

# A Religio-Cultural Inquiry into the Spiritual Journey of a Fiasidi through Initiation Rites at the Troxovi Shrines in Klikor, Ghana



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## ABSTRACT

Initiation rites play a pivotal role in shaping cultural identity, reinforcing societal norms, and facilitating the transmission of cultural values from one generation to the next. Using a qualitative approach which was supported by interpretive philosophy, the study explored the initiation rites of a *Fiasidi* which involves a series of rituals, ceremonies, and teachings that are designed to prepare young girls or women for their ritual responsibilities in serving Torgbui Adzima shrines in Klikor, Ghana. A case study was used in the research. Observations, document analysis, semi-structured interviews, and audiovisual materials were used to gather data. The opinions and experiences of fifteen (15) participants, including high priests, priestesses, ritual functionaries, petitioners, and *Fiasidiwo* (initiates), were sampled using the purposive sampling approach. Thematic analysis was used to do an inductive study of the data. The study revealed that three main rituals feature in the initiation rites of a *Fiasidi* in Klikor. These are *Godedegome* (puberty rite), *Gatete* (*Fiasidi's* homecoming), and *Flaxoxo* (purification rite). The study concluded that the Troxovi shrines are effective in ensuring social order and discipline and promoting African indigenous knowledge and spirituality among the Anlo-Ewe communities. It recommended that other ritual performances such as performing libation, wailing wall prayers, and traditional dance forms be explored by other researchers. The study has contributed to providing insights into cultural diversity, and spiritual identity and illuminating the significance of ritual practices in various fields including social anthropology, African aesthetics, and African traditional religion.

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## INTRODUCTION

One essential aspect of human civilization is religion. Since it predates humanity, it is akin to human nature and may persist for the duration of human life. Man is a social species that possesses both religious and political beliefs. Given that he is the only species known to have a religion, man is inherently religious.

Implicitly, religion is a ubiquitous phenomenon that is practiced in all human communities.<sup>1</sup> *Fiasidi* tradition is a religious practice among the Anlo-Ewe where females are selected and approved by the deities to serve in a Troxovi shrine as part of rituals meant to prevent a communal calamity supposedly provoked by the transgressions of members of the females' family. The *Fiasidi* tradition is a centuries-old cultural practice found in the southern part of the Volta Region of Ghana. The initiation rites of a *Fiasidi* mark the induction of the initiates into a religious and cultural institution known as *Fiasidi* tradition, dedicating them to serving the deities, preserving Ewe cultural traditions, and fostering community cohesion.

The Anlo-Ewe people, like many ethnic groups in Ghana, have always held the notion that there is no smoke without fire; thus, every occurrence has a cause. For this reason, whenever there is a run of bad luck, disease, or a series of unexplained deaths in a family or the community, efforts are made to establish the cause and to find a remedy.<sup>2</sup> The process of discerning the cause of misfortunes is usually conducted by the high priests either voluntarily or following a request from the afflicted individual, family, or elders of the affected community. If it is determined that the calamities are a punishment from the gods for the misdeeds of a person or group of individuals, then sacrifices or offerings are made to avert the misfortunes and prevent similar events in the future.<sup>3</sup> The initiation rites of a *Fiasidi* signify the initiate's dedication to the deities, her community, and her role as a custodian of cultural heritage. The initiation rites of the *Fiasidi* tradition are a significant cultural practice, shaping the lives of the *Fiasidiwo* (initiates) and promoting cultural continuity, and community cohesion among the Anlo-Ewe people. The initiation rites involve the teaching of cultural values, practices, and beliefs, spiritual purification and consecration, adornment of traditional regalia, and performance of rituals, dances, songs, and sacrifices among others.

The *Fiasidi* tradition is deeply rooted in Ewe culture, but the nuances of the cultural and spiritual contexts and their impact on the initiation rites are not well understood and documented. There are limited written records and scholarly research on the Troxovi shrines in Klikor, making it challenging to understand the depth and complexity of the initiation rites of a *Fiasidi*. Thus, this study aims to provide a deeper understanding of the initiation rites of a *Fiasidi*, exploring their spiritual significance, and contributing to the preservation of the Anlo-Ewe cultural heritage.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### The Troxovi System

The Anlo-Ewe people of South Eastern Ghana practice a religious cult known as the Troxovi shrine. The Troxovi religious shrines in Ghana are mostly located in the southeast of the Volta Region, where related rites are practiced.<sup>4</sup> The majority of its establishments are in Tongu, Avenor, and Anlo communities. The gods worshipped at the Troxovi shrine are said to be in charge of these ethnic groups' social control. The Dangme East and West Districts of the Greater Accra Region also follow a similar custom known as Woryokwe.

Troxovi is the practice of utilizing a human being, often a young girl (preferred over adult and even married women, who are acceptable in some situations), to atone for a transgression committed by a family member by bringing them to the shrine of a deity. The system is a component of social control mechanisms in various Anlo-Ewe communities where the practice is present, and it has been a part of their social structures.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> D. Okafor, "Religion and Societal Development: A Social Work Perspective," *Religion and Societal Development: Contemporary Nigerian Perspective*, 2004.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Kwame Ameh, "Reconciling Human Rights and Traditional Practices: The Anti-Trokosi Campaign in Ghana," *Canadian Journal of Law and Society/La Revue Canadienne Droit et Société* 19, no. 2 (2004): 51–72; C. Abotchie, *Social Control in Traditional Southern Ewe Land of Ghana: Relevance for Modern Crime Prevention* (Accra: Ghana Universities Press, 1997); Amy Small Bilyeu, "Trokosi - The Practice of Sexual Slavery in Ghana: Religious and Cultural Freedom vs. Human Rights," *Indiana International & Comparative Law Review* 9, no. 2 (January 2, 1999): 457–504, <https://doi.org/10.18060/17469>; Sandra E Greene, "Modern" Trokosi" and the 1807 Abolition in Ghana: Connecting Past and Present," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 66, no. 4 (2009): 959–74.

