.org/case\\_witchhunts.html](http://www.gendercide.org/case_witchhunts.html)) Katz (1999) affirms with certainty that it is the more outspoken and independent women in the towns, who were accused. Here several men would stand in judgment of these women and testify against them reporting incidences of their personal misfortune that they believe were directed against them by these threatening despotic women. In cases when an accused woman speaks up against her accusers, she would even be more readily accepted as a witch because she was outspoken in a time when women were supposed to be submissive. In many areas of the medieval world, any scolding done by a woman was regarded as a crime and women committing these crimes would be accused of witchcraft. Rendering support, Jones (2002) citing no less authority than Woodcut (1579) writes, it was a general presumption that it was the women who cling to the power of self expressing and assert their independence against the power structure of patriarchal society that were more likely to be exposed to the dangers of witch hunt of the period [60]. Katz [58] lends credence to Jones subsumption when he opines that the most likely people to be susceptible to witchcraft accusation were the older women, more especially the barren ones and the more authoritative women, who were quite difficult to be assimilated into the patriarchal social structure [61].

### **5.1.3 Having knowledge of herbs and gift of healing**

Another factor that makes people, especially women vulnerable to witchcraft suspicion was having knowledge of herbs and gift of healing. Here Barabara and English (1973), justify the above assertion when they note 'that nurses and midwives were special targets in witch-hunts in medieval Europe. In their words, 'the old wise women were particular target of witch hunting' [62]. In this regard, Scot [1972] notes 'there is an underline similarity in the old English between the witch and healer, so that it makes no difference to say, she is a witch or she is a healer or rather a wise woman' [63] Thus the pre reformation age depended so much on the spiritual powers and wisdom of these wise women and sometimes men for their healing needs. The wise people also known as sorcerers, wizards or white witches could cure all manners of infirmities both of the mind and body by the combination of their herbal knowledge with spiritual powers and as such they became popular among the common people of the era. Their popularity also came on the scores that their charges were affordable and method more effective than the ones given by the church priests, monks and physicians. This situation brought them at the cross-road with the church authority of the period, the churchmen of the reformation era rejected both the wise people and the healing they offer but until witch hunt became wide spread, the common people did not comprehend why their healers (physicians, midwives, nurses) should be considered evil. Before this period, healers, nurses and midwives were considered people of noble vocation, who use their knowledge and gift to the well being of humanity.

On the contrary, the orthodox Christians consider such healing powers as impudence to God's own authority. The general aphorism of this period is that health and healing come from God and not the efforts of human being. Thus the most acceptable means of healing

recognized by the church and propagated by the preachers and priests is only obtained through humble entreaty to God himself by praying and fasting and any other means is antithetical to God's ordained means of healing. Thus in struggle to diminish the influence and popularity of the traditional healers, the church appointed, trained and licensed male healer to replace the traditional healer libeled witches. The common people having been convinced of the power and efficacy of the healing offered by the traditional healer considered the alternative provide by the church as ineffective, hence the keeper of the Canterbury prison once confessed freeing a witch [wise woman] in 1570 on the grounds that the woman did more good in one year by her healing powers and method than whatever the church physicians could do in their life time [see also Helen 2011]. In the opinion of the common masses, the church licensed physicians were no match whatsoever to the old women's knowledge of healing herbs. Among the upper class of the reformation age, the traditional healer had great reputation. Among them was Paracelus, a physician of a note, who once asked, 'does not the old nurse very often beat the doctors? While Francis Bacon, who it is known had little regard for women, is known to have said that the society had more happy times in the cures of the old women than the learned physicians [64].

However, the physicians themselves tacitly underscoring the powers of the traditional healers blamed their own ineffectiveness in healing on the activities of the old women, whom they defame as witches. Thomas attested to the veracity of the above assertion when he writes:

The reason is ignorantia p[er] illu[m] maleficu[m] et incarratio [a cloak for physician's ignorance when he cannot find the nature of the diseases, he saith the party is bewitchment. Thus when an illness could not be understood even the highest body of England, the Royal College of Physicians London was known to accept the explanation of witchcraft, hence the traditional healers [old women] were regarded by the churchmen as the most dangerous of all the witches and as such the most despicable monster.

