

A Study of *Aklama* among the Ewe

By

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This thesis is submitted to the University of Ghana, Legon in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the award of PhD in Museums and Heritage Studies Degree.



September, 2023.

Declaration

I hereby declare that except for references to other people's work which have been duly acknowledged, this thesis is the result of my own research.

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Acknowledgements

Mía Mawu si le dzifo, the Almighty God, my sincere gratitude! *Fafatɔ Akpe!!* I also wish to register my deep appreciation to the Horst Antes Foundation, Germany for funding this doctoral study on *Aklama* among the Ewe. Professors Joachim Sartorius and Kurt von Figura of the Horst Antes Foundation are here mentioned for their commitment to the project. I am equally grateful for the support by the University of Ghana, and the Institute of African Studies (IAS) Legon, in granting me study leave with pay to pursue the study. To Professors Wolfram Laube (University of Bonn), Kojo Amanor and Dzodzi Tsikata (IAS) Legon, I extend my appreciation for introducing me as well as strongly recommending me to my funders for this project. Special thanks are due my dedicated supervisory committee; Professor Kodzo Gavua (Department of Archaeology and Heritage Studies, Legon), Professor Hans Peter Hahn (Goethe University, Frankfurt), and Professor Kodzo Avorgbedor (IAS) Legon for showing me the ropes and patiently guiding me to complete this work successfully.

Now to my Research Assistants Michael Adanuvor (Wusuta), Victus Logah (Anloga), Justice Adzimah (now Togbe Kwasinyi Agyeman V, *Dufia* of Mafi-Adidome), and Joseph Antonio (Keta), and their families, I am truly grateful for their commitment to the success of the project. I certainly could not have done it without their empathy and trust. Also to Sylvanus Klutsey, Stephen Seshie and Togbe Kwasinyi Agyeman V who transcribed the Ewe interviews into English scripts, I say “*akpe na mi kataa*”. Similarly to my informants, especially the priests, priestesses and the carvers of *Aklama* figurines whose experiences and stories give credibility and substance to this study, I acknowledge their enormous contribution with gratitude. I am particularly grateful for their generosity and kindness to share their experiences and knowledge about *Aklama* with me and subsequently, readers of this thesis. Again to Godsway Ayisuxedu from Kuli in Dzodze my heartfelt gratitude for his timely intervention to transport us to the St. Anthony Hospital, Dzodze when Victus and I were involved in a motor accident at Garitsorpe during a reconnaissance trip.

I wish to thank Togbe Agubretu IV (*Dzamafia*, Peki-Blengo), Togbe Kotoku (*Zikpuigatɔ*, Wusuta), Togbe Dra IV (chief of Aveme-Dra), Togbe Gidi-Yiboe II (*Adamefia*, Anfoega), Togbe Kwasinyi Agyeman IV (the late *Dufia* of Mafi-Adidome), Togbe Akpasati Lotsu and his elders (Battor), Togbui Kumassah (*Agbotadua* of the Tay-Agbozo Stool of the *Anlo* State), Togbui Agbeli III (chief of Blekuso) and Dr. Harry Agbanu (Legon) for their exceptional warm reception and keen interest in the study.

Finally to my siblings, Alfred, Bismark, Dacosta, Diana, Emmanuel, Lawrencia, Samuel and Collins, my twin brother, I express appreciation for their words of encouragement, kind thoughts and prayers. To my wife Millicent, and our children Nyametease, Nkonim, Ataa Nhyira and Atta Nyamekye, my heartfelt gratitude for standing with me and making me a *Venatsu*, a favoured father of twins!

Dedication.

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my parents, the late Mr. Kwame Asase and Madam Adwoa Kosei Adum-Atta.



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Abstract

This thesis explores sculptures of Ewe spirituality and spirit-mediums generally referred to as *Aklama*. Based on ethnographic research, it examines local conceptualizations and narratives about *Aklama* across the Volta Region of Ghana. Cognisant of the fact that there are some commonality of traditions as well as significant variability in the indigenous religious practices among different Ewe-speaking groups, the research utilized a trifocal zoning of the region generally along the traditional dialects of the *Ewedome*, *Tongu* and *Anlo*. Adopting snowball sampling of informants within the designated zones, the study however prioritized personal experiences of individuals who engage in traditional religious rites as well as those who make or possessed *Aklama* figurines. Thus, the thesis analyses the figurations and engagements with *Aklama* in the contexts of the indigenous religion, and observances of customary rites. The study establishes that the phenomenon of *Aklama* is significantly undergirded by ascriptions to metaphysical origins of the human being as well as local beliefs about the essence of life and supernatural agency on kinship relations and social responsibilities. Worldviews among the Ewe thus conceptualized as a moral ecology, individuals owe to themselves the responsibility to optimally manifest their preordained destiny, uphold the common good of society and ultimately transition to the world of spirits as veritable ancestors. Doing due diligence to individuals' spiritual agents and relations, *Aklama* enable the avenues for perceptibility and interactions with the otherwise unseen/non-sensible metaphysical agencies. Thus, considerations about *Aklama* are towards ensuring that individuals appropriately engage with requisite spirits or seek the assistance of the supernatural to successfully navigate this life. Particularly so in situations of misfortune, unaccounted illnesses and incessant experiences of blight, *Aklama* figurines serve as media through which humans negotiate with spirits for respite or alignment with benevolence. While similar worldviews and myths observed in the different zones about the universe as created by *Mawu* (the Supreme Being) serve to provide fairly common metaphysical foundation of *Aklama*, their figurations intersect with the peculiarities of individuals' experiences and traditions of substantiating spiritual entities. In this vein, although there are significant similarities across the different zones about local conceptualizations of *Aklama*, there is far more variability both within and across the different zones resulting from experimenting and/or validating material forms in which spirits are manifested. Hence, prioritizing their attested functional efficiency over formal attributes, *Aklama* figurines are better evaluated within their contexts of engagements than any collectivised generalizations. That notwithstanding, the study provides important insights for provenance research on Ewe religious sculptures in general, and promises some prospects for better understating of *Aklama* figurines in museum collections.



1.0.CHAPTER ONE: Is that my *Aklama*? An adventure on Ewe Spirituality and its Material Expressions.

It was on Tuesday the 14th November, 2017, while still on my annual leave, I decided to pass by the office. My assistant at the museum told me a professor from a sister institution had requested to bring his students on an educational tour to our museum at the Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana on Friday the 17th November, at 10 a.m. Considering the importance of such tours to students' experiential learning, he would appreciate if I could come over to carter for the needs of the visit on that day. I obliged.

On the said date, I had gone to the museum gallery by 9 a.m. to wait for my anticipated guests. It was past noon and I thought I had waited long enough for my guests who had not as yet showed up. It was just when I was about to close my little office by the museum gallery that I noticed someone had opened the door to the gallery. Was that my long-anticipated team of visitors? I had thought! To my utmost surprise, however, rather than the group who would never show up, it was one of our fellows; a professor of the Institute of African Studies with a visiting professor from Germany on an exchange programme at the University of Ghana. "Yeah, this is the gentleman you need to talk to" said the fellow to the visiting friend. After a brief tour of the goldweight exhibition at the gallery, the visiting professor engaged me in a conversation about a collection of Ewe religious sculptures in Germany. Already, there had been some art-historical study on the collection and their characterization as *Aklama* sculptures but there was still the need for deeper ethnographic research about them. The question then was, "would you consider the call for that contextual ethnographic study as a project for a master's research?" I was hesitant not only because I already had a master's degree in anthropology but that I am an Akan who actually did not speak the Ewe language. I therefore proposed to connect him with some students of Archaeology, and

also at the Institute of African Studies with bachelor's degrees who speak the Ewe language and might be interested. While he appreciated my proposal, he suggested I sent my resume to him to be forwarded to the Horst Antes Foundation, Germany that owns the collection for consideration to pursue the project for a doctoral degree.

A little over a month later, exactly on my birthday on the 8th January, 2018 I got an email from a fellow of the Horst Antes Foundation that the decision had been made that I carried on the project on *Aklama*! From that time till my admission into the School of Graduate Studies at the University of Ghana later that year in August, I engaged an Ewe teacher to learn some basics of the language. The objective was to make sure I was ready for an adventure into an unfamiliar field as important as the Ewe spirituality and their religious sculptures. To further convince myself about the prospects of my adventure, I deliberately engaged any individual I met in the line of duty who identified him or herself as an Ewe, including two professors who eventually became my supervisors, about what *Aklama* meant. The responses were varied and interesting. Common among the answers, however, were the allusions to the human soul, shadow, fortune, destiny as well as *Dada Se*, the personal guardian-god/goddess of each individual person. As my exploratory adventure into an otherwise unplanned journey unfolded, it would appear quite convincingly that *Aklama* indeed was beckoning at me to which I courageously responded. The fact that I survived a near fatal motor accident and hospitalization with one of my research assistants during a field trip, and again the fact that the research could still be carried through despite the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic are tribute to the calling of *Aklama*; a fulfilment of destiny or, perhaps, my moments of extraordinary favour!

This thesis explores Ewe spiritual figurines and spirit-media generally referred to as *Aklama*. It examines local conceptualizations and narratives about *Aklama* across the Volta Region of Ghana.

1.1. The Ewe.

The Ewe are a transnational language group in West Africa. Ewe-speaking people are found mainly in southeastern part of Ghana, and across southern Togo and Benin¹. Ewe culture has received considerable interest and maintains currency in scholarship on African indigenous customs and spirituality. Beginning from the 19th century, Christian missionaries from Western Europe documented aspects of Ewe customs and traditions mainly as a means to formulate strategies to proselytize (Spieth, [1906] 2011; Jehle [Westermann], 1907; Spiess, 1903; see also Meyer, 2002; Ustorf, 2002). Again, in the ensuing colonial periods², some colonial agents and scholars in similar fashion maintained a general scholarship on Ewe worldviews and social structure of what was considered a “primitive society” and colonial subjects (e.g. Manoukian, 1952; Herskovits; 1939; Spiess, 1922; 1903). Thus, by mid-20th century, ethnographic works on Ewe culture had been done mainly by European missionaries and scholars framed within Eurocentric gaze on Africa with much focus on cosmology, social structure and expressions of spirituality.

A cursory survey on scholarship on Ewe culture in post-independent era indicates that some nuanced ethnographic and contextual studies have been done mostly by scholars who are Ewe-speakers, as well as a few others whose research focus is Ewe culture (e.g. Gavua, 2015; Ganusah, 2008; Abotchie, 1997; Amenumey, 1989; 1986; Nelson-Adjakpey, 1982; Nukunya, [1969] 1990; Fiawoo, 1968; 1959; c.f. Burns, 2017; Greene, 2002; Meyer, 1999; Geurts, 1998). However, much

¹ Ewe identity is quite complex and fluid. There is proliferation of sub-groupings that tend to identify themselves by various denominations such as *Anlo*, *Tongu*, *Agave*, *Ewedome*, *Mina* among others. Again, margins of Ewe sub-groups blur up with neighbouring groups. Thus, Ewe ethnicity and identity are more in connection with the shared Ewe language more than discrete and bounded territory.

² The Ewe have had complex colonial engagements with different European countries including the Danes, Germans, British and the French, and with that the dynamics of geo-political dominance, ethnic identity formation, alliances and enter-ethnic influences with non-Ewe neighbours.

of these works have been attempts at chronicling Ewe histories and identities, and elucidating certain understanding in changes in Ewe customs, kinship systems and traditions. Evidently, there are some exceptions that largely focus on Ewe arts. Yet, the dominant genre of studies on Ewe arts has been folklore, music and dance (e.g. Anyidoho, 1982; Avorgbedor, 1986;1994; 2000; Agawu, 1988; Gbolonyo, 2009; Kuwor, 2013 Burns, 2017), and not as much are devoted to Ewe religious material culture (e.g. Adjei, 2019; Gavua, 2015; Rush, 2010; Lisa, 2007; Drewal, 1996; Amoaku, 1975).

Regarding Ewe religious sculptures, which are of particular interest to this study, a few ethnographic studies have been undertaken (e.g. Falen, 2016; Rush, 2010; 2011; Lovell, 2002; Rosenthal, 1998; Drewal, 1996; Blier, 1995; Gilbert, 1982). However, many of these studies are mainly focused either on the publicly seen ‘protective sculptures’ commonly referred to as *Legba* (e.g. Gilbert, 1982; Cudjoe, 1971) or the indigenous religious practices often characterized as *vodu* cults. While these notable ethnographic studies provide great insights about Ewe spirituality in general, and indigenous shrines in particular, the major focus has been on the rituals and ceremonial performances rather than the material components and their significance (c.f. Montgomery and Vennier, 2017; Wicker and Opoku, 2007; Lovell; 2002; Rosenthal, 1998; Drewal, 1996). Consequently, Ewe sculptural genre predominantly of miniature human figures privately engaged as religious or function-specific material mediums generally referred to as *Aklama* are hardly elaborated. *Aklama*, is often discussed in passing in relation to individual’s destiny, success in a person’s vocation, or as an aspect of rites of passage (e.g. Spieth, [1906] 2011; Agbanu, 2011; Gbolonyo, 2009; Ganusah, 2008; Jehle [Westermann], 1907; Spiess, 1911; 1903; 1902; Ellis, 1890; cf. Nelson-Adjakpey, 2008). Moreover, *Aklama* figurines are said to be very personal and sacred objects dedicated to a person’s spiritual protection and achievements

(Quarcoopome, 2016, p. 37; Nelson-Adjakpey, 2008, pp. 54-56; Agbanu, 1999, pp. 51-53). Quarcoopome reveals that *Aklama* figurines are confined to private altars in chambers, and even designated *Aklama* shrines are rarely displayed in public (Quarcoopome, 2016, p. 37). It is perhaps due to their extremely private engagements that only a few ethnographers and scholars have given *Aklama* figurines some attention (e.g. Quarcoopome, 2003, p. 77; Jehle [Westermann], 1907, pp. 405-414; Spiess, 1922, pp. 143-154). Moreover, scholarly works on art traditions in West African hardly mention Ewe sculptures (e.g. Visonà, Poyner and Cole, 2008; Seiber and Walker, 1987; Asihene, 1978). Thus, except for Cudjoe's study on Ewe sculpture in a museum collection (Cudjoe, 1969), and the publication *Aklama: Helper Spirits of the Ewe and Dangme from the Study Collection of Horst Antes* (Quarcoopome, 2016), very little field research has been done and published in any detail on *Aklama* figurines. Again, in a very recent publication *Ewe: Twin Sculpture of the Ewe* (Scheutz, 2021) which categorizes all Ewe wooden sculptures, including what seemed to be the Yoruba special commemorative figurines for deceased twins, the *Ere Ibeji* as *Venavi* [sic] sculptures, strongly indicates the real dearth of ethnographic information on Ewe religious sculptures (see Scheutz, 2021, pp. 18, 27; cf. Chemeche, 2003; Batulukisi, 2000, p. 25-27; Blier, 1998, pp. 92-94). There is therefore the need to fill in the gaps in present knowledge on the subject and also provide contextual understandings of *Aklama* concepts. This study therefore focuses on *Aklama* figurines also known generally as *Aklama kpakpe*, and their ramifications as part of Ewe religious sculptures that have so far received little scholarly attention. To highlight the production process and design elements of *Aklama* figurines, as well as factors that influence same, the study draws on the advantages of ethnographic field research.

1.2. Study Background

Many of the works on the Ewe predominantly describe or fit the southeastern *Anlo* culture. Moreover, there is a dearth of published information on *Aklama* figurines. Even in the limited available literature in which *Aklama* is mentioned in passing, the phenomenon of *Aklama* has been variously expressed as an Ewe concept (e.g. Van Eck and Sakitey, 2019; Quarcoopome, 2016; 2003; Ganusah, 2008; Nelson-Adjakpey, [1982] 2008; Agbanu, 1999; Greene, 1996; Cudjoe, 1969; Spiess, 1922; 1911; Jehle [Westermann], 1907; Spieth, [1906] 2011; Ellis, 1890). *Aklama* has been conceptualized as the human soul, plurality of interrelated tutelary deities responsible for individuals' destinies, representation of deities, or a genre of Ewe religious sculptures that function as abodes of spirits. Thus, *Aklama* fairly encapsulates Ewe spirituality, religious materiality and symbolisms.

According to Westermann, *Aklama* in Ewe cosmology represents the soul, and has an incorporeal existence prior to the birth of the individual (Jehle [Westermann], 1907, p. 405). He also indicates that there are physical or material representations of *Aklama*. Westermann therefore provides ethno-historical accounts on how some Ewe-speaking communities fashioned physical representations³ of the otherwise metaphysical entity to engage with it as part of the expressions of the indigenous religion (Jehle [Westermann], 1907, p. 407). Drawing on another ethno-historical information by Bernhard Schlegel⁴ (the mid-19th century German missionary to the Eweland), Greene identifies *Aklama* as the “spirit or life soul, also referred to as *gbɔgbɔ*, *dzogbe* or *se*” among the Ewe (Greene, 1996, p. 33; see also, Uzukwu, 2012, p. 158; Meyer, 2012, pp. 93-

³ Westermann noted that material representations of *Aklama* included pointed calabash, clay figures and crudely carved wood.

⁴ The Rev. Bernhard Schlegel, the mid-19th century Bremen missionary, lived among the Ewe in Waya and Anyako to study the Ewe language. He produced the first Ewe Primer, Grammar, Dictionary, Bible history, the life of Christ and translated the four Gospels into Ewe.