<sup>3</sup> Bilyeu, "Trokosi - The Practice of Sexual Slavery in Ghana: Religious and Cultural Freedom vs. Human Rights"; L. W. Rouster, *Field Findings on the System of Slavery Commonly Known as Trokosi* (ECM Africa Publications, 2005).

<sup>4</sup> Elom Dovlo and S K Kufogbe, "Baseline Survey on Female Ritual Bondage in Ghana: The Geographic Spread and Count of Victims," *A Report Prepared for ING and CIDA. Accra, Ghana: International Needs Ghana*, 1997.

<sup>5</sup> Dovlo and Kufogbe, "Baseline Survey on Female Ritual Bondage in Ghana: The Geographic Spread and Count of Victims"; G.K. Nukunya, *Tradition and Change in Ghana: An Introduction to Sociology*, 2nd ed. (Accra: University of Ghana Press, 2003); K. Akpabli-Honu, *Female Ritual Bondage in Ghana: A Study of Troxovi System among Ewes of Ghana* (Accra: Woeli Publishing Services, 2014).

According to Abotchie and Ameh, in several instances where a crime is committed and the perpetrator is unknown, the party that was wronged or resentful goes directly to a traditional priest to track out the culprits and beg the gods to punish them and their families.<sup>6</sup> The gods are called upon to aid in the hunt for the culprit. In an interview, a traditional leader clarified that if tragedies like recurrent deaths or disease outbreaks start to happen in a specific family within the community soon after the search and invocation of the gods, the consensus will be that the offender is a member of the afflicted family and that the gods are punishing the wrongdoer in response to the invocation. After the distressed family conferred with him, the high priest could verify this. The next step is to send a girl or woman to the shrine to appease the deities.

In addition to Ghana, Benin, Nigeria and Togo are other frequent users of the Troxovi system.<sup>7</sup> A family is cursed for a crime committed by a member as a social control mechanism. The curse is frequently the result of the deity's response to the family member's transgression. The curse is frequently said by the criminal victim who turns to the god, who is thought to be able to identify and punish wrongdoers, for help. Tragic events, such as the untimely and frequent deaths of family members, general failures in life's endeavors, and odd illnesses, then befall the offender's family. A spirit medium reveals the reason for the family's misfortunes and sends the offender's family toward the shrine at the center of the punitive punishment.<sup>8</sup>

The Troxovi shrine is renowned for more than just its mastery of social control. Its ability to heal has also been noted. It is thought that the barren woman has been cured and her fertility has returned. Certain names for children indicate that they are offerings from these temples. Ameevor, for example, noted that the names Kosi (for female) and Klu (for male) are given to infants whose mothers, fearing they would not conceive, had to pray to fertility deities to conceive.<sup>9</sup> The names express the parents' gratitude to the fertility deities. The parents' intuition tells them that their kids are more the property of the gods than of them.

In the Klikor Traditional Area, the *Fiasidi* comes in various forms. This first group consists of those who willingly decide to serve at the shrine.<sup>10</sup> Those who are sent to the shrines by their family members as restitution for transgressions made by other relatives make up the second type of *Fiasidi*. The *dorfleviwo* (children of the god) make up the third group. This third kind of *Fiasidi* is thought to have been created via the gods' supernatural intervention as a result, the child was sent to the shrine as a thank-you for their help.<sup>11</sup> These are children whose parents, facing the possibility of being barren, prayed to gods to help make the womb fertile so that they might bear children. A child of divinity, known as *trovi*, is another term for such a child.

### **The *Fiasidi* Tradition as a Cultural and Religious Practice**

Religion represents human attempts to comprehend the ultimate source, meaning, and purpose of existence as well as power for survival.<sup>12</sup> Since it is an attempt by humans to achieve a range of goals, there is a chance that incorrect interpretations of the notion may occur. An illustration of this kind of religious interpretation is the Adzima religion, which originated in Ghana's Volta Region and is to blame for the practice of selling virgin girls into slavery as retribution for supposed misdeeds done by members of their family. Geertz defined culture as a system of inherited notions articulated in symbolic forms that individuals use to communicate, maintain, and expand their life experiences and attitudes.<sup>13</sup> Perhaps this

<sup>6</sup> Abotchie, *Social Control in Traditional Southern Ewe Land of Ghana: Relevance for Modern Crime Prevention*; Ameh, "Reconciling Human Rights and Traditional Practices: The Anti-Trokosi Campaign in Gnana."

<sup>7</sup> Ameh, "Reconciling Human Rights and Traditional Practices: The Anti-Trokosi Campaign in Gnana"; Stephen Awudi Gadri, *The Revealed Myths about Trokosi Slavery: Human Rights Violations* (AuthorHouse, 2010).

<sup>8</sup> Elom Dovlo and A K Adzoyi, "Report on Trokosi Institution," *Report Commissioned by International Needs for Department for Studies of Religions, University of Ghana, Legon, 1995*; Akpabli-Honu, *Female Ritual Bondage in Ghana: A Study of Troxovi System among Ewes of Ghana*.

<sup>9</sup> P. M. K. Ameevor, *Nkwo De* (Tema: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1987).

