

**School for International Training  
College Semester Abroad - Ghana  
(Arts & Culture)**

**Fall 1998**

**Spiritual Check-up: The Art of Healing in  
Anlo-Afiadenyigha, Volta Region**

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**Project Advisor:**

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Institute of African Studies,

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## **Abstract**

This paper is the result of three weeks of fieldwork studying a traditional healer in the Volta Region, Ghana. It provides a short biography on the Priest Husunivi Avuworda and an explanation of the system of gods and deities among the Ewes. It explains the processes and results of divination through the afa oracle.

Through studying the beliefs about the causes of mental illnesses, as well as the methods of treatment, this paper provides insight to the importance of spirituality in traditional healing. The cases documented within reveal the evidence necessary to understand the non-separable relationship between the spiritual world and illness in traditional societies.

To all who cannot find satisfaction  
until they too have  
reinvented the wheel.

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## Definitions of Terms

There are several terms used in this paper which cannot be held to their exact English definition. During the interpretation of the interviews from Ewe to English, the researcher chose to accept most words as they were given to her, without attempting to change them to fit the standards of correct English terminology.

Torgbui, priest, herbalist, sorcerer, traditional healer: all of these terms are employed in this paper to refer to the Priest studied or to anyone practicing medicine by similar means.

Sorcery is a term used by the Priest to describe how he receives information and what he does. It can refer to both negative and positive actions; it is used both to cause affliction and to heal and cure.

"Juju" is a local term that is used in similar context as sorcery.

An *emagasi* is a local term indicating a person who acts as a medium between the gods and, usually, the priest. The mechanism by which an *emagasi* receives information is through possession.

Examples of mental illness as defined by the Priest include madness, stomach-aches and infertility. Madness is a general term that is the most specific explanation given of abnormal



behavior demonstrated by an individual that is taken to be an illness. Stomach-aches seem to include pain that is located within the torso area, and, when referred to as a mental illness, arising only from spiritual disturbance. Infertility as a mental illness seems fitting given the high priority of having children in Ghanaian culture.

*A waterfall is not a separate entity from the source above and the outlet below. The waterfall only exists as a result of a body of water succumbing to the force of gravity, and, after each molecule's brief freefall, continues to exist not as a waterfall, but once again as another body of water. While the eye may rest solely on the magnificence and power of the water as it tumbles down the rock, there nevertheless is the effect the falling water has on the environment below it, just as the waterfall is nothing more than the effect of the water above it, at its source.*

## **Introduction**

In traditional Ghana illness rarely exists on its own. It comes in between a cause and an effect. Illness does not just happen, and the illness itself is by no means the end. In Ghana it is believed that life is composed of two-elements- spirit and matter- and it is the complete merging of these two elements into one that makes up the man, the personality. Keeping in line with this thought, illness, as something that befalls a man in his life, cannot be separated into a purely physical (matter) affliction, because by definition a man is the union of matter and spirit. Thus, illness must also relate to the spirit.

The source of an illness in many cases is spiritual, and before the illness can be cured, this spiritual disturbance must be treated. From this logic, one can clearly state that illness on an individual level grasps a hold of both the physical and spiritual aspects of a man's life.

On the other end of the waterfall- the sum of the energy accumulated by the velocity of the falling water- is the result of the illness. Illness is a manifestation of socially deviant behavior; the individual deviates from the normal condition, thus disrupting social relationships and the production capacity of society (Twumasi 1988).

Even if the illness begins only on the individual level, the ramifications that it brings lead its effect to be a cultural phenomenon. Illness is social because the condition of suffering is a subjunctive experience. Therefore, illness is a disintegration that acts biologically, psychologically, spiritually and socially (Twumasi 1988).

Even in the face of increasing western influence into Ghanaian culture, the traditional view of medicine- and the traditional healer- can still be found in every community. While western medical facilities widely exist within the country, the Ghanaians still trust the curative powers of the traditional healers. Kwadu explains two separate reasons why this is so. Spirits hold a central role in a person's life, and many illnesses are believed to have spiritual causes. A cure is impossible until the spiritual disturbance is cleared up and the gods' blessings are reinstated. Western medicine does not consider the spiritual aspect and therefore is seen as incomplete. Also, the traditional healer understands the patients socio-cultural and religious demands. His diagnosis and therapy are more satisfying to the patient than western medicine (1988).

This paper discusses the ideas and beliefs of a priest among the Anlo Ewe community of Ghana. It focuses on mental illnesses and illness as manifested from spiritual disturbance. Beginning with brief descriptions of the priest and of different facets of traditional healing, the body of the paper works to lay the foundation for the prominent themes found in the last two sections; the explanation of mental illnesses as understood in traditional Ghana and the emphasis of spirituality in the individual cases observed over the course of this field research. This paper does not attempt to prove or disprove, credit or discredit, or in any way judge the information contained within. It acts only to state the information, as it was given, and as it was received.

## **Literature Review**

The traditional healer plays a large role in traditional Ghana. As Kwadu points out in *Ghana: The Land, their People and their Culture*, besides healing, some of the other functions of a healer might include being a member of the council of elders, advising the chief on issues of the spiritual welfare of the community, observing the natural environment and praying for protection, and performing ceremonies to connect the spiritual world and the living world (1989).