94; Meyer, 1994, p. 52; Asamoah, 1986, p. 32). However, Jakob Spieth, a contemporary of Westermann, provides another dimension to the Ewe concept of *Aklama*. He situates *Aklama* within the category of personal gods in the hierarchy of Ewe pantheon of intermediary divinities; personal gods in the order of subordinating deities and spirits associated with the earth and the heavens (Spieth, [1906]2011, p. 50). Thus, *Aklama* is identified as a constituent part of tutelary gods “partly domiciled in *Amedzɔfe*, their spiritual home, and partly live with the people themselves [on earth]”. Those who reside at *Amedzɔfe*, Spieth points out, include “the mother in the spiritual world, the husband and wife of the other world, and especially *gbetsi*, the bequeathed word, of which there are good ones and bad ones”. He specifically refers to “the tutelary gods which live with humans [on earth]” as *Aklama*, “the ever ready helper and blessing bestower” (Spieth, [1906]2011, p. 50). Notably, *Aklama* is presented as a plurality of personal patron deities and/or in conjunction with other spirits including *dzɔgbe*, *kpegbonola* and *ade*⁵ whose task is to protect their wards and enable them to have good success in their life on earth (Spieth, [1906]2011, pp. 50, 537-542; see also Agbanu, 1999, pp. 58). It is clear that Spieth’s descriptions contrast with Westermann’s identification of *Aklama* with a personal soul. While they are not necessarily contradictory, Spieth’s characterization of *Aklama* rather indicates individuals’ interactions with perceived relations in the spirit world, and the contingent fulfilment of personal destiny on the earth. It is noteworthy that Spieth also admits that the concept of *Aklama* could be very ambiguous in different communities where he observed euphemistic expressions of the people’s religious experiences and individuals’ facility with the rich Ewe language. Spieth, for instance, remarks that “one can think of the terms for *gbɔgbɔ* ‘breath’ for spirit, *luwɔ* ‘shadow’ for soul, *kekeli* ‘daylight’ and “that the religious language [of Ewe-speaking communities] have some expressions which are

⁵ It is spelt *adee* by Spieth who identifies it as “the hunter *adee* who lives among the people”, also as *aklama* (Spieth, [1906]2011, p. 541).

so inseparably bond to the traditional practices that they are rendered unusable [or ambiguous]” (Spieth, [1906]2011, p. 41). Consequently, local conceptualizations of *Aklama* seem to reflect such ambiguities which require further interrogations to pry out a meaning in contexts.

On another breath, *Aklama* is expressed to connote personal fate or destiny (Ganusah, 2008; Nelson-Adjakpey, 2008). Here, it is conceptualized as a person’s share of the attributive aspect of *Mawu*, God the Supreme Being. Thus, as fate, *Aklama* is believed to follow a person throughout life in accordance with *Mawu*’s plan for the individual (Nelson-Adjakpey, 2008, p. 31; Jehle [Westermann], 1907, p. 406; Asamoah, 1986, p. 33). In this vein, *Aklama* is a person’s sharing, in a special way, God’s very nature as a guardian spirit that protects the individual as well as ensures his or her success in life. Thus, in Ewe indigenous traditions, *Aklama* is considered as a personal god to the individual whilst on earth (Van Eck and Sakitey, 2019; Agozie, 2000; Gavua, 2000). According to Gavua, *Aklama*, also known as *Dzɔgbese*, is “a positive spirit that is responsible for the birth, death, reincarnation and destiny of each person” (Gavua, 2000, pp. 90-91). Similarly, Agozie identifies *Dzɔgbese*, personal destiny with *Se*. He explains that *Se* is another name for the Supreme Being who is in control of destiny. Thus, *Se* is “the force that controls the things that happen to the [individual]”, and is “embodied in the human person as his/her destiny (*Dzɔgbese*)” (Agozie, 2000, p. 39). Consequently, as the master life-plan for each individual, *Dzɔgbese* differs from a person to another which makes “the worship of *Se*, [the deity in control of destiny] an intensely personal affair” (Agozie, 2000, p. 39).

Similar conceptualization of the uniqueness and individuality of a personal god for each human person in Ewe cosmology is explained by Amoaku although he does not necessarily refer to it as *Aklama* (Amoaku, 1975). According to Amoaku, “every human being is believed to have his or her own god, *dzɔgbe*” [and that] “it is this god that controls the personal life of the individual”

(Amoaku, 1975, p. 151). He further maintains that “if the *dzogbe* is offended and angry, it may leave the body [of the person], in which case the individual is no longer in touch with the invisible world, and may die, if the god is not appeased in time” (Amoaku, 1975, p. 151). Again, if an individual’s habits and mannerisms are largely not in line with common norms and practices of the society, it is attributed to the nature of the person’s *dzogbe* which needs to be consulted through divination and appropriately placated for desirable transformation in the person’s life (Amoaku, 1975, pp. 151-152). This implies that by the agency of *dzogbe*, the human person relates as well as participates in the invisible world of spirits. Thus, Amoaku contends that in Ewe beliefs “it is considered most unwise for anyone to offend his *dzogbe*”. Hence, in most instances, individuals are conscious about the need to appropriately engage with their *Aklama* usually by means of observing certain rites and prohibitions (e.g. Ganusah, 2008). However, the most common means by which individuals engage with *Aklama* as the embodiment of destiny or a personal god is through personal devotions where “special prayers with promises of animal sacrifices or other items are made periodically by individuals to their *Aklama* in order to solicit their blessings and ensure success in life” (Gavua, 2000, p. 91).

It is evident that the means of engagement with *Aklama* have implications for representing the personal god of one’s destiny, in a medium for example, as well as focalizing it at a place to facilitate the offerings and supplications for blessings (Nelson-Adjakpey, 2008, pp. 55-56). However, Gbolonyo differentiates *Aklama* from notions of destiny or personal god. He points out that, “*Aklama* is a part of extra powers that an individual is endowed in addition to his or her destiny, [the life-plan] at the departure from *Dzofe*, the spiritual home of human origin, to the physical world” (Gbolonyo, 2009, pp. 244-246; c.f. Asamoah, 1986, p. 32-33). *Aklama* is therefore identified as fortune; an invisible gift and a guardian spirit from God to help the individual in all

of life's pursuits (e.g. Van Eck and Sakitey, 2019; Nelson-Adjakpey, 2008; Fiawoo, 1959). In this vein, *Aklama* is not essentially the destiny or the metaphysical blueprint of what a person is to become on earth, but a guardian spirit that situates a person within paths to success if one acknowledges it.

From these cosmological explanations, *Aklama* could fairly be conceived of as a spiritual component of the human; an indwelling or a companion spirit that shapes a person's personality and guards his/her destiny as an individual on the earth. Thus, serving as a tutelary spirit, *Aklama* is acknowledged in some customary rites and may be materially represented in sculptural forms for example. In this vein, Quarcoopome from the perspective of art-history provides a dualistic conceptualization of *Aklama* (Quarcoopome, 2016, see also Quarcoopome, 2003). He describes *Aklama* as a guardian spirit and a medium for function-specific deities. Implying *Aklama* as a material medium, and abode for spiritual entities, he asserts that *Aklama* "provides a point of visible contact with the owner's guardian spirit [which is] a spirit force that dwells outside and yet is inextricable from its owner" (Quarcoopome, 2003, p. 77). Gbolonyo's assertion that "[i]n indigenous Ewe society some individuals provide sculpture (carving) as physical representation of otherwise a metaphysical entity" (Gbolonyo, 2009, p. 245) provides an explanation to the implied dualistic quality of *Aklama* (c.f. Pese-Kumah, 1991, pp. 13-27; Quarcoopome, 2003, p. 77). This indicates that *Aklama* as a concept has both metaphysical and substantive qualities. This is corroborated by Westermann in his ethno-historical account on the Ewe-speaking people that "the usual symbol of *Aklama* is the *Aklama kpakpa* [sic], the carved *Aklama* [which is] a roughly carved figure in human shape" (Jehle [Westermann], 1907, p. 405; c.f. Gbolonyo, 2009, pp. 245-246; Cudjoe, 1969, p. 50).

In sum, it is evident that as a metaphysical concept, *Aklama* is variably expressed in the belief systems of the Ewe in ways to represent the *Dzɔgbɛ/Dzɔgbese* or the *Se* as the god of personal destiny, or the content of a person's destiny, the life-plan from *Mawu* the Supreme Creator, or better still as helper-spirits to guide a person into fortune. Accordingly, *Aklama* figurines reflect broader worldviews among the Ewe-speaking people (Spieth, [1906]2011). Thus, as Quarcoopome aptly suggests, that “[t]o the extent that *Aklama* is inextricably linked to individual spirituality and actions, any art-historical [and indeed anthropological] analysis of the sculptures must hinge on a thorough understanding of the indigenous religious beliefs that underpin their creation and use” (Quarcoopome, 2016, p. 47), there is the need for ethnographic research on *Aklama* figurines. This study therefore provides ethnographic information on *Aklama* figurines, and fosters a deeper understanding of the spiritual/religious contexts for their production, circulation and use among the Ewe in the Volta Region of Ghana.

1.3. Aim and Objectives of Study.

Aklama is conceptualized in various ways, including representing an individual's destiny, fate, soul or as abode for spiritual entities. This concept forms an integral yet understudied aspect of indigenous Ewe spirituality and cosmology. Therefore, the aim of this study is to deepen understanding of Ewe spirituality and religious sculptures by exploring the composition, variability and meanings of *Aklama* figurines and associated practices among the Ewe people in Ghana.

The specific objectives of this study were to:

- a) Explore local conceptualizations of *Aklama*.
- b) Identify *Aklama* symbolisms.
- c) Explore processes by which *Aklama* figurines are made and used.
- d) Investigate the significance of *Aklama* iconographies and iconologies (i.e. the verbal and visual language) to a community.

1.4. Research Questions.

In keeping with the above stated research objectives, this study has sought to answer the following research questions:

- i) How is *Aklama* conceptualized in local Ewe worldviews?
- ii) How is *Aklama* characterized and/or represented?
- iii) Who make(s) *Aklama* figurines? When and why are they made?
- iv) What do *Aklama* figurines signify?

1.5. Methodological Approaches.

The Volta Region has both cosmopolitan and rural characteristics. Therefore, this study acknowledges that Ewe communities are not homogenous. Apparent complexities in demographic features of the Volta Region include not only different forms of cultural expressions but also influences from different faith traditions especially Christianity and Islam. As indicated by Greene, for example, Ewe identities have been shaped significantly by complex socio-political processes especially from 1600 (Greene, 1996, pp. 12-13). Aware of this plurality of Ewe ethnic constructs and identities, attention is however focused on fairly shared traditional beliefs, rituals, and customs that could conveniently be characterised as indigenous. According to Cox, notable characteristics

of indigenous societies include significant emphasis on kinship relations, ancestorship as well as an exclusive identification with a specific geographical space (e.g. Cox 2013, p. 11). Thus, the major source of information for the study is generated from ethnographic fieldwork particularly among adherents of the indigenous religion in which *Aklama* figurines are actively engaged.

Methodologically, the study utilized data triangulation (e.g. Dzokoto, 2020; Gosden, 2004; Vansina, 1985), and interpretive theoretical frameworks focused on relationships between materiality and indigenous worldviews (e.g. Houtman and Meyer, 2012). By reviewing and analyzing available archival data and literature (e.g. Greenblatt, 1999), the data triangulation approach adopted for this study includes intertextual synchrony of information on the phenomenon of *Aklama* in addition to ethnographic information gathered through qualitative research methods. Presented as an eclectic narrative, oral data including personal stories, biographical histories and oral traditions generated through fieldwork are processed as ‘text’ (e.g. Vansina, 1985; Mammatta, 1976; Adali-Mortty, 1965; Awoonor-Williams, 1965) and synthesized with available documented information. Thus, participatory observations (e.g. Spradley, 2016; Sewell, 1997; Jorgensen, 1989), in-depth interviews with key informants and focus group discussions (Monstakas, 1994), were the data collection strategies for information on *Aklama* figurines in their contexts of procurement, use and decommissioning. Accordingly, local conceptualizations of *Aklama*, ritual protocols associated with the production and use of the figurines and their appropriation into shrines (both private and communal) were documented.

1.5.1. Data Collection Methods.

For intra-local variability in *Aklama* representations, and assessments of worldviews among the Ewe that frame the use of *Aklama* figurines, the study employed reconnaissance surveys and trifocal ethnographic field research across the Midwest, Southwestern and Southeastern dialects zones of the Volta Region of Ghana⁶. Foreshadowing the reconnaissance survey, however, was the review of literature on Ewe worldviews, as well as explorations on general literature on material culture as a tool to enable deeper conceptualizations of *Aklama* and their materiality.

To test my research instrumentations and strategies for data collection, I was involved in the January 2020 field school for final-year undergraduates, and graduate students of the Department of Archaeology and Heritage Studies at Peki in the Volta region. The Peki experience was quite an eye-opener. I observed that people's experiences and knowledge about *Aklama* varied remarkably. Notably, it was the aged and the very old respondents who identified *Aklama* as connoting anything more than its common association with 'good-luck' which happens to a person in otherwise calamitous situations. Again, noted for a significant influence of Christianity on their religious outlook, I noticed that many people in Peki generally shy away from any association with religious mediums. Thus, the common response to my plodding for evidence of *Aklama* figurines was "we the *Ewedome* do not do *atikpaka*" implying that people in Peki did not possess 'idol images'⁷. Consequently, the reconnaissance surveys were undertaken in March and June 2020 as preliminary fieldstrips to the various demarcated zones across the Volta Region to establish

⁶ The zoning was based on the common traditional grouping of the Volta Region into the Northern, Midwest *Ewedome*, and the Southern *Tongu* and *Anlo* (see Nukunya, 2016, pp. 308-310).

⁷ Examples of this popular view in Peki that the *Ewedome* are 'too Christian' to meddle in 'idolatry' are evident in key informants' interviews with Dadaga Ajoa Bansah, a 93 year-old woman on 12/01/2020, and Togbe Agubretu IV, the *Dzamafia* (a divisional chief) of Peki-Blengo, on 13/01/2020.

rapport⁸ and to assess the prospects of getting individuals associated with *Aklama* figurines who might participate in the research. More importantly, the preliminary fieldtrips were to assess the extent to which contextual information on the otherwise privately engaged *Aklama* figurines could be accessed⁹. The ultimate goal was therefore to evaluate the feasibility and prospects of the study on *Aklama*, and to particularly concretize the research design for the substantive ethnographic fieldwork.

The preliminary fieldtrips indicated some positive prospects for the study as respondents expressed much willingness to participate in the study. However, except for two respondents who registered their willingness to grant access to information about their personal shrines with their material ensembles including what seemed to be *Aklama* figurines, many of the over thirty sampled respondents expressed some kind of cautious restraint. It was my haunch that some of them might have *Aklama* figurines themselves, or at least they knew individuals who possessed them, but they seemed to want to know more about me and more so about my actual intentions. Thus, familiarizing myself more with the people and becoming aware of particular cultural norms of the various zones, I took cognizance of local protocols that needed to be observed. In each of the zones visited, I observed the basic protocol of visiting the traditional leadership to be introduced and to inform them about my objective. In each of those visits, I stayed with a family in the community and also had, as my research assistant, a person from the community.

⁸ I had piloted with my research instruments on a research project at Peki in January 2020 under the supervision of my principal supervisor. The reconnaissance surveys were undertaken in March and June 2020 in the Midwest and Southern Volta respectively as further experiments on the usefulness and applicability of the research instruments. See, Philip Owusu, *Experiential Learning Report, 2020* submitted to the Graduate Committee, Department of Archaeology and Heritage Studies.

⁹ This was particularly instructive because previous attempts on ethnographic studies on the subject of *Aklama/Se* figurines in the 1970s by Dzagbe Cudjoe, for instance, had not been very successful (see GMMB Annual Report 1970).

To create room for some interactions and to get more ideas about the community, I asked to share at least my host-family's dinner where I had the opportunity to discuss my observations. By this means, with the insights from my hosts, potential barriers to the project that needed to be carefully negotiated for the success of my subsequent fieldwork in the areas within the different zones were also taken into consideration. Again, in order to avoid infraction of local norms, and intrusion of individuals' privacy, clearance was sought from the Ethics Committee for Humanities Research, University of Ghana, to do due diligence to ethical protocol for the fieldwork¹⁰. The objectives of the research as well as modalities for recruiting informants clearly outlined in the document were explained to all participants. This was done to ensure that potential informants understood the objectives of the study, and accordingly gave their consent to participate in the research before we could proceed. The ethical clearance also respected the rights and liberties of informants to withdraw their participation at any point in the course of the study if they felt it necessary. For their time, the ethical clearance also allowed moderate compensation in cash and in kind gestures to the informants.

Subsequent to the ethnographic reconnaissance surveys, extensive fieldwork was pursued at each of the three zones. Purposive sampling with snowballing approach was used to recruit informants from various towns and villages in each zone. Employing purposive sampling, the criteria for inclusion favored individuals and groups such as makers and owners of 'potent' *Aklama* figurines¹¹ as well as certain traditional leadership and adepts who are customarily related to the subject of *Aklama*. Thus, designated stool-fathers, titled regal stewards, priests and priestess of the

¹⁰ I was issued Ethical Clearance Certificate No. ECH 017/20-21 for the study. Copies of the certificate were given to informants with the consent form in which the aim of the study is clearly spelled out. Only Individuals who endorsed the consent forms were recruited for the study.

¹¹ *Aklama* figurines that were in the possession of owners who had been initiated with the appropriate rites to establish them as personal or household shrine.

indigenous religion, spiritualists/herbalists and carvers of *Aklama* figurines constitute the key informants of the study. An average of an hour in-depth semi-structured interviews were held with the informants at convenient places of their choosing. The interviews were therefore undertaken at the residences, shrines and workshops of informants. In a few instances however, the interviews were done during the observance of rites and ritual performances. Again, in some cases the interviews were complemented by other persons that an informant had invited to witness the process or to contribute to the discussions on *Aklama*. Where two persons were thus engaged, it was considered as complementary discussion. Similarly, in a few situations where three or more persons were involved, per the invitation of an informant to contribute to the discussion, the interview sessions were considered as focus group discussions. However, in both designated complementary and focus group discussions, the interview was recorded as one session in connection with the person who signed the consent form as the key informant. Where necessary, different interview sessions were held with a particular informant.

All interviews were audio recorded and where permitted, photos and short videos were also done on *Aklama* figurines in the contexts of personal altars, household shrines and other sacred spaces. In cases where respondents instructed that they did not want their shrines and their elements to be photographed, or their personal pictures be circulated, such were adhered to and only audio-recordings of the interviews were done. Similarly, prospective informants who registered their disinterest in participating in the research either outrightly or subtly by evading scheduled appointments for interviews were not recruited although efforts were made to explain the objective of the research and why they were needed to participate.