It is therefore against this backdrop that the churchmen extended the definition of witch to include anyone with knowledge of herbs, those who use herbs to cure. The new definition is predicated on the belief that those who use herbs to cure are in coalition with the devil. Here one is at sea for such a new definitional development, hence before this period medicine was always associated with herbs and magic. Notably, the Greek and Latin words for medicine, *pharmakeia* and *veneficium* respectively were derived from both magic and drug. The reformation churchmen in an attempt to revise the connection between medicine and magic therefore consider the mere possession of herbal oil as a significant sign of witchcraft.

#### **5.1.4 Being a midwife**

Being a midwife was another great factor that made women suspects of witchcraft and magic. Notably, the churchmen of this era regarded given birth as means of defilement to both the mother and child. Thus they consider any women that gave birth to a child [ren] as having lost her Christian status and needed to be readmitted into the church through a purification rite after a certain period of quarantine as determined by the church authority. The quarantined period however range from forty days for the boy child and eighty days for the girl child. The differentiation on the period is predicated on the assumption that the girl child carried more impurity/defilement than the boy child. Some churchmen within this period went to the extreme to maintaining that any woman that died during either the period of pregnancy, child birth or quarantine should not be given a Christian burial as both her and

her child were considered heathens before the rite of readmission into the church, technically known in church language as churching of women after child birth.

Before the reformation era, midwives were considered very important in aiding women give birth safely, though a dishonourable profession best left in the custody of common women [see Helen 2001] With the reformation fever on ground, there occurred a historical revisionism as midwives became regarded as dangerous elements in the society. This is simply because they were thought of as possessing the skills: 1. to abort a fetus, 2. To educate women on the techniques of birth control, 3. To mitigate women labour pains. Thus the wise women's knowledge of herbs to relieve birth pains and in fact any sort of pain for that matter was considered an affront to God, who divinely ordained birth pang to the women as their prize for initial disobedience, being a progeny for Eve the mythological mother of humanity. Therefore, to relieve labour pain as a Scottish priest puts it, would be vitiating the primal curse on women [see [www.thenazareneway.com/dark\\_side\\_of\\_christian\\_history/htm](http://www.thenazareneway.com/dark_side_of_christian_history/htm)]. It was in this regard that chloroform which helps in the alleviation of pains was also regarded as against the will and purpose of God for humanity. In the words of Helen [2011], 'An English minister once explained that chloroform is a decoy to rob God of the deep earnest cries, which arise in time of trouble for help (see also [www.bibliotecapley.net/vatican/esp\\_vatican29.htm](http://www.bibliotecapley.net/vatican/esp_vatican29.htm)). It was also on record that Martin Luther, the great reformer, once says, if women became tired or even die in the cause of child bearing, let them die, that does not matter much for that is the reason they are here [see [www.thenazareneway.com/dark\\_side\\_of\\_christian\\_history/htm](http://www.thenazareneway.com/dark_side_of_christian_history/htm)] It is therefore not surprising that women who possess herbal knowledge and used the same to aid and nurse the women would be prime suspect of witchcraft ( see also Helen 2011).

### **5.1.5 Being Poor and Helpless**

Labeling women as witches, Barstow, maintains is the desire within the period to rid the population of the town of its lower class members. Notably, in several instances within the reformation period, towns would solve their crisis of a low crop yield by turning its lower class women and their children as witches to inquisitors. Here lower class widow were the major targets since the hardship will often force them to beg from the upper class members of the town [65]. Katz (1985) notes that more women than men tend to survive in the old age and if no dependent relations to take care of their needs, they turn themselves into begging and as such became burdens to the society, who may not willingly accept to care for them but rather see them as burdens and thus turn them to inquisitors as witches and dangerous elements and consequently witness against them, maintaining that the poor women had cursed them when they did not provide help for them and their families.

## **5.2 Major Accusations for Assorted Evils and Misfortunes**

Some of the major accusations against the women labeled witches vary in their range. Hence, witches were said to be guilty of copulation with the devil, assembling at Sabbaths, preventing conceptions of babies and causing practically every conceivable misfortune; from hailstone and loss of cattle and crops to causing illness and insanity [66]. The wise women now libeled as witches were held liable for nearly all societal calamity. Dorren [2002] confirm this state of affair when he writes, '...not surprising, areas of political turmoil and religious strife experienced the most intense witch hunts. Witch hunts tended to be more severe in Germany, Switzerland, France, Poland and Scotland than in more homogenously Catholic countries such as Italy and Spain. Witch hunters also declare 'rebellion as the sin of witchcraft. In 1661 Scotland royalists proclaimed that rebellion' is the mother of witchcraft