There are different types of traditional healers and many different modes of entry into the profession. Some of the ways through which one becomes a healer are as follows: a spirit could be involved, a candidate could become possessed, one might buy herbal knowledge, it could be bestowed through inheritance, related to an association with dwarfs, from dreams, visions or revelations, or through training (Anyinam 1987). A diviner, such as the Torgbui, is a healer who is chosen by the gods and thus is highly respected in the community (Kwadu 1989). When a candidate is "called" into priesthood, the process will start with either an illness, a demonstration of socially aberrant behavior, a series of misfortunes, or even a disappearance of the candidate. Recovery from such events depends on the candidate answering the call and beginning and apprenticeship leading to priesthood (Anyinam 1987). A priest typically uses methods of possession, divination and other ritual means to diagnose and heal the patient (Twumasi 1988).

Witchcraft and "juju" are two means of acquiring illness that appear frequently in the paradigm of traditional healing. "Jujumen" are those individuals who solicit inherent mystical powers in nature for their own personal interest; for good or to cause harm (Kwadu 1989). There is not much literature published on "juju," possibly because of its

straightforwardness: a person wants something and uses his powers to get it, or a person is angry with someone and he uses his powers to harm them.

Witchcraft is not so straightforward; generally a topic more feared and less discussed. For a field worker with limited time, the most realistic mechanism to learn the background information associated with witchcraft is through the efforts of researchers who have come before. Bringing up the topic can too easily lead to fear, distrust and silence- possibly three of the heaviest rains that can flood the path of the field worker. In *Religion and Medicine of the Ga People*, MJ Field points out that witches are not motivated by normal motives, such as resentment, hate, spite or jealousy. Rather, the witch kills people whom it is not natural for them to hate. One definition of witchcraft is as a bad medicine directed destructively against other people. There are no real apparatuses connected- no rites, ceremonies, incantations or invocations performed by the witch. The evil is projected at will from the mind of the witch. A reason for the fear of the elusiveness of witchcraft is that witchcraft appears among good people; witches hide their witchcraft behind kindness (1961).

What is more, one can become a witch without intending to, and may not even realize that she has become a witch. Other than intentionally buying or acquiring witchcraft, she may inherit it, it accidentally may be "picked-up," bought or swallowed by chance (Debrunner 1961). For instance, Field narrates the case of a girl who inherited all of the property of her dead sister, and as her sister was a witch, she became a witch too (1961). The Ewes believe poor people are more prone to witchcraft because they must spend cheaply, and consequently have a greater chance of accidentally buying it (Dubrunner 1961).

Protecting one's self from witchcraft has thus become a part of Ghanaian customs. The Ewes believe that witches are always hungry, and one could ward off evil done by a witch by offering her food. Thus, homeowners regularly give their house-guests water and food as soon as they arrive, hoping that in the case a guest were a witch, this would appease her. Another form of protection is through medicines, usually in the form of a black powder. The powder is often mixed with water or palm wine, to be injected or drunk, functioning to make the blood bitter and unappealing to the witch. Similarly, it could be made a cream and either rubbed into the skin or bathed in to make the flesh bitter and nasty to the taste (Debrunner 1961).

## **Methodology**

The ISP process began as early as last spring when it was time to fill out the application to be accepted into this SIT program. One of the questions asked that the applicant propose a first attempt topic. In the question it was suggested that the student should speak with a professor or advisor at his or her university to help construct a topic. I took this suggestion seriously, and, at a time when my current academic duties seemed routine and dull, this task gave me something brighter to focus on.

I set up an appointment to meet with Dr. M.Gustin, a professor in the biology department at Rice University. I had never had him as a professor, and he was not my advisor, but I had known him since my freshman year, and I knew that he was an intelligent man and a friendly person. We met and I explained to him my situation; I was a science student who was applying for a program focusing on arts and culture, and this ISP time might be a way that I could merge the factual works of science and the aesthetic flow of culture together.

He admitted to knowing very little about Ghana, and told me that he would talk to a few people, do some research and get back to me. During our next meeting, he had learned of three or four scientific projects going on in West Africa, and he gave me the addresses of several internet sites to look up. This would be the first and last time that the internet would be a part of my research.

At that point in time, I felt that what I would be the most interested in overall was the developing status of Ghana and how the culture was transforming as Western capitalism, science and way of life infiltrated the country. This idea- broad in scope and applicable to just about anything I would choose to study was as narrow and fine-tuned as

my knowledge at that point would allow, and although I could not decide what interested me the most, I had a solid mindset and the confidence to explore my options.

Once I arrived in Ghana, I thought that my interests would lead me to narrow my ideas into a few manageable topics. I was wrong. As I learned about Ghana, my interests ramified exponentially and I had a difficult time focusing on only one thing. I also came in with the expectations that throughout the semester I would be engaged in numerous consultations about my ISP and that the giving of advice was something that would be taken seriously. Again I was wrong. It was only a few days before the onset of the ISP time when I was given any sort of positive feedback, and, because of the lack of time, a good bit of help.

As I had decided to study traditional healing in an Ewe community, I was introduced to an Ewe woman living near Accra, who agreed to connect me with a small town in the Volta Region where she knew many people. On my first visit I was introduced to her friend, who is a teacher at a school in a nearby town. I explained to him my mission; what I was hoping to do and what I would need to achieve it. He then introduced me to Jacob Dorkenoo, a school headmaster living in the town who would help me. I again explained my situation, and he assured me that he could find me a healer to learn from, and he would work as my translator, or find someone else to in the case that he was occupied. After returning to Accra to finalize the administrative details, I was ready to begin my work in Anlo Afiadenyigba (see appendix A).