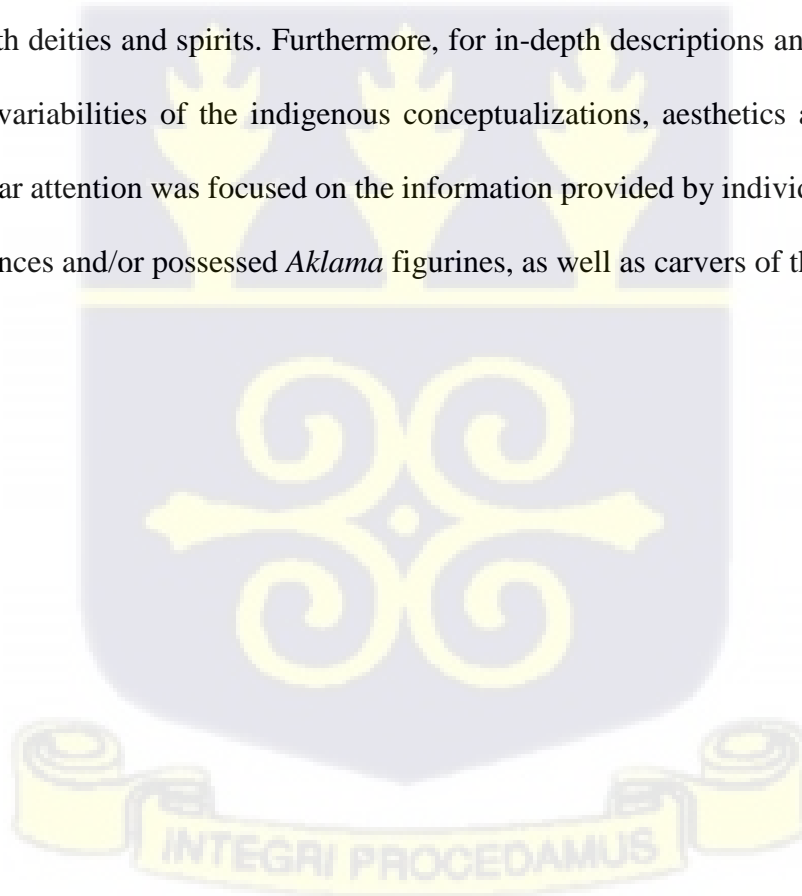
In the Midwest Volta, the fieldwork was undertaken in September and October, 2020 covering the Kpando Municipality, North and South Dayi Districts of the Volta Region. Towns

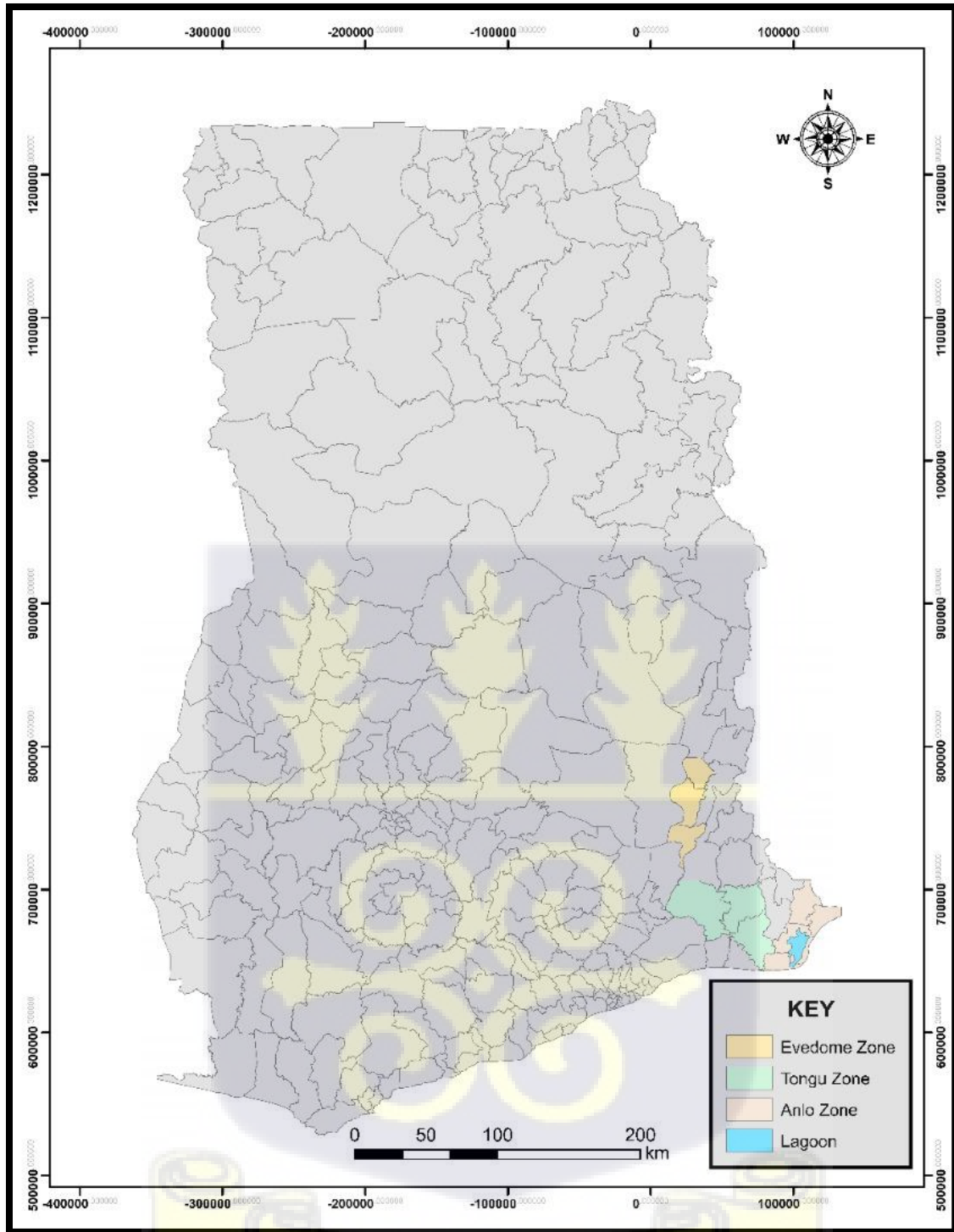
and villages from which informants were recruited included Wusuta, Vakpo, Tsrukpe, Anfoega, Awate, Aveme and Kpando. Similarly, in the southern Volta *Tongu* and *Anlo* Zones, fieldworks were undertaken in November 2020, March and April, 2021. Towns and villages covered in the *Tongu* Zone included Mafi-Adidome, Mafi-Kumasi and adjoining Tsati and Asiekpe villages in the Central and South Tongu Districts. Also covered were Battor, Mepe, and Aveyime towns in the North Tongu District across the Volta River. In the designated *Anlo* Zone towns in which informants were engaged included Anloga, Attito, Woe, Vui, Tegbi, Dzelukope, Klikor-Agbozume, Blekuso, and Dzodze.

Whilst in these communities, I partook in a number of ceremonies and local customs that provided insights to the subject of *Aklama* among the people. These included regal and shrine protocols especially undertaken through the pouring of libation in acknowledgments of the gods and ancestors, sessions of *Kuxaxa* rites,¹² funerals, a ceremony for twins, and annual celebrations by priests and priestesses. I also observed demonstrational sessions of oracular divination and individuals' engagements with their *Aklama* mediums or figurines. As a sympathetic participant in those activities, the firsthand experience enabled me to appreciate varied local conceptualizations of *Aklama* as well as elicit contextual meanings of *Aklama* figurations and symbols. Following up on the personal observations of those ceremonies and rites, further clarity and insights were sought from subsequent interactions with informants.

¹² This is a gathering where the elders of the community engage with the immediate family members of the deceased to discuss issues concerning the manner of death and appropriate burial of the dead. This was particularly witnessed in Wusuta, Vakpo and Anfoega towns in the Midwest Volta.

From the three designated zones, scores of individuals were thus engaged for a broader appraisal of the indigenous conceptualizations of *Aklama*. Regarding the processing of the field data, however, recurrent themes and focused information on *Aklama* were generated from a total of 86 interview sessions comprising of 20 selected Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) from the reconnaissance surveys, and 60 KIIs from the fieldwork, and 6 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). The interviews were transcribed for content analysis to identify common themes, parallels and similarities as well as contrasting experiences of the informants. Consequently, the identified themes and comparable elements provided the iconographic variables for the representations and semiology of the otherwise metaphysical entity of *Aklama* in ways possible for perceptual engagements with deities and spirits. Furthermore, for in-depth descriptions and analysis of intra and inter-zonal variabilities of the indigenous conceptualizations, aesthetics and figurations of *Aklama*, particular attention was focused on the information provided by individuals who had had personal experiences and/or possessed *Aklama* figurines, as well as carvers of the figurines.





Map 1. Zoning of the Study Area.

1.6. Theoretical Orientations.

Particularly among the adherents of the indigenous religion in Ewe-speaking communities, notions of *Aklama* represent a major consideration for both social engagements and religious rites (Nelson-Adjakpey, 2008, pp. 44, 55-57; Ganusah, 2008, pp. 25-28). In this vein, the search for security for the self and harmony in indigenous Ewe societies are considered a sacred responsibility that is negotiated through certain cultural practices (e.g. Agbanu, 2011; Dogbe, 1980; Opoku, 1978). Thus, the theoretical framework for this study is situated in the broader contexts of indigenous Ewe worldviews and their attendant religious practices and customs. For that, a discussion on religion is considered instrumental to understanding those aspects of Ewe culture and traditions that attempt to deal with issues of spirituality, and conceptualizations of productive life and harmonious social living. The quest to unravel puzzling events in personal and communal lives, and to securing desirable conditions for social living are framed within the concepts of religion and worldviews.

Consequently, the study draws on the triangulation of theories of Moral Ecology (Brinkmann, 2004; Akyeampong, 2001; Hertzke, 1998; and Bella et al. 1985) and Material Culture (Hahn, 2018; Gavua, 2015; Renfrew, 2012; Tilley, 2007; and Ferme, 2001; Arnoldi, Geary and Cole, 1996) as two-throng approach to deal with the metaphysical and material expressions of the phenomenon of *Aklama*. This is an effort to duly acknowledge similarities as well as diversities in *Aklama* concepts and associated symbolisms within different traditional zones, and across the Volta Region. Thus, particular insights are drawn from perspectives on materiality of religion, and explore processes by which indigenous worldviews and beliefs are constructed and/or objectified in visual or material forms (e.g. Abraham, 2015; Kedzierska Manzon, 2013; Houtman and Meyer, 2012; and Insoll, 2011; Drewal, 1996; 1988).

Additionally, to foster deeper understanding of the indigenous aesthetics and the religious associations of *Aklama* figurines, the discussions are grounded in the concepts of harmony in the construct of community and individuals' fulfilment (Assimeng, 2010; Dube, 2006; Eggen, 2002; Dickson, 1984; Dogbe, 1980). Thus, analogies are drawn from African indigenous beliefs and practices towards divinities in the search for balance in personal life and harmony in society (e.g. Insoll, 2007; Gavua, 2000; Geshiere, 1997; Wiredu, 1996; Assimeng, 1989; 1976; Bravmann, 1983; Duerden, 1975; Parrinder, 1969; Field, 1960).

1.6.1. African Religion and Culture.

While as yet the subjects of religion and culture continue to elude discrete and conclusive definitions, some basic differentiations between the two phenomena are quite suggestive. As Nukunya points out succinctly, religion connotes “beliefs and practices associated with the supernatural” (Nukunya, 2016, p. 69). Thus, the basic conceptualization of religion is the acknowledgement of transcendence in the affairs of human life, and a sense of community that include humans and supernatural phenomena—ancestors and spirits (Dube, 2006; Megesa, 1997; Opoku, 1978). Thus, in the words of Mbiti, “the African is notoriously religious” (Mbiti, [1969] 1990, p. 1). This presupposition that religion permeates every aspect of the African life has been challenged as rather an exaggeration (e.g. Kudadjie, 1973). However, it cannot be said about indigenous African societies to be without religion (Munyaka and Motlhabi, 2009). The sense of the supernatural are particularly real as there are still many things that elude common sense and empirical rationality. This, however, does not make religion irrational although conceptualizations of the supernatural are in many ways non-rational (Frazer, 1980). This is arguably not peculiar to Africa and its cultures such as the Ewe.

To invoke E.B. Tylor's classical definition of culture as "the complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, custom, and any other capabilities acquired by man as a member of society" (Tylor, 1871, p. 1), culture on the other hand, represents the totality of the life-ways of a people including the learned and shared patterns of life. Thus, culture serves mainly as a means of adaptation and survival (Wagner, 1981). Perhaps it is fair to surmise that in many African societies, religion and culture may be the two sides of the same coin as they interact to give meaning to life (Munyaka and Motlhabi, 2009; Megesa, 1997). However, the interactions and/or the correlations between religion and culture are dynamic and thus vary significantly both in space and through time (e.g. Gavua, 2015). Serving the core function of adaptation and survival, it is possible that a culture may exist without a significant consideration for religion as individuals realize more and more control over their affairs of life. On the contrary, the same cannot be said about religion; that is to say that without culture there could not be a religion. Culture therefore provides not only the necessary condition but also sufficiently conditions religious traditions (e.g. Hosbawn and Ranger, 1993). Admittedly, culture and religion are closely related, although they do not represent the same thing. Hence, the quintessential elements of religion such as beliefs about the universe and supernatural phenomena; ritual expressions; and the performances of rites are culturally engendered and are therefore traditional. It is by such conceptualizations that a culture constructs and develops its religious outlook and customary practices which in many ways constitute its worldview; the frame of reference to existence and reality (Megesa, 1997). According to Amoaku, for instance, worldview as frame of reference connotes:

attitudes necessarily acquired as the direct result of recognition and adoption as facts beyond the need for proof that: a) the invisible World of Spirit, Man and the Visible World of Nature, form an indivisible unit; b) the Visible World of Nature is the reflection of the real Invisible World of Spirit, [. . .]; c) Man is as

much an offspring of the Visible World of Nature as he is of the Invisible World of Spirit; d) there is no such thing as “dead” or “lifeless” matter; and e) because Man contains within himself portions of both the World of Spirit and of Nature, he is, therefore, able to function effectively in either World, but is responsible and accountable to both Worlds (Amoaku, 1975, p. 62).

Paradoxically, while culture as adaptive strategy seems to be more resolutely expressed than religion in westernised societies, it appears that in most indigenous societies the vital root of culture is religious outlook and belief traditions (e.g. Abraham, 2015; Atiemo, 2013; Dube, 2009; Megesa, 1997). Thus, as religious outlooks and traditions get transformed by new encounters and experienced realities, the culture is equally impacted (Wagner, 1981). This point is relevant in expressing the fact that *Aklama*, as an indigenous concept, bothers on such dynamic relations between culture and religious outlooks.

1.6.2. Worldviews and Materiality.

The well-spring of cultural expressions are beliefs and worldviews. Particularly among indigenous societies, various forms of art represent ideals anchored in beliefs and practices (Atiemo, 2013, p. 66; Appiah, 1996, p. 22). Arguably, however, cultural expressions as evident in performance, verbal and visual engagements, are appropriated or approved as social value largely on their intended functions (Appiah, 1996, p. 22). In this, material elements of the environment, in particular, influence the constructions of cultural ideals and also provide the means to negotiate social identities and significance (e.g. Hahn, 2022, pp. 7-9; Latour 2005, pp. 106-109; Godsen, 2004, pp. 33-40; Drewal, 1996, pp. 308-309; Douglass, 1992). As Tilley points out, any artefact produced by humans is material culture. It may include landscape, the human body, plants and animals that have had human influences (Tilley, 2006a). Also, Drewal asserts that “a people’s material culture consists of all objects used by them” (Drewal, 1996, p. 309). Thus, material culture

expresses object-subject relations between things and humans that underlie our understanding of human conditions in the world in which the identities of things and humans are mutually entangled. It is in such contexts that materiality expresses the capacity of objects or materials as vital agents with humans in cultural processes (e.g. Hahn, 2018, p. 6; Morgan, 2018, p. 20; Wynn-Jones, 2015, p. 66; Knappett, 2011; pp. 5-8; Latour, 2005, pp.33-36).

Again, the substantive properties or self-referential qualities of things serve to enable or evoke social interactions (Knappett, 2004). Thus, stressing on objects as active ‘actors’ in social interactions and associations, Latour, for instance, argues that “anything that does modify a state of affairs [in a given group or culture] by making a difference is an actor, or if it has no figuration yet, is an actant” (Latour, 2005, p. 71). As actants, things become important co-subjects with humans in social interactions and identity expressions. Thus, subjectification of things, resonate with the idea that material objects have the capacity to “determine and serve as a backdrop for human actions [. . .]” as Latour points out it (Latour, 2005, p. 72). It could therefore be argued that negotiations for meaning and significance in communal life are enabled or facilitated by materiality (Tilley, 2006a, p. 4; Gosden, 2004, pp. 34-37; Knappett, 2004, p. 46). In ethnographies of material culture, although emphases are laid on materiality, significant approaches include strands of structuralism, practice, and structuration perspectives (e.g. Hahn, 2018; Tilley, 2013; Hicks and Beaudry, 2010). For instance, from structuralist stand points, material culture is considered as having the facility to communicate meanings like language does. The silent grammar of artefacts with their social significance are thus explored in such approaches. In a similar vein, objects are considered to have a kind of autonomy, an intrinsic essence that helps in creating with them social categories and expressions (e.g. Miller, 1998). This implies a materiality of things as

representational forms characterized by multidimensional perceptual qualities that could be experienced in many ways through the senses.

Also, from the perspectives of practice, things are objectified and assigned agency (e.g. Renfrew, 2012). As pointed out by Tilley, objectification, considered in the most general way, “is a concept to overcome the dualism [. . .] in subject and object regarded as utterly different and opposed entities” (Tilley, 2006b, p.61). He maintains that, “personal, social and cultural identity is embodied in our persons and objectified in our things” (Tilley, 2006b, p.61). Here, the idea is expressed that in the process of making things, people make themselves. Thus, material things are not passive but rather play a fundamental part in the creation and establishment of forms of sociality in which objects evoke thoughts and enact actions (e.g. Houtman and Meyer 2012; Tilley, 2006b; Drewal, 1996).

Furthermore, through structuration, shared-knowledge and actions by individual agents foster a frame of social and material contexts within which layers of meanings are negotiated and established (Douglass and Isherwood, 1996). Thus, things may be understood and interpreted in multiple ways from the points of view of the manufacturer, social audience and users for example (Knappett, 2004). In this regard, material things are characterized with “thick signification” that permit contrasting and even contradictory meanings in different contexts of experiences and interpretations (e.g. Hahn, 2022).

While there are no doubt considerable approaches to material culture, Hahn, contends that cultural ecological approaches that privilege materiality as important component of cultural process promise better insights about material things (Hahn, 2018, p. 6). Hence, the contexts of engagements with *Aklama* figurines are given critical consideration to establish their cultural and

situational embeddedness in Ewe cosmologies. This is an attempt to highlight meanings and significance of *Aklama* figurines and how they vary within and across the different designated zones of the study.

