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# Liberation

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# Liberation

## A look At Trokosi Reform

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Independent Study Project  
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## **TABLE OF CONTENT**

Acknowledgements

Abstract

Introduction

Methodology

Part 1- The prayers

Part 11- The process

Chapter 1-The initial visit

Chapter 2-liberation Negotiations

Chapter 3-Liberation Ceremonies

Chapter 4-Rehabilitation

Chapter 5-The Aftermath

Chapter 6- Testimonies

Conclusion

Endnotes

Bibliography

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## **ABSTRACT**

The intent of this paper is twofold. Firstly I wanted to identify the organizations that is involved in the Trokosi reform. Secondly I wanted to get a clear understanding of what the liberation process entails.

During my initial research I had heard the term ‘Liberated’ over and over again. I begun to wander who was doing the liberation? Were these Trokosis happy to be liberated?

This paper seeks to answer those questions.

I begun with the News papers and ended up in the field meeting these women and men. This paper is record of those experiences and my attempt to qualify the liberation process.

## INTRODUCTION

I first heard of Trokosi from Uncle Eric. He mentioned it in passing, as a form of contemporary slavery. I was intrigued and began to do a little research. It soon became clear, from various articles in the Daily graphic, that Trokosi was big issue for human rights groups. Any article the Paper published on the subject was followed by a number of editorials and letters; it seemed to be a very controversial issue.

Personally the topic of Trokosi appealed to me on many different levels. Firstly, there is an academic connection. The two areas of study I focus on are women's studies and anthropology. The chance to go out into the field and do case studies appealed to my anthropological side. Also I felt that a short study of this nature would give insight into my own ability to gather and process information in an anthropological way. The gender aspect of this paper is also very important to me. Although I have heard from multiple sources that men can also be Trokosis, it seems to be very rare. In fact I did not come across a male Trokosi or any priest who had at any time had male Trokosis. The other thing that attracted me to this topic was the chance to actively attempt to shed my personal bias. Coming from the perspective of a western feminist, Trokosi is clearly a human and gender rights abomination. However it should ideally be viewed within the context of its own culture and traditional religion. This proposed a situation I knew would be difficult to achieve but was eager to try. One of the Fetish Priest I interviewed defined Trokosi for me<sup>1</sup> He said,

“ Trokosi means someone in your family committed a crime that has been reported by the Deity. The Deity punished the family in the form of a curse until the family came to atone for the crime. By giving a girl to the deity, the family seals the hole so that no- more curses can pass through”

The concept of the “ hole” that requires sealing is one that many people used to explain Trokosi to me. Many different things can cause the hole. The most common cause is that of crime, in which case the Deity curses the family until the family comes forward and gives a girl. The crime could be defilement of an existing Trokosi or something entirely different like theft or murder .In this way the Trokosi system serves as a system of law enforcement (traditional law) .There are other situations that might mandate the donation of a child to the Deity, for example if an infertile couple seeks the help of the shrine and is later able to have a child, their first child must be donated given to the Deity. It is in this way that some men may come to be Trokosis, but it is rare.<sup>2</sup>

In most cases it is a young girl who is given to the shrine, She may be any where from 5 to 20 years of age but she must be a virgin. This girl now a Trokosi is the slave of the Deity, to

whom the shrine is dedicated. Furthermore she is in effect the slave of the priest who lives at the shrine. The Trokosis are responsible for the daily maintenance of the priest and the shrine (i.e cooking, washing etc.) and of the farm. The priests are also allowed to have sexual relations with the Trokosis. One priest may have anywhere from 5 to 100-120 Trokosis. However not all of the 100 Trokosis would be living serve at the shrine. Part of the Trokosi system is that there is no uniform amount that a girl must serve. Some are life terms and some are as short as three months. The length may be determined by the crime or by the individual shrine rules. However even when a Trokosi is temporarily released she is still considered as a possession of that shrine. She may be obligated to return to the shrine for certain annual festivals or duties. One thing that is a universal within the Trokosi system however, is the fact that it is the girl's family and not the shrine that is responsible for the welfare and health of the girl and her children.<sup>3</sup>