Because I would be working with one priest during the time, I realized that the theme of my topic would be determined largely by his personality and through the results of our interactions. Unlike any scientific research I had done in the past, I now had to



work with a subject's emotions, temperament and customs, and not just my own. Because I would always require the aid of a translator, I technically was working with three distinct personalities. My experience would thus be a result of the interactions between the priest, the translator and myself. With this in mind, I decided to proceed cautiously. I would start off small and work towards building trustworthy relationships. This continual buildup would take precedence over the desire to simply ask all of the questions at once. I would have to be extremely patient and have faith that such a system would work.

Over a period of three weeks, I observed and interviewed the Priest in his combined work and home. I began with meeting the Priest for short amounts of time, and with the full-time help of the translator. For instance, the first meeting was a customary one, where I presented the Priest with a bottle of Schnapps and a gift. I introduced myself, stated my mission and then left. During the next meeting I conducted a formal interview with a ~ list of general introductory questions. I wanted to get to know the Priest, but I did not want to ask questions that were too personal, or questions about healing that were too 'heavy.' From his responses, I was able to get a feel for how far I would be allowed to go and how open he was planning on being with me. Our next meeting was again a formal interview; this time the questions covered more information and went into greater depth. It was at this point that I decided which angle of healing I would approach, and how I would continue the rest of my research.

The remainder of my work was done mainly through a mixture of informal interviews and non-participant observation. I would come to the Priest's house and shrine and observe him with patients, if any, or ask questions based on what was currently going on. This would then lead me to have other questions and other ideas- I think the

process was moving towards infinity. My translators were teachers and only able to assist me in the afternoons. After spending enough time getting to know the Priest, I was able to work past these limitations by going alone to observe the Priest on some mornings; what I could not understand through simple observation, I could be explained at a later time when the translator was present. Early on, I realized that I wanted to interview as many of the patients as possible, because it became clear that the examples of the individual patients' stories were what my questions were after. This proved to be unrealistic for two reasons: one, most of the patients were from other West African countries, such as Togo, Nigeria and Cote d'Ivoire, and the patients had traveled to this town, been treated and then returned home, and two, the Priest specialized, and I became interested, in cases of mental illness. Ethically it would be difficult to determine which patients I should talk to, and what questions would be suitable to ask. There was one former patient who was living at the Priest's house to whom I was able to give a formal interview.

Observing the Priest with current patients was non-participant, but I engaged in one participant observation of an ancestral ritual that was related to my topic. Although the ritual is not directly associated with healing, it offers another example of the use of afa divination. To further my study in afa, I had also planned on conducting an interview with the Head of the Afa oracle, who was living in the town. This failed to occur due to an illness I contracted during the last week of my field study. The illness also blocked me from having time to meet with another traditional healer. I feel that the subsequent lack of cross-checking might weaken the credibility of my work. I was happy, though, to spend most of my time with only one priest; I felt that this would build a relationship conducive to learning.

While conducting the research I lived in a house a kilometer or so from the town. Had I resided directly in the town, or at the Priest's house, I might have had the opportunity to see more, because I would have spent more time in the company of traditional healers. However, living in the field in general is a very demanding task; to be living with the Priest twenty-four hours a day might not leave enough space for reflection, and the occasional separation that I need.

## **Biography of Torgbui Husunivi Avuworda**

The focus of this paper is on Torgbui Husunivi Avuworda, a traditional healer in Anlo-Afiadenyigba, Volta Region, and the beliefs, methods and applications of his practice. The Priest was born in April of 1919. Beginning in childhood he began seeing signs that he had a special gift and was being called into priesthood. He was seeing things that were not seen by the natural eye, such as various visions and revelations (and claiming that he was not at all frightened by what he saw). In 1947, while still a young man, he saw a particular vision that told him that he was to become a sorcerer. From this point on, whenever he slept he would hear voices telling him what was necessary to be done in order to heal anyone who was sick at the time. He then began to practice healing as an occupation.

Husunivi underwent both formal and informal training; he studied under GKK Bendmah, the President of The Ghana Psychic and Traditional Healers Association for a period of time to become more enriched, and he learned through revelations and practice. Unlike many healers, neither of his parents were involved in traditional healing.

Currently his healing practice is his sole occupation. He is a licensed healer both nationally and regionally (Ketu District). He is known "worldwide" and has over 200 followers. The Priest specializes in mental disorders, such as madness, baroness and stomach ailments, and treats various other illnesses such as high blood pressure, paralysis, cancers and difficulties associated with childbirth.

His shrine is a room in his house. For him it functions as a seclusion; a place where he may reflect and revelations and answers can easily come to him. His shrine is also his office; when patients come to his house, he greets them and much of the action

occurs in the shrine. He sits in a chair at the front of the shrine, with some of his attendants sitting on mats on the floor, and the patient and family sitting on benches facing the Priest. There is an alter which he brings out when he has to offer something to the gods, but other than that there are no physical objects in the shrine that are sacred in themselves or serve as spiritually significant.

Every August his followers come to the town for a ten-day festival. The festival is full of music and dance and is a celebration of the gods that he and his followers worship. His followers are either former patients or individuals who joined the shrine for "relief." For instance, if someone was not moving forward in his work, he might join the shrine to receive assistance in his job from the gods. Becoming a member of the shrine is open to anyone.