In Ewe worldviews about the environment with perceived spiritual character or associated supernatural, objects serve vital mediatory roles in the interactions among human beings, and between humans and supernatural entities (e.g. Agbanu, 2011, p. 99). In this vein, things are acknowledged as material symbols of value. However, given the multi-dimensional affordance of materiality (Latour, 2005, pp. 71-72), and potentially varied symbolic values of objects, meanings of a particular object may change in different contexts as they may serve different purposes in various social interactions (Morgan, 2018; Drewal, 1988; Seiber and Walker, 1987). Similarly, as Miller points out, artifacts have multiple domains for expressing significance and thus, ethnographic observation should seek for ways to carefully figure out “what people actually do and in particular, what they do with things” (Miller, 1998, p. 12; see also Knappett, 2004, p. 48).

Furthermore, from the standpoint that materiality is evocative, the procuring process of *Aklama* figurines are observed to explore the kinds of meanings they lend themselves to, and how different forms are ascribed cultural significance by their makers and users. In this light, the material properties of the figurines as well as the networks and associations they form with other things in the contexts of their religious engagements are assessed (e.g. Knappett, 2011). The assemblages and configurations of *Aklama* figurines in sacred spaces and altars are, as much as possible, explored to identify how they enact religious devotions as well as compel some social actions (e.g. Morgan, 2018). Also, contextual information about *Aklama* figurines and their assemblages are considered as a means for better understanding of particular events or moments in the lives of their possessors (e.g. Kedzierska Manzon, 2013; Stahl, 2010; Hoskins, 1998).

Premised on the understating that material things do not only shape social life, but are themselves social, Stahl, for instance, draws our attention to “material histories” and biographical approaches to studying material culture. In other words, personal stories of individuals who own *Aklama* figurines as devotional mediums provide insights about their significance in connection with specific moments as well as evolving interactions with the metaphysical entities they represent. These personal narratives enable the rare opportunity provided by *Aklama* figurines and their contextual associates as biographical objects embodying trajectories of both personal and shared experiences (e.g. Kedzierska Manzon, 2013, pp. 1127-1130; Stahl, 2010, p. 155). This particularly highlights individual *Aklama* figurine as a container of story-telling as well as object of memory in ways that overcome logocentric categorizations.

This study therefore subscribes to the viewpoint that material symbols constitute the foundations on which institutional facts expressed as social structure and values are built. Hence, new meanings of the world are generated in the ever on-going process of engaging with the environment. *Aklama* figurines are therefore analyzed and discussed within conceptual frameworks of materiality; the agency of things or objects (Morgan, 2018; Kedzierska-Manzon, 2013; Tilley, 2006b; Renfrew, 2012; Knappett, 2011; Hicks, 2010). The figurines are interpreted as a part of the materiality of religious rites and practices among the Ewe.

I argue that the material representations and ritual symbolisms in the Ewe material culture actively enable subjective appreciations and routine engagements with the otherwise supernatural entities considered to be vitally involved in the life of the people and their successes. Expressing the Ewe conception of the spirit-world as materially objectified, Eggen remarks that, “materiality [of divinity] in fact, stands for this realms independence; the world of deities, ancestors and totemic prescripts is a coherent reality in its own right” (Eggen, 2002, p. 352). He further points out that

the functional impact of Ewe materiality of divinity on social issues is evident, and therefore argues that “a symbol’s function must be sought from the internal logic of their imagery systems, which uses inputs from daily experiences and life events” (Eggen, 2002, p. 352).

Thus, through *Aklama* figurines, spiritual entities are materially substantivized. As described in subsequent chapters, *Aklama* figurines provide memetic and metaphorical tropes to communicate social norms and values significant for balance and harmony in Ewe traditions (e.g. Montgomery and Vannier, 2017, pp. 9-10; Dogbe, 1980, pp. 783; c.f. Tilley, 2006, pp. 60-73; Ferme, 2001, pp. 9-11).

1.7. *Aklama* and the Business of Life in Ewe Cosmologies.

In Ewe worldviews, life on earth is like a business venture; individuals are expected to play some specific roles of which they are accountable and accordingly rewarded (Friedson, 2009, p. 104; Eggen, 2002, pp. 354-356). In that cosmological frame, there is the belief in *Mawu*, the Supreme Creator, coupled with the existence of intermediary spirits considered to be associated with the natural landscape such as the mountains, rivers, trees and spirits of the dead (e.g. Gavua, 2015, pp. 142-143; Dogbe, 1980, p. 786). Related to the Supreme Being and the other divinities are human beings considered to be uniquely characterized by immortal souls/destinies and bound by moral prerequisites (e.g. Agorsah, 2010, p. 7; Nukunya, [1969] 1990, pp. 47-48). Thus, the acknowledgment of a Supreme Creator, a belief about the sanctity of human life and reverence for perceived supernatural entities associated with nature, provide Ewe culture the bases for strong norms and customs that guide individuals’ life and social relations. Notably, this conforms to cultural practices and belief systems shared by indigenous cultures in many African societies where individuals are committed to ensuring social harmony through adherence to common norms

and customary practices towards the supernatural (Oduyoye, 2004, p. 48; Gyekye, 1997, pp. 228-229; Dickson, 1984, p. 62).

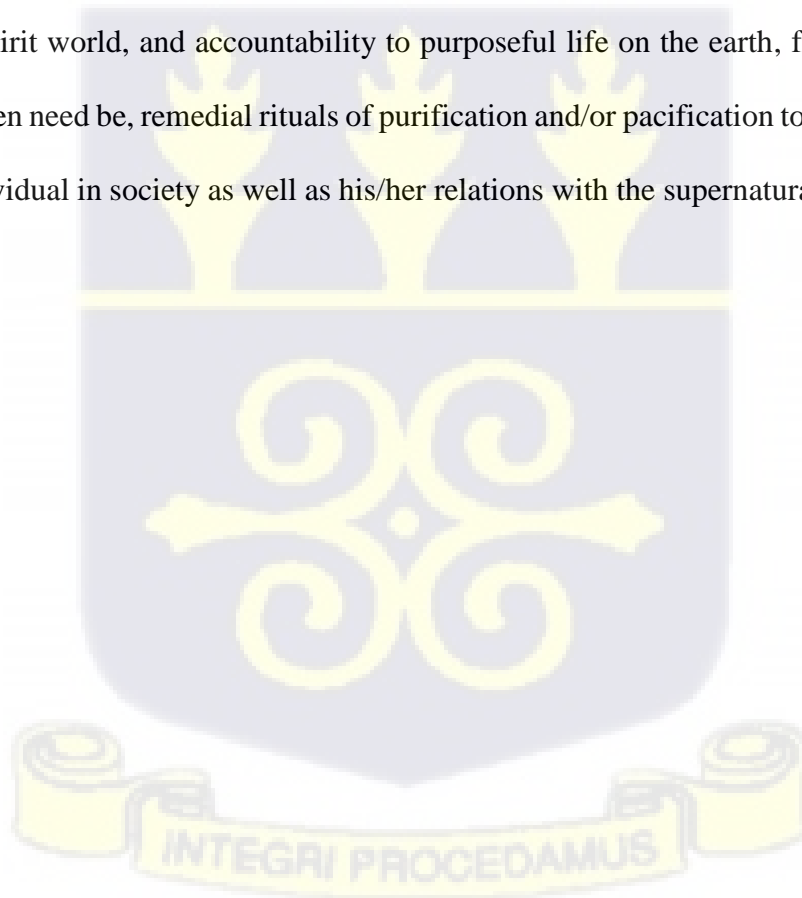
In dealing with puzzling and challenging situations, especially those that threaten their existence and livelihoods, some knowledge is formed about powers that may not be perceived physically, and yet are conceived as having a crucial role in their life and survival (Gavua, 2015, p. 142; Wiredu, 1992, pp. 137-139; Amoaku, 1975. pp. 62-64; Field, 1960, p. 40). Such knowledge embodying the worldviews of the people are often retained in legends and myths and passed down from generation to generation. Therefore, about Ewe worldviews, Amoaku maintains that “there is the acknowledgement of a transhuman controlling power which is symbolized in a Supreme Being [called *Mawu*] with whom they are often in covenant” (Amoaku, 1975, p. 64). Acknowledging Ewe cosmological hierarchy headed by *Mawu*, followed by a gradation of lesser gods and spirits, as well as the spirit of the dead, Amoaku’s asserts that “it is for this reason that community activities, whether on group or individual basis, are approached with caution and reverence, for each is considered to effect a link with inhabitants of the Invisible World” (Amoaku, 1975, p. 64).

Also, Dickson, for instance, points out that in indigenous worldview, “a society is in equilibrium when its customs are maintained, its goals attained and the spirit powers [are] given regular and adequate recognition” of which “members of society are expected to live and act in such a way as to promote society’s well-being” (Dickson, 1984, p. 62). Thus, the society and individuals’ well-beings are collectively mediated by customs and cultural practices. Deviations from cultural norms are potentially disastrous not only for the individual offenders but also the society as a whole. Significant aberrations from customs and norms result in moral debts on a person that must be atoned for, propitiated or pacified by the means of rites and ritual performances

(e.g. Akpabli-Honu, 2014, p. 35; Agbanu, 2011, pp. 97-99; Abotchie, 1997, pp. 66-67; Nukunya, 1990, pp. 67-68). Accordingly, in Ewe worldviews, a healthy society must achieve harmony as well as protection from potentially malicious spirits, and these are attempted through routine observances and customary rites (Jenkins, 2017). Moreover, as Assimeng contends, in African indigenous worldviews, the disposition to explain why individuals' expectations become fulfilled are not as challenging or pressing as the desire to account for unfulfilled expectations in personal and communal lives (Assimeng, 2010, p. 9). Thus, the acknowledgment of a force believed to be higher than humans, underlie the search for association of dependence with benevolent supernatural for security in people's social and economic lives. It could be argued that Ewe worldviews do not only influence their social actions, but also structure the interactions with divinities as well as negotiate 'critical distances' from potentially malevolent spirits. In other words, *Aklama* as related to the individuality of personal destiny and desirability for success in life, frame religious attitudes that deal with the social as well as the livelihoods of the Ewe people.

Again, the phenomena of birth and death significantly hold a mystery about the purpose of life, afterlife and notions of ancestorhood in African indigenous cultures (e.g. Anyidoho, 1982). In connection with the purpose of life on earth in indigenous Ewe cosmology, the society is conceived as a conjoined physical-spirit world in which humans and the supernatural co-exist. While the transcendental world of spirits and the physical world of life are perceived to operate in different realms of reality, they are considered to be interrelated. The two worlds are therefore believed to be non-detached and considered to flow together in cyclical unison by means of birth and death, and cross-fertilised by reincarnation (e.g. Anyidoho, 2003; Quarcoopome, 1987, pp. 110-136; Spieth, [1906] 2011, pp. 530-542). Consequently, religious systems in African indigenous societies form a significant part of social institutions crafted to maintain the perceived link between

the physical and the spirit worlds. Interactions with spiritual relations are particularly maintained in rites of passage, ancestral veneration, and periodic communal ceremonial performances. In this frame of African indigenous religious expressions of spirituality, disharmony in society is generally considered to be rooted in the behaviour and actions of the members in violations of social norms, or a breach in the relations with the spiritual world (e.g. Asamoah-Gyedu, 2010). Hence deviations from established norms in the community are considered blemishes believed to attract sanctions from perceived supernatural counterparts who are considered to be active participants in the physical-spirit world (Agbanu, 2011, pp. 97-97; Meyer, 1999, pp. 86-87; Wiredu, 1992, p. 138). Thus, in Ewe cosmology, notions of *Aklama* as embodiment of negotiated destiny in the spirit world, and accountability to purposeful life on the earth, frame their rites of passage, and when need be, remedial rituals of purification and/or pacification to maintain a proper status of an individual in society as well as his/her relations with the supernatural (see Diagram 1).



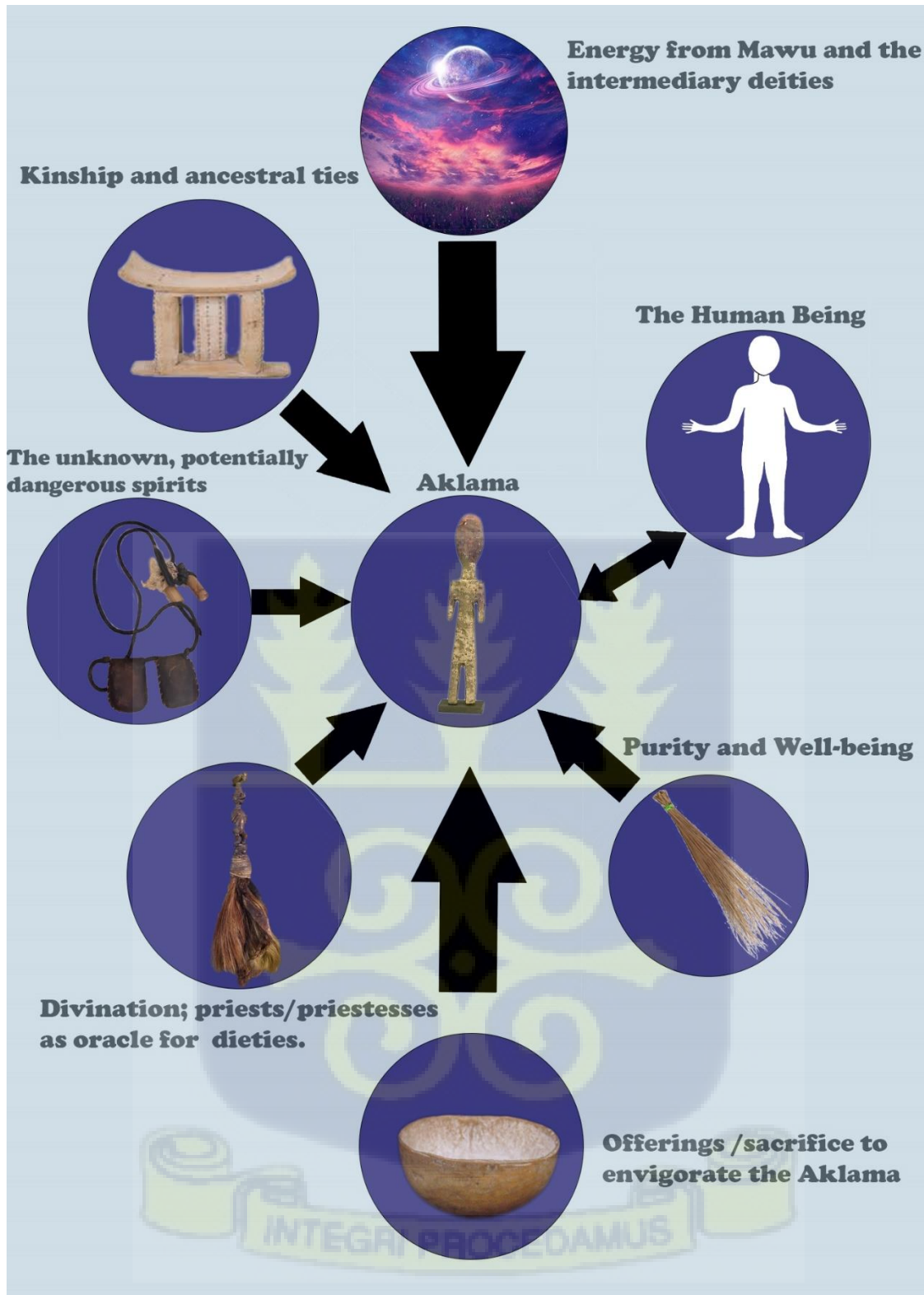


Diagram 1. Representation of *Aklama* as a set of Relations in Ewe Moral Ecology Encompassing the Spiritual and Physical Existence(s) of the Huma Being.

1.7.1. Ewe Worldviews as a Moral Ecology.

With particular emphasis on notions of interconnected relations among humans, the natural environment and supernatural beings, ecological metaphors are adopted in explaining Ewe worldviews as a form of moral ecology. Moral ecological metaphors adopt ideas of environmental eco-systems in explaining patterns of human societies and cultural processes. Recourse to moral ecology are therefore particular attempts at addressing the concerns for increasing liberalized individual behaviour and their correlated cultural crisis; the eroding sense of community and kinship ties especially evident in modern societies (e.g. Palmer, 1993). Pointing to the ‘lost’ of sense of community in modern societies, Palmer laments that “there is an illness in our [secularized and liberalized] culture [that] arises from our rigid separation of the visible world from the powers that undergird and animate it. With that separation we diminish life, capping off its sources of healing, hope, and wholeness” (Palmer, 1993, p. 10).

Similarly, Hahn points out that in our globalized world, means for self-fulfillment come forth as important factor of value by which the evolvement of the individual is greatly appreciated (Hahn, 2022). With the view on the common good of society, Hahn is however quick to add that “such values which lie beyond the interests of the individual are of major importance for the continued existence of society” (Hahn, 2022, p. 12). Thus, in the quest for wholeness, as Palmer draws our attention, there is the need for the sense of community and a moral ecology in which “we know as we are also known, [which is] a way of acknowledging our common bonds and assuming our rightful role in the created community” (Palmer, 1993, p. 12; see also Dube, 2006, p. 145).

Again, in their book, *the Habit of Heart*, Bella et al. (1985, p. 335), for example describe moral ecology as the web of moral understandings and commitments that sustain the society. Similarly, Herzke (1998) subscribes to the view of society as a web of interconnected human relations with moral commitments to achieving a common good. The common good, as Herzke argues, is achieved through social-cultural practices that compel conformity to social ideals and values in the interactions within society, and with the environment (Herzke, 1998, pp. 630 - 632). Herzke also points out that “what links physical ecology and the moral realm, [. . .] is an appreciation of interdependency that fosters greater concerns for the common good and less stress on individual autonomy” (Herzke, 1998, p. 632). Moral ecology therefore expresses a kind of sustainable cultural logic underlying diversified tasks connected with the dynamic interactions between humans and their physical environments typical with traditional societies. Here, there is particular emphasis on socio-cultural values developed in the interactions with the environment.