Ghana outlawed the Trokosi system both in its 1992 Constitution and in a newer 1998 legislation. However there has been little enforcement of this law. In light of this NGO's sprang up to reform the Trokosi system. One such organization is International Needs (IN). Since 1998 organisations like IN have been liberating these women from their servitude in the shrines. Other organizations that oppose the reformation of Trokosi and do not see it as a human rights violation have also appeared. The shrines and the Trokosis seem to be caught in the middle.

The goal of my research was twofold. Firstly I wanted to define the liberation process. The phrase liberation is being tossed around in the papers but I had no clear understanding of who was liberating who or what it entailed. Secondly I want to identify the key players in the Trokosi debate and evaluate their positions.

## *Methodology*

I began this paper by reading the newspapers. The Daily Graphic in particular had paid a lot of attention to the Trokosi issue. From editorials and response letters that they had printed I was able to identify various group who were involved. Secondly I found in ISP written by Natasha Johnson on Trokosi. She had focused on children within the Trokosi system but her report still provided valuable background information.

I decided that my course of action would be to seek out all those who had published articles about Trokosi. So immediately I wanted to speak with Mr. Vincent Azumah from International Needs, the Afrikania Mission and the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ). From each of these sources I wanted to learn about their position on Trokosi, the historical background of their involvement, and the degree of their current involvement.

I also want to be out in the field as much as possible. I wanted to speak with Trokosis living at the shrines, Trokosis in rehabilitation, completely rehabilitated Trokosis, fetish priests who still had Trokosis and those priests who had liberated their Trokosis. I had hoped to observed all phases of the liberation.

In reality not all of this happened. I was able to get formal statement from the Afrikania Mission and IN about Trokosi. I did speak informally to Mr. Elolo and Mr. Lawrence Lartey of CHRAJ but our scheduled appointments for a formal interview did not work out. I had hoped to contact other opposition groups but was unable to locate them.

I was more successful in my attempt to observe and learn about the separate phases of liberation. As IN is the primary organization working for Trokosi reform I accompanied their representatives on any outings that I could. I was able to attend two liberation negotiations, witness child profiling, visit the Adidome Vocational Training Center, interview four ex-Trokosis at the center, and attend a meeting between the fetish priests (who had liberated their Trokosis) and IN. Unfortunately I was unable to speak with any completely liberated Trokosis, not employed by the center. Also it proved impossible to interview Trokosis who were still living at the shrines.

In the end I found IN to be the most helpful resource during my project. In addition to answering all of my questions, IN allowed me to tag along on field trips and interview (while translating for me) almost everyone we encountered on our travels. The Afrikania Mission gave me an important theme to consider that of the possible Christianization of Traditional Religion, during our short interview. Overall my paper is based on many informal conversations, formal interviews and observations from the field.

## **PART 1**

### *The Players*

There are three main organizations involved in the Trokosi issue. This section will identify each organization, its stance and the degree of its involvement.

International Needs is the primary organization involved in Trokosi Reform. Officially started in 1987 as a NGO for women and children's rights, IN was invited in 1992 by the regional minister of the Volta Region to a shrine. Since that visit IN has been working to liberate Trokosi women. They have built a Vocational Training Center and have completed building about 3 schools for the children of the Trokosis in addition to those Trokosi who were liberated in their formative years. They liberated their first shrine in 1998 and since then have liberated the Trokosis of 23 major shrines and about 200 minor shrines (Major shrines have 60 or more Trokosis whereas minor shrines have less than 60). That translates into 2,900 Trokosi women who have been liberated, leaving an estimated 2,100 Trokosis remaining in the shrines.<sup>4</sup>