Torgbui Husunivi does not work or exchange information with other healers. The reason for this is simple; when a case is brought to him, he divines and from the gods receives all of the information that he requires. Thus he never needs to seek the advice of others. If through divination it is revealed that the illness is not curable by him, such as the case of AIDS, he then recommends the patient to the hospital.

When asked what was the most important reason that he accepted his "calling" into priesthood and performs his work, he answered that it is human feelings. If he sees someone suffering, he has a desire to help them.

### **Gods and Deities**

To understand healing in Ghana, in particular among the Ewes, it is necessary to first mention the gods and the deities that control the people and their environment. There

is a traditional view that man is at the center, and that the physical environment, plants and animals exist around (perhaps orbit) man. The gods interact in the people's daily lives and for man to be healthy and prosperous, there must be a harmony between men, the gods and the total environment.

Among the Ewes it is believe that there are four tiers of gods and deities. They are as follows:

- 1 Mawu- The Supreme Being
- 2 tro(wo)- the divinities and local gods, natural
- 3 ancestors
- 4 lesser gods- including protective powers, juju, etc.

Other titles for the Supreme Being among the Ewe are Mawuga, meaning The Great God, and Se, meaning The Supreme God (Opoku 1978).

Below God are the trowo (singular tro). These are the divinities created by God to fulfill specific needs; these gods did not come to existence on their own. The divinities are seen as children, messengers or agents of God, and can be either male or female, and either good or evil. They are given a place to abode in the environment, for instance, a river, but essentially are spirits and thus remain distinguishable from the habitat (Opoku 54).

There are two categories of divinities as distinguished by a Opoku.

A) Togbuitrowo- These are the "ancient tutelary divinities who are a communally owned and who have been worshipped from time immemorial."

They are the children of God and their function is to protect the community from harm (55).

B) Dzositrowo- These divinities are more recent in origin, and can be referred to as "medicine." They are made up by different physical objects and instruments that are used in the practice of

magic, and have become elevated to the status of gods. These divinities are non-communally owned. Rather, they are the possession of an individual and thus can be used for good or bad (56).

Although positioned on the third tier, the ancestors are considered to be next in importance to God (Opoku 36). The ancestors are everywhere; they continue to live, but in another kind of existence. They exist at the same time in both the living and the spiritual worlds. They therefore know more than the living do and should be given respect. It is believed that the ancestors live very close to God (Opoku 36). No understanding of traditional beliefs would be complete without a mention of the ancestors.

On the fourth tier one finds the lesser gods. Torgbui Husunivi works with gods on this level. There are two "officer" gods that he works through, as well as several others below these. *Tsitsi* is the male deity; the husband. He is the one who is primarily responsible for healing. Mama is the female deity; the wife. She is responsible for giving signs and omens of the illness and thus is the first god consulted for treatment. She also assists *Tsitsi* in healing. Both gods must be consulted in every case. The priest employs the use of sorcery to gain information from the gods.

The original home of the gods is Boko, an island near Afiadenyigba on the Keta Lagoon. Boko is considered to be the home of the ancestors before they migrated to the present location. The island is a place of purity. If a worshipper of these gods (a member of the shrine) has committed a crime, he cannot go to the island or he will die. During the ten-day celebration in August, the followers take boats and go to the island to make offerings.

The Priest, those who are training under him and the others who act as spiritual mediums and work with the shrine wear blue cloths so that the gods can easily recognize them. Some also wear brown and black beads on their wrists, ankles and upper arms.

There are other smaller gods that the Priest works with as well. For example, there is one god named Calico. This god helps in treatments. If an animal is to be sacrificed for Calico, it is not cooked by fire (as most are). Instead, it is cut and put inside a cloth. The cloth is then shaken, the meat becomes cooked and then it can be offered to the god.

### **Divination Through the Afa Oracle**

In healing, the gods work through the Torgbui; the cause of the illness and the cure are told to the Priest by the gods through a process of divination. In general, divination is a means of contacting the supernatural beings to reveal something that is hidden, or something that will happen in the future.

There are different types of divination. One is a technique termed watergazing, in which the healer 'gazes' into a body of water until he is able to see the spirits and communicate with them. Another form of divination is to work through a human medium in trance, or possession.

The Priest himself does not use possession as a means to communicate with the gods, but he relies on the aid of *emagasis*. An *emagasi* is a person, chosen by the gods, who when possessed is told revelations by the gods and spirits to tell to the Priest. The *emagasi* is told things that will help the Priest heal and is given information about the future. A person might be chosen to be an *emagasi* either because he has offended the gods or because ~ the gods love him. Once one is chosen he would go through a ritual, at



which time several offerings are made, and then be confined in a shrine for sixteen days. This period of confinement is a time for the gods to teach the trainee. At the end of the confinement, the final rites would be performed. The possession that occurs to an *emagasi* is spontaneous; there does not need to be a structured ritual or event to bring it on.

The Priest performs his divination through the Afa oracle. Afa is a means to learn things that are unknown from the gods. The Priest sings or chants to invoke the gods, and then, using a bag of charms and four strands of beads, will ask the gods questions and be given answers. To be able to receive the answers one must understand the language of afa, and to do this one must go through extensive training. At the time of observation in November 1998, there were five trainees apprenticing under the Torgbui.



Figure 1: An attendant of the shrine consulting afa. He asks the gods questions and learns the answers through the beads.