<sup>10</sup> Ameh, "Reconciling Human Rights and Traditional Practices: The Anti-Trokosi Campaign in Gnana."

<sup>11</sup> Ameh, "Reconciling Human Rights and Traditional Practices: The Anti-Trokosi Campaign in Gnana."

<sup>12</sup> V.S. Gedzi, "The Role of Culture and Law in Sustaining Trokosi Institution in Southern Ghana," 2012, <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/338645601>. %09[Accessed: August 17, 2023].

<sup>13</sup> Victor S. Gedzi, Yunus Dumbe, and Gabriel Eshun, "Field of Power: A Religio-Cultural Analysis Trokosi in Ghana," *Political Science Journal* 1.01 (2016): 122-42.

is why culture and religion work together symbiotically and readily identify as "a system of inherited conceptions"; culture and religion are a big ally.

Recent research has shown how culture and religion constitute a significant area of power that, either for good or ill, consistently imposes limitations on behavior through mental control and "definitions of the world".<sup>14</sup> "Mawu," the Almighty Being who created the cosmos, is a central figure in Southern Ewe traditional metaphysics. The people believe that Mawu acts through mediators between humans and Mawu, such as gods (referred to as "trowo" in the Ewe language) and ancestor spirits.<sup>15</sup> The gods, known as *trowo*, are believed to serve worshipers in protective, welfare, and truth-seeking capacities. They are held by people, families, or communities.<sup>16</sup>

The Adzima deities, found in the *Fiasidi* tradition in Klikor, are a kind of African traditional religion that influences the way of life of the populace as a whole by promoting a morality of communal responsibility. Therefore, socially, the Southern Ewe live in a community based on shared responsibility, where a person's actions may have an impact on other clan members.<sup>17</sup>

This implies that members of a clan may be held accountable for the wrongdoing of an individual. As a result, clan or family members discipline a member who deviates from being each other's guardians. According to Robson, the custom dates back to Nigeria's 16th century and calls for giving female virgins to a deity in exchange for favors or as atonement for transgressions committed by a family member.<sup>18</sup> This is done to keep the deity's wrath from destroying the family through illness, death, or other tragedies.<sup>19</sup>

Akpabli-Honu claims that this practice is motivated by psychological pressure since families are taught that refusing to bring a female virgin to the shrine upon request is tantamount to defying the gods.<sup>20</sup> Serious repercussions for the family and future generations might result from this. The females are seen as wedded to the shrine's deity, who is embodied by the conventional priest. It is the initial hexing procedure used in the *Fiasidi* tradition at Klikor. The complaint is filed with the temple by the complainant. The research indicates that the complaint can ask God to intervene in a specific kind of calamity, such as the wrongdoer's death, maiming, or blindness. As part of the process, the complaint must give the priest a bottle of schnapps and a consultation fee. Over the money, the complaint whispers, either specifically or generally, asking the deity to literally "see something at the wrongdoer's place for me"; "*kpo nu le amea gbo nam.*" Put another way, get revenge on the wrongdoer.

The requirement that the god "see something at the wrongdoer's place" expands the range of possible punishments to encompass the collective guilt of the offender's family. In order to be redeemed when the god grants his desire, the complainant must then provide conditional appreciation (rewards for the deity).<sup>21</sup>

The *Fiasidi* tradition is a way by which the people of Klikor transmit and preserve their cultural knowledge and heritage from one generation to the next. Through storytelling, dance, music, and symbolic rituals, the tradition reinforces the community's shared identity and values. The *Fiasidi* tradition represents a living connection to their history, spirituality, and social cohesion. The *Fiasidi* tradition stands as a testament to the resilience and cultural richness of the Anlo-Ewe people.

<sup>14</sup> Gila Stopler, "A Rank Usurpation of Power-the Role of Patriarchal Religion and Culture in the Subordination of Women," *Duke J. Gender L. & Pol'y* 15 (2008): 365.

<sup>15</sup> Abotchie, *Social Control in Traditional Southern Ewe Land of Ghana: Relevance for Modern Crime Prevention*; M. Tubor, "A Critical Analysis of the 'Trokosi' Practice in Parts of West Africa as a Harmful Tradition against Women and Girls: States Obligations under International Human Rights Law." (Åbo Akademi University, Finland, 2019).

<sup>16</sup> M. Ohrt, "Conflicting Discourses on the Trokosi Practice in Ghana: Exploring Tensions in the Global and Local Human Rights Translations" (International Institute of Social Studies, Ghana, 2011); Gedzi, Dumbe, and Eshun, "Field of Power: A Religio-Cultural Analysis Trokosi in Ghana."

<sup>17</sup> Ohrt, "Conflicting Discourses on the Trokosi Practice in Ghana: Exploring Tensions in the Global and Local Human Rights Translations."

<sup>18</sup> A. Robson, "The Chosen Ones: Slavery in the Name of God: An Ancient Cult Is Alive and Well in Ghana, Taking Girls as Young as Two and Offering Them as Wives to Appease Their Deities," 2006, [www.independent.co.uk/news/world/africa/the-chosen-ones-slavery-in-the-name-of-god421629.html](http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/africa/the-chosen-ones-slavery-in-the-name-of-god421629.html).

<sup>19</sup> Ameh, "Reconciling Human Rights and Traditional Practices: The Anti-Trokosi Campaign in Ghana"; Dovlo and Adzoyi, "Report on Trokosi Institution"; S. K. Kufogbe and E. Dovlo, "The Geographic Spread of Trokosi in Ghana," *Bulletin of the Ghana Geographical Association* (Accra: Department of Geography and Resource Development, University of Ghana, Legon, 1998); G.K. Nukunya, "Report on the Trokosi System in South Eastern Ghana" (Accra, 2003)..