The next organization who plays an important role is the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice. Unfortunately I was unable to have a formal interview with a representative from CHRAJ but was able to have two small informal conversations, with Mr. Elolo and Mr. Lartey, from which this section is based. In 1994 the Commissioner of CHRAJ launched an investigation into the Trokosi matter. This team of investigators, headed by Lawrence Lartey was given blessing by the regional minister and began to visit shrines in the Volta Region. The investigation concluded that Trokosi was a human rights abuse and should be outlawed. (Although the Ghana's constitution forbids Trokosi, it was not specifically outlawed until 1998). Since that time the Commissioner has been present at many Liberation Ceremonies and seems to be an ally in the crusade to liberate Trokosi women and girls.

The third player is the Afrikania Mission. Headed by His Holiness Osofo Kofi Ameve, the Afrikania Mission has a firm position on Trokosi. His position is that Trokosi does not exist. His Holiness told me that "Trokosi does not exist as International Needs Describes it."<sup>5</sup> However he was not interested in defining his view of Trokosi for me. It is His Holiness' contention that IN has not liberated single shrine or woman; rather they have organized their own church goers to pose as paid actors. His Holiness was in fact rather unwilling to talk about the Trokosi issue, "We are not interested in talking about Trokosi anymore because the world is only interested in lies and not in truth."<sup>6</sup> His Holiness seemed to have been recently discouraged when the American Embassy released a report that

concluded that Trokosi does exist and is a human rights violation. “I helped the Americans, gave them all our information, and they still tell lies, the world is not interested in truth”.<sup>7</sup>

Personally I felt that His Holiness came off as rather close-minded but there was some logic to his argument. As a proponent of Traditional Religion, he sees the effort to liberate Trokosis as a mar on the face of Traditional Religion. Also he seemed very concerned about the threat of Christianization of the Trokosis and the Priests. He pointed out that the Executive Director of IN is a Christian Reverend.

However, not all members of the Afrikania mission share the same views as His Holiness. For example in an article that appeared in The Mirror<sup>8</sup>, a “concerned member of the Afrikania mission” spoke out against the position of His Holiness. “We are surprised at the way Ameve and few members have reduced the great mission into supporting rituals that have rightly been described by human rights activities as obnoxious and barbaric.”<sup>9</sup> And, from the Ghana News Agency Wire Service. “The Afrikania Mission on Tuesday apologized to the International Needs... CHRAJ and all those involved in the reformation of the Trokosi practice for any hindrance the Mission might have caused them.”<sup>10</sup> The article went on to say that only a few, Ameve and others, support this denial and thwarting of Trokosi Liberation.

However according to IN the interference of the Afrikania Mission has not ceased. As recently as March the Mission has been involving it-self in what appears to be an attempt to throw a wrench in the wheel of IN.

There are also many other important players in this issue, although they are not formal organizations. First and foremost the Trokosis and the Fetish Priests are the core of this whole debate. It is their way of life that is has now become a political debate. Tied in with their fate is the fate of the shrines that house the Trokosis practice. Although a silent player, it is the well fare of the shrine it-self that often colours the liberation negotiations.

## **PART II**

### ***The Process***

The Liberation Process, as enacted by IN is a long and lengthy process. As Mr. Azumah said “It takes them a long time to understand because this (Trokosi) has been there for centuries now, so it is no easy thing to pass a law and have it work immediately.”<sup>11</sup>

## CHAPTER 1

### *The Initial Visit*

The Liberation process begins with an initial visit by IN to the shrine. In the case of the Adevor Shrine in Agave, the Volta Region, IN first visited in 1997. According to Mr. Azumah the priest there wouldn't talk to them and asked them to leave.<sup>12</sup>

In 1998 Ghana pass a law that made the practice of Trokosi illegal. In light of this IN returned to Adevor. The priest was no warmer this time and Mr. Azumah quoted him as saying: "Well if the government says we should change then I want to see the President", of course we couldn't bring the President so we stopped coming for a while".<sup>13</sup>

According to Mr. Azumah this is often the way an initial meeting goes. In the case of Adevor, IN changed their strategy and re-organised their approach. In early 2002 IN organized an educational seminar for the townspeople of Agave. They then handpicked a team of 12 individuals, from the town, who were also interested in Trokosi reform. This team was headed Mr. Gabuga, a citizen of Agave. Mr. Gabuga and his colleagues then took over the meeting with the priest and the town elders in an attempt to convince them to reform Trokosi.