The different charms are used to ask about different things. For instance, a trade bead is used when asking about a woman, and a cowries shell is used when asking about

a man. The answers to the questions and the information from the gods is revealed through the beaded strands by mechanisms known only to those performing the actions. The afa oracle is thus like a language or code; the Priest insists that reading it is like reading the stars and producing a horoscope. He furthered the analogy by adding that the study of afa is like the study of astrology.

Afa can work like the following: the patient (or anyone who wants to find out information) will whisper to a piece of money what it is that he wants to know. He then places the money on the mat with the charms and beads. The Priest will say the rite, moving the charms around and picking the beads up. This is done to invoke the spirit and then receive the answers. The Priest then records what he has learned in a code.

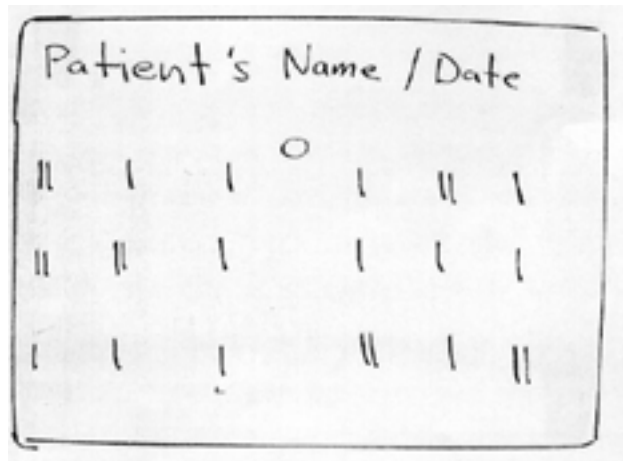


Figure 2: An example of the language used by the Priest to record information. Each person who comes to consult the gods has such a record, kept by the Priest.

According to the Priest, afa can tell him if a patient is going to survive. It can tell someone things that he should or should not eat; foods that could result in illness or dissatisfaction. It can be asked if one should or should not travel on a particular day. These are a few of the questions that can be asked of afa besides those specifically about illness. For example, cancer can be caused either by natural processes or from bewitchment or "juju." Afa will tell the Priest which is the cause and what should be done to cure it.

## **Mental Illness**

The Torgbui specializes in treating mental illnesses. This section will discuss two forms of mental illness: madness, and infertility arising from either baroness or impotency.

### **Madness**

The Priest defined madness as abnormal behavior, as seen through speech and action, and any deviation from the norm. Madness is the result of various things; its cause can be spiritual, hereditary or drug-related. The manner in which the patient would be dealt with is as follows. Usually, the family brings the patient in to be admitted. If he is too wild, the patient might initially be physically restrained. Herbs are administered in some cases to help calm the patient down, as a means of emotional restraint. Once the person has regained consciousness and is ready to proceed with treatment, the Priest performs divination by afa to determine the cause of the illness and the cure. If through divination it is found that the cause is of a spiritual nature, that is, that the illness comes from the works of "juju" or witchcraft, the Priest must then consult the spirits or witches responsible, through the gods, to determine what needs to be done for the patient to be relieved. The patient is required to pacify the spirits. The gods also decide which herbs are to be administered to the patient. The medicine is then taken until recovery. If the patient does not fully satiate the request of the gods, then he will begin to recover, but again fall sick. Divination is used to ask the spirits if they are satisfied.

After all of this, the Priest as healer must determine for himself if the patient has recovered and is well. For instance, if the patient is a scholar, he might be asked to take some type of test, or to read and write. Otherwise, the patient is employed in a conversation to determine if he is healed and is normal. Finally, a thanksgiving is performed to the gods and spirits, and the patient is free.

If the problem is hereditary, then the course of action is similar. In order to cure the patient, one must drive away the spirit in the family that is causing the disorder, by offerings or appeasement. However, once the spirit is driven away, it is gone from the whole family and no one else will fall victim. If the problem is because of drugs, such as marijuana or cocaine, the Priest finds the madness difficult to treat. This is because once the drugs have "gotten to the brain" they are hard to remove. He sends these patients to the hospital.

### **Barrenness & Impotency**

Barrenness in women is considered by the Priest to be a mental illness, and can arise from several different causes. It may be natural, where the woman "can't take seed." In this case, the situation is helpless, and there is nothing he or a hospital can do. Another case may be that the "womb is not properly fixed." For this, he is able to prepare herbs that will resettle the womb. A third case may be that the sperm comes directly out of the woman after intercourse, and the egg cannot be fertilized. For this, too, he can prepare herbs to correct the problem. The final reason that a woman will not become pregnant is due to a spiritual disturbance. If this is the case, the Priest must go through divination to find out what spirits are at work with the woman. Once the spirit involved is contacted, it

will reveal to the Priest what it wants before it will allow for pregnancy to occur. For example, if the woman has offended someone, he or she might send a spirit after her, leading to barrenness. This spirit could ask the woman for a goat, cow, turkey, fowl, pigeon, duck, money, or cloth, etc. Note that if the spirit asked for a cow, and the woman could not afford it, she would be able to satisfy the spirit with some blood from a cow, some intestines and the head- these things could be purchased from a butcher. After the spirit has become satisfied, pregnancy can occur.

