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Types and Statuses of Children of *Trɔxovi* Shrines

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Abstract:

The “trɔxovi” system is a religious cult of the Ewes of South Eastern Ghana. It is established mostly in communities among the Anlo, Avenor and Tongu. The trɔxovi system revolves around deities believed to be responsible for social control in these communities. Associated with these deities are minors described as children of trɔxovi shrines. In contemporary times, these children are described by some as slaves because they are believed to have been abused and neglected. Lumped together and perceived as belonging to the same category and having the same status, they are, on the contrary, into four different identifiable categories with different statuses. These are the maidens of the shrines (trɔkosis/fiasidi), the children of the maidens fathered by the chief priests, the children of the maidens fathered by men other than the chief priests and children given birth to by barrenness threatened couple through the intervention of the deities. This work provides nuances to children of trɔxovi shrines believed to have been abandoned and abused in the shrine. Data was generated from respondents from seven shrines including chief priests and children from the four defined categories. Unstructured in-depth interview was used in generating data from the respondents. In addition to the interviews, personal observations were made in the study shrines during ritual celebrations. It was found out that these children of the trɔxovi shrine are treated differently with some having their freedom while some others do not. The trɔkosi/fiasidi, who is mostly committed as a child has no freedom, so is the child she gives birth to in the shrine with the chief priest. However, the others, the dɔflevi and the child of the trɔkosi/fiasidi fathered by any ordinary man other than the chief priest enjoy freedom.

1. Introduction

In Ghana, the practices associated with *trɔxovi*¹ religious system are concentrated in the south-eastern part of the Volta Region. However, a parallel practice referred to as *woryokwe*² is also found in the eastern part of Greater Accra Region specifically in Dangme East and West Districts. In the Volta Region, the practice is common in North and South Tongu, Ketu North and South, Akatsi Districts and Keta Municipality. *Trɔxovi* or *woryokwe* is a practice of using a human being, usually a young virgin (the most preferred to adult and even married women who are acceptable in some cases) to the shrine of a deity in atonement of a crime committed by a family member. The human being paid which is the *vi* (child), refers to a young female virgin. The system has been part of the social structure of the various societies where the practice is found and forms part of the institution of social control mechanism in these social systems (Dovlo and Kufogbe, 1997; Kufogbe and Dovlo, 1998; Nukunya and Kwafo, 1998; Nukunya, 2003; Akpabli-Honu, 2012).

Available literature on the phenomenon indicates that the *trɔxovi* system does not only exist in Ghana but is also common in the Republic of Togo and Benin. As a social control mechanism, a curse is invoked upon a family for a crime committed by a member. The curse is often a reaction by the deity to the crime committed by the family member. The curse is often pronounced by the victim of the crime who seeks redress from the deity which is believed to have powers to expose and punish offenders. The offender's family is then afflicted by calamitous circumstances including sudden and frequent death of members, general failures in life's activities as well as strange diseases. The cause of the misfortunes in the family concerned is, however, revealed by a spirit medium, which also directs the family of the offender to the shrine at the centre of the punitive punishment (Dovlo and Adzoyi, 1995; Dovlo and Kufogbe, 1997; Nukunya and Kwafo, 1998; Kufogbe, 2008 and Akpabli-Honu, 2012).

The *trɔxovi* system is not only noted for its social control prowess. It has also been known for its healing powers. The sick are believed to be healed and the fertility of the barren restored. Some names given to children are indicative of the fact that they are gifts from such shrines. For instance, Ameevor (1987) observed that the name *Kosi* (for female) and *Klu* (for male) are conferred on children whose mother, apprehensive of being barren, had to solicit the spiritual intervention of fertility deities before giving birth. The names are indicative of the parents' gratefulness to the fertility gods. By intuition, the parents think their children belong to the deities more than to them.

¹ *Trɔ* means deity; *xo* is a corrupted version of *xɔ* which means receive while *vi* refers to child. *Trɔxovi* therefore means child receiving deity.

² *Woryokwe* (Ga-Adangme dialect) refers to the slave of the god.

Klu and *Kosi* are the names that reflect the lord-servant relationship between the fertility gods and the children whose conception and birth they believably necessitated. As long as the children live, the parents believe they are protected by the gods that help bring them to the world. They are consequently regarded as children of the gods. In all, four categories of children have been identified with *trɔxovi* shrines. These children are either fully settled in the shrine or pay regular visits during festive or ritual occasions as is determined by the circumstance of their association with the shrine. Although the link between these children and the shrine are their parents in most circumstances, some of them are given shrine names that define the degree of their association with the deity. This study analyzes the various types of children of the *trɔkosi* shrine and their statuses. It is also meant to explore the future of these children as to whether they have a future of their own or are in perpetual spiritual bondage.

2. The Problem

The *trɔxovi* religious system is blamed for its maltreatment of children. For instance, their association with the shrine is referred to as spiritual bondage. In contemporary times, some even refer to them as “slaves”. The *trɔkosi/fiasidi* is sent to the shrine at a very tender age. Morkli (1995:3) gave an example of Dorgbazi Yotia who was committed in Avakpedome at the age of 12. Agodzo (1996:2) cites the case of Adukuor who was sent to the shrine at Ada, where a parallel practice of *trɔxovi* system referred to as worryokwe is practiced, at the age of 10 years and expected to spend her lifetime facing physical and spiritual bondage. Nukunya and Kwafo (1998: 7) also observed that children were pledged to the deities as their servants or wives by barrenness-threatened couples who approached the shrine for *dɔflefle*³ to enable them give birth. They further indicated that couples who experienced *fugblegble*⁴ frequent and *dzikuidzikui*⁵ also pledged to give their children to serve the gods should the spirits helped such children survived. Azumah (1996) who studied the impact of the phenomenon of *trɔkosi* in North Tongu on women and children called for its abolition because of its dehumanizing nature. To Ababio (2000: 23-24) both women and children could be found in *trɔkosi* shrines in dehumanizing situations. She contended that although Non-Governmental Organizations managed to secure freedom for some women, they had to go back to the shrines because of their children who were left behind. She was of the view that some NGOs “liberated *trɔkosi* women and forgot about their children” (p. 23). Kufogbe (2008: 1-2) indicated that a 1997 International Needs (Ghana) initiated study revealed that about 5000 women and children were in servitude.