and in England, the puritan, William Perkins called the witch 'the notorious traitor and rebel that can be (see also [www.theazareneway.com/dark\\_side\\_of\\_christian\\_history.htm](http://www.theazareneway.com/dark_side_of_christian_history.htm)). Here both the Protestants and the reformed Catholics were of the opinion that any magic was sinful as it was also an indication of belief in the powers of the devil. Therefore, the church was left with only single option in handling this matter and that is to kill the devil's agent, who is the wise woman now considered as witch. (see Batterson 2012). In the words of Russell (1980), 'As people adopted the new belief that the world was a terrifying realm of the devil, they blamed witches for every misfortune-since the devil created all ills of the of the world, his agents-the witches-could be blamed for them ([67] see also [www.theazareneway.com/dark\\_side\\_of-christian\\_history.htm](http://www.theazareneway.com/dark_side_of-christian_history.htm)) The whole panorama was implicated on the assumption that the devil seems to possess more powers than Christ. With regard to miraculous power, the witches could raise the dead, turn water into wine or milk, control the weather and know the past and the future [68]. Thus witches were considered scapegoats for any sorts of misfortune, bad harvest, famine or plague Trepidation for female sexuality was also part of the reason for witch hunt in the medieval Europe The popular hand book on witchcraft and its persecution, The Malleus Maleficarum, written by Spranger and Kramer attests to this fact. This book describes how witches use to collect male organs in their number with the aim of bringing the men to their subjugation and submission to their caprices.

### **5.3 Method of Trial and Torture**

The trial and persecution of witches took the form of the trial and persecution of other heresies in the many parts of medieval Europe and it seem to have began at the point the trial and persecution of other heresies stopped. The method of the trial was also quite severe as that of other heresies. In fact Helen [2011] notes that it is impossible for any person indicted of witchcraft practice to be absolved [69]. The trial begins with oral examination and this is followed up with bodily examination, which aimed at finding witch incision on the body of the accused. It was Spranger and Kramer (1948) in their book Malleus Maleficarum (The hammer of witches) published in 1487 as a Theological Encyclopedia on witchcraft that described how a witch could be discovered, tried, tortured and executed. In their words: To detect witches the holy inquisition recommended method was to first strip the victims and shaved them of all body hair and a search made for the "devil's mark" This mark, also known as the "witch tit" and it is supposed third nipple with which these women sucked demons. This tit could turn out to be anything, a mole, a wart or even the clitoris. When a suspicious mark is invariably found to be insensitive to pain, it was taken as a proof that the devils mark has been found. When on the whole, there was no such mark discovered, guilt can still be extracted by a more cruel method of sticking needled in eyes and other sensitive parts of the accused. The accused is therefore convicted if the inquisitor could in the slightest mistake find any part insensitive to the sticking of the needle. Guilt was also extracted by other methods of torture developed during the persecution of the heretics. Here King James writes, 'loathe they are to confess without torture' [70]. Katz [58] further reports of the words of a licensed physician serving in witch prison as saying, 'by frequent torture...kept in prolonged squalor and darkness of their dungeon ...and constantly dragged out to undergo atrocious torment until they would gladly exchange at any moment this most bitter existence for death or are willing to confess whatever crimes are suggested to them rather than be thrust back into our hideous dungeon amid ever recurring torture (see also [http://www.thenazareneway.com/dark\\_side\\_of\\_christian\\_history.htm](http://www.thenazareneway.com/dark_side_of_christian_history.htm) and [http://www.bibliotesaplay:ades.net/vatican/esp\\_vatican29htm](http://www.bibliotesaplay:ades.net/vatican/esp_vatican29htm)). Thus any one accused of witchcraft is first asked to confess to the crime, should she or he refuse to confess, it never occurred to the inquisitor that an innocent person will refuse to confess. Thus the suspect