The Priest can also treat impotency in men. If the cause is biological, and the man's sperm is not "good for fertilization," then the Priest can give him some herbs to help. Often the cause of impotency is spiritual. For instance, there is a husband and wife. The spirit within the woman does not want the husband to flirt with any other woman. The spirit can cause the man to become impotent if he has any mistresses. Thus, if the husband and wife are having sex and the husband is unable to hold an erection, then the wife will know that he has been cheating. A similar example also involves a husband and his first wife. The spirit inside this wife does not want the husband to take a second wife. If he takes one, the spirit can make the husband lose his erection anytime he has sex with the second wife. To cure the man of either of these causes of impotency, the Priest would divine to determine what was necessary to appease the spirit. Finally, there is impotency that develops late in a man's life. This is the result of the man eating or drinking something that he should not have. The Priest can divine to determine what food or drink is the cause, and if the man abstains from taking it, he will return to normalcy.

### **Cases and Observations**

(I) 16NOV98 A family of three came into the shrine- a mother, father and infant. The mother and the child were sick. The family had come in on a previous day, and it was divined then that they should return with a pigeon to offer. They also brought drink, money, cigarettes and kola nut to be offered.

The Torgbui took the pigeon through the blue curtain into the back room. This is the room where the gods speak to the Priest in private. He then returned to the main room of the shrine. The pigeon was rubbed across the mother and child seven times as a means of cleansing them. There were a few attendants of the shrine; these are men training under the Torgbui to enter into priesthood. The gods- *Tsitsi* and Mama- smoke cigarettes and chew kola nut. The attendants gave these objects to the gods by blowing cigarette smoke and by spitting the juice from the kola nut onto the alter.

The Priest and his attendants sang an invocation song to the gods and held the pigeon to the alter. The invocation song is sung to make the gods happy. It is used to call the spirits that the Priest wants to help him by calling their appellations. Once the spirits are content they will give the Priest, and the patient, what is needed. At the end of the song, if the gods have accepted the bird as an offering, the pigeon will be dead. In this case, when the song ended, the bird seemed to be dead and lay motionless on the floor. After 20 or 30 seconds, the pigeon shook its body and was alive. The gods had not accepted the offer.

The Priest asked the man if he had something to confess. The reason that the gods had rejected the offer was because there was a secret or impurity within the husband and wife. They are both members of the shrine, and if they have sinned against the shrine or committed a crime that they have not admitted to the Priest, "bad things" will happen to

them, such as sickness and death. The husband confessed to committing a crime. The Priest hears the man's confession and then goes through the blue curtain into the back room. When he returns, he tells the man that the gods demand a further explanation of his crime.

The man had sinned against the gods; he had performed rites that would bring misfortune to some of the worshippers of Torgbui's shrine because they had offended him in some way. The guilty husband had used "juju" to have the offenders killed in a car accident. The accident was to take place earlier in the week, when he knew of members of the shrine congregation who were going to a nearby village to drum. On the way back from the village the drummers were involved in a car accident, and several people were injured, including someone who was living at the Priest's house. After his confession, the man was lectured by the Priest. Asking the spirits to murder a person is one of the sins that can act to separate a worshipper from his god. Again an invocation song was sung by the Priest and his attendants. The lyrics in this song asked the Torgbui's gods to untie the hold that the other god had; the gods should help release the man and dislodge the plot. When the second song ended, the pigeon was dead. The mouth of the bird was opened and blood was squeezed out onto the alter for the gods. The heart was cut out and also given to the gods. (The remainder of the pigeon was given to the children in the house).

The Priest asked the gods to verify the acceptance of the ~ offer. He tossed five stones onto the mat to learn the answer. Through the stones the Priest learned that the woman must also be cleansed before the gods will be happy. He asked her to confess any sins of which she was guilty. She had quarreled with people in the house she had been living in, and she swore to the gods that she would never set foot into the house again.

Now, she needed to return to the house because she had nowhere else to live. Because she swore on the gods, if she were to go back to the house without confessing, she would die.

Now that the couple had confessed all of their sins and were cleansed, they could ask for help from the gods. Following these actions, the Priest would divine and determine which herbs should be administered to the woman and child. Granted that the family should not commit any further sins, the patients would return to good health.

(II) 18NOV98 A man entered the shrine with what was at first said to be a "stomach-ache." Later his symptoms were announced. He had become impotent and had a "watery fluid coming out of his penis." (The stomach-ache sounded to this researcher like a venereal disease). The man did not know the cause of his illness, and so the Priest performed divination to find out. Through divination it was revealed that the man's wife and her family were juju people, and they had deceived the man. They had given him a medicine that they claimed would make him stronger, but, instead, it made him ill.

One of the shrine attendants took the man into another room in the house away from the shrine. With a freshly-sharpened knife, he hit vertical cuts into the flesh of the man around his waist, at the lower abdomen. The cuts were made deep enough to cause bleeding, because they were the means of opening up the bloodstream for the medicine. The concept is similar to an injection- both are a direct means for the medicine to reach the blood. The attendant then took a black powder that had been prepared earlier, mixed it with a liquid to form a paste along the cuts around the waist of the man.

They returned to the shrine where the Priest was waiting. The Priest had a few words with the man, and then gave him a bag of black powder. This powder was to be



mixed with water and taken orally. The patient left and had not returned during the course of the two weeks following, indicating that he was recovering.

(III) [Information received from a former patient of the shrine. Events began around five months prior to the time of the interview] 19NOV98 Florence<sup>1</sup> is from a coastal village near Anlo-Afiadenyigba, but she was residing in Abidjan when she became sick. She claimed that she had a "heart sickness." For instance, if she were to become startled, she would fall unconscious. She visited several hospitals and they all told her she was anemic and gave her injections for her blood. She did not respond to the medicine and remained ill.