Other considerations of moral ecology generally consider the harmonizing roles of shared values and norms as a cultural system (e.g. Brinkmann, 2004, pp. 57-59; Akyeampong, 2001, pp. 104-106; Gyekye, 1997, pp. 228-229). This conceptualization of moral ecology as a system of culture emphasizes processes that ensure conformity to norms and desirable social outcomes in the interactions with the environment (Agbanu, 2011; 1999; Greene, 2002). According to Brinkmann for instance “we experience the moral world as given to us, or as something we discover”. He therefore argues that “the human world is most fruitfully conceived of as a moral ecology, that is, as a meaningful world that presents us with genuine moral demands and moral reasons for actions” (Brinkmann, 2004, p. 59). In a similar vein, Dogbe characterizes indigenous African societies as having “an ontological structure of the entire cosmos [. . . comprising several] categories of beings serially ordered but fused” (Dogbe, 1980, p. 782). Dogbe therefore argues that “to have harmony

and peace in this community of beings, good communal relationships must be established between all the [. . .] ontological categories through rites, offerings, sacrifices, and invocations” (Dogbe, 1980, p. 783). In this indigenous frame of community and relationships, as some scholars have expressed, to maintain a healthy community evil is pacified to prevent chaos, while benevolent is invoked to secure peace and prosperity (e.g. Assimeng, 2010, p. 62; Eggen, 2002, pp. 355-356; Dogbe, 1980, p. 738; Meyer, 1999, pp. 86-87; Amoaku, 1975, pp. 62-69).

Thus, underlying African indigenous lifeways and spirituality, beyond the “web of moral understandings and commitments” to each other as Bellah and others point out (e.g. Bellah et al., 1985, p. 335), there is also the responsibility to the spiritual entities associated with nature and communal life (e.g. Dube, 2006, pp. 142-145). Thus, a broader conceptualization of moral ecology as Akyeampong argues, supports African indigenous ideas about human life and community as being “simultaneously ecological, social and cosmological” (Akyeampong, 2001, p. 104). Thus, African indigenous worldviews do not only acknowledge the divinity of nature but also the spirituality of the human being as co-constituents of society (see Diagram 1). Hence, the mundane and the sacred are largely considered to be discretely inseparable (Agorsah, 2010; Asamoh-Gyedu, 2010; Dube, 2006; Dickson, 1984).

Besides Akyeampong and Dogbe whose analyses on Ewe worldviews and culture explicitly reflect this perspective of moral ecology, related works by other scholars are here presented to throw more light. Abotchie’s description of the interface between Ewe cosmology and religious practices and their particular function in social control provides useful insights. He argues that at the core of the search of security in indigenous Ewe beliefs is the “notion of escapelessness” from individuals’ obligations and responsibilities to customary lore believed to be policed by higher spirits co-existing with humans in the society (Abotchie, 1997, pp. 60-83). Thus,

he observes that Ewe indigenous religion and spirituality serve a regulative function of social control in which a personal breach is considered to have consequences not only for the individual offender but also the community at large (Abotchie, 1997, p. 67). This is explained in the context that while judgment may not be immediate, it will certainly be served to the culprit; and if that wrong was not appropriately pacified, the family or the society vicariously suffered in consequence. He therefore maintains that the notions of 'escapelessness' does not only project "an involuntary retributive compuncture in the mind of the offender, linking his every ill or mishap with his offence" but also implicates other relations in the family or the community (Abotchie, 1997, p. 65). Therefore since "most afflictions are believed to be inevitable consequences of wrongdoing" he contends, "it is only natural that the search for security in traditional society imposes as its guiding principle abstention from wrongs" (Abotchie, 1997, pp. 67). Ultimately, in deference to the belief in the 'escapelessness' of supernatural sanctions, redemptive rituals, usually in the form of supplication or offering of sacrifices are made, while regular religious practices and rituals are undertaken to persuade or induce people to conform (Abotchie, 1997, p. 67). To facilitate the intended redemptive and regulative functions of Ewe religious practices, mediums and abodes of spirits are acknowledged as loci to engage with the supernatural. Therefore, Abotchie's concept of 'escapelessness' and the concomitant moral responsibility of individuals and society to remedy undesirable circumstances is relevant for our analysis for the largely involuntary making and engagements with *Aklama* figurines.

In another breath of insight on the Ewe moral ecology, Agbanu identifies the social value of Mafi-Ewe as 'ethics of command' which is maintained by customary sanctions and punitive rites (Agbanu, 2011). As observed by Agbanu, among the Mafi-Ewe, individuals are knitted together by ties of relations that involve not only kinship relations, but also with the environment

considered to host other supernatural beings and spirits (Agbanu, 2011, pp. 95-96). He maintains that “the focus of Mafi-Ewe relationship with nature is internal, based on an integrative interdependence and harmony between humans and nature” (Agbanu, 2011, p. 95). Regarding such kind of relations to the environment, as for example expressed in the reverence for sacred groves and the association of some trees and animals with certain spirits, individuals and the community at large are enjoined to commit to certain cultural values (Agbanu, 2011, pp. 102-109). Thus, Mafi-Ewe ethics of command, as Agbanu points out, provides an example of how cultural systems invest in socio-spiritual relations to ensure harmony of individuals with their supernaturally charged social environment. In a similarly vein, as Eggen observes, Ewe cultural system is a kin-based social structure with a premium on social harmony through the search for what he termed as ‘social concern’ for which personal and collective interests of society must converge (Eggen, 2002, pp. 354-356). In the making of the Ewe society, Eggen points out that each person is considered to have a part to play in accordance with his or her calling, the *se*¹³. He therefore remarks that “respect for each other’s calling (*se*) marks the numerous and complex operations of life, all of which are both material and permeated by intense religious aspect” (Eggen, 2002, pp. 355-356). Following such conceptualizations, it could be argued that social values and traditions that ensure conformity to cultural norms are created or developed as moral imperatives.

However, as Brinkmann points out, social values and ideals that sustain the community are “rightly placed in the world of objects and events, [the ecology and the physical world], instead of the minds of people” (Brinkmann, 2004, p. 59). Brinkmann’s call to consider ‘things’ and ‘objects’ in social constructs and interactions is an acknowledgement of the ontologies of the elements of

¹³ Eggen distinguishes *Se* (i.e. with the uppercase) as representing the Creator-God, and *se* (with a lower case) as representing the peculiar assignment of each person on earth.

the physical environment and their capacities to induce certain thought and feelings. In other words, cultural norms and traditions cogitate around such associations with the environment and interactions among its groups of people. It is worthy of note here that these cultural norms and traditions are not static, and thus social values are processual and evolving; their relevance are in their capacity to proffer solutions to prevailing problems, promote social harmony and also to guard against the undesirable (e.g. Greene, 2002; Akyeampong, 2001).

1.7.2. *Aklama* and Expressions of Ewe Religious Outlook and Materiality.

In certain respects, the relations among members of the community, the spiritually-perceived environment and the supernatural could be conceptualized as co-evocative (Dube, 2009, p.192). This, in many ways, represents an adaptive or innovative process of co-dependence mediated by rituals and symbolic engagements (Montgomery and Vannier, 2017; Gavua, 2015; Greene, 2002; Lovell, 2002; Rosenthal, 1998; Drewal, 1996). Geurts, for instance, indicates that lifeways in some Ewe communities reflect their sensory perceptions of metaphysical phenomena of the environment and their representations in everyday lives and social engagements (Geurts, 1998). Thus, ritual-life and aesthetics among the Ewe, she suggests, constitute a complex domain that requires contextual evaluation for better appreciation and deeper understanding (Geurts, 1998, p. 28). Accordingly, among the Ewe, the conception of an order of existence of humans with divinities is considered to have largely developed and been sustained through a system of symbols facilitated by material representations and object manipulations (Abotchie, 1997, p. 65; Fiawoo, 1959, pp. 51-52). This supports the general view that materiality of things or objects affords religious beliefs and practices the substance and aura of reality, and therefore privilege symbolic social actions and at the same time motivate ritual engagements with the otherwise unseen supernatural (Assimeng, 2010, p. 10; Eggen, 2002, p. 352; Drewal, 1996, p. 309). As pointed out

by Tilley, for instance, “materiality is an integral dimension of culture, and that there are dimensions of social existence that cannot be fully understood without it” (Tilley, 2013, p. 1).

Thus, while social norms are considered the mainstay of the society, the potency of beliefs that shape behaviour and promote communal harmony derives from the capacity of symbolic engagements with the environment, and relations with perceived divinities. In this vein, this study recognizes variability in the local conceptualizations and different representations of *Aklama* as a product of both a broader Ewe worldview about human nature, and the peculiarities of individuals’ experiences with metaphysical entities recognized to be actively involved in both personal and communal lives. It is therefore apt to assert that such experiences provide metaphoric as well as memetic tropes to materially characterize the supernatural or divinities for perceptible engagements. Against this background, it could be argued that worldviews among the Ewe people have developed through the process of interactions and experiences within their culturally-invested natural and social environments (Greene, 2002; Lovell; 2002; Akyeampong, 2001; Rosenthal, 1998).

Considering the worldviews and their concomitant indigenous religious practices among the Ewe as cultural adaptive strategy, this study is anchored in descriptive ontological ethnographic approach (Holbraad, 2018; Kohn, 2015). The focus is to explore multi-relationalities that enable a deeper understating of the evolving relations between human beings and nonhuman components of the universe expressed in Ewe worldviews and material culture (e.g. Lovell, 2002; Amoaku, 1975). Thus, *Aklama* is considered as a concept associated with Ewe beliefs in transcendent powers and the means by which divinity could be apprehended to ensure the well-being of the individual and society. To highlight these relations, as already indicated, the study employs conceptual triangulations in the theories of Moral Ecology and Material Culture.

1.7.3. Theoretical Positioning of *Aklama* in Ewe Moral Ecology and Material Culture.

Aklama as a multi-faceted concept is embedded in the cosmology and indigenous aesthetical valuations of the Ewe. In keeping with the perceived interrelated physical and spiritual operation of the community, moral ecology aptly fits a consideration of African indigenous cultures as integrated social, natural and spiritual environment (Assimeng, 2010). Similarly, in the contexts of Ewe worldviews and culture practices, considerations for material culture expressions enable deeper insights into how individuals engage with things and how those things also influence and shape their lives (Tilley, 2013, p. 4).

Accordingly, awe-inspiring and unexplainable natural phenomena enable constructions of the divine, as well as relationships between human beings and divinities (Lovell, 2002; Fiawoo, 1959). As noted by Lovell (2002), among some Ewe groups, a sense of communal identity “is constructed through intermediary of deities which are themselves extensions of natural and environmental features” (Lovell, 2002, p. 23). It could therefore be argued that the interactions with perceived divinities underlie cultural mapping of the environment and some religious practices among the Ewe (see Agbanu, 2011; Nelson-Adjakpey 2008; Greene, 2002; Akyeampong, 2001). Thus, aspects of nature are invested with cosmological and social meanings.

Acknowledging deities by association with unusual or distinctive features of the environment, objects and spaces are sacralised largely according to their noted ‘power’ or religious functions. Ascribing special names and the functions they are noted for, and thereby creating identities and physical mediums that accommodate divinities in personal lives and the society. In this vein spiritual entities are focalized whereby designated religico-social spaces are considered as both a metaphysical domain, and terrestrial entity mediated by customs and traditional rites. Consequently, while in Ewe indigenous religion the proper domain of deities is the realms of the

spirit, the necessity to appropriately acknowledge and engage with them compel performances in which the presence of divinity could be manifested at designated spaces or focalized in some kind of material mediums (Lovell, 2002; Greene, 2002). Such material associations with spirit beings therefore provide the means to tap into the benevolence of divinity, and by the same token propitiate offended deities or aggrieved spirits. More importantly, as Lovell points out, this kind of engagements with divinity appropriate perceived metaphysical landscape in the lived environment; extending it beyond the confines of the strictly terrestrial to encompass the sea, river, trees, wild animals and the sky as abodes of spirits (Lovell, 2002, p. 23).

Furthermore, attempts at solving puzzles of life, particularly those related to the phenomena of birth and death, are expressed in cosmological constructs. Thus, notions of pre-existing human soul and individual destiny among the Ewe find expressions in *Aklama* as both a metaphysical concept and representational medium (Quarcoopome, 2003 p. 77; Gbolonyo, 2009, p. 245). This characterizes the relations of interdependence in the Ewe moral ecological universe shared by humans and their nonhuman supernatural associates. *Aklama* symbolisms in this vein bridge and negotiate access to the perceived physical-spiritual world in Ewe worldviews. Generally evident among African indigenous cultures, Assimeng for instance, identifies beliefs, icons and images, and sacrifices as the relational elements and core ingredients of religious approach to the supernatural (Assimeng, 2010).

Hence to discern the integrated cosmology of African indigenous societies is to acknowledge the sense of community which include the yet-to-be born, the living and, in particular the ancestors recognized as custodians of private and public morality (Assimeng, 2010, p. 51; Dube, 2009, pp. 199-200; Oduyoye, 2004, p. 48; Abotchie, 1997, pp. 64-66; Megesa, 1997, p. 77). Thus, natural disasters, personal misfortunes and social mishaps are often interpreted as breach in

moral ecology, and perhaps the incurring of disfavor of divinities and the ancestors (e.g. Dube, 2009; Greene, 2002; Akyeampong, 2001). Many scholars who have studied the culture of Ewe have expressed similar views (e.g. Akpabli-Honu, 2014; Ganusah, 2008; Greene, 2002; Meyer, 1999; Abotchie, 1997).

As illustrated in subsequent chapters, in Ewe traditions, individuals therefore have responsibilities that permeate the economic and moral orders of the community. In these, the divinities and the ancestors, in particular, are believed to have the ability to endorse appropriate engagements aimed at achieving sustenance. Ultimately, communal sense of existence and social cooperation/co-dependence of individuals in the society constitute the goal of human existence in Ewe worldviews (Akyeampong, 2001, pp. 104-106; see also Dogbe, 1982). Thus, as Akyeampong points out “extreme individualism, rampant greed, witchcraft and the neglect of indigenous religion or rituals are all deprecated as undermining the [religico-spiritual] environment and community” (Akyeampong, 2001, p. 106). These Ewe worldviews corroborate Brinkmann’s view about what he describes as the topography of moral ecology, and the argument that moral values and human good exist to provide reason for actions (Brinkmann, 2004). It is noteworthy that Ewe conceptualization of community as meaningful world with moral imperatives for actions, also significantly implicates their material culture. For example, in their shrine studies, Montgomery and Vannier indicate that important activities including rites and rituals at a shrine have both material and socio-cultural dimensions as the primary vehicle to engage with the spirit world (Montgomery and Vannier, 2017, p. 12). The point here is that, at the shrine, the agency of material things enables the subjectification of divinity as well as mediate the interactions between people and the supernatural (e.g. Drewal, 1996).

1.8. Research Hypotheses.

Drawing on the information reviewed from the available literature on the subject of *Aklama*, and the characterization of Ewe indigenous worldviews in the conceptual framework of moral ecology, the study is premised on the following core research assumptions and hypotheses that:

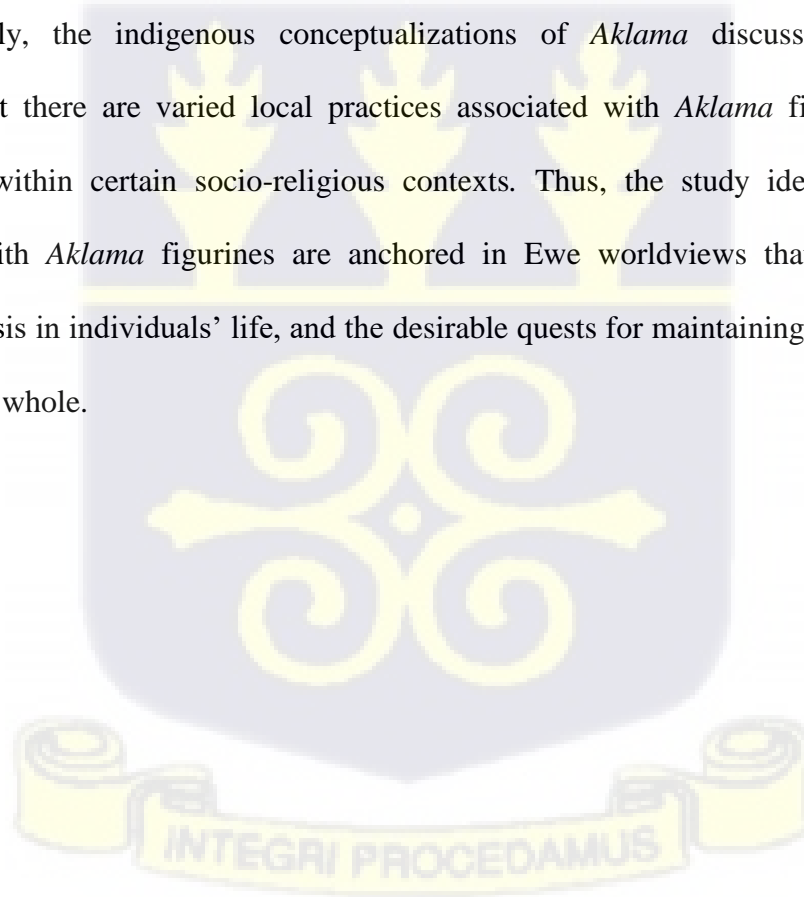
- 1) *Aklama* in Ewe worldviews is an intermediary element remediating the unexpected as well as assuring a better life and future of the individual. This particularly underscores the agentic value of *Aklama* in addressing issues related to personal destiny and fulfilment of purpose of the individual's life.
- 2) In their material forms, the functional values of *Aklama* are more important than the formal variables. Thus, the form of *Aklama* figurines serve secondary or complementary purposes in their efficiency in engaging with relevant metaphysical agents usually through the rites of pacification and/or purification. Thus, formalisms and stylistic analyses of *Aklama* figurines may be less rewarding than a deeper analysis of their value in assemblages and the contextual networks of relations to the person(s) who own them.
- 3) Contextual and individual meanings of *Aklama* and their subjective appreciations are more important than any generalized collectivization. Thus, from the preceding points outlined, I come to the conclusion that *Aklama* object biographies and meanings provide multifaceted insights and understanding of *Aklama* concepts and symbolisms.



1.9. Significance of the Study.

With particular regards to the dearth of ethnographic study on the concept of *Aklama* and its figurations, this study is a path-breaking contribution. Although the study is not necessarily aimed at comparative analyses of *Aklama*, it provides cross-sectional perspectives on *Aklama* concepts among the Ewe in Ghana. More so, methodologically, the multisite approach of the study particularly affords deeper understanding of the variability in *Aklama* concepts and representations. Thus, the study provides important insights that significantly contribute to provenance research on Ewe religious sculptures in general, and for a better understating of *Aklama* figurines in museum collections in particular.