will be tortured until a confession is abstracted and after the confession, the victim is tortured further to implicate others. Should the victim at any time retract the original confession, she is tortured the more until the earlier confession is reaffirmed. However, if the accused refused to confess to the crime after repeated torture, she will still be burnt at the stake anyway, if not for the crime of witchcraft then for their obstinacy. However, in the majority of the cases, none of the accused person would admit ever to have any practice of witchcraft. Those women who admitted of either to have practiced witchcraft or sorcery were either insane or only did so after an extreme torture. In some cases the accused were counseled to accept having a romance with the devil in order to avoid torture. The *Malleus Maleficarum* laid out plans to elicit confession from the accused. Spranger and Kramer (1948) wrote: She may be promised her life on the following conditions: that she be sentenced to imprisonment for life on bread and water provided that she supply evidence which will lead to the conviction of other witches. And she is not told, when she is promised her life that she is to be imprisoned this way but should be led to suppose that some other penance, such as exile, will be her punishment... After she had been confined to prison in this way, the promise to spare her life should be kept for a time but then after a certain period she would be burnt [71] (See also Bennett 2006) Here we shall give a sample of the nature of torture and conviction witches within this period go through. Our sample case is Else Gwinner. Mrs Gwinner was arrested for witchcraft on the 31<sup>st</sup> of October 1601 after being accused of the crime by two women, who were themselves convicted of the same. Both the accusations and their implication of Gwinner were abstracted under torture. When she was brought before the inquisitor, Gwinner denied the charges and attested her innocence. She was told to spare herself unnecessary suffering and simply confess her crimes, however she refused. Then, the systematic torture began. The first torture was known as the "Strappado". Here her hands were tied to her back and her waist was fastened with a rope. With the rope she was repeatedly twisted off the ground to solicit her confession, Strappado only succeeded in making her unconscious. She was then sent back to her cell. A week later the strappado was repeated but with heavier weights attached to her back. The torture was repeated three times. On the third time, Gwinner screamed in pain and finally agreed to confess. When they let her down she admitted to having sexual relationship with the devil. Eager to know more details, the inquisitor ordered her to be hoisted up again. This time even more weights were attached to her body. When they let her down she retracted her confession and protested her innocence, saying that she had lied earlier to escape the suffering. (See Katz 1995, 201-206) Meanwhile Gwinner's daughter, Agatha who was also accused of witchcraft had named her mother as a witch under torture. This increased the inquisitor's resolve to extract the confession of Gwinner. She was then tortured with thumb screws, another common instrument of torture. As the screws were tightened on to her fingers, she bravely protested her innocence but the pain become unbearable that she fainted. Every time she fainted, the holy inquisitors sprinkled her face with water to wake her up. On the 11th of December 1601, fifty days after the first torture, she confessed to the crime of witchcraft. Her confessions however were not enough for the inquisitors, who then demanded that she name other witches. Her spirit having been broken, Mrs, Gwinner named two and promised to reveal more. However, two days later, she again reasserted her innocence and refused to make final oath of confession. The inquisitor threatened her with further torture, this time Gwinner remained steadfast and retracted the names of the two people she had implicated. On the 21st of December, 1601, the inquisitor ordered her to be burnt alive at stake, she died without finally confessing that she was a witch [58]. However those women who refused to confess after being promised their life were imprisoned and tortured. They died in the prisons as a result of the violent torture. Some of them even fell victims of the onslaught of 'cleansing' by which Christians would come into the prison and attacked the demons that held on these women and gave them their supernatural powers. Often this cleansing was

done by beating the demons off the women rather than through prayers. Unless the accused women died through torture, she was taken to public gallows for execution and would not be allowed to address the public spectators by cutting of their tongues or tying their mouth with a wooden gag.

With the orthodox understanding that sexuality came from the carnal nature of mankind consequent upon the fall, therefore sexual desire is considered ungodly. Thus when the men persecuting the accused women found themselves aroused, the blame the women for the sexual arousal, thinking that it came from the women rather than themselves and consequently attack the breasts and the genitals of the accused with pincers, pliers and /or red-hot-iron. In some case, the zealots Christians were even allowed to visit the female prisoners in solitary confinements, thereby permitting sexual abuse. Hellen [2011] notes particularly that the general public of Toulouse were convinced that the inquisitor, Foulques de Saint George arraigned women for no other reason than to sexually abuse them and as such took unusual steps of gathering evidences against him (see also [http://www.theazarareneway.com/dark\\_side\\_of\\_christian\\_history.htm](http://www.theazarareneway.com/dark_side_of_christian_history.htm)). Hellen continues the ode as she laments that the horror of witch hunts know no bounds. It was holistic as it affected both the accused and her children and sometimes husbands. It is noted that even the children of the accused were liable to be persecuted too. The younger children below the age of nine were tortured to elicit information about their mother's involvement in witchcraft activities, while the girls from the age of nine and half and boy from the age of ten and half can stand trials as witches themselves. The worst case scenario was the point where the testimony of a two year old child could be used as evidence against the accused mother; while such was not admissible in other types of offences (see [http://www.theazarareneway.com/dark\\_side\\_of\\_christian\\_history.htm](http://www.theazarareneway.com/dark_side_of_christian_history.htm)).