## CHAPTER 2

### *Liberation Negotiations*

By the time there is a liberation negotiation meeting held, the priest and his elders have already agreed in principle to liberate their Trokosis. The purpose of these negotiations is to answer any questions the priest and elders might have and outline the liberation process.

The Adevor shrine agreed to have a meeting with IN about 6 months after Mr. Gabuga began his advocacy campaign. I was able to be present for this meeting on April 18<sup>th</sup>, 2002.

This meeting began by Mr. Gabuga reading the minutes from the last meeting he had held with the priest and his elders. He directed any questions that the priest and elders had to Mr. Azumah.

The first area addressed was chores and rituals that the Trokosis perform. The reallocation of the Trokosi's chores seems to be a fairly common concern among priests considering liberation. I was surprised to learn that these rituals and chores were not spiritual. In fact these rituals covered fetching of firewood, sweeping the shrine, farming and washing. In the very short time that I spent in the field I repeatedly heard the phrase "a goat can't sweep the shrine".

The remark about the goat concerns IN's counsel to accept cash or animals instead of young women for further crimes. However it is IN's position that a goat can sweep the shrine, by extension. The cash brought, or the money generated from the sale of goats and chickens could be used to hire help. The point that Mr. Azumah stressed was that "You don't need to depend on someone, who should have been in school somewhere, should have been learning a trade somewhere... to be your slave, when you have the hands to do the same thing."<sup>14</sup>

In other shrines that have been liberated the priests do indeed hire help or more frequently remarry a woman who assists to complete the chores. The next area of concern that was voiced by the priest that day as the extent of the assistance IN would give him and his shrine. Mr. Azumah answered that IN has a micro-credit program both for the ex-Trokosi and for the priests themselves. The program gives the priests the capital to start a small business venture. Also IN foots most of the bill for the Liberation ceremonies and other costs associated with the reformation.

Initially, before Trokosi was outlawed in 1998, IN was giving five or six cattle to each priest who liberated his women. "So the early priests who agreed to change should have very

big cattle ranches by now.”<sup>15</sup> However since 1998 the law is on their side and such bribery is no longer necessary.

The other assistance that IN gives open ended is advice and counsel. Currently IN is in contact with all but one of the 223 shrines they have liberated. (That one shrine has made an alliance of sorts with the Afrikania Mission and refuses to speak to IN any longer).

The last area of concern the Priest at Adevor mentioned was the questionable ability of the poorer families to come up with money or cash to pay the deity. According to Mr. Azumah, “They are contending that it is easier for a poor family to come and dump a poor girl in the shrine and go away, instead of looking for money or a goat or sheep.”<sup>16</sup> And it appears that the heart of the matter lies within that statement. It seemed to me that the biggest problem IN is facing is the perception that Trokosi is not a bad system, rather it is the most effective way to deal with the problems of crime and shrine maintenance. At any rate Mr. Azumah responded by saying that “if the deity is powerful enough to mandate a young girl, he can also call until the money, the sheep or the goat is found.”<sup>17</sup>

The end result of the meeting was that the Priest and the town elders agreed to liberate their Trokosis; however they could not speak for the deity. So before anything could be finalized, they would have to travel to Benin to speak with their deity, the cost of the trip most likely to be funded by IN. Mr. Azumah felt that this was a good result and thought that he would return to Agave in the next week or so, bringing money and finalizing the dates for the final liberation ceremony.