Ultimately, the indigenous conceptualizations of *Aklama* discussed in the study demonstrate that there are varied local practices associated with *Aklama* figurines and their interpretations within certain socio-religious contexts. Thus, the study identifies that those engagements with *Aklama* figurines are anchored in Ewe worldviews that reflect ways of ameliorating crisis in individuals' life, and the desirable quests for maintaining well-being of life in the society as whole.



2.0. CHAPTER TWO: Review of Literature on Traditions and Worldviews among the Ewe.

In this chapter I present a review of literature on aspects of Ewe traditions and worldviews. This is intended to be a general background to understanding Ewe representations of the supernatural and, with that, figurations of *Aklama*. A brief history of the Ewe is provided that highlight their migration story and shared customs that largely identify with the Ewe-speaking people. That notwithstanding, the chapter also considers some differences in aspects of Ewe cultural expressions and economic engagements. These notable differences are particularly evident in the exploitation of the diversified resources available in the different zones of the Volta Region, as well as complex histories of founding of autonomous polities, experiences of enslavement, dominations and their corollaries on Ewe traditions, worldviews and religious practices in which *Aklama* finds expressions.

2.1. A Brief History and the Migration Story of the Ewe.

In the Volta Region of Ghana, the Ewe-speaking people are broadly categorized into Northern and Southern Ewe. However, the topography of the Volta Region can be considered as being constituted by three distinct geographical features with highly diversified economies. Stretching from the southern coastal littoral¹⁴ through the plains along the Volta River¹⁵ are notable southern *Anlo* and *Tongu* Ewe-speaking territories. The northern Ewe polities collectively called the *Ewedome* are located uplands and valleys of the Midwest Volta¹⁶ (Gavua, 2000; Amenumey, 1989; Manoukian, 1952). That notwithstanding, the various Ewe groups largely share a migration story of liberation from Notsie, considered as their ancestral home and erstwhile powerful kingdom. In the migration narrative, it is maintained that during a period of oppression and extreme distress

¹⁴ Conveniently referred to the as *Anlo* Zone,

¹⁵ Conveniently referred to as the *Tongu* Zone,

¹⁶ Conveniently referred to as the *Ewedome* Zone, especially those found in the mid-west of the Volta Region.

under a king called Agorkorli, nothing could have been more desirable than escape from tyranny. Thus, hatching out a subterfuge, the masses were able to escape from Notsie by cutting through the wall and walking backwards from the walled-kingdom where their footprints rather created the impression of inward movement to their oppressors. Ewe traditions further hold that the people were subsequently separated into three groups who eventually settled in their present territories beginning in the mid-17th century¹⁷ (Amoaku, 1975).

Again, ancient deities referred to as *xɔgbetrɔwo* (pronounced *horgbetrɔwo*) associated with Notsie are recognized by some Ewe-speaking communities. *Xɔgbetrɔwo* are ancient deities considered to have aided the Ewe in their precarious journeys following the escape from tyranny. Thus, deities and priesthoods identified as *xɔgbetrɔwo* are found among various Ewe subgroups across the Volta Region (e.g. Apoh, 2019, p. 70-71; Akpabli-Honu, 2014, pp. 35, 83-84; Amoaku, 1975, pp. 88-91; Fiawoo, 1959, pp. 55-58). It is however, apt to surmise that there are differences in some aspects of the worldviews and traditions evident in the different dialect zones of the Volta Region. Notable differences are perhaps attributable to borrowings from other cultures, and also as a result of innovative appropriations in their interactions with other non-Ewe people (Apoh, 2019, p. 73; Nelson-Adjakpey, 2008, pp. 15-17; Akyeampong, 2001, pp. 106-109; Gavua, 2000, p. 6; Greene, 1996, pp. 54-56). It must therefore be noted that while notions about ancient deities and notable ancestors may be common among Ewe-speaking people, associated rituals and commemorative performances vary significantly.

¹⁷ Oral traditions among some Ewe groups identifies an ancestor called Detoe Akplɔmada as the progenitor of the *Anlo* Tsiameawo and the *Tongu* people. His other two brothers are identified as Aga and Gata from whom the Agave, the Etsɔafɔwo and the Dzeviawo clans descended (Mammatta, 1976). The peopling of the Ewe territory also involved the absorption of some auctothonus groups encountered in the cause of their migration, as well as later incorporation of some of their Akan and Dangbe neighbours.

However, in recent times, through commemorative celebrations of the Notsie migration in particular¹⁸, the concept of a common Ewe origin and unity is sustained to a greater extent (Greene, 1996; Amenumey, 1989; Amoaku, 1975). According to Amoaku, in many instances, regal rights and royal authenticity in most Ewe communities are reckoned through the ability of the individual as a member of a patri-clan to trace ancestry to Notsie as *agbogbome*, the ancient homeland (Amoaku, 1975, p. 88; see also Akyeampong, 2001, p. 106). Thus, as Apoh points out, although contestable, dominant in the oral traditions of the various Ewe sub-groups is the Notsie migration narrative (Apoh, 2019, p. 42). Despite the Notsie ‘metanarrative’, however, there are other Ewe oral traditions that suggest multiple waves of episodic migrations possibly preceding the supposed exodus from Notsie (e.g. Gavua, 2000; Mammattah, 1976). Consequently, the peopling of the Ewe in their current homelands may be considered to possibly have come about through episodic migrations and, perhaps, climaxed by the alluded exodus from Notsie.

Accounts on sub-ethnic transformations of the Ewe-speaking people point to innovative subsistence strategies which have developed into traditional economies based on varied intensities of fishing, hunting, farming and crafting—in pottery, basketry and weaving. These traditional economies enabled by the peculiarities and challenges of the coastal marine/riverine environment of the south, and forest/plain environments of the north (i.e. the Midwest Volta) have also evolved some notable customs and traditional practices. Thus, over the centuries there have been founding of patri-clans and villages spearheaded by notable warrior-hunter leaders believed to have wielded considerable spiritual powers (e.g. Verdon, 1983). Those founding ancestors, *Afetofiawo*, whose feats are considered to have been grounded with guidance of divinity are memorialized in legends,

¹⁸ The historical exodus from Notsie is commemorated by differently named festivals. For example among the Anlo-Ewe of the south *Hogbestosto* is the common commemorative festival. However among the Adaklu and others in the northern Volta for instance, it referred to *Glidzi*.

and are venerated (e.g. Gavua, 2000, p. 6; Amoaku, 1975, p. 88). Consequently, Ewe subgroups have emerged and developed noticeable variant dialects of the Ewe language. According to Amenumey, for example, at the turn of the 20th century about one-hundred and twenty Ewe polities varying in size and degree of political centralizations were recognized (Amenumey, 1989).

While the relative autonomy of the different polities are acknowledged, the various subgroups recognize themselves as interdependent and essentially one people; a concept of Ewe unity that hinge on claims to their erstwhile Notsie ancestral home¹⁹ (Geurts, 2003). It is worth mentioning that the historical memories and/or the memorialization of the migration story does not only establish a bonding for the various groups of the Ewe²⁰, but also identify them with their Fon neighbors in Togo and Benin. However, some scholars have attributed the ethnic harmonization of the Ewe-speaking people to European missionary activities, especially through the missions' school system and literary standardization of the Ewe language based on the *Anlo* dialect (e.g. Meyer, 2002, pp. 177-178; Avorgbedor, 1986, p. 108). Thus, contesting the claim to a common Ewe ethnic identity, some oral histories and historical accounts point to Ewe inter-subgroup competitions and complex cultural affinities with other cultures (Apoh, 2019; Jenkins, 2012; Greene, 1996). For instance, raiding and trading of enslaved people in the West African sub-region in the context of the trans-Atlantic trade had a great deal of influence on some Ewe groups (Venkatachalam, 2012). Amenumey points out that, attempts by some groups among the Ewe-speaking people to engross as much of the prevailing economic prospects in the trans-Atlantic

¹⁹ The concept of Ewe unity is particularly evident in Ewe unification movements and various festivals that commemorate the historical migration from Notsie.

²⁰ One of the unifying element in Ewe customs is the rites of installation of most Anlo chiefs at Tsiamevute, a sacred forest associated with the legendary spiritual leader Togbui Tsali considered to be a patron ancestor who has left footprints in various Ewe communities. These landmark and features associated with the memory of Togbui Tsali are considered sacred to date (see Mammattah, 1967, p. 313).

trade particularly represent an era of conflicts among Ewe sub-groups (Amenumey, 1989). Notable examples of historical inter-subgroup animosities among the Ewe are recorded as early as the 1680s in the height of the trade in enslaved people. Similarly, in exploring the marine and lagoon resources, particularly in the quest for economic autonomy in salt exploitation and fishing in periods of unpredictable livelihoods during occasions of flooding and extended droughts, both intra-ethnic alliance and conflicts ensued at certain times in the past. Furthermore, some Ewe-subgroups are known to have formed alliances with non-Ewe groups to protect their interests in times of war (Greene, 1996, pp. 25-27). Consequently, people of Akan, Guan and Dangbe origins are known to have been incorporated as bona fide clan members in some Ewe-speaking communities (e.g. Apoh, 2019, p. 62; Nukunya, 1990, p. 21). According to Amenumey, the historical inter-polity fights among the Ewe caused considerable disorganization and threatened to align individual Ewe polities into 'blocs' in partnership with their non-Ewe neighbours. Nonetheless, he argues, there continued to be customary ties and trade interactions among the various groups which have militated against the development of sharp frontiers separating one Ewe subgroup from the other (Amenumey, 1989).

2.2. Worldviews and Spirituality among the Ewe.

As earlier indicated, worldviews among the Ewe acknowledge the existence of one Supreme Deity, *Mawu* who is the creator of the universe and assisted by other minor deities/divinities (Asamoah, 1986, pp. 32-33; Fiawoo, 1959, pp. 42-47) As the Supreme Creator, *Mawu* is believed to be the giver of each person's lot in the world; this includes successes, failures, joy as well as sorrows. Thus, answers to questions about life in general, and in particular about birth, death as well as the well-being of a community are sought from *Mawu*. However, *Mawu* is considered to have a distant celestial abode and therefore exercises dominion through intermediary deities and spirits. Thus,

Mawu is not the object of any organized worship with a priesthood, a temple, a shrine or congregation; *Mawu* could only be engaged through the agency of the lesser deities as intermediaries (Nukunya, 2016, p. 70). Consequently, special places of worship are set apart for the worship of divinities through whom sacrifices and supplications are carried to *Mawu* (Nelson-Adjakpey, 2008, p. 39). Thus, the Ewe generally conceptualize a co-existence of humans and other nonhuman spiritual entities in cosmologically spirit-physical worlds which are intertwined and interdependent. That conjoined world of spirits and the physical is considered to be hierarchically structured, and yet a fused moral ecological universe in which the physical mirrors the eternal principles of the spiritual (e.g. Ganusah, 2008; Nelson-Adjakpey, 2008; Akyeampong, 2001; Abotchie, 1997; Dzobo, 1992; Dogbe, 1980; Amoaku, 1975).

Furthermore, Ewe cosmological discourses attribute to *Mawu*, the creator and sustainer of life a dual or binary essences (cf. Gavua, 2000, pp. 85-86; Spieth, [1906]2011, pp. 49). In indigenous Ewe conceptualization of *Mawu* as the Supreme Being who exhibits androgynous qualities of femininity and masculinity at the same time, *Mawu* is represented in the unison-self as *Mawu-Sogbo-Lisa*. On the other hand, however, as presenting a complementary Godhead, the Supreme Being is seen to be jointly constituted by *Mawu-Sodza*²¹ (being the masculine) and *Mawu-Sogbla* (the feminine counterpart). Spieth, for example presents another perspective about the complementary embodiment of *Mawu*. He reports on the characterization of *Mawu* as a divine pair; *Sogbla* who is the *sotsu*, the male and *Sodzo*²² who is the *sonu*, the female (Spieth, [1906] 2011, p. 49). Hence, the feminine characterization of *Mawu*'s is expressed in terms of motherly tenderness, fertility and the show of mercy to humankind particularly symbolized by the earth

²¹ *Mawu-Sodza* is also referred to as *Mawu Lisa*.

²² Spieth rather makes reference to *Sodzo*, the *sonu* as the feminine pair of twain.

(Pese-Kuma, 1991, p. 11; Dzobo, 1971, p. 26). Thus, the earth is acknowledged as a deity often addressed as *Mianɔ zɔdzi*²³ and associated with other divinities collectively called *Anyigba trɔwo*. On the other hand, the masculine part of *Mawu* is expressed in terms of God's justice and certain judgment on human actions and deeds. This is particularly exemplified by such natural elements as lightning and thunder which could be deployed to punish evil-doers²⁴.

Moreover, as a complementary Godhead, an attributive aspect of *Mawu* responsible for personal destiny and the divine ordering of times and seasons is known as *Se*, the dispenser of life. The *Se* also connotes a general principle in the cosmic order of the universe which also patterns the trends of economic and social lives on earth (Geurts, 2003; Eggen, 2002). Again, as Nelson-Adjakpey has expressed, *Se* is associated with fate or destiny which is believed to be the “the attributive aspect of God that follows every person according to God's plan through this life” (2008, p. 31). Hence, differences in individuals' abilities and successes in life are attributed to destiny; the bequeathed qualities of *Se* requisite for individuals' unique assignments and purposes on the earth. This is exemplified by the popular Ewe saying “*Se ɔo ame da ameto*”, meaning, “*Se* (God) sends each person individually endowed with peculiar destiny” (e.g. Dzobo, 2018; Pese-Kumah, 1991, p. 23). Thus, common among the beliefs of the Ewe is that every person is imbued with some attributes of *Mawu* transferrable in the personalities of individuals dispatched with their assigned duties on the earth, and assisted by a pantheon of deities who serve as tutelary spirits.

²³ The “Mother Earth” responsible for sustenance; she contains the water and vegetation essential for earthly life and to whom will every person be given/buried after death for the onward journey to the world of the spirits.

²⁴ Related to this attribute of *Mawu* are celestial deities including *Xebieso and Avleketi*; fearsome deities symbolised by the thunder and rainbow.

2.2.1. Transposable Divinities: *Trɔwo* as Messenger Deities.

Trɔwo, the lesser gods in Ewe worldviews, are intermediary deities considered to be protector and welfare gods. They are believed to assist *Mawu* to exercise dominion and maintain justice in the scheme of things in the universe. The *trɔwo* are generally believed to be associated with some specific functions, for example, fertility, economic prosperity and protection from adversity. However, a particular *trɔ* may be called upon to perform other functions. The *trɔwo* usually have regulations to be adhered to by their devotees. Thus, depending on a person's attitude towards them, they could influence one's life for good or for ill (Ganusah, 2008, p. 21).

The *trɔwo* usually have shrines with designated priesthood and followership dedicated to their worship (Nukunya, 2016, p. 71; Agorsah, 2010, p. 14; and Nelson-Adjakpey, 2008, pp. 37-42; Ganusah, 2008, p. 20). Acknowledged Ewe pantheon of lesser gods are associated with the natural elements of the environment including the skies, the sea, earth formations, some trees and animals. Amoaku, for instance, explains that the attitude of the Ewe towards the universe is that anything from nature could potentially possess a spirit (Amoaku, 1975, p. 152). However, these natural elements are not considered deities in themselves; they may only be associated with divinities. As Nukunya remarks "the impression should not be given . . . that because of their association with these objects [of worship], the objects are also worshiped" but that "they depend on the power and approval of the High God" (Nukunya, 2016, p. 71).

Moreover, the efficacy and success of organized devotion to the lesser gods through those objects of worship derive from *Mawu*. Consequently, the activities and successes of designated shrines of lesser gods must find favour with *Mawu*, and their methods so approved. The acknowledgment of these deities and their efficacy, therefore, depends to a large extent on correct methods, procedures and conditions of performance. Usually, the symbolism of natural elements

such as the qualities of some animals and trees are appropriated into the performance of certain rites and rituals (Gavua, 2015, pp. 142-145). For example, the procurement and use of water from certain sources, herbs and eggs as natural elements ontologically associated with life and fertility are almost constant in most traditional rites and ritual performances (e.g. Dzobo, 1992b, p. 88; Amoaku, 1975, pp. 129-130; Vermeer, 1971, p. 70). More importantly, as Nukunya asserts, “ritual purity on the part of the priest [or priestess] especially and the followers is, therefore, essential to ensure success and efficiency” (Nukunya, 2016, p. 71). Thus, there are taboos and prohibitions to ensure the purity of rituals and acceptance of offerings by the gods; menstruating women are particularly proscribed (e.g. Gavua, 2015, p. 145; Meyer, 1999, p. 87). Again, appropriate times for the performance of certain rites or rituals are reckoned on the basis of customary cycle of days considered sacred for designated deities²⁵ (e.g. Adzei, 2012, pp. 56-57; Vermeer, 1971, p. 59).

It is worthy of note however, that these Ewe beliefs about divinities and devotion to the supernatural are not static (Greene, 2002; c.f. Quarcoopome, 2016; Gavua, 2015; Nelson-Adjakpey, 2008; Drewal, 1996; Nukunya, 1969; Fiawoo, 1959). Consequently, among different Ewe-speaking groups, some indigenous practices towards the supernatural are quite different in form and performance. Thus, it could be argued that the Ewe indigenous religious beliefs and practices may be transformed by the expediency of the times and the dynamics of the attested potency of the acknowledge deities (Greene, 2002; Akyeampong, 2001; Drewal, 1996; Fiawoo, 1959). Deities that have proved effective particularly in dealing with puzzling challenges in the

²⁵ There is a four-day cycle for reckoning appropriate days for rites and rituals among the Ewe. The datum reference is the market day on which people rest from their major economic activities and also observe certain taboos in recognition of some deities. Each of the four days is named in relation to market days which falls on every fifth day (e.g. Amoaku, 1975, p. 133). The market day is known as *Aisgbe*, and followed by *Asiamigbe*. The third day is considered a mini-market day and is generally known as *Afene* and last day in the cycle is called *Asiteo*. Among the Ewe each day is under the jurisdiction of a particular deity or gods.

lives of both the individual and community are maintained while inefficient ones are largely ignored.