#### **5.4 Salient Reasons for Witch-Hunting.**

The most obvious reason, though not overt to the public, for the persecution of the witches in Europe was economy. Noting that witch hunt just began immediately the inquisition ended and as such the region had been economically made destitute by the stoppage of inquisition. Hence the inquisitors complained that there were no more rich heretics and retorted that it is a pity that so salutary institution as ours should be uncertain of its future [[http://www.theazarareneway.com/dark\\_side\\_of\\_christian\\_history.htm](http://www.theazarareneway.com/dark_side_of_christian_history.htm)]. By including witchcraft to the list of crimes to be persecuted, the inquisitors discovered another gold mine that will sustain the future of their institution that was already ebbing away. It was Hellen [2011] that gave a vivid account of how the inquisitors turn the blood of the accused into gold as she recounts, 'victims were charged for the very ropes that bound them and the wood that burned them. Each procedure of torture carries a fee. After the execution of a wealthy witch, officials usually treat themselves to a banquet at the expense of the victims' estate [93]. By implication, the victims of this obnoxious practice were not only stripped of their freedom, innocence, life but also their wealth. In this regard, Barstow [9] laments, 'oh wretched creatures, you are compelled by the severity of the torture to confess things you have never done...and so by the cruel butchery innocent lives are taken and by a new alchemy, gold and silver are coined from human blood ([72] [http://www.theazarareneway.com/dark\\_side\\_of\\_christian\\_history.htm](http://www.theazarareneway.com/dark_side_of_christian_history.htm)).

Furthermore, throughout the centuries that the witch trials and witch hunts lasted, many women were murdered mercilessly. Poor women saw each other being burned on the stake or die miserably in the dungeon. This made a lasting impression on the women of the medieval era. Women were forced to become more and more submissive and allowed less

and less control over their own lives which may be the reason for the whole gendercide. It is against this backdrop that Jones (2002) asserts that the medieval witch hunts have long been depicted as part of a “war against women” conducted exclusively or overwhelmingly by men, especially those in position of central authority [73]. In this regard, Wills (2001) notes that the more polemical feminist account are likely to portray the witch as a heroic proto-feminists resisting patriarchal oppression and wholly innocent victims of male authored reign of terror designed to keep women in their place [74] see also [http://gendercide.org/case\\_witchhunts.html](http://gendercide.org/case_witchhunts.html)

## **6. CONCLUSION**

Turning a human being into a thing is almost the first step to justifying violence against the person. We see it with racism, we see it with homophobia, and we see it with terrorism. It is always the same process. The person is dehumanized and violence becomes inevitable. The medieval conception of the women as already discussed in this work places the women at a disadvantaged position. Thus having been reduced to a thing or a state of sub-humanity, they become victims of both personal and institutional capricious venom. The religio-philosophical traditions that know that all lives stems from one source, in order to achieve the supremacy of patriarchy within the medieval period removed sacredness of the life from the women or rather materialized them for their personal interests. Consequently, all sorts of abominations, cruelty and violation were done to keep the women in checks and submission. All these were done against the rule of natural laws, conscience, reason and scriptural injunctions. It must have seemed to Christians that all of Christendom was afflicted with the terrible curse of witchcraft. Thus women under torture were confessing the crimes they never actually committed – of having romance with the devil. It never occurred to the seeming pious inquisitors that it was precisely their method of torture that was responsible for creating those confessions. Hence, the victims eager to relief themselves of the unbearable pains, simply confessed to anything the inquisitors wanted them to. Then in 1657, the congregation of the Holy Office announced that for a very long time, not a single case of witch-hunt trials had been conducted properly. In order words, it had admitted that millions of women that died under the witch hunts were innocent, yet the church as body had no single word of apology for such heinous crime against humanity. I think that to carry out real purgative measure necessary for the harmony required for the desired peaceful world, we require a well worded apology and real actions from both Rome or Canterbury that will pacify humanity for the heinous crime the church committed against her.

## **COMPETING INTERESTS**

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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