<sup>20</sup> Akpabli-Honu, *Female Ritual Bondage in Ghana: A Study of Trɔxovi System among Ewes of Ghana*.

<sup>21</sup> Gedzi, Dumbe, and Eshun, "Field of Power: A Religio-Cultural Analysis Trokosi in Ghana."

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

According to Molette & Mole, Afrocentric Aesthetics is the recommended theoretical framework for analyzing the initiation ceremonies of a *Fiasidi* (initiate) in the context of African cultural performance.<sup>22</sup> The Afrocentric Aesthetic Theory holds that Africans are humans rather than objects, who mold culture and the social environment and decide their destinies based on common historical experiences. According to Asante, cited in Obaje, Africans need to view themselves as players in European, Arab, and Asian civilizations rather than as outsiders.<sup>23</sup> Afrocentric aesthetics, according to Molette & Mole, maintains that beauty does not always imply the absence of moral values like good or bad and that the worth of artistic forms or works derives in part from the purposes for which they were purposefully developed.<sup>24</sup>

The concept of Afrocentricity is centred on an African viewpoint on nature, beauty, and the importance of creative manifestations, as well as a knowledge of African realities.<sup>25</sup> The importance of African spirituality and traditional religious rituals is highlighted by Afrocentricity. Adzima deities and ancestor spirits are revered in initiation rites, which are in line with Afrocentric ideas that emphasize the significance of African spiritual traditions and practices. Afrocentric aesthetics theory significantly contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the intricate tapestry of African artistic expressions, fostering a heightened appreciation for the cultural and aesthetic values of these initiation ritual performances.

In the context of this study, the Afrocentric aesthetics theory serves as the anchor for examining the initiation rites of a *Fiasidi* within the study area. This approach facilitates a deeper appreciation of the ritual performances of a *Fiasidi* to gain valuable insights into the cultural traditions, beliefs, and values that shape the identity and social life of the Anlo-Ewe at the Troxovi shrines in the Klikor Traditional Area, Ghana.

## Study Area

In Ghana's Volta Region, Klikor is a town in the Ketu South Municipality. Klikor is situated around thirteen (13) miles from Lome, Togo, and one hundred and six (106) miles from Accra, it is situated on the Accra-Lome Road. The Klikor people are members of the Ewe ethnic group, which is found in Ghana, Togo, and Benin. In the fifteenth century, they moved to Ghana from Notsie in modern-day Togo, where they settled on the Volta Region's Atlantic coast.<sup>26</sup>

One of the few areas left where native habits, traditions, and religion have not been eradicated by outside influence is Klikor. There are a few worship shrines that host festivals all year round. The festival of Kli-Adzima/Mama Vena is a religious cult practiced by the *Fiasidi* tradition's initiates and petitioners. Because of the yearly Kli-Adzima/Mama Vena festival, which takes place in July and August, Klikor is one of the most popular tourist attractions in the Volta Region. Klikor is organized into two leadership tiers namely Zonal Council leadership and traditional leadership. The supreme chief of the Klikor Traditional Area is Torgbuigah Addo VIII. The Klikor Zonal Council's chairman is Hon. Edward Gbeti. It is said that the three Adzima deities guard Klikor.

Moreover, the local chapter of the Afrikania Renaissance Mission (ARM) is located in Klikor. The ARM has taught the elders of the Adzima shrines and the Klikor community to be priests, and they have established a Sunday service-holding branch of the ARM in Klikor. The Adzima priests have a special role in these events and are essential to their coordination, together with the officiating priests.

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<sup>22</sup> C.W. Molette and B.J. Mole, *Afrocentric Theatre* (Bloomington, Indiana: Xlibris Corporation, 2013).

<sup>23</sup> O.J. Obaje, "Aesthetics In African Cultural Performance: A Critical Study of Otegwu Festival among the Igala People in Nigeria" (University of Kwazulu-Natal, South Africa, 2018); Molefi Asante, *Afrocentric Idea Revised* (Temple University Press, 2011).

<sup>24</sup> Molette and Mole, *Afrocentric Theatre*.

<sup>25</sup> Soul Shava, "African Aesthetic," in *The SAGE Encyclopedia of African Cultural Heritage in North America*, ed. M. J. Shujaa and K. J. Shujaa, vol. 53 (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2015), 11–16.

<sup>26</sup> D.E.K. Amenumey, *Ewe Culture, "Highlights of Early Ewe History."* (Accra: Woely Publishing Services, 1997); G. K. Nukunya, "The Land and the People," in *A Handbook of Eweland*, ed. Francis Agbodeka, vol. 1 (Accra: Woely Publishing Services, 1997), 8–13; B.N. Lawrence, *The Ewe of Togo and Benin* ( Accra: Woely Publication Services, 2005).