All the studies mentioned above indicated that all the inmates of the shrines suffered inhuman treatments. Sexual abuse, physical assault, forced labour, denial of freedom of movement, lack of access to formal education and compulsory wearing of symbols of identity such as the deep blue cloth/greybaft or calico without their consent were some of the maltreatments suffered by the inmates.

Preliminary observation by the researchers revealed that there are four different categories of children in these shrines. What are the categories of the children of the *trɔxovi* shrines being referred to as victims of the practice? Do all these children suffer abuse in the shrine or their alleged plight is an over-exaggeration of the case of children in *trɔxovi* shrines? This paper defines and examines if all these children are really subjugated and abused in *trɔxovi* shrines. Ultimately, it enables the creation of awareness about which groups are shrine inmates and whose rights have been allegedly abused or otherwise.

3. Literature

The literature on the various categories of children associated with *trɔxovi* shrines has been very scanty since the searchlight has only been on the *trɔkosis* and *fiasidis*. Irrespective of the bleak literature on the categories of children associated with the *trɔxovi* system, the phenomenon of the association of these minors with the shrines can be discerned from a few studies. For instance, Gomelesio (2011) sampled 18 *ex-trɔkosis*⁶ who served in shrines in North Tongu before their liberation and found out that 83.3% of them were committed below 18 years of age. In *trɔxovi* societies where shrines insist on acceptance and committal of virgins to atone for the crimes committed by their relatives, it is imperative that children will be committed. It is therefore not surprising that maidens committed as *trɔkosis* in the Tongu areas have always been children.

Ababio (2000) has identified two categories of children in the *trɔxovi* shrines who are subjected to abuses. She observed that most *trɔkosis* are sent to the shrines at very tender ages. The younger the better. This means that in their innocence they are unable to refuse the sexual advances of the priests who subject them to sexual abuse.

This observation is indicative of the fact that *trɔkosis* enter the shrines as children and later become not only mere adult adherents but also wives or concubines of the chief priests who alone have the prerogative over their sexual lives. Through this category of children (*trɔkosis*), other children, by ascription, are also recruited into the shrine. These are the children of the *trɔkosis* and in other cases of the *fiasidis - trɔviwo*. Their description as children of the deity as already explained is because their father, the chief priest, is the deity’s proxy and does everything including either marrying or entering into concubinage relationship with the maidens on behalf of the deity. Children born to the maidens ultimately belong to the deity, hence their description as *trɔviwo*.

Nukunya (2003:247) has also mentioned some categories of children associated with *trɔxovi*. His account includes female children offered by their parents in thanksgiving to the deities for helping them to be successful in very important ventures brought before them (the deities) in the shrines. He further observed that “barren couples also approached the deities with the promise to offer

³ *Dɔflefle* literary means buying of womb. It, however, connotes the ritual buying of fertility.

⁴ *Fugblegble* this is frequent or continuous miscarriages.

⁵ *Dzikuidzikui* refers to still-births or the continuous death of children given birth to by couples.

⁶ *Ex-trɔkosis* refer to redeemed *trɔkosis* who are no longer associated with the *trɔxovi* system. This is because these maidens of the shrine have been freed of their association with the shrine through the interventions of Non-Governmental Organizations such as International Needs and Fetish Slaves Liberation Movement. They are liberated and are no more adherents of the *trɔxovi* system.

daughters as servants or wives should the deities help them get children". Nukunya (2003: 247) continued that "when couples experienced frequent or continuous miscarriages, still-births or frequent deaths of their young ones, a phenomenon known in Ewe as *dzikuidzikui*⁷, such promises were made to the gods". In conclusion, Nukunya indicated that "male children so pledged were called *Klu* while females were known as *Kosi* or *Dzatugbi (Dzatu)*" and that although they do not live in the shrines, they owe them (the shrines) some duties and obligations.

Dovlo and Adzoyi (1995:1) and Ameevor (1987:12) have been scanty on categories of children in the shrines. Apart from the maidens themselves who are usually committed when they are minors, their mention of *dɔfɛfle* (womb buying) is only in reference to children born to barrenness- threatened couples who sought spiritual intervention from the shrines. They note, however, that payment for the *dɔfɛfle* is a vow to dedicate resultant children to the god for a period of years. Examples of such children (*dɔfɛflewiwo* shortened as *dɔflewiwo*) are *Klu* (a male) and *Kosi* (a female). The two names are indicative of the slave relationship between the deity and the children. Etymologically, *Klu* is the name for the description of any captive of war. It means slave. Although it is a neuter noun, it has been accepted for the male captive. Ameevor (1987: 12) opined that *Kosi* is the feminine version of *Klu*. However, *kosi* is derived from two Ewe words *ko* and *asi*. *Ko* in Ewe means poverty while *si* is the short form of *asi* which means wife. The word *kosi* therefore means "wife of poverty". *Kosi* is also the suffix of *trɔ* (deity) and reads *trɔkosi* which literally means "deity's wife of poverty". This literal meaning of *trɔkosi* is ambiguous. The ambiguity surrounding the description of these maidens has also been realized by Dovlo and Adzoyi (1995: 1) who think that "the status of the girls committed to the shrines as 'wives of the gods' rather than 'slaves of the gods' is ambiguous". They think that "the etymological meaning of *kosi* is much more indicative of slavery than spousal relationship". This has been the controversy surrounding the status of the maidens described as *trɔkosiwo* (slaves of the gods) but said to be the wives of the gods and treated as such by the proxies of the gods, the chief priests.