2.2.2. Ancestorship and Ancestral Veneration.

Another significant feature of Ewe cosmology is the strong belief in the presence of ancestral spirits (Nukunya, 1964; Fiawoo, 1959). Ancestral spirits include those of patron ancestors who were lineage or clan founders, and illustrious persons who had once lived exemplary lives and had achieved notable feats (Nukunya, 2016, p. 73; Nelson-Adjakpey, 2008, p. 37). Ancestorship is particularly borne by the indigenous belief in life after death in which death only terminates the physical existence of a person. Death does not necessarily mark the end of life, rather the transition into a life in the spirit (Ganusah, 2008, p. 28; Dzobo, 1992c, p. 132). Thus, contingent on a person's success in the life on the earth, particularly in the fulfilment of destiny as well as making a significant contribution to the community, one becomes an ancestor after death. In this light, while it is believed that upon death the individual transitions to the spirit world, not every dead individual becomes an ancestor (Gavua, 2000, p. 96). It is therefore required of the individual to live exemplary life and also die honorably in advanced age to become an ancestor²⁶. Individuals who die from ignoble illness and tragic circumstances are not reckoned as ancestors. It appears that most acts of devotion to the gods and the ancestors are efforts to ward-off such misfortunes that potentially disqualify an individual from being acknowledged as an ancestor after death (Pese-Kumah, 1991, pp. 13-14). As echoed by Megesa, ancestorship is an act of communion in remembrance that is also actualization of life or resurrection of the dead. He points out that ancestorship "constitutes making present among us here and now those who are remembered [. . .

²⁶ Among the Ewe, one must die a "good" death to be reckoned as an ancestor. Hence, death through accidents, suicide, wasting ulcers, and execution are among those considered as "bad" deaths which disqualify a person from ancestorhood.

and thus] ancestors and their descendants on earth are in continuity” (Megesa, 1997, p. 77; see also Wiredu, 1992, pp. 137-138).

In keeping with the belief in continuity of life beyond the grave, ancestral spirits are believed to have keen interests in the well-being of the living; they are believed to keep a constant watch over their lineages and descendants (Akyeampong, 2001, p. 107; Wiredu, 1992, p. 138). Traditionally represented by the *Togbe zikpui*²⁷, the ancestors could be consulted and called upon in times of need (Amoaku, 1975). They are also called in witness at the performances of rites reckoning significant milestones of the lives of individuals in the family and lineage. Through the rituals of libation and the offering of sacrifices, the ancestors are called to partake in the welcoming of newly born babies, contracting of marriages and the funeral rites of lineage members (e.g. Ammah, 2016, pp. 84-85; Adzei 2012, pp. 56-57).

Ancestors of a particular family are believed to have the capacity to punish deviance in the family and equally reward conformity to social norms, which they were very instrumental in developing and bequeathed to their descendants (Abotchie, 1997, p. 14; Wiredu, 1992, pp.137-138; Spieth [1906]2011, pp. 53-55). As “stakeholder divinities” and wielders of justice, the ancestors are believed to expressly register their displeasure for major infractions of social norms and aberrations of age-old customs (Meyer, 1999, pp. 86-87). Hence, reasons for unexpected happenings are sought and efforts are made to remedy them. Pacification rites and periodic purification rituals are therefore common means to intervene for possible contraventions of spiritually-sanctioned social norms and customary lineage principles (Nelson-Adjakpey, 2008; Abotchie, 1997). Consequently, calamities and unexpected mishaps such as fatal accidents and

²⁷ *Togbe zikpui* are carved ceremonial stools that represent the authority and presence of the ancestors.

incessant hardships in individuals' lives are recognized as possible consequences of aggrieved ancestors. Dashed expectations in economic ventures and some forms of ill-health may be attributed to spiteful ancestors seeking the attention of the family or individuals for redress. When such are not so-discerned as possible warning or punishment to be given the needed attention, major mishaps loom over the lives of both individuals and the community.

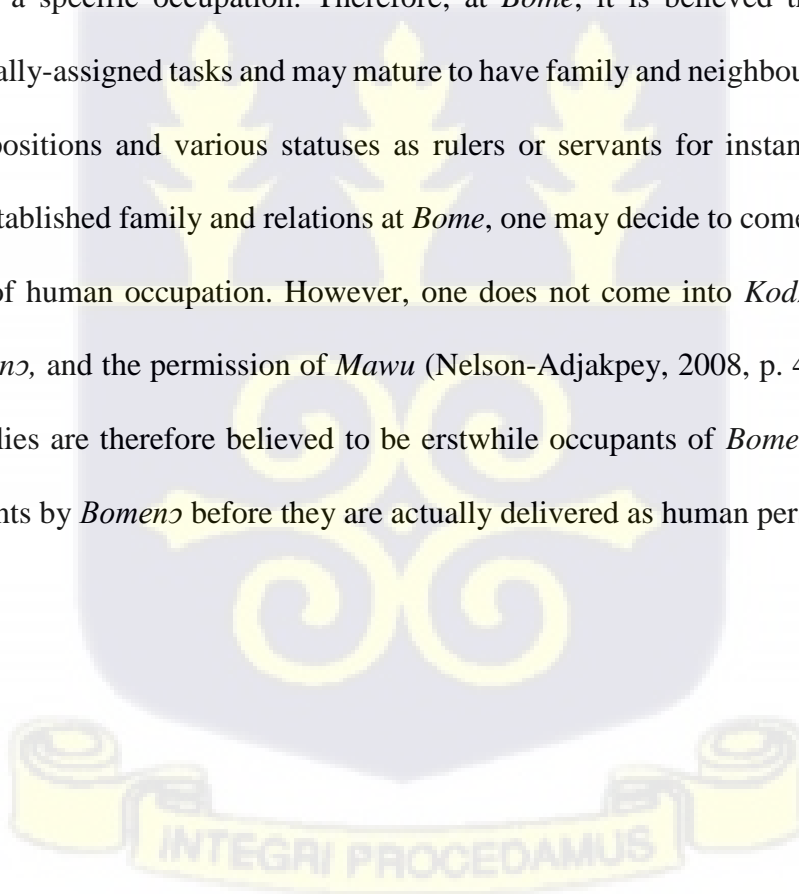
However, some misfortunes are attributed to malevolent spirits associated with *adzo*²⁸, (i.e. sorcery) and *adze* (i.e. witchcraft) as evil forms of spiritual engagements that must be averted (Nelson-Adjakpey, 2008, pp. 37-38; Gavua, 2000, pp. 86-87; Agbanu, 1999, p. 64-86; Meyer, 1998, p. 335; Abotchie, 1997, pp. 87). Pese-Kumah, for example, explains that the *dzositrowo*, the practice with *adzo*, which basically involve the manipulations of material objects for magic, were initially aimed at self-protection or healing of certain illnesses (Pese-Kumah, 1991, p. 14). However, *dzositrowo* are seen to be notorious perpetrators of evil in many communities. According to Abotchie, among the southern Ewe for instance, “the two most abhorrent stigmas are carried by the labels *adzeto*, witch or wizard, or *dzoduameto*, practitioners of evil magic” (Abotchie, 1997, pp. 87, see also Meyer, 1998, p. 335). Culpable individuals associated with *adzo* and *adze* are severely sanctioned in some Ewe communities (e.g. Agbanu, 1999). Thus, Ewe cosmology establishes the moral imperative for the individual person not only to be aware of, but also to live responsibly in the seamless religico-social environment comprising humans and nonhuman others (Eggen, 2002; Dzobo, 1992; Dogbe, 1980). The individual is therefore enjoined to find his/her particular niche for duty on earth, promote social harmony and ultimately fulfill personal destiny.

²⁸ In the Ewe dialect among the *Ewedome*, this is referred to as *edzo*.

In other words, the individual must be social-centered and self-aware at the same time in order to be accomplished in the business of life (Dogbe, 1980).

2.3. Ewe Concept of the Human Being: the Individuality of the Soul and Personal Destiny.

The Ewe believe that human beings have ethereal existence at *Bome*²⁹, the home of origin. At *Bome*, individuals are nurtured by *Bomenɔ* who serves as the spiritual mother of all humanity (Dzobo, 2018). Thus, in Ewe cosmology, the human person is believed to have had his or her first existence as a spiritual being with a soul at *Bome* (Ganusah, 2008, p. 25; Asamoah, 1986, p. 33). In that spiritual pre-existence of the human person, the individual is endowed with special gifts and abilities for a specific occupation. Therefore, at *Bome*, it is believed that the individual undertakes specially-assigned tasks and may mature to have family and neighbours as well³⁰. Thus, people occupy positions and various statuses as rulers or servants for instance. Subsequently, haven already established family and relations at *Bome*, one may decide to come to *Kodzogbe*, the physical world of human occupation. However, one does not come into *Kodzogbe* without the consent of *Bomenɔ*, and the permission of *Mawu* (Nelson-Adjakpey, 2008, p. 43). Children born on earth to families are therefore believed to be erstwhile occupants of *Bome* entrusted to their prospective parents by *Bomenɔ* before they are actually delivered as human persons.



²⁹ *Bome* is variously known as *Amedzɔfe*, *Dzɔfe*, *Dzime*, *Esefe*, or *Mawufe* in the different Ewe dialects. It is described as the celestial home and origin of humankind.

³⁰ There is the general belief about individual's family at *Bome* which includes a spouse and children. Among the Southern Ewe, especially the *Tongu* people, there is the notion of *vui* who is supposed to be a man's spiritual wife (the first wife) at *Bome*.

For the acknowledgment of *Bomenɔ* as the true mother of every human person, appropriate rituals commonly referred to as *vihehedego*³¹ are performed to outdoor newly-born babies (Adzei 2012, pp. 56-57; Amoaku, 1975, pp. 192-193). The *vihehedego* rites are performed not only as an appreciation to *Bomenɔ* for allowing another individual from *Bome* into the family but to also seek blessings for the child who has decided to stay with the earthly family in order to accomplish a mission.

Again, Ewe worldviews postulate that human beings, *amegbetɔwo*, are formed in clay by *Mawu*. The moulded being then receives the breath of life from *Mawu*, and is enabled the ability of movement. Thus, in the physical state of existence on the earth the human being as an *amegbetɔ* implies a moulded being with life and the capacity for movement. The human person is therefore composed of *ɲutila* (the flesh), *gbɔgbɔ* (the breath of life), and *luvo* (a personality soul). Imbued with the breath of life from *Mawu* and nurtured at *Bome*, the human being is considered to possess a spiritual dimension; a spiritual-self that connects with the spirit world while on earth. Life on earth is therefore a continuation of life from *Bome*. However, explanations about the links or relations between the apparently metaphysical spiritual-self of the individual at *Bome* and the physical life of the person as a human being on the earth varies. In one breath, life on earth is considered as the unfolding destiny in which the individual maintains his/her status at *Bome* and in that capacity engages with the business on life as a transitional state of existence. Thus, for

³¹ This rite is usually performed on the eighth day after the birth of the child. However, in some communities it is the ninth day which is considered most appropriate; the eight is believed to be the indication that the child has come to stay with the living (e.g. Amoaku, 1975, pp.192-193)

meaning and purpose, a person's earthly occupation must be in conformity to his/her wielded status at *Bome*³².

In another sense, however, the human person is considered to have been ushered into a new phase of existence on earth with endowed abilities and skills for communal exchanges and engagements. In this new phase of life, the exercise of free-will and responsibility are paramount for success. While this does not rule out predetermined destiny of the individual, fulfilment are considered to be contingent on personal contribution to communal sustenance and social harmony (Eggen, 2002). However, to navigate the complex social environment successfully, one needs to acknowledge the spiritual dimension of physical life and engages with the assistance and benevolence of divinities. Thus, certain rites and rituals are means by which individuals engage in dialogue with the supernatural for insights into personal destiny, approval of considered actions and a sense of direction in life.

2.3.1. Negotiating Destiny: Human Nature, Fate and Freewill in Ewe Worldviews.

Ewe worldviews maintain that before assuming the earthly existence, at *Bome* individual's nature referred to as *Dzɔdzɔme* is determined, and with that one chooses his or her destiny. Broadly, *Dzɔdzɔme* encapsulates the general essence of a person as a human being and the conformity to cosmic laws as functional prerequisite for life in society (Spieth, [1906]2011, p. 538; see also Duerden, 1975). In his observations from oral traditions from several indigenous societies in African, Duerden suggests similar worldviews in which through certain forms of association, a person is considered to embody a poly-faceted soul and a destiny. He therefore argues that such traditions "support a thesis that the various parts of a [person] takes on the attributes of the world

³² Individuals who were leaders at *Bome* are expected to find fulfilment in becoming rulers on the earth. Similarly, excellence in the indigenous trades and craftsmanship are believed to be the exhibitions of those abilities already exercised and perfected at *Bome*.

[i.e. the spirit-cum-physical world] to which he belongs; the over-soul or destiny-soul takes on the attributes of the sky, [and] the body essence takes on the attributes of the earth, and where there are clan-souls they take on the attributes of the clan personalities” (Duerden, 1975, p. 68). This observation seems to be parallel to the Ewe notion of *Dzɔdzɔme* which points to a shared human essence and the moral capacity of the individual as a member of society. However, destiny which connotes the particularity of occupation and personal life’s purpose of a person on the earth is individually negotiated and significantly influenced by personal freewill.

Thus, in connection with personal destiny, an important Ewe indigenous belief is that at *Bome* a person outlines his/her life’s purpose to be undertaken on the earth, and makes a binding pronouncement to commit to that. Accordingly, those pronouncements made at *Bome* constitute *Gbetsi* (Ganusah, 2008; Nelson-Adjakpey, 2008; Asamoah 1986, pp. 33). *Gbetsi* is therefore the proclaimed destiny of a person which is also personified as the individual’s advocate or personal god considered to be always present at *Bome* (e.g. Asamoah, 1986, p. 33). With *Gbetsi*, a person’s occupation on earth, and aspirations for social statuses as well as longevity are believed to be pre-destined (Pese-Kumah, 1999). As advocate, *Gbetsi* expects moral uprightness and makes great demands on its ward for breaches and non-compliance. Hence, a significant aspect of a person’s life is directly contingent on *Gbetsi*; a well negotiated destiny indicates *Gbetsi-nyui*, good fortune that ensures a full actualization of life. On the other hand, individuals who abuse their freewill in violation of their *Gbetsi* may suffer *Gbetsi-vue*, evil ramifications of fate (Gavua, 2000, pp. 90-91). Being a strict enforcer, *Gbetsi* is not usually associated with fortune but considered as an alien spirit with a rather vicious influence on people (e.g. Gavua, 2015, p. 146; Amoaku, 1975; p. 152).

Thus, in some context, *Gbetsi* is considered “negative soul” of a person often characterized in antagonistic stance to smooth flow and longevity of a person’s life³³ (Gavua, 2015, p. 146).

While still at *Bome*, it is maintained that *Mawu* honours the choice of day on which the individual person had willed to be born. On that day of birth, the individual is believed to be further endowed. Reference to the divine gifts to the individual is commonly known as *Dzɔgbese*. The *Dzɔgbese* is believed to pattern and order a person’s life on earth. In other words, *Dzɔgbese* marks the point of ushering of the individual into the physical world with a particular divine destiny (Adzei, 2012, p. 57). Additionally, *Mawu* assigns to the individual a guardian spirit identified as *Aklama*, to protect and ensure the person’s success (e.g. Ganusah, 2008, pp. 27-28; Nelson-Adjakpey, 2008, pp. 43-44; Gavua, 2000, p. 91). Closely associated with the very personality and destiny of the individual, *Aklama* is often considered synonymous with *Dzɔgbese*. However, a suggested distinction is that *Aklama* is particularly believed to have the power to accelerate or even overturn the pre-ordered pattern and content of a person’s life (i.e. the *Gbetsi*), usually for the better (Ganusah, 2008, pp. 26-27). This is achieved especially when individuals actively engage with their *Aklama*, and through the performance of some rituals make requests to have the prospects of their destiny change for the better (e.g. Adzei, 2012, pp. 57-58). As a spirit, the *Aklama* is believed to be neat, cheerful and optimistic; it does not want the individual to have lamenting attitude or habitually live in dirty surroundings. *Aklama* therefore expects the individual to be cheerful, happy, clean and courageous in facing issues of life. Thus, in the business of life, successful people are individuals believed to have come to this world not only with good *Dzɔgbese* but also with very efficient *Aklama*.

³³ Scholars often highlight the ethnographic experiences with *Gbetsi* as being merciless and hostile spiritual force. For example while Amoaku consider it as one of the evil forces which work against human progress (Amoaku, 1975, p. 152), Gavua refers to it as the “evil ramification of *Aklama*” (Gavua, 2000, p. 91)

Again, individuals faced with incessant challenges or misfortunes in life are considered to have possibly willed them at *Bome*, or had circumvented the divine procedure of seeking approval from *Mawu* for propitious *Dzɔgbese*. However, it should be noted that a person may have suffered malicious orchestrations from other people through evil manipulations. It is in this vein that diviners and spiritualists are critical in the search for explanations about unusual or unexpected happenings in a person's life (Abotchie, 1997; see also, Murove, 2009; Dube, 2006; Kirwin, 1989; Gelfand, 1964). Thus, milestone rituals or rites of passage are observed at certain periods of the life of the individual to strengthen his/her *Aklama*. In the case of babies, parents or the family observe appropriate rites aimed at a successful life of the individual on earth. Again, to ensure successful unfolding of a propitious destiny as well as averting malicious obstructions to life, individuals may engage in certain prescriptive customary rites.

2.3.2. Metaphors and Transpositionalities of the Self: *Gbetsi*, *Dzɔgbese*, and *Aklama* as Spiritual Relations.

Evidently, there are several considerations of Ewe concepts of destiny and personality as elaborated in latter chapters. Of particular interest here, however, are Ewe indigenous conceptualizations of *Dzɔgbese* and *Gbetsi* as representing closely associated and interrelated concepts coterminous or synonymous with individual's personality and dispositions for success. In Ewe cosmologies as earlier indicated, it is maintained that the individual 'legitimately' leaves *Bome* as a spirit being to become human on earth only after a well-defined destiny or purpose of life has been established. It is also maintained that at birth, in accordance with a person's destiny, the individual is endowed with special gifts (i.e. talents and dispositions) by *Mawu* or *Bomenɔ* who in addition also assigned some spiritual entities tasked to ensure the person's success on earth (Dzobo, 1992a, p. 78; Dzobo, 1992b, pp 90-91; Pese-Kumah, 1991, pp. 19-23). It is in this frame of reference that the human being is considered to be both a physical and spiritual entity. As

elaborated in chapters three and four, indigenous Ewe conceptualizations of a negotiated personal destiny (i.e. *Gbetsi*), special gifts and the spiritual escorts at birth, variously referred to as *Aklama*, *Dzɔgbese* or *Se*³⁴, constitute the spiritual-self of a person.