Figure 1: A map showing Klikor along Accra to Aflao road  
Source: Blakhud, 2022

## METHODOLOGY

The study was qualitative and took the form of a case study method. Qualitative research involves contact between the researcher and the participants since it occurs in the socio-cultural environment of the participants, which is located in the Klikor Traditional Area.<sup>27</sup> Through the case study approach, the researchers were able to comprehend the perspective of the participants and the sociocultural setting in which they resided.<sup>28</sup>

The study employed document analysis, audiovisual materials, in-depth semi-structured interviews, participant and non-participant observation, and document analysis to examine the initiation rites of a *Fiasidi*. A sample size of fifteen (15) participants, comprising high priests, priestesses, ritual functionaries, *Fiaisidiwo* (initiates), and petitioners in the Klikor Traditional Area, were selected using a purposive selection approach. Thematic analysis of the qualitative research technique was used to organize, transcribe, analyze, and interpret the fieldwork data.<sup>29</sup>

## Ethical Considerations

To gain access to the field, a participant from the KLI-D-25 sample frame, a colleague at St Paul's Senior High School, introduced the researchers to a participant from the KLI-A-6 sample frame, who is the principal informant and research Coordinator of Kli-Adzima shrines. A formal letter from the Department of Painting and Sculpture, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, KNUST seeking permission for interviews was obtained. Permission was sought verbally and appropriately through formal letters before recording and photographing. Informants were given the assurance that photographs and information solicited would not be used for any other purposes except for this study. Respondents were also made aware that their responses would remain anonymous and sensitive information that could spark disputes among shrine leaders would not be divulged to the other persons.

## PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### The Troxovi Shrines: An Overview

Participants in the study told the researchers that the Adzima shrine is an actual spot where worshippers of traditional religions in the Klikor traditional area assemble. To the participants, the term "shrine" alludes

<sup>27</sup> Jennifer Anne Cleland, "The Qualitative Orientation in Medical Education Research," *Korean Journal of Medical Education* 29, no. 2 (2017): 61.

<sup>28</sup> Hinnah Kusi, *Doing Qualitative Research: A Guide for Researchers* (Accra: Emmpong Press, 2012).

<sup>29</sup> Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology," *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3, no. 2 (2006): 77–101; J.W. Cresswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches*. (London: Sage, 2013)..

to a place of worship. The frontal view of Torgbui Adzima Shrine, Afegame-Klikor is depicted in plate 1. The shrine is a consecrated location, devoted to only believers and devotees of traditional religious devotion. The shrine also functions as a repository for gods and deities Devotees who come to worship deities, make sacrifices, and carry out rites related to the shrine's deities.<sup>30</sup>



Plate 1: The frontal view of Torgbui Adzima Shrine, Afegame-Klikor  
Source: Fieldwork, 2023

In Anlo-Ewe territories, every religious cult has a cult house or shrine associated with it. The same applies to the *Fiasidi* cult in Klikor. The cult house is commonly referred to as *trɔkporme*, meaning the house of the deity. The shrine usually has someone in charge of it, referred to as its high priest. The high priest is normally a high-ranking priest known as *Torgbui* (Chief) as depicted in plates 1 and 2 in an interaction with the researcher.



Plate 2: The researcher in an interview with the high priest of Torgbui Adzima's shrine,  
Afegame-Klikor  
Source: Fieldwork, 2023

<sup>30</sup> Senyo Adzei, "Creative Processes, Structures and Performance of Shrine Music of the Northern Ewes: The Case of Awudome People of Ghana" (University of Cape Coast, 2020).



Plate 3: The researcher in an interview with the High Priest of Mama Vena's shrine,  
Source: Fieldwork, 2023

The high priest interviewed also stated that,

Torgbui (chief) oversees the affairs and the responsibilities of the *trɔkporme*, (shrine) the high priests and locations of the shrine are normally attached to the *trɔkporme*. Their bond with people in Klikor and the shrine community at large is reflected in this title. The priests are considered *fiaviwo* because they come from the "shrine-owning" family. Thus, the Mama Vena *kporme* in Ablotsivia, the Torgbui-*kporme* in Afegame, and the Mama Vena *kporme* in Ablogame are all in Klikor (*KLI-A-5 personal communication, May 6, 2023*).

According to the petitioners and *Fiasidiwo* (initiates), the Togbui Adzima and Mama Vena shrines receive a lot of travellers, some are attracted to the shrines because of their prestige, their connections to people in Klikor, and other factors, such as their frequent requests of the gods to resolve their problems. People regularly visit the Adzima shrines to present "drink offerings" for their prosperity, fertility, and other well-being-related difficulties. For specific issues, such as protection against "enemies" and "finding the truth" when these enemies are unknown, others flock to the Adzima shrines, believing that these issues are the goddesses' areas of expertise.

The collection of shrines known as the Adzima shrines in Klikor consists of the Togbui Adzima shrine in Afegame, the Mama Vena shrine in Ablogame, and the Mama Vena shrine in Ablotsivia. The shapes of the cult buildings in Klikor are circular (plates 4 and 5). Inside, the shrines are divided into sections, each with its own entrance. This design ensures privacy during ceremonies that are closed to the public. In the investigation, the two shrines were examined. At the time of the research, the third shrine was not in use due to the demise of Torgbui Humali of Mana Vena shrine in Ablogame and issues of a successor lingers on.



Plate 4: The High Priest of Torgbui Adzima's shrine Ablotsivia-Klikor  
Source: Fieldwork, 2023



In the Klikor Traditional Area, *Fiasidi* shrines are sacred places dedicated to the veneration or worship of Adzima deities. Petitioners often interpret the *ahadedezeme* (drink offering) deed as "prayers" or "petitions" regarding the underlying act of supplication. The petitioner must provide the priest the consultation fee (shown in plate 5 below) as well as some foreign gin or schnapps or locally made akpeteshie.



Plate 5: A section of petitioners in the act of gbedodo (drink offering) at Torgbui Adzima's shrine  
Source: Fieldwork, 2023

The researchers observe that, when people visit the shrines, the consultation charge is GHC50.00. The priest pours some of the alcohol into a hole that has been made on the floor near the entrance of the *trɔkpome* (shrine). This is the sacrifice made to the god by the priest. After summarizing the petitioner's concerns, the priest performs an *adefofo* rhyme which translates to "ringing or striking the tongue" for the god. The high priest is the one who typically oversees the shrine.