Assimeng postulates, "having more children is regarded as a divine blessing; childlessness is treated as a curse, a response to possible breaches of tribal taboos. It is believed that through the machinations of witches, a person's womb can be stolen. This is a familiar petition that is heard by custodians of traditional cults and Pentecostal and spiritual churches in the country" (1999: 48). It is therefore expected that children, whose conceptions have been occasioned by divine entities, constitute a percentage of adherents of religious sects of all characters – traditional or Christian. Their continued submission to the deities that occasioned and facilitated their birth will ensure their protection from the forces that nearly succeeded in blocking their entry into the world.

4. Methods

The study was conducted in some selected *trɔxovi* shrines in the South-Eastern part of the Volta Region. Seven *trɔxovi* shrines were drawn from Klikor (Ketu South District), Afife (Ketu North District), Avenorpeme (Akatsi District), Anloga (Keta Municipality), Avakpedome (Tongu North) and Agave Afedume (Tongu South). The selected shrines from these areas were those of Togbi Adzima, Togbi Nyigbla and Mama Ziɔ, Mama Dzoli, Mama Tormi, Togbi Avakpe I and II and Togbi Adzemu respectively. From these shrines, respondents were selected. These included a shrine owner, the chief priest, 12 *trɔkosis/fiasidɔs* (2 from each of the 6 shrines) and 20 children of *trɔxovi* shrines who were born through the intervention of the deity and bore the special shrine names. Besides these respondents who were purposively selected using non-probability sampling technique, snowball sampling procedure was also used in selecting two respondents each from the six study areas. These were couples who sought the deity's intervention to enable them give birth.

Unstructured in-depth interview schedule was used in the collection of data from the respondents. Besides the interview, participant observation was also employed especially in two study areas during their *trɔxovi* annual festival. These were Klikor and Afife. Although Togbi Adzima shrine was selected from Klikor for the study, the festival observed involved all the 3 shrines in the town. These were Mama Vena I and II in addition to Togbi Adzima shrine. The festival lasted from 1st July to 10th August, 2011. In Afife, Akpabli-Honu (2012:89) indicated that 5 shrines but 6 deities could be found and all were Togbi Nyigbla shrines from which Nyigbla I shrine which also housed Mama Ziɔ was selected. Their annual festival involved all the shrines. It lasted for 10 days in February, 2012. During the festival, there was interaction with adherents who believed that it was the vow they took in the shrine that enabled their fertility. The researcher also interacted with children whose births were occasioned by the intervention of the *trɔxovi*.

The field work, which took six months (August, 2011 – February, 2012) to execute, enabled the generation of needed data for this study.

5. Categories and Statuses of Devotees to *Trɔxovi* System

Data revealed that categories of children associated with the shrine included *trɔkosis/fiasidɔs*, *trɔwiwo*, *dɔfɛflewiwo* and children of *trɔkosi/fiasidɔ* fathered by a man other than their ritual husband (the chief priest). There are also *dɔfɛflewiwo* of parallel fertility gods to the *trɔxovi*. These typologies of children are usually found in the shrine. They are, however, treated differently each according to the status he/she occupies. Accordingly, they have different roles to play. The role each child plays is commensurate to his/her status. The descriptions of these categories of children, their statuses and roles within the *trɔxovi* system as analysed from the data are presented below.

5.1. The *Trɔkosi/Fiasidɔ*

⁷ *Dzikuidzikui* explains the situation of continuous loss of babies or infants after their births. The phenomenon is so described if a couple continually experiences the loss of babies more than once.

The young female virgin used as the sacrificial maiden is referred to as *trɔkosi* in Tongu areas and *fiasidi* in Anlo (Ketu Districts and Keta Municipality) and Avenor (Akatsi District). *Trɔkosi* is understood as a “slave of a deity” (Nukunya and Kwafo, 1998; Dovlo and Kufogbe, 1997; Kufogbe and Dovlo, 1998; Nukunya, 2003; Akpabli-Honu, 2012). *Fiasidi* on the other hand is a “prospective wife of a chief” (Akpabli-Honu, 2012: 4). This is similar to Nukunya and Kwafo (1998) and Nukunya (2003:244) who also explain the term to mean “prospective wife of a chief (or deity)”. Chief in this case is the deity (*trɔxovi*) represented by the priest in charge of the shrine. Undoubtedly, the sacrificial virgin is preserved for the *trɔxovi* (deity) and by implication, the chief priest, the proxy of the deity. The *trɔkosi* or *fiasidi* is also referred to as *mama*⁸. The system revolves around this category of adherents as is depicted in the name which describes it – *trɔxovi*.

Shrines located in Tongu areas accept these maidens at their tender age; preferably before their menarche. Field data confirmed that the *trɔkosi* and *fiasidi* respondents were sent to the shrine very early in their lives when they were between the ages of five (5) and twelve (12) years. These are primary school going years. There was, however, an exceptional case of a maiden of a Klikor shrine who completed Junior High Secondary School before her commitment. She was sixteen years old at the time of her committal. This age did not make her an adult since she fell below eighteen (18) years.

Although shrines in Anlo Traditional Area never insisted on the use of children as objects of reparation, they nonetheless accepted them once they were sent to be committed. Informants other than the chief priests revealed that the preference for the girl child was because the comparatively far older priests become sexually rejuvenated the younger and more beautiful the females are. The priests, however, thought they were only acting on the orders of the deities and that the acceptance of the maiden brought to the shrine was done by the deities and not the priests for any parochial interest. A priest, in justifying their acceptance of the girl child observes that: *etrɔwo fe gbedzie miele; mieɔa naneke wɔna kple miaɔutɔwofe ɔyuse o.*⁹ According to the priests, their occupation of the stool was decided by the deities and failure to obey their command meant calamity.

In Tongu, only virgins were accepted in the shrine for the ritual atonement. The demand for virgins necessitated the use of the girl child for the purpose since their virginity was assured compared to the relatively older colleagues that may also be used in shrines of Anlo and Avenor Traditional Areas. The practice therefore encourages the use of children for the purpose of atonement of crime committed by their relations. The *trɔkosis/fiasidis*, therefore, have largely been children of the shrine. From the observations of the priest, it was clear that the use of the girl child as object of reparation would remain in the *trɔxovi* system until the deities deemed otherwise.