In Abidjan, Florence knew a woman who had been very sick, to the point where she was thought to be dead. Through divination by a priest in Abidjan, it was discovered that she was not fully dead and could be brought back to life. Someone there knew of Torgbui Husunivi as an herbalist and brought her to see him. The Priest cured the woman, she became a worshipper of the shrine and returned to Abidjan. It was this woman who recommended to Florence that she go to see the Priest. Florence's husband was living in Togo and she first went there. She was taken to a shrine in Lome, but was unsuccessfully treated. Her husband then brought her to Afiadenyigba.

When she first arrived at the shrine she was unconscious, and thus does not recall what happened right away. When she regained consciousness she discovered that some medicine had been prepared for her and she took it. She then continued to take medicine;

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<sup>1</sup> Fictitious name

when she would finish with one prescription or bottle, a group of women would go into a trance and the gods would reveal to them what kind of medicine she should take next. The treatments initially made Florence feel better, like she was being cured. She was spending much time sleeping. In the Priest's house there is an area near the shrine where the patients who are boarding sleep. On three consecutive nights, while Florence was sleeping there, spirits came to visit her. The spirits were those of *emagasi*. She did not reveal their visits to anyone. On the fourth day, another *emagasi* of the shrine became possessed by the gods. This *emagasi* learned that the spirits told Florence she was to become an *emegasi*. When confronted about this, Florence initially denied all of the encounters. Because she would not narrate the events, Florence became unconscious. She then told the truth and told of what she had seen and been told.

Since admitting the visions and preparing to become an *emagasi*, Florence has remained well and not fallen sick. Once she has performed all of the rites, she will become an *emagasi*. At the time of the interview she was waiting until she had enough money to buy all of the items needed for the final rites. She will then aid in healing and function as a part of the shrine.

(IV) Other cases narrated during interviews (a) A woman came to the shrine because she had been suffering from mental problems. She had initially been treated, but every night a spirit would visit this woman asking her to "give him things." Through divination the Priest learned that it was the spirit of one of the woman's cousins who had died. When he died, the woman had taken some of his possessions, including a chamber pot. The cousin did not want anyone to use his possessions, and so the spirit was coming to collect these

things from the woman. Again through divination it was revealed that the spirit wanted the woman to dig a hole in a rubbish dump, put the items in the hole and cover it for no one to see. The woman followed his orders, and poured alcohol and water in libation. Her mental problems ended and she was free.

(b) A sick woman from Abidjan came into the shrine and wanted to join the afa oracle. Through divination the Priest learned that the woman should not return to Abidjan. She did not believe him and said that she needed to go there to collect her belongings.

On the third day she was back in Abidjan, the woman was found dead by what seemed to be natural causes.

(c) A sick woman was brought to the Priest from a nearby village. After partial treatment in the shrine, she said that she wanted to briefly return home to visit her family. Instead, she traveled to a town past her village to visit her boyfriend. This act offended the gods because she had not asked for permission to do this; it was an act of disobedience. While in her boyfriend's village, she complained of a stomach-ache, was sent to the hospital and died within two weeks of leaving Afiadenyigba. Her death was believed to be a punishment sent by the gods.

(d) A man came to the shrine who had too much "mucus in the head." The mucus was making contact with the brain and causing mild madness, as demonstrated through abnormal behavior. The Priest consulted afa and the gods advised him of the correct herbs to use. The Priest squeezed juice made from the herbs into the patient's nose. The herbs ridded the man of the mucus in his head and he subsequently became free from madness.

(V) 18NOV98 [Participant observation of ancestral rites] The relatives of Mr. Damalie, one of the translators, prepared a feast to offer to the ancestors. The preparation of the dinner began at 4:00 pm. Prayers were said by two of Mr. Damalie's relatives over the drinks to be poured in libation. The man dug a hole in the ground and placed a mat of leaves on two sides of the hole. Two chickens were then sacrificed for the feast- one hen and one rooster- by cutting the necks with a dull knife. The uncle squeezed blood out of the open throats of the chickens onto the leaves around the hole in the ground. (Two hours passed while the chickens were cooking)

The feast was prepared by some women of the house and it was laid out while prayers were said. Most of the food was placed on the leaves to offer to the ancestors. The remainder of the food was placed in the center of the group attending the ritual, and shared by everyone in the house. (The children and the women ate separately from the men and this female researcher).

After everyone had eaten, the cousin had to divine to find out if the ancestors were satisfied with what they had been offered. He used afa as a means of communication: two beaded strands and a bag of charms. He pulled about ten charms from the pile to use in the divination. Through questioning he learned the ancestors were happy with the offering. Throughout the whole evening the men were drinking local gin. By the end of the night they were quite loud.



**Figure 3: Relatives pouring libation to one of their ancestors.**

## **Conclusion**

The brief three weeks of field work that created this project contained more insights than could ever be put into a paper, no matter how many pages it contained. The data compiled can speak for itself, and rather than reiterate something so straightforward, the writer will conclude this paper by attempting to 'read between the lines,' for it is the conviction of the beliefs that does not easily translate with words.