Petitioners may also commit tangible goods to the deities at the drink offering (*gbedodo*) and oath-taking (*atamkaka*), provided the deity is successful. If the god is granted a request, petitioners frequently make offerings to the temple without making a vow during the drink offering. This is known as *atamfexexe*, or "paying the oath debt." Money, a goat, or a chicken have been the most frequently observed pledge items, according to the study. When it comes to goats or chickens, the animal will either be killed or preserved by the shrine for later use. It will then be cooked with ritual *dzenkple*, a dish made from maize and meat combined, brought to the deity, and distributed among those in attendance, with some being given to those who are not.

The participants indicated through an interview that, petitioners visit the shrines to make drink offerings, and will also take a ritual bath using the *Mama Afu* water (*tsilele* or *agbametsilele*). The natural spring outside of Klikor, which was conceptualized as the *Mama Afu* water imbued with spiritual qualities for all ritual rites in the shrine. The priest adds herbs (*amawo*) to the water while reading a verse. Petitioners are led inside the *tsilefe* (bathroom) in the inner shrine, which has several water-filled basins, to take a bath.

The petitioner stands in front of each basin and fills up five basins with water with their hands before pouring it over their body. This kind of bathing is meant to cleanse the body and shield the individual from harm. For example, one could want to take a bath at the shrine when they are feeling ill or when they are experiencing problems with their overall well-being. The *eshi*, a necklace fashioned of palm reeds and adorned with red stone (*dekpe*), is bestowed upon the petitioners. They are told to wear it until it slips off on its own. In addition, individuals appeal to the shrine elders for conflict resolution by filing complaints with the shrine court (*nyadrɔdrɔ*).

During a routine visit, a member of the Council of Elders submitted a complaint that needed to be resolved. The details of the matter were that he was involved in a *susu* (money lending) business and one client came for a loan of Ghc 10,000.00. The customer pledged to redeem the loan in one year. For about

two years, the said customer couldn't pay his loan. He called him several times but to no avail. The defaulter has used the money to buy a plot of land for his church business. When invited before the arbitrators, the young Pastor pleaded profusely and promised to start the payment in two months. Fortunately for him, he was given a month's grace period to resume the payment to avert any disgrace from the Adzima deities if he claimed to be a Pastor of one of the local churches in town. The goal of the court is for the disputing parties to voice their complaints so that the high priest in charge and the council of elders can provide a decision (*afiatsotso*).

According to observations made, court rulings (*afiatsotso*), can be contested. It's possible that courts of a different sort, such as high courts of the government, leaders from the area, and heads of lineages, have previously settled these conflicts. Dissatisfied with the elders' decision, disputing parties have the option to either take their case to a different court or undergo an ordeal known as an attestation (*nududu* - "eating the deity"), in which both parties eat from the deities' "plate" symbolically. This implies that the criminal will get both spiritual and bodily justice from the gods, who will also handle the matter.

Participants in the study revealed that the daily lives of a significant number of Klikor people and the wellbeing of the community are significantly more evident while recounting the ambiance of the shrines during the Kli-Adzima/Mama Vena festival. Activity in and around the shrines increases even more during the deities' month-long annual festival. *Fiasidiwo* and petitioners from around Ghana, Togo, and Benin come together for rites to honour the gods and ensure their continuous well-being.

These ceremonies represent a connection between the petitioners and the deities that permeates daily interactions in family, business, and social life. The yearly celebration also gives friends a chance to catch up, and both men and women can look for future spouses there. The day of drumming, when petitioners and initiates come together to dance, drink, and celebrate the victory and strength of the deities, is the pinnacle of the Kli-Adzima festival.

## **Initiation Rites of a *Fiasidi* at Troxovi Shrines in Klikor**

### ***Godedegome* Initiation Rite (Puberty Rite)**

The data obtained from the participants revealed that the *godedegome* (puberty rite) is the first phase of the initiation ceremonies associated with the *Fiasidiwo*. The term *godedegome* (puberty rite) refers to a set of rites that verify a *Fiasidi's* identification and formally initiate her connection to the Adzima gods and shrines. This ritual is offered symbolically to the deity on behalf of individuals who are susceptible to the threats that the deity poses as a result of "doing a bad thing." The *godedegome* (puberty rite) ushers girls' age into womanhood. The ceremony begins under the supervision and direction of the high priestesses. One priestess in an interview calls it "*Baptism into the Fiasidi institution*" because it marks the entry into the *Fiasidi* institution. Indeed, some participants call it *tsideta*, meaning 'baptism'. It is normally performed in the evening.

She is detained in a room for five days to complete her indoctrination after arriving at the shrine. She is taken out after five days and given instruction on how to cook, clean, sweep, and do other domestic tasks (*KLI-B-10, personal communication, July 16, 2023*).

The rite's name, *godedegome*, reflects the understanding that the fabric is "like a loin cloth." *Gome* means "the bottom of something," alluding to the genitalia; *dede* means "the act of wearing"; and *go* denotes a loincloth, or in this case, the *bishi* (*KLI-B-11, personal communication, July 16, 2023*).

Thus, the wearing of the *bishi* (blue cloth) during the *godedegome* signifies the start of the *Fiasidi's* association with the deity. The climax of the ritual of *godedegome* takes place in the sacred grove of the deity. The initiate is sent to the sacred grove where she is made to remove the black cloth. She is ritually bathed by a female ritual specialist who herself is an old *Fiasidi*. The ritual specialist then asks the girl to put on the black cloth. The girl or woman is told to continue putting on the *bishi* (blue cloth). Those who have formalized links to the Adzima deities through initiation and specialized ceremonial functions are always identified from others by adorning *bishi* (blue cloth) around their waists (plate 6) as a symbol of identification and recognition of *Fiasidi* tradition in the Klikor Traditional Area.