5.2. *Dɔfɛflewiwo*

One other category of children associated with the *trɔxovi* system is referred to as *dɔfɛflewiwo*. These are children whose parents, threatened with barrenness, solicited the spiritual intervention of deities that facilitate the fertility of the womb necessitating their birth. Such a child is also described as *trɔvi*.

These *dɔfɛflewiwo* are identifiable by names bestowed on them by the deities. Names given to such children include Atitso, Atitsogbi, Klu, Klutsey and Kadevi for males, while females have names such as Dzatua or Dzatugbi, Kosi, Kosifi, Gbesi, Xanu or Xanuvi, Dzawoe, Maago and Maagofi. Although all the fertility deity shrines have these names for the children born through their intervention, there are specific names associated with particular shrines. For instance, the name Dzawoe is unique to shrines in Tongu areas while Maago and Maagofi are associated with Afife shrines in Ketu North District. The names are given to the children sequentially. Atitso is derived from *atitsotso*¹⁰. Shrines of deities are normally enclosures delineated with fences. The name Atitso refers to the person who cuts sticks for the preparation of the fence delineating the shrine. This, Atitso usually does when the fence breaks down and is to be mended or re-constructed for a ceremony such as a festival or ritual. He is therefore the deity's stick cutter. According to one of the respondents “*woyom be Atitso gake nye menɔa trɔkpo me o; nye mede aza dufɛa dɛke ha kpo o. Anɔ eme be dzinyelawo kom yi trɔfɛa le nye dɛvi me*”.¹¹ This is the stand of many respondents belonging to the category of *dɔfɛflewiwo*. However, there were others who also attached themselves to the shrine because they were told while growing up that they owed their lives to the deity. Similarly, Dzatua or Dzatugbi¹² is the first female child born after the fertility ritual. However, Dzatua or Dzatugbi are interchangeably used.

⁸ *Mama* is a title reserved for a couple of positions among the Ewes. It is used for grandmother, the wife of a chief or traditional ruler and a queen mother. In this context, it is used for the *trɔkosi/fiasidi* who is believed to be the wife of the deity and for that matter the chief priest (the proxy of the deity). Since the deity is addressed as *togbi* (which is how the chief priest, the proxy, is also addressed) the maiden (who is the wife) is also addressed as *mama*.

⁹ We act on the orders of the deities; we do not act on our will.

¹⁰ *Atitsotso* in Ewe means cutting of stick(s). The sticks are often used in fencing the shrine. Usually, this occurs when there is a major ritual to be performed on the *trɔxovi* system calendar. For instance, preparations precede the annual *trɔxovi* festivals. As part of the preparations fences are mended or reconstructed. Sticks for the construction of the fences are cut by people designated for the purpose. These people, who are adherents of the deity, are known by the name Atitso or Atitsogbi.

¹¹ I am called Atitso but I do not live in the shrine; I have not also attended any of the annual festivals. My parents might have sent me to the shrine in my childhood.

¹² Dzatugbi is the same as Dzatua with the latter being the short form of the former. *Dza* is maize flour served to invite activists of religious cults to festivals and other ritual occasions. It is also served to initiate herbalists into action such as healing and ritual sacrifices. In some cases money is added to the maize flour. In contemporary times, however, a small amount of money is used in most cases in place of the maize flour. Dzatua therefore means the one who serves the *dza*; and Dzatugbi, in the same vein refers to the day of serving *dza*. By implication, it means the

These children whose births are guaranteed by the deity are named in the shrine on a particular day (the day of dedication) determined by the priest and it is on this day that they are first shaved with razor. As long as they are not dedicated and “christened” in the shrine, they are not supposed to be shaved. Their hairs therefore remain dreadlock. These children do not live in the shrines as is the case for *trɔkosis/fiasidi*s but owed some duties and obligations to the shrine as illustrated by their names (Nukunya and Kwafo, 1998; Nukunya, 2003 and Akpabli-Honu, 2012).

Field data revealed that these children marry with the consent of the shrine. For instance adherents to the deity at Have in the Republic of Togo introduce their potential spouses to the shrine for some rituals to be performed for them to ward off evil spirits which may attempt to ‘block’ their chances of reproduction as experienced by their parents.

This category of children occasionally visits these fertility shrines and during some ritual ceremonies. Purposively, such a child is sent to the shrine by the parents for ritual bathing which is known as *agbametsilele*¹³. While some of these children remain active and dedicated adherents of the deities, others are dormant with some diverting their belief systems to other supernatural entities. The study found out that as many as thirteen such children out of the twenty interviewed became Christians. One of the respondents called Kadevi said:

“I am now a Christian fellowshipping with Action Chapel International here in Accra..... I can’t even remember my way to the shrine where my conception and birth were allegedly occasioned. I have also married and have neither sought permission from the deity nor have I sent my woman to the shrine for spiritual blessing. I have two boys with my wife. They are all with me outside Ghana”.

Although there were other respondents who have similar experiences as Kadevi, there were yet others who have not severed ties with the shrine. An example, Atitso, a respondent observed that: *Ameadeke menɔa tɔ tsom yɔa lo dzu na o. Agbea me wunu haɔke o. Trɔ sia woe nye xexea me. Woawoe hem va xexea me eyata masubɔ wo ɔaa.*¹⁴ In all, the ability to continue worshipping the *trɔxovi* depended on the individual. It was clear that the *dɔfɛflewiwo* were under no obligation to worship the deity.