The next day we went to a meeting at a shrine in the village of Dalive, just across the river from Agave. The same local team headed by Mr. Gabuga had been heading up the advocacy in this area. This meeting went quite differently however. As we drove into a village we spotted a well-dressed Ghanaian family getting out of a car in front of us. It seemed that as soon as the father spotted the white skin he became angry. However it was not until we walked over to the meeting grounds that he approached us. “What are you doing here? What kind of meeting is this?” Unfortunately I can not site him properly because he refused to give his name. I tried my best to stay in the background and let Mr. Azumah handle the argument, as I was supposed to be observing rather than participating. The angry man was not content to leave me silent however and as we argued his position became clear.

He had grown up in Dalive and moved to New York to attend college 35 years ago. He had stayed in New York but came back, bringing his wife and children, to visit his family about every year or so. And was a firm adherent for traditional religion. He did not know of IN and was not interested in who we were or what we were doing. To him, we were missionaries, and I was even worse than a Ghanaian one. He wanted to know why we were

stomping out his religion, repeatedly told me that “You can’t go to India and take away their Buddha”. As we were able to tell him more about IN purpose he did not budge on his position. He is one of the many who told me that a goat cannot sweep the shrine. In fact he went so far as to say that he would willingly give his young daughters to the shrine if the deity chose them.

In the end he conceded to let us have the meeting and did not kick us out. However he refused to be present at the meeting. Mr. Azumah felt that he had damaged the proceedings immeasurably, because he was clearly a respected man in the Dalive, probably because of his success in New York.

That meeting proceeded much as the other had, but in the end no decision was reached. The chief elder of the village was not present, and the fetish priest had recently died, so the council there felt that they could not speak for everyone. The final decision was the IN would have to return for another meeting when everyone was present.

## CHAPTER 3

### *Liberation Ceremonies*

Once a priest has agreed to liberate his Trokosis there is a ceremony that is conducted. The purpose of this ceremony is to inform both the Deity and the people that this woman is now free. She is no longer the property of the shrine.<sup>18</sup>

This ceremony has traditionally been performed upon a Trokosis release and has not recently been adopted by the reformers. This ceremony is very important to the liberation process because it is the signal that the stigma is to be removed from the Trokosi. It is the outward signal that she is no longer a Trokosi but has again become a woman or a girl.

Unfortunately I was unable to observe one of these ceremonies or gather much information about them.

## CHAPTER 4

### *Rehabilitation*

The Liberation Negotiations discussed in the last chapter are actually the beginning of along time period of rehabilitation and vocational training, both for the Trokosis and for the priests. The Rehabilitation comes in many different forms. First there is The Adidome Vocational Training Center built by IN. Secondly there are also schools, that have been built for the children, both of Trokosis and for Trokosis who are children. Lastly there is the micro-credit program. Although these programs were set up mostly for the Trokosis, the priests can benefit from them as well.

I had the chance to visit Adidoome Vocational Training Center on April 10, 2002. Unfortunately standard classes were not in session at the time however were about 10 girls there for a special session teaching knitting. This knitting program was being taught by an English woman and was a sort of extra curricular program for those who wished to pick up an extra skill. All those girls who were present had already learned Kente weaving. However, the center also teaches many other skills such as baking, cooking, batik and hairdressing.

An ex-Trokosi can spend anywhere from 3 months to three years at Adidome. At the facility are dormitories for the women in addition to classrooms, kitchens and other facilities. An ex-Trokosi can take part in more than one training program if they so desire. However when they chose to leave they are provided with the tools for the skill they trained in. For example all of the women who train in kente weaving are given a loom upon their departure.

It appeared to me that the center also gives the ex-Trokosis a chance to bond together and adjust to their new freedom before embarking on their new lives. The center is full of women in various life situations, some of the teachers are ex-Trokosis, who can give support to the young women.