Plate. 6: A group of Fiasidiwo (initiates) in bishi (blue cloth)  
Source: Fieldwork, 2023

### **Gatete Initiation Rite (Ritual Dressing)**

The study's participants indicated that *Gatete* is the next initiation after *godedegome*.

*Gatete* meaning "adorning with precious ornament and clothes" is the second but the principal ritual. It is always an impressive ceremony in which the items requested from the family for the deity and his wife, the *Fiasidi*, are brought and presented at the shrine. (KLI-B, personal communication, July 16, 2023).

A *Fiasidi's gatete* ceremony is a thrilling event, drawing large crowds to the shrine to observe the ceremonies and take in who and what has been brought to the shrine. According to *Fiasidiwo* and ritual experts, the *gatete* initiation ceremony signifies "marriage to the deity." During the *gatete*, presents are given to the shrine and the *Fiasidi* after consulting with a bokor (diviner). In the evening, the Council of Elders and high priests perform a secret ceremony near the *tagba* (sacred grove). This ceremony also marks the commencement of the *Fiasidi's* participation in the yearly celebration of the Adzima shrines and the lifting of the taboo on them having sexual relations.

The remaining members of the family holds bowls filled with the *gatetenuwo*, or the *gatete* ceremonial goods, seen in plate 7, while the new *Fiasidi* carries a white stool with colourful scarves wrapped around the base of the stool during the procession through Klikor township.

People congregate around the procession, extending greetings and financial support.



Plate 7: The arrival of a Fiasidi with *gatetenuwo* (ritual items)  
Source: Fieldwork, 2023

According to the *Fiasidiwo* sampled, the new *Fiasidi* is dressed with indigenous kente cloth and beads around her neck, arms, and joints, adding to her beauty. The lineage representatives are on their knees in prayer, and the *Fiasidi* sits on a stool beside the high priest as they make a "drink offering" at the shrine to alert the Adzima deities that the lineage has come.

The *gatetenuwo*, (the *gatete* ritual items) which consists of home, individual, and prestige objects to be delivered to the *Fiasidi*, as well as the ceremonial things she will utilise at the deity's annual festival, is then carefully inspected by the shrine elders after the drink offering.

Before the family sets off from their hometown to the shrine for the ritual, there is the preliminary ceremony of "gadzordzor", a donation from all family members. Members are made to contribute money to be given to the girl. The *Fiasidi* sit on a seat next to the high priest as they make a "drink offering" at the shrine to notify the deity that the lineage has arrived, while the lineage representatives are on their knees in prayer. Once the consultation has ended, the group departs and then starts preparing the *Fiasidi* for the evening ritual held in the *tagba* (sacred grove).

Part of this money is given to the priest as the family's widow's mite towards the development of the cult. It is believed that the deity rewards family members who make this contribution by blessing them with success in their endeavours. This contribution is also to express the curse-infested family's readiness to financially support the girl at all times for her willingness to be used as a sacrificial lamb to atone for the sin of the whole family.



Plate 8: The procession of a *Fiasidi* with *gatetenuwo* (ritual items) and family members through the Klikor Township  
Source: Fieldwork, 2023

A participant narrated that, the last ceremony with the priest is performed at the *tagba* (sacred grove) by the *Fiasidi*, the male lineage heads, and a few female lineage representatives after sunset. The Adzima ritual specialists and elders described this ritual as the actual moment in which the *Fiasidi* becomes the 'wife of the deity' and signifies the end of the prohibition of the *Fiasidi*'s sexual relations through making drink offerings to the deity. The resident *Fiasidiwo* ran into the shrine with mud and other forms of dirt to smear on the neophyte *Fiasidi*.

The researchers were made to understand that this attitude of the old *Fiasidiwo* is to symbolically express their jealousy over "their husband", the deity marrying a new wife. She is dressed in her usual blue cloth with raffia strands (*si*) around her neck. She carries a load of items prescribed during the first ritual, for this ritual. At this point, the offending lineage members can be considered as *fiawiwo* (children) of the deity. Today, this *gatete* ceremony lasts for two days but the researchers were told that in the olden days, it could last for three months.

### **Flaxoxo Initiation Rite (Purification Rite)**

According to many of the participants, this is the last initiation rite of a *Fiasidi*. "*Flaxoxo*" literally means receiving *fla* (herb of peace). It is also called "*Flanana*", meaning "Giving Fla", in the Klikor Traditional Area. In this context, the term idiomatically means 'freedom', because, by its performance, the *Fiasidi* is now free to enter her family house again and can now marry or remarry if she was already married before

coming for the *Fiasidi* rituals. It is also tantamount to freedom because the rites performed are meant to neutralise or negate the punishment or evil that the deity has administered on the curse-infected family.

*Fla* is also known as "Fafagbe" meaning "the herb of peace". As such it plays an important role in reconciliation ceremonies comparable to the Olive Branch. It is a herb with the botanical name *portulaca oleracea*, used in rituals. It is used in preparing *Flatsi* (ritual water). The ritual water prepared with this herb is always given to patients as a mark of purification or healing. In the same way, it is given to a *Fiasidi* to purify and free her and her family from the bad omen visited on them due to the misdeed of a member of the lineage. In this study, the process by which a *Fiasidi* receives or is given ritual water as a mark of purification is referred to as *Flaxoxo*.