5.3. *Trɔviwo*

Associated with *trɔxovi* shrines are also children born by a *trɔkosi/fiasidi* in the shrine. These children are often born to the chief priests who alone have the prerogative of having sexual intercourse with the maidens once they remain unmarried to anyone else. These children are, by birth, adherents of the *trɔxovi* system. They also assume the names conferred on the *dɔfɛflewiwo*. The first male or female child of a *trɔkosi/fiasidi* is “christened” Atitso or Dzatua respectively. While the second male or female child is Klu or Kosi, the third pair is named Klutse or Xanu respectively. This order of naming these children is, however, not fixed. The first male child in some shrines is named Klu while the female counterpart is also named Gbesi or Xanu. Although such names are adopted by the shrines, no fast rule exists. Differences are noticed from shrine to shrine. Shrines in Afife, for instance, use Klu, and Klutsey for the male children, while the female children are called Maago and Maagofi. At Mama Dzoli shrine of Avenorpeme/venu, the names adopted are Atitso, Klu and Klutsey for the male children and Dzatua and Xanu for the female children. Data indicate that shrine names are not borne by all children of *trɔkosi/fiasidi* and the chief priests. Once the earlier children exhaust the available names the subsequent ones are given any ordinary name.

6. Children of Parallel Fertility Gods

It is important to note that not only children born from *dɔfɛfle* known by the shrine names as already discussed. This is because there are private versions of the *trɔxoviwo* owned by individuals and families that also allegedly provide fertility services to barrenness-threatened couples. This category of deities also provides security and protection for the owners and their families. They provide their clients with services such as spiritual fortification, success in business, cure for ill-health and solution to infertility problems. Children born by barrenness-threatened-couples through the spiritual intervention of this category of deities are also given names similar to those of the *trɔxovi* shrines. In Ketu North and South Districts as well as Keta Municipality, the personal versions of Togbi Adzima and Togbi Nyigbla located at Klikor and Afife respectively abound in individual family homes but are not considered *trɔxoviwo* although the adherents of these personal deities use *bishi* (deep blue plain cloth) as their official wear with strings of *la* (raffia leaf) around their neck. Examples of communities where these personal versions of the *trɔxovi* deities are found include Anlo- Afiadenyigba, Dzodze, Penyi, Xevi and Ehie. While mostly men have been the priests in charge of these personal deities, there has been an instance at Anlo-Afiadenyigba where a woman was chosen by the deity to administer the shrine. These priests also wear the *trɔkuku* (a ritual straw hat worn by a chief priest of *trɔxovi*) and hold ritual staff as a symbol of office. The female administrator of the shrine is referred to as *togbi srɔ*. Children cured of strange diseases and those born after the *dɔfɛfle* ritual become adherents of these personal deities. Apart from *trɔxoviwo* that double as fertility deities which are owned by lineages or clans and recognized as community deities, a famous fertility god which also assumed wide recognition and patronage by not only people from Togo and the Volta Region but beyond is Togbi Ave located at Have in the Republic of Togo.

In the case of these private fertility gods other than the *trɔxovi*, barrenness-threatened-couples visit the shrine of the deity with one or two bottle(s) of schnapps and an amount of money described in Eve as *adeɔfokoe* or *dza* (money paid to a priest requesting from

Dzatua is plays her role of serving *dza* on the day appointed for the activity (the *dza*-serving day)

¹³ This refers to a ritual bath prepared with water and assorted herbs amid incantations for the fortification of the adherents of the deities concerned against ill-luck, evil spirits and misfortunes. It is taken in the shrine during ritual ceremonies. Any adherent may however visit the shrine at will and ask to be allowed to have a ritual bath. Adherents who are ill also visit these shrines to have the ritual bath believed to have potent healing powers.

¹⁴ Nobody insults the crocodile while crossing river. Life is not ended yet. These deities are the world. They brought me into this world and I will always worship them.

him special intercessory prayers or libation, seeking solution to a problem or problems brought before the gods). The priest offers the intercessory prayers after which the afflicted is permitted to directly present his/her request to the god. In the process of pouring of the libation, a vow is made to the deity. This is normally done by putting a request to the deity and pledging some items and cash to be offered for thanksgiving if the request is granted. In the event of the deity granting the couple a child, the baby is sent to the shrine for dedication. The hair of the baby is then shaved and he or she is named. It is a taboo to comb the hair of the baby before this dedication ritual.

The dedication normally takes place when the child is completely weaned. For this reason, a child is normally ready for dedication when it is six months and above old. However, parents who cannot wait for this long have their children dedicated when they are three months old. The decision to dedicate *trɔviwo* at six months and above after birth is informed by the fact that newly born babies mostly develop fontanel (also spelt fontanelle) for which reason the skull should not be left bare else the baby, according to respondents, becomes vulnerable to all kinds of diseases including chronic headache. It is for this reason that traditional African mothers frequently use very hot towel on the head of their newly born babies to enable the head become compact and strong.

This notwithstanding, a *trɔvi* may grow into an adult before he or she is dedicated. In this circumstance, the parents must ensure that the child does not shave. In situations of this nature, the parents of the child are warned that since the child's hair will not be combed until the dedication and ritual shaving, it can result in dreadlocks. The parents are advised to keep pieces of the dreadlock that fall off the head safely for submission to the shrine on the day of dedication and shaving. The loss of a piece of dreadlock or hair is capable of spelling doom for the child. However, parents who notice that the dreadlocks of their children risk falling off are granted a leeway to contain the situation. Such parents are allowed to use a sharp piece of broken schnapps bottle to shave the child and keep the hair safely for submission to the shrine during the dedication and naming rituals.

Delay in the dedication of *dɔfɛflewiwo* may arise due to factors such as poverty, marital conflict (preventing the couple from taking decision on the child), divorce and death involving one of the parents. Acquisition of ritual items for the shrines dedication may be difficult for some parents hence the delay in the performance of the ritual in some cases. Sometimes conflict between the couple renders decision-making difficult as none of them is willing to compromise his or her stand for the sake of the welfare of the child. Divorce retards preparation towards the dedication ritual of the *dɔfɛflewi*. Since the two parents are no longer together, they cannot plan to have their child sent to the shrine for the naming and shaving rituals. The death of a parent can also delay the dedication ritual of the child. This is because the surviving parent who must observe restrained social life until he or she performs the widowhood rites has to shelve the idea of planning the dedication of the child until the performance of the widowhood rites. The performance of widowhood rites can curtail the movement of the individuals concerned for a long time. This can affect the schedule for the dedication of the *dɔfɛflewi* by postponing the performance of the ritual over a long period of time. The study encountered two male adults who said they were yet to go for *talulu*¹⁵ rites in the shrine.