The Schooling Program for the children is open to both Trokosis who are children and children of Trokosis. I had the opportunity to go on a child-profiling excursion with Mr. Azumah between Liberation Negotiations on April 14<sup>th</sup>, 2002. We went to three different villages and profiled a total of 60 children. Each child was photographed and his or her information was record (level of schooling, age etc.) One of the things I found most interesting was that the priest from the nearest shrine was there to assist with the information gathering. Hopefully IN will be able to provide each of these children with further schooling.

Lastly there is a micro-credit program that has been implemented by IN. On April 10<sup>th</sup> I accompanied Sandra Damkua, an IN employee, on her rounds to collect payment.

According to Ms. Damkua, the loans are given to groups, but each individual is responsible for his or her repayment. Usually the starting loan is for 300,000 cedis and is paid back within a year. Payments can be made weekly, or in a lump sum but are most commonly collected monthly. In addition to this Susu savings is encouraged among the group in an effort to make the loan taker self-sufficient. Priests are also encouraged to take part in the micro-credit program.<sup>19</sup>

## CHAPTER 5

### The Aftermath

What happens after the Trokosis come through rehabilitation is question that I was unable to answer sufficiently. While I was at Adidome I was able to meet two women who were now teachers at the center. They themselves had been Trokosis. For them their liberation had been a wonderful thing and they were completely self-sufficient. Unfortunately they are only two women of thousands.

I was able to find much more information on the priests. As I have mentioned before IN remains in contact with the priests and the shrines long after the Trokosis have left. On April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2002, I had the opportunity of attending a meeting held near Akatsi in the Volta Region with 15 priests. This meeting was held for information and strategy purposes.

In March about 130 fetish priests, who had all liberated their women, came to Accra to ask for government support in their farming ventures. They laid their position before the government and asked for assistance like tractors and fertilizers. According to IN, the Afrikania Mission then arranged a similar envoy of a number of chiefs from the same villages as these priests to come to Accra and publicly state that these priests were liars and did not own any shrines. His Holiness Ameve declined to comment on this issue. So the purpose of this meeting was to inform the priests of this new development and decide on a strategy to counteract the Afrikania Mission.

This meeting was a sight to watch. The Priests were outraged at the Mission and there was much yelling about it. In the end the decision was that they would compose a formal letter to send to the government, also they would invite all the chiefs to come to their villages and tell them to their faces that they were frauds. And should all that fail, the priests unanimously decided they would then be forced to unleash their deities on the chiefs.

I was also able to do a short interview with seven of the priests after the meeting. The interview was conducted in-group form and I was curious about their basic information. Between the seven of them they had had 54 Trokosis and 61 children with those Trokosis. Out of those 61 children they estimated that about 27 of them had or currently were attending school, although they could not tell me when the children had started schooling. They had all liberated their women within the last three years. Six of them had remarried, only 1 man had taken more than one wife. They said that for the most part their new wives do the chores that the Trokosis had done, but two said that they hire outside labour as well. Interestingly though no one has come forward for a crime since liberation so no animals or money have yet been accepted. When I asked if their farming production had declined since letting their women

go there was boisterous laughter. They were unanimous that farming had ‘seriously declined’, one man even came over to feel my biceps and then graciously proposed marriage to me. One Priest said, “I am convinced I have done a good thing by letting my girls go, I am no longer a criminal, but now we need help from the Government to keep our shrines.”<sup>20</sup>

## CHAPTER 6

### Testimonies

While I was at Adidome I was able to interview three ex-Trokosis and one daughter of an ex-Trokosi. Because I only had a short time with them and many questions to ask, our interviews were short and broad.