The researchers were informed that its performance is indispensable because without it, the curse visited on the family of the girl still hovers around them and this explains why the *Fiasidi* is still forbidden to enter her family house. On the day of its ritual performance, the family sends to the shrine two bottles of local schnapps and two bottles of foreign schnapps, two white fowls, one white sheep, and anything they wish to add to express their profound gratitude to the high priests and ritual functionaries.

At dawn, the priest and his assistant go to the sacred grove to pray to the deity informing him or her of the ritual. A pot of ritual water is fetched from a sacred pot believed to be always mysteriously filled with water in the grove. *Fla* (herb of peace) is put in the water. The water is carried home by the ritual functionary who makes sure none drops onto the ground on their way home. The belief here is that, if any drops onto the ground, the deity will prevent rain from falling in the town.

Back home, the assistant priest slaughters the two white fowls and the sheep. He uses the chicken to prepare a ritual meal called *Dzenkple*. *Dzenkple* is a corn meal cooked with either coconut or palm oil but without pepper, tomatoes, and salt. Normally, food cooked for the deities is free of these ingredients (pepper, tomatoes, and salt). When asked to explain why the deities eat food without these ingredients, the priests interviewed simply said the deities are not human beings to have the taste for these ingredients. In short, the deities are not sensual. After the preparation, the priest is served with a portion he uses to feed the deity. The rest is shared among those present. However, this is a special holy communion that only those who do not harbour evil against their neighbours are allowed to partake of.

The mutton is also used to prepare another *Dzenkple*. Ingredients like salt, pepper, and tomatoes are used in this one. This meal is simply for festive purposes and is shared among everybody present. Part of the ritual water (*flatsi*) brought from the forest is fetched into a pot and put on fire. The high priest sprinkles the rest of the "flatsifafa" (cold ritual water) on the family members of the girl present saying: "egbe mena mi fla" meaning,

"Today I have given you fla". He then sprinkles it on everybody present saying, "Dagbe neva na mi kataa" meaning, "May prosperity and abundant life come to you all". The hot ritual water (*Flatsidzodzo*) is given to the family members to take home signifying that all is not yet peaceful in their household. (*KLI-A-2, personal communication, July 16, 2023*).

The family is asked to go home and sprinkle the hot ritual water in their family house and to caution all in the family that all is not yet peaceful. Following this, the family is free to return home and follow the priest's instructions. A week later, the *Fiasidi* is sent home in the company of the assistant priest. They go to the house of the *Fiasidi* with the cold ritual water (*Flatsifafa*). Back home, the *Fiasidi* is supervised by the ritual functionary to sprinkle water in all houses belonging to members of the family whilst she says;

Today, my grandfather (Torgbui Adzima) has given us all *fla*. May we have a long and prosperous life? May evil pass over us! (*KLI-A-6, personal communication, July 17, 2023*).

The use of hot water for rituals, signifying evil and cold water, signifying peace or good, and symbolically making good (cold water) negate evil (hot water) is common in Anlo Traditional Religion. For example, during stool festivals (*Zikpuinuwowo*) when stools are ritually bathed, "hot" and "cold" water are used consecutively.

Also, during festivals of the deities (*tronuworwor*) the ritual objects are bathed first in hot water and later in cold water to show that after all the turbulence and vagaries of life, there is always peace. It is also a way of telling the deity to make life as easy as possible for humans as a way of reciprocating the

kind gesture shown towards him/her by humans. With the *Flaxoxo* ritual performed, the neophyte is now a full-fledged *Fiasidi*. Her family is also now free from the curse hanging over them. The *Fiasidi* is also now free to marry but should make sure that the would-be husband marries her from the high priests of the deity and not her biological father.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the researchers recommend that other ritual performances of the *Fiasidi* tradition such as performing libation, wailing wall prayers (*balili*), healing practices, and traditional dance and music forms be explored by other researchers to understand the significance of these ritual performances, shedding light on their symbolic meanings and historical contexts behind each ritual. Further research could be carried out in other ethnic groups in Ghana where the *Troxovi* system (a deity that receives a child) is practised. A classic example is the customary and symbolic marriage between the Ga deity represented by the chief priest Gborbu Wulomo-Shitse and Naa Okromo, a 15-year-old girl in Nungua to examine the cultural significance of the ritual marriage.

## CONCLUSION

The concept of initiation rites represents a fundamental aspect of human culture and societal organization. These rituals, which mark significant transitions in an individual's life, are essential for understanding the dynamics of social structure, identity formation, and the interconnectedness of individuals within a community. The study revealed that three main rituals feature in the initiation of a *Fiasidi* performed by the ritual functionaries of the *Troxovi* shrines in Klikor. These rituals have their significance and symbolic representation within the framework of the *Fiasidi* tradition. *Godedegome rite* represents a series of rituals in which the identity of a *Fiasidi* is confirmed and formally marks the beginning of her affiliation to the Adzima deities and shrines. The *gatete* initiation ceremony signifies the symbolic and ritual "marriage to the deity". *Flaxoxo* rite is the last ritual performed on a *Fiasidi* to purify and free her and her family from the bad omen visited on them due to the misdeed of a member of the lineage. As part of the belief system, *Troxovi* shrines serve a multipurpose function, including protection of the Klikor communities from external evil forces, communication with the living and the ancestors, crime control mechanisms, and above all cultural heritage continuity. The study also indicated that regardless of the many changes that have taken place in the socio-cultural space of Ghana, the indigenous religious modes of crime control and prevention have not changed.

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