Talulu, according to data, is very significant in the life of the *dɔfɛflewi*. It signifies submissiveness to the deity through surrendering of one's soul to the god. To surrender one's soul to the deity, it is believed, is a means of guaranteeing supernatural protection and the shaping of one's destiny for the better. It was revealed that *dɔfɛflewiwo* in general suffered no cruelty within the system to warrant describing them as slaves in the.

7. Children born by *Trɔkosi/Fiasidi* to a Non-Priest Husband

Another category of children associated with the shrine is children of *trɔkosi/fiasidi* born to men who have no relationship whatsoever with the shrines. Although the maiden is married off properly to another man according to customs, she continues to recognize the chief priest as the husband and addresses him as such. It is believed that the man who marries the maiden from the shrine only enters into concubinage relationship with her. The chief priest of the shrine of the maiden remains the husband. Although some children of the maidens may have their father from outside the shrine, they (the children) belong to the shrine by ascription. Their membership of the shrine is through their mother. These children also assume shrine names such as Atitsogbi or Atitso, Klu, Klutsey, Kadevi (for males) and Dzatugbi, Gbesi, Xanu, Kosi (for females). These children are not sent to the shrine for dedication but they take part in celebrations by virtue of the fact that their mother belongs to the shrine. Some of the children consider themselves as inmates of the shrine and see the chief priests as their father.

These are the different categories of children that identify with *trɔxovi* shrines with some having more attachment to the shrines than others. During ritual ceremonies and annual festivals, these children are seen interacting in the shrine and running errands for the elderly. In seeking long life, good health and prosperity for these children, their parents ask that they always take part in the *agbametsilele*.

8. The Children versus Freedom and Servitude

The study explored the categories of children that are associated with the *trɔxovi* shrine. In doing so, data was generated on the status of their freedom or servitude in the shrine. The data, as discussed below, showed that not all the categories of children in relationship with the shrine were "enslaved".

8.1. The *Trɔkosi/Fiasidi*

This maiden's presence in the shrine is occasioned by the committal of crime by a relative against the deity or someone else who sought the intervention of the deity for redress. Upon unleashing sudden disaster on the family of the culprit and the revelation by the oracles of the source of the catastrophe, the girl child is sent to the shrine to appease the gods for cessation of calamities

¹⁵ *Talulu* in the Ewe language means shaving of the hair. As has already been indicated, it is during the dedication ceremony of the *dɔfɛflewi* that the child is first shaved.

against the family of the criminal. The girl child, in this case is confined to the shrine and her upbringing is dictated solely by the rules that govern the operations of the shrine.

In Tongu shrines, the maiden serves a mandatory seven years before she gains some freedom of living outside the shrine but remains an adherent to the shrine throughout her life. Even at death, the body belongs to the shrine. She therefore appears enslaved throughout her life. After experiencing her menarche, she is made to have sexual intercourse with the husband the deity who is by proxy, the chief priest. She therefore starts giving birth as a child. She works for the chief priest without reward which constitutes exploitation. She must be taken care of by the family whose interest she is serving in the shrine. The girl child is also prevented from going to school since data showed that formal education is not encouraged among the maidens else they become intellectually sophisticated and pose a threat to the survival of the *trɔxovi* system.

In Anlo and Avenor shrines, the maiden spends a week in the shrine during her committal rituals and is allowed to leave for her home town until she is sent to the shrine permanently once the family is prepared to do so. The preparation of the family involves provision of basic things the maiden needs to live a life on her own. These include household necessities such as cooking utensils, clothing, stools and other household equipment. After committal, the duration of time needed to send the maiden to *afe*¹⁶ is not fixed. It varies from the day of committal to when she is of age¹⁷. Depending on the age at her committal, it may take up to twenty (20) years to send a maiden to *afe* in Anlo and Avenor Traditional Areas. Families which think they suffered too many calamities such as frequent deaths and strange diseases from the wrath of the deity may prepare before sending the maiden for committal after which they leave her in the shrine. At her new home, the maiden may become the wife of the chief priest or may be married by anybody interested in her. Such marriages take place in the shrine and bride price, in the form of drinks and money is paid to the chief priest if the suitor is not the chief priest himself.

The maiden, therefore, suffers multiple abuses including no expression of freedom; she is sexually abused, subjected to child labour, forced into marriage as a child, deprived from going to school or continuing with her formal education, forced out from her original home town by virtue of her committal and deprived from freely associating with a religion of her choice. It is obvious that the fundamental human right of the *trɔkosi/fiasidi* is trampled upon. She is virtually exposed to sexually transmitted illnesses since the chief priest, her husband has multiple partners – wives and concubines. Above all, she is not economically empowered because as is the case in Tongu traditional areas she is virtually in servitude. Although her situation is not as characterized with deprivations as is the situation of the maiden in Tongu, she has also nonetheless been abused. The *trɔkosi/fiasidi* as a child of the shrine, therefore, suffers abuses and is also left without any freedom of her own. She is virtually in servitude in the name of religion. The problems the maidens go through in the shrine is captured in the observation with one of them in vernacular that: *miafe nya le abe abimakumaku ene.....evevem eye wo miavem ha*¹⁸. When asked to explain further, the respondent said she never wanted to recall anything about her enslavement. She asked whether the slave enjoyed any freedom. She said her family gave her up to suffer and she accepted it but posterity would settle everything.