Traditional medicine distinguishes itself from western medicine by its emphasis on the cause and effect of an illness. The spirituality of the illness enforces that it needs more than simple medicines to cure it. The importance of the effect of illness in a traditional Ghanaian society is huge, considering that deviations from society are frowned upon, and illness in an individual can lead to a decay of the entire society.

One of the principle interests during the course of this project was in finding some kind of clue, some type of understanding of the power of belief, and where this power comes from. Faith is one of those terms easily taken for granted, but fundamental in

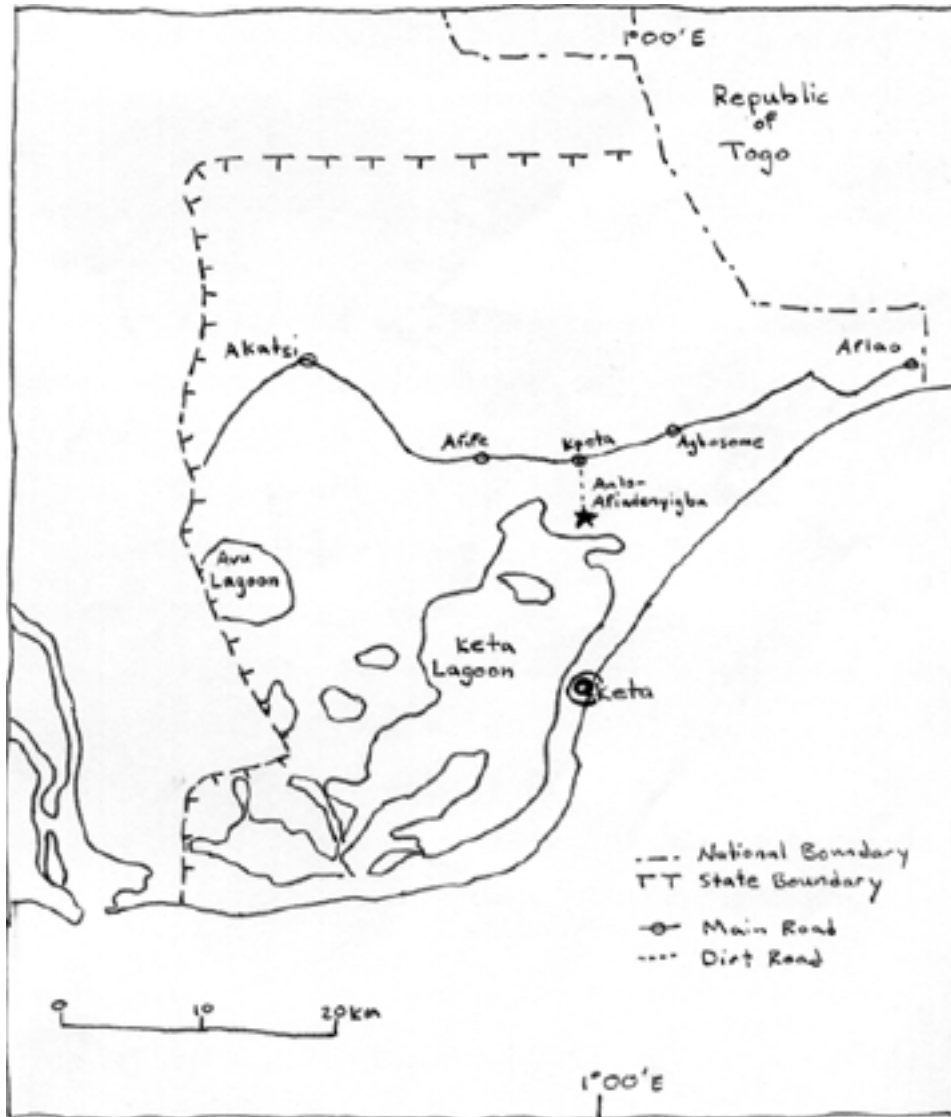
every aspect of life. One wakes up every morning with faith in the world; faith that it still exists and faith that he has a place in it.

In this study, the spiritual aspect of healing takes precedence over the biological aspect; the examples- as they were observed or as they were explained- strongly emphasize the spiritual cause of illness, while the "medicine" taken for it is mentioned only in passing, as one of the final steps in the curing of a patient. Does the cure come as a result of the medicine or from the faith of the patient in the diagnosis? One could analyze this question to try and pinpoint exactly what is the cure; the top medical professionals from the United States could examine the patients with X-rays and brain scanners, microscopic video cameras and cardiovascular monitoring; the top scientists could fill vials and slides with the herbs and medicines, observing with electron microscopes, finding the molecular structures (and enantiomers), engaging NMR spectroscopy and mapping the cellular biochemical reactions. Psychologists and psychiatrists could hold hours of therapy, administering the Rorschach test, having the patient perform free-association, and employing all of the latest advances described in the latest journals. Once it was decided- what is the cure- the tenured professor could write a book about it, published at the Number 1 university in the country, as determined by the most recent Newsweek's Guide to Colleges, and it could be distributed to every household, coast-to-coast, just like the *Yellow Pages*...

"Having pried through the strata, analyzed to a hair, counceled with doctors and calculated close, I find no sweeter fat than sticks to my own bones" (Walt Whitman). Faith is individual. Even in the largest religious movement, the communist society and the culture of television, faith begins and ends in the single soul. The patients have faith

in the Priest, the treatment he offers and the gods that bring relief. The Priest has faith that he is a healer. Further questions might just be a waste of time.

**Appendix A**



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