The first woman I interviewed was Olivia Neukpedu. Olivia is currently 30 years old and spent seven years of her life living in a shrine. She was temporarily released (which means that she has to return to the shrine at certain times of the year for festivals and other things, but no longer resided there) at the age of 16. In Olivia's case temporary releasement did not release her from her marriage rite to the deity of the shrine. Olivia was fully liberated by IN at the age of 28. Since that time she has been at Adidome. She underwent Kente weaving instruction and now teaches it to other ex-Trokosis going through the center. She has three children with the shrine and has not remarried since her release. When I related the comments of His Holiness Ameve of the Afrikania Mission to her she laughed. She responded by saying, "we are in fact Trokosis, I could show you my shrine."<sup>21</sup> She was quick to say that IN had not forced anyone to become to Christian, but she had indeed become a Christian. When asked why she had become one she answered, "There is so much suffering in idol worship, now that I am a Christian no-one forced me to do anything."<sup>22</sup> Overall she felt that her liberation had been a very good thing, she is now economically self sufficient as an instructor and is very happy with her life.

One of the other Trokosis I had the pleasure of speaking with was Judith Nordzro. Judith is 21 years old now, and lived in a shrine for about 10 years. She was sent as a baby because her grandfather sexually violated another Trokosi. She was temporarily released at the age of 10 and was fully liberated at age 18. She spent the last three years at Adidome.

I found Judith extremely compelling. The first time I met her I asked her age and was answered through translation, that she was 21. I said that I was 20 and I think we both thought for a minute, about the very different lives we have led, I know I did. At any rate, Judith has also been instructed in Kente weaving although she has not yet stood the test of self-employment. She left Adidome for the first time this January but her loom broke. In fact I met her because she came over to report her broken loom to Mr. Azumah. Our next meeting was at Adidome where she was being trained in knitting, still waiting for the loom parts for her Kente loom to arrive. Judith is also a Christian, but was clear that she had not been forced. In fact every ex-Trokosi I spoke with said that they had not been forced but admitted that they were indeed Christians. When I asked them if they knew any ex-Trokosis

that were not Christian, each girl thought for a moment and answered yes, they knew some. Judith said, “some stay traditional, but most stop believing in anything.”<sup>23</sup> It seems the Afrikania Mission and the angry man from Dalive may have something to their arguments.

Every ex-Trokosi I spoke with agreed that their liberation had been a very good thing, and one reoccurring them was that of independence. Since liberation the women felt that they were their own mistresses. Judith talked much about this, “in the shrines they force you to do so many things, now that we are free, we decide.”<sup>24</sup> And when I asked the women how they felt about IN each one responded with a positive statement. The one I like the best was made by Favour Atise, the 19-year-old daughter of a Trokosi, she said, “Have you ever heard of a priest putting up a school?”<sup>25</sup>

## *Conclusion*

I would like to begin by saying that I do not feel I successfully operated without bias during this project. I do believe that Trokosi is a human and gender rights violation and should be completely eradicated. Whether that belief comes from honest unbiased observation or is a projection of my personal opinions is something I still am not sure of.

Generally speaking I strongly disagree with the position His Holiness Amede from the Afrikania Mission takes. Having met and spoke to many Trokosis and priests I feel confident that they are neither liars nor actors and that the situation of the Trokosis is one that merits reform. However I think there is something to be said for his concern against Christianity. It is my observation that IN takes pains to keep the integrity of the shrine and the Deity and not involve Christianity. However, every ex-Trokosi I spoke with now self-identifies as Christian.

I had asked Mr. Wisdom Mensah, coordinator for IN, if he thought that the ex-Trokosis were becoming Christian in an effort to assimilate after their release from the shrines. He answered that he did not think so; it was his impression that the final liberation ceremony was a signal to all that the girl was now free and was sufficient to remove any stigma the girls might have attached to them.<sup>26</sup> If that is so then why is there such a swing towards Christianity? I feel that the answer lies in a closer examination of what is being liberated or eradicated. By liberating the Trokosis IN is also liberating them from their religion. I feel that there must be at least a small implication that there is fault in the Traditional Religion when an organization comes in and says we have to rearrange this so that human rights are not being violated. Perhaps that leaves a different sort of hole that must be filled. Perhaps this role requires a new belief system instead of a virgin.