8.2. *Trɔviwo*

These are children of the chief priest born to him by the *trɔkosi/fiasidi*. Primarily, their membership of the *trɔxovi* religion is by ascription. They are children born and bred in the shrine by the chief priest and the wife who is the wife of the deity. As children, they are made to have ritual baths regularly and to also take part in the ritual meals. They grow in the *trɔxovi* religion since they are not introduced to any religion than that of their parents.

Although members of the *trɔxovi* religion, the children are not ‘maltreated’ as is the case of their mothers. This is because the *trɔviwo* are not in the shrine to atone for the crime of any of their relations although their mothers are.

The freedom of the *trɔviwo* manifests in their benefit from formal education. Their ability to receive formal education is dependent on the value their father, the chief priest, attaches to education. Field data indicates that the inability of the *trɔviwo* to receive formal education can be attributed to the number of children each chief priest has. The number of children of a chief priest is a factor of the number of wives and concubines he has. Morkli’s (1995) account of a chief priest in Tongu who fathered 522 children with his 76 harem of wives and an uncountable number of concubines is supportive of the problems the priest would have gone through if he decided to let his children acquire formal education. This situation was not different from what Kufogbe (2008) also reported of Kwadzo Loh, a former chief priest of Togbi Adzima shrine of Klikor Afegame who also had twenty wives and realized rather too late that this was too much for a chief priest. The onus rested with the wives and the concubines, who played the greater role in taking care of the children and to decide whether to educate them or not. However, taking such a decision was also the prerogative of the man. It is, however, clear that even if the chief priest valued education, the number of children he fathered made the implementation of it impractical. The children therefore remained illiterates till old age. Such is the situation of *trɔviwo*. The priests, during data collection, did not reveal the number of children they had but said that the children of the *trɔkosi/fiasidi* are for the deity.

However, data from the field showed that schools were established in Tongu Traditional Area by International Needs, Ghana mainly to provide formal education to this category of children and others. As many as a hundred *trɔviwo* were receiving formal education in schools established in the various towns and villages in North Tongu with their *trɔkosi* mothers and those *trɔviwo*

¹⁶ *Afe* means home town. In the *trɔxovi* system, *afe* refers to the shrine the *trɔkosi/fiasidi* belongs. The shrine becomes their new home since they no longer belong to their initial home town. She becomes a stranger in the home town of the parents.

¹⁷ This refers to the time the relations think the maiden is mature for marriage.

¹⁸ Our plight is like the chronic festering wound...it smells and pains.

who outgrew the basic school were also being trained in vocational skills at Adidome where such vocational training institutions have been established for the purpose.

The phenomenon of depriving *trɔviwo* from receiving formal education is however not a general one. Children of some chief priests received formal education and were in various positions in the public sector with others in the second cycle institutions. For instance, the chief priest of Mama Vena shrine of Ablorgame – Klikor educated his children who occupy various positions in the public sector. While one of the children was an accountant, another was a nurse with yet another who was a certificated teacher. One of his sons was on scholarship and offering science at Keta Senior High school in the Volta Region. There were others in basic schools. The deceased chief priest of Togbi Adzima and Mama Ziɔ shrine of Afife also had three of his children staying with their father's sister and schooling at Ashaiman near Tema. It was found out that, these children's education was being sponsored by their fathers. One of the educated children of the chief priest from Klikor observes that: "*our father has vowed to give us the best of education he could provided we demonstrated our interest, dedication and commitment.....I don't believe that trɔxovi chief priests don't educate their children. If some do, then certainly it is not our dad*". On the contrary a *trɔvi* respondent from Adidome expressed indignation at his inability to receive formal education and said: *esi mia tata dudu mi kɔɔi abe dzinuviwo ene de aleke wɔge wo le hafi akpɔ mia dzi le suku*.¹⁹

8.3. *Dɔfɛflewiwo*

These children have the greatest freedom among all categories of children associated with the shrine. Besides occasions such as the observation of annual rituals, festivals and other special ceremonies which take a few days parents of these children might want to attend with them, they are not obliged to be shrine dwellers as the case is with the maidens and *trɔviwo*. The frequent visit to the shrine by the *dɔfɛflewiwo* and their parents, particularly the mothers, is due to the belief among the adherents that the closer one is to the deities as well as participating in shrine rituals the more the blessing and protection received.

The freedom enjoyed by this category of children manifests in several ways. They are free to acquire formal education. Indeed, many such children attend school not only in the shrine catchment areas, but elsewhere where they live with parents or relatives. These children also attend the Christian church with some baptizing and adopting Christian names. Some of them have not converted and yet show no interest in shrine activities despite the fact that they reside in settlements close to the shrine locations. The study discovered several of these children who have attained secondary and tertiary education levels and are serving in high places in the civil and public services. Those of them who are still known by their shrine names but relocated from their shrine catchment settlements have also never shown any keen interest in shrine activities. Their parents, however, claimed to have been committing *dza*²⁰ into the coffers of the deities in request for special prayer, prosperity and protection for them wherever they may be.

Some of the *dɔfɛflewiwo* interviewed claimed they did not experience any curtailment of their freedom in any way. Some also converted to christianity. Others were prominent members of their various churches. Interestingly, some maintained their shrine names in addition to their Christian names. They argued that the shrine names, according to their parents, enabled their birth or survival and that they should not delete such names since it could occasion the withdrawal of the protection of the deities they enjoyed over the years and suffer calamities consequently.

The phenomenon of adopting both shrine and Christian names by some *dɔfɛflewiwo* has been analyzed by others within the context of complementary roles played by traditional and Christian religions. For instance, Busia (1951), Brokensha (1966) and Senah (1997) have all observed the complementary roles of the two religions. In the case of Busia (1951:208), the influence of Christianity on the converts may be likened to a 'thin veneer'. He observed that among Christians of Ashanti and Gold Coast, Christian beliefs were superficial and when converts felt threatened by difficult situations they had recourse to their old beliefs. Similarly, Brokensha's (1966:34) observation of Christianity as an agent of social change in Larteh indicates that both religions – traditional and Christian – appear to be complementary of each other's role. According to him, "most Larteh Christians probably accept that Christianity is appropriate for some situations, whereas in others recourse should be made to *abosom*, the other gods, whose powers can better deal with the problem". In the same vein, Senah (1997:88), found out in his study of the people of Botianor, a settlement which is a few kilometres from Accra, that:

"a critical examination of the religious life of the villagers show that their attitude to the two major religions, indigenous and Christianity, is very pragmatic. Non-Christians for instance, celebrate Christmas and Easter without any regard for their Christian significance. Similarly avowed Christians easily resort to traditional therapeutic systems in the event of illness whose etiologies are perceived as metaphysical".

Consequently, the action of the *dɔfɛflewiwo* and their families of maintaining the shrine names is in accordance with the recognition given to the role believed to have been played by the deities in the conception and birth of such children. It is therefore not surprising to come across people with names such as Peter Atitso Mensah or Evelyn Kosi Mensah and others. It is therefore a matter of choice for the *dɔfɛflewiwo* as to whether they want to associate themselves with the shrine or not. Those who decided to adhere to the beliefs and practices of the *trɔxovi* system had always exercised their freedom and decided whether they should visit the shrine during rituals and festivals times or not.

¹⁹ When our father dropped us like stars, how can he take care of us in school (it implies that their father gave birth to them and they are as many as the stars and that because of the numbers he is incapable of providing them with formal education)

²⁰ *Dza* is an amount of money given to a priest for intercessory prayers, rituals, oracular consultations or spiritual healing. It is also money or drink given to a specialist as initiation for the performance of task.

9. Children of *trɔkosi/fiasidi* and Their Non-Priest Husbands

This category of children is not born in the shrine since their mothers have married outside the shrine. The maidens who marry outside the shrine are under the control of their husbands although they have their unflinching loyalty to the shrine and the chief priest who remains their only acknowledged ‘husband’²¹. The children have the privilege of receiving formal education and leading normal life like any ordinary person. However, they are affiliated to the shrine through their mother. As children, they are sent to the shrine by their mothers whenever they are visiting their home, the shrine. They take part in celebrations in the shrine as their mothers do. They are however under the control of their respective fathers who may or may not be affiliates of the shrine. This notwithstanding, these children may spend considerable amount of time in the shrine at the behest of the mothers. The woman who is a *fiasidi* may spend days, weeks or months in the shrine each time due to misunderstanding between her and the husband or on the orders of the deity. The children who normally accompany their mother on such visits often have their education curtailed. A respondent who said he was the first child of the mother, a *fiasidi* of Mama Ablewor shrine of Avenorpeme/venu, said *etrɔkpɔ me dede kple nɔnye na be nye mede suku o; enye nusi te de dzinye egbea*.²² This view was shared by a couple of respondents who belonged to this category of children. However, one of them working with the judiciary said but for the father’s resilience in preventing the mother from sending him to the shrine at Afife, education would have eluded him. He revealed that the father had several conflicts with the mother over his refusal to send him to the shrine especially when he (the child) started schooling. This resulted in the father being summoned to the shrine where he was told that his children belonged to the deity because their mother was the deity’s wife.

Once a non-priest husband is an affiliate of the shrine, it follows that the children’s membership of the shrine becomes automatic until they are mature and can take their own decisions. Even in such a situation, the children are not mainstream adherents of the system. They are, however, present in the shrine during special occasions because their mothers must necessarily be present. Such children grow up to be on their own and lead their own lives as the *dɔfɛflewiwo*. According to Kofi “it was in my childhood days that I followed my mum to the shrine as a dog on the heels of the owner”. He followed up in vernacular that, “*tsa-kese dzo la avu le*”²³. Kofi’s statement means that his association with the *trɔxovi* shrine in his childhood was as a result of ignorance. As a child, he could not reason responsibly and decisions were taken for him by the parents. Despite situations such as this, this category of children never suffered any abuse from the shrine.

10. Conclusion

Different figures have been put up by researchers and institutions as estimates of adherents of the *trɔxovi* system in bondage. For instance, the total number of maidens said to be in bondage in the Volta Region as estimated by Dovlo and Kufogbe (1997) was 4,462. Nukunya and Kwafo (1998) also put the figure at 9,000. According to Kufogbe (2008:1), a study initiated by International Needs, Ghana revealed that about 5,000 women and children were in bondage. Similarly, Kufogbe (2008:2) reports that the Democracy and Human Rights reports of the US Department of State put the number of adherents in bondage as not more than 100. These have been modest estimates compared to 20,000 reported by Agodzo (1996) and Morkli (1995). While some of these figures failed to specifically mention children as part of those in bondage, some did.

Irrespective of who are in bondage or not this study investigated the freedom of children associated with the shrine. It found out that in all, four distinct categories of children are associated with the *trɔxovi* shrines. Of these categories, the *trɔkosi/fiasidi* has her freedom curtailed in the name of ritualistic reparation. *Trɔwiwo*, although not slaves, suffer deprivation since their care is absolutely in the hands of the maidens, who, by virtue of their situation, are incapable of providing their children the needed basic care. On the other hand, children of the maiden fathered by a non-priest husband have better chances to life. These children are not deprived of their freedom. Above all, *dɔfɛflewiwo* have their freedom. Their dedication to the shrine is a fulfilment of vows and a sign of gratitude to the deities for making it possible for their parents to give birth to them.

It is therefore inappropriate to lump all these children associated with the shrines together and consider them as in bondage. Their association with the shrine must be contextualized and analyzed to give good grounds for the determination of their status and rights within the system.

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²¹ Any man who marries the maiden from the shrine and pays bride price to the chief priest is only to be in concubinage with her.

²² Constant visits to the shrine with my mother deprived me from receiving formal education which I regret.

²³ The expression literary means that the monkey (kese) of yesteryears was successfully hunted by the dog (avu) because of its ignorance. It is an expression used by anyone who has experienced unfair treatment in the past to warn others of his/her rich knowledge of situations and will never be taken for granted any more.

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