Generally speaking however, I feel that IN is an amazing organization. One aspect about them that I found surprising is the grassroots level of their involvement. I had expected to find the head of the organization to be Canadian or European. I was surprised to learn that the Executive Director of IN is a Ghanaian from the Volta Region. In fact most of the people in their office are from the Volta Region. I heard Mr. Azumah repeatedly use the 'we' re from the same village speech':

"I tried to appeal to their conscience by reminding them that I am from the Volta Region, I speak their language, my village also has a shrine in it. If I see that my NGO can bring development well then the first place I should go is home and start from there...it went over well."<sup>27</sup>

Another aspect of this is the fact that Mr. Gabuga was in charge of the meetings and advocacy campaigns in his village. In this way I feel that IN is making sure they have a local support base, that they are not forcing anything on anyone.

Another aspect of their organization I found surprising was the vast network of programs they have begun for Trokosi, the children and the priests. The Vocational center, schools, micro-credit programs and counsel for some 223 shrines is a big task and I was surprised that an organization with half a floor of a small building was supervising all of these programs.

However the most important question is the system really working? On the surface it seems to be working. 2,900 women and girls have been released and sent through this system. But are they all self-sufficient? Has their training been applicable and appropriate? The women I spoke with all felt that the answer was yes, however there are 2,860 other women to be asked.

The priests are a separate matter to consider. It seems that they are suffering the biggest losses as far as economics. All of the priests I spoke with verified that their farming yield had seriously declined after the women left. One thing I was unable to determine is, will that decline have serious effects in the shrine itself? What are the long-term implications of this decline? Will the shrines be able to exist in another generation?

In conclusion these are the questions I am left with. However, there is one question I leave for you. Are these possible problems with the reform system greater than a human life or the suffering it experiences?

## <sup>1</sup> ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Interview by author, 2 April 2002, Akatsi, notes, School for International Training. (or possession of author)

<sup>2</sup> Akador, Sister Margaret Mary. Trokoso System and It s Effects on Girl Child Education. A Project work presented to UCC, August 2000.

Johnson, Natasha, Children of the Shrine. ISP, Dec. 1998

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Vicent Azumah, Interview by author. 18 April 2002. Akatsi. Notes. School For International Training (or possession of author).

Wisdom Mensah, informal Interview by author. 2 April 2002.

Notes School for International Training (or possession of author).

<sup>5</sup> Osofo Kofi Ameve, Interview by author, 8 April 2002, Accra. Notes, School of International Training (or possession of author).

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> “Stop the Smear Campaign”. The Mirror. 28, March 2002

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ghana News Agency, Wire Service. March 2002. Copy possession of author.

<sup>11</sup> Vincent Azumah, interview by author, 18 April 2002, Akatsi. Notes, SIT (or possession of author)

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Wisdom Mensah, Informal Interview by author, 2 April, Akatsi. Notes, SIT (or possession of author).

<sup>19</sup> Sandra Dankwa, Interview by author, 10 April 2002. Adidome, Notes, SIT (or possession of author)

<sup>20</sup> Fetish Priests, Interview by author, 2 April 2002 Akatsi. Notes, SIT (or possession of author).

<sup>21</sup> Olivia Neukapedu, Interview by author, 10 April 2002, Notes, SIT (or possession of author).

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Judith Nordzro, Interview by author, 10 April 2002, Adidome, Notes, SIT (or possession of author).

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Favour Atise, Interview by author, 10 April 2002, Notes, SIT (or possession of author).

<sup>26</sup> Wisdom Mensah, Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Vincent Azumah, Ibid.

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8. Neukapedu, Olivia. Former Trokosi, Interview by Author, 10 April 2002, Adidome, Notes, SIT (or possession of author).
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