As metaphors of individual's personality, *Aklama/Dzɔgbese* or the *Se* establishes a coupling of the individual with his/her spiritual-self; the unseen soul, destiny and/or tutelary spirits about the person. These metaphysical element(s) of the spiritual-self are considered to afford the human being simultaneous agency in both the spirit and the physical realms of the Ewe conceptualized spirit-physical universe (e.g. Spieth, [1906]2011, pp. 52-53; Asamoah, 1986, p. 33). In my understanding, *Gbetsi* which associates the destiny of an individual with particular emphasis on a metaphysical event at *Dzɔfe* in which a person negotiates and agrees on what he or she is to become, the concept of *Gbetsi* makes earthly life of the individual distinctively covenantal; time-bound and one of accountability. However, *Dzɔgbese* and/or *Aklama* conceptualized as the guardian or a collectivity of helper-spirits accommodate free-will of the individual as well as expedite possible re-negotiations of the individual's life prospects (e.g. Ganusah, 2008, pp. 26; Dzobo, 1992c, p. 131).

2.3.3. Symbolisms of *Aklama* and/or *Dzɔgbese*.

One of the common beliefs in Ewe worldviews is the connection of a person's spiritual-self with the placenta³⁵, *amenɔ*, which represents the *Se* or *Aklama* as a personal god who accompanies the ward to the earth (see Fiawoo, 1959, pp. 46-47). Among explanations offered about the significance of the placenta is that when it is severed from the body of the baby at birth,

³⁴ In some contexts *Aklama*, *Dzɔgbese* and *Se* are considered to be synonymous. However a critical review of Ewe indigenous conceptualizations of the human personality and destiny, they are considered to be somewhat different in their specific roles.

³⁵ The placenta is referred to as *amenɔ* which is also described singularly as "the mother" or "carrier" of the human being.

it indicates that the *Se* has successfully accomplished the ushering of the ward into the world and into the custody of the earthly mother. Traditionally, the placenta and the adjoining umbilical cord of a baby represent the link between a person's spiritual-self and physical being. Thus, the placenta and the umbilical cord are never treated ordinarily; they are customarily buried in the earth as an indication of being 'sent off' to *Bome* to assume the status as the advocate for the person³⁶. Nelson-Adjakpey, for instance, remarks that the burying of the umbilical "also has this added significance of having some spiritual connection with the ancestors who have equally been buried in the same soil" (Nelson-Adjakpey, 2008, p. 40).

In another breath, *Aklama* is conceptualized as the spiritual embodiment of the soul and personal destiny of the individual handed over to the person at the time of birth to abide with him or her through life (Spieth, [1906]2011, pp. 532-540). It is in this vein that *Aklama* may also be referred to as *Dzɔgbese*, which implies an endowed gift or assigned destiny on the birthday (Ganusah, 2008). Thus, as an abiding personal destiny or soul, *Aklama* serves as the guardian spirit of the individual on earth, while at the same time at *Bome* the returned spiritual-self³⁷ assumes the role of advocate for the pronounced destiny, *Gbetsi* (Ganusah, 2008, p. 27; Agbanu, 1999, p. 50; Spieth, [1906] 2011, p. 53; c.f. Gavua, 2000, p. 91; Amoaku, 1975, p. 152). Until the destined time for the individual to leave the earth for an afterlife existence, *Aklama* and the personal advocate at *Bome* must be in alignment to help the individual in all life's endeavors. In principle, since *Gbetsi* is the spiritual advocate who ensures that individuals remain true to their promises at *Bome* and is

³⁶ In this vein, the buried naval cord returns to *Bome* and serves as the personal advocate otherwise called *Gbetsi*.

³⁷ One explanation offered is the belief that the placenta is actually the spiritual-self that accompanies the individual to the world and subsequently returns to *Bome* to be the advocate for the individual. This advocate is referred to as *Gbetsi* or *Tatoroe*, among the Ewe in the Midwest and Southern Volta respectively. There is also the general notion among the Ewe that apart from the placenta, there is a star that comes with the birth of the individual. The brighter that star the more likely a person will have fortunes in his/her life on the earth.

believed to enforce that to the latter, it is often characterized as inimical to proactive *Aklama*. Thus, the success or failure of the individual is greatly influenced by the prospects of *Aklama* but in keeping with *Gbetsi*. This underscores the trans-positionality of *Aklama* as a fluid spiritual entity permeating a person's relations at *Bome* and life on earth (Amaoku, 1975, pp. 187-188). It is that quality of *Aklama* that necessitate a focal medium to domicile or objectify it when the individual needs to physically engage with it in some rites or rituals (Agbanu, 2011, p. 51).

In another light, *Aklama* as the spiritual-self of an individual is considered to be constituted by a somewhat two-part soul; a conjoined life-soul and death-soul of which the former dominates until the physical death of the individual at which point the two parts separate for different destinations³⁸ (Manoukian, 1952). Alternatively, the soul and the spiritual-self are considered to be synonymous but operates differently in their respective physical and spiritual realms of existence. In this perspective, in the incorporeal home at *Bome*, the human person is believed to have existed only as a soul; a spirit entity. However, by assuming a physical existence in the world the soul is transformed into an indwelling spirit attended with other spirits as helpers for an earthly mission³⁹ (Pese-Kumah, 1991, p. 26). Thus, the human being is characterized by a soul and assigned with a destiny and other spiritual entities to ensure the success of a person's life on earth (e.g. Ganusah, 2008; Gbolonyo, 2009). Further still, the incorporeal soul is considered to abide with the human being like breath (*gbɔgbɔ*) or the shadow (*luwo*) and then transforms into *ɲoli*, spirit of the dead, when the person dies (Jehle [Westermann], 1907). A common belief shared by

³⁸ According to Spieth the life-soul is said to go to *Bome*, whilst the death-soul goes to *Tsiefe*, the land of the spirits of the dead.

³⁹ Agbanu for example identify a host of helper-spirits that are assigned to each individual to facilitate a successful sojourn on earth (see Agbanu, 1999, pp. 58). These are also identified as *Dunawo* "spiritual body-guards" by Pese-Kumah (Pese-Kumah, 1991, p. 26). Spieth also seems to suggest such spiritual body-guards which include *Aklama*, *Dzogbe* and *Kpegbonola* as tutelary gods that protect the individual particularly from untimely death (Spieth, 1906[2011], p. 50).

the Ewe in this connection is that the physical sites for *Aklama/Dzɔgbese* are the palms, hair and nails of the individual⁴⁰ (e.g. Nukunya, 1990, p. 28). Thus, according to Nukunya for example, among the Ewe, “every dead person’s *luvo* (literally the soul) comprising the finger nails and hair” are buried in the ancestral home, and that “when a lineage member is buried outside the hometown or in a foreign land, the *luvo* is always brought home for burial” (Nukunya, 1990, p. 28). Ganusah also points out that one of the means to show appreciation to *Aklama* is a rite of spiritual cleansing which involves the shaving of the hair as tokens of offering to allow for a regeneration in the person’s life (Ganusah, 2008, pp. 27-28).

In a nutshell, in Ewe cosmological viewpoints, the human person is believed to come from the spiritual world, to which he or she eventually returns after an earthly sojourn (see Diagram 2). The human being is therefore considered to be both a physical and spiritual entity. Consequently, as pointed out by some scholars of Ewe traditions like Nukunya (2016), Agbanu (2011; 1999) and Nelson-Adjakpey (2008) a popular belief among the Ewe is that the earth is filled with deities including potentially malevolent spirits that need to be carefully engaged, placated or pacified. Similarly, a traditional belief in justice-wielding divinities referred to as *trɔwo*, considered to be the children of *Mawu*, harmonious co-existence among humans, nature and the supernatural are regulated and maintained.



⁴⁰ It is believed that at birth, in the fisted hands of the baby is the *Aklama*, the soul and destiny. However, the most abiding sites of the soul are the hair and nails of the individual; the visible elements that come with a baby and ideally go with the person at death.

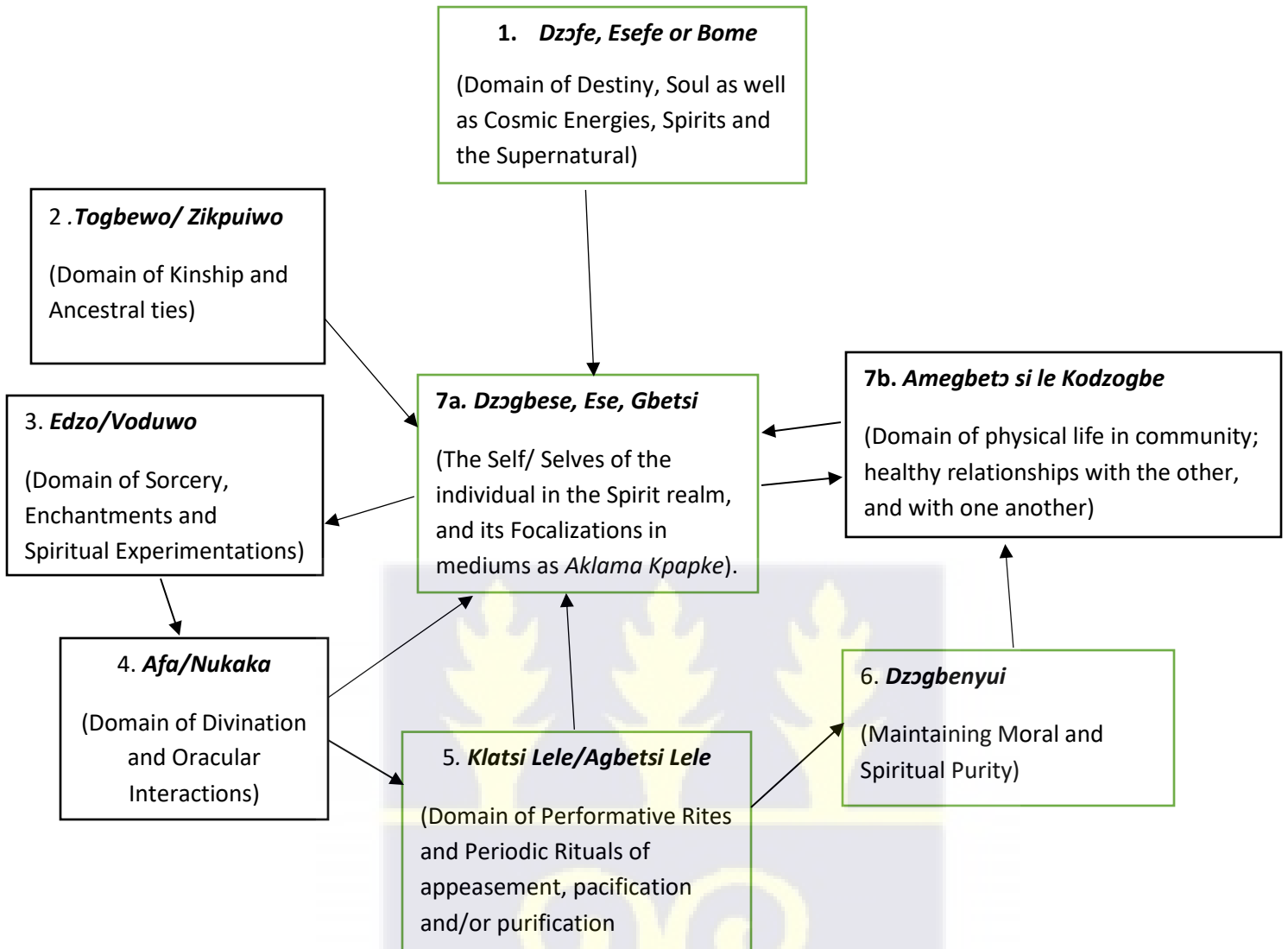


Diagram 2. Representation of Ewe cosmology in which *Aklama* represents permeable relationships and mediates interactions across domains of physical and spiritual existences of the human being.

2.4. Trans-positioning of the Self: *Aklama* and the Revolving Realms of Human Existence in Ewe Worldviews.

Within Ewe worldviews, as illustrated by Diagram 2, in relation to the domain of kinship and ancestral ties, it could be argued that the place of the human being in the interlinked spirit-physical world is regulated by the phenomena of birth and death coupled with the notion of reincarnation. Fiawoo, for instance, explains that “prior to the entry into the visible world, [the human person] has led a full life in the land of the souls, where life is in many ways similar to one of the visible world” and that “in the spirit world, a [person] has parents (guardians), siblings, spouse, and children” (Fiawoo, 1959, p. 61). Thus, birth and death serve as the revolving entry and exit points that position the individual in pre-earthly, earthly, and afterlife realms of existence. Thus, every person comes to the world with a unique destiny and a life’s purpose to be integrated into the harmonious spirit-physical world (Quarcoopome, 2016; Gbolonyo, 2009; Dzobo, 1992). Hence, the human person as both spiritual and social being experiences multi-loci existence in processual states of being human on the earth, and becoming a spirit in the afterlife. In relation to the *Aklama* therefore, the human person assumes three possible temporal existences of which life in the physical realm is transitory (see Diagram 2). Hence, sequel to the spiritual life at *Bome*, is a post-natal state of existence of the human person as a mortal being; a state of life in the flesh on earth where the pronounced and chosen destiny at *Bome* unfolds.

The transition of the soul from *Bome* to *Kodzogbe* is connected with physical birth. Thus, in Ewe worldviews, the individual is introduced into the physical realm through earthly parents who are considered to be conduits linking the conjoined spirit-physical world. A person supposedly continues his/her occupation⁴¹ from *Bome* on earth, maintain his or her spiritual

⁴¹ Individual souls at *Bome* are believed to have social statuses and specific trades. There are parents, chiefs, queen-mothers, priests, artisans among others at *Bome*.

relations and is also expected to be a productive member of the earthly community. Therefore, a successful person is an individual who does not only excel in his or her occupation but also sires a good number of children to consolidate the lineage, and eventually dies ‘peacefully at home’ as an old person. These serve as the measure for successful life on earth and the prerequisite for ancestorship and possible reincarnations.

2.4.1. *Aklama* as the Agency of Helper-Spirit(s) and/or the Actualization of *Gbetsi*.

The efficiency of a person’s talents or abilities and his or her success in earthly occupation is believed to be facilitated by *Aklama*. Every individual’s *Aklama* is supposed to be propitious, and it is therefore in many ways synonymous with fortune.⁴² However, just as the individual exercises the will and aspirations in determining his or her destiny at *Bome*, the person is also free to exercise judgment in all earthly engagements. While *Aklama* is believed to follow the individual and to guide him/her on the paths of fortune, it does not subvert the will of the person (e.g. Dzobo, 1992). Thus, on hindsight at the neglect of the *Aklama*, an individual may move from one occupation to another and achieve some success, but might not find fulfilment until he/she lands on the particular trade embodied in his or her destiny as the *Gbetsi* enacted at *Bome*. In other words, an individual is supposedly successful when the person actualizes his *Gbetsi* within certain milestones in life on earth.

However, the capacity of individual’s free-will also suggests that while certain events for a person’s life on earth are predetermined, a person further negotiates life’s prospects in social interactions and interrelationships (Agbanu, 1999, p. 59). This underscores the fact that outside a predestined vocation, the individual could be proactive in taking some decisions or undertake a

⁴² The synonymizing of *Aklama* with fortune finds expressions in the popular Ewe saying “*Aklama dinow!*” to indicate how lucky an individual had been in admittedly dangerous or fortuitous situations.

momentary action that could be destiny-changing. When such actions decisively put the individual on the path of success for the rest of his/her life, it is particularly attributed to *Aklama* as a guardian spirit who serves the best interests of the individual even outside what had been originally destined for the person (e.g. Ganusah, 2008, p. 28). Therefore, in the social milieu of members associated with different destinies and interests, *Aklama* serves to protect the person from potential obstructions and harm. More importantly, *Aklama* ensures that the individual successfully fit a niche to accomplish his/her roles on earth. The individual is therefore expected to be aware of his or her *Aklama* and acknowledge it as the initiator or enabler for spectacular feats he or she may possibly achieve.

Again, when a person narrowly escapes fatal accidents or survives situations of certain death, the person's *Aklama* is credited for such feats. Thus, to position one's self on the paths of fortune and success, the individual is required to acknowledge *Aklama* as the companion-spirit, and consciously engages with it (Ganusah, 2008, pp.27-28; Nelson-Adjakpey, 2008, pp. 43-44; Gavua, 2000, p. 91).

2.4.2. Deification and/or Objectification of *Aklama*.

Basically, *Aklama* is a personal spirit believed to accompany a person from *Dzɔfe* into the world for the business of life on earth. Although unseen, *Aklama* is believed to communicate to the conscience of the individual⁴³ and expects to be recognized and heeded accordingly (Ganusah, 2008, pp. 27-28). Recurrent misfortune or incessant mishaps in a person's life may be attributed to a slack in the individual's engagements with the otherwise propitious *Aklama*. When identified, lapses in the desired interaction between *Aklama* and its ward may be attended through periodic

⁴³ *Aklama* is believed to communicate to its ward through dreams and premonitions to reveal secrets and realities in the realms of the spirit as precursors to real life situations yet unfolded.

offerings and rites of purification of the soul. Enervated *Aklama* is therefore rejuvenated through pacification and purification rites. However, certain circumstances may demand the subjection of *Aklama*, the personal spirit, to a form of religious observance and sustained devotion (Nelson-Adjakpey, 2008, p. 44). For devotional engagements with *Aklama*, material mediums provide focal point for interacting with otherwise non-perceptible spiritual entities.

The focalization of *Aklama* which involves the transformation of the unseen personal spirit to a “personal god” which is given cultic attention is necessitated, on one hand, by the need to actualize the spirit into perceptual form for regular interaction for success in certain ventures. On the other hand, when it is established that the destiny a person had willed for him/herself at *Dzɔfe* was not the best and must be ritually re-negotiated, *Gbetsi* the strict advocate must be pacified. Nelson-Adjakpey for instance reveals that “it is this state of affairs that *Aklama* had developed into a personal god to more effectively protect a person, regulate and control his behaviour, and if need be, defend him from possible interruption from *Gbetsi*” (Nelson-Adjakpey, 2008, p. 44). Thus, in subjectifying *Aklama*, a physical medium is invoked with the spirit to serve the means to domicile the soul or the personal-helper spirit of the individual for devotion—to enable perceptible engagements with it.⁴⁴ The most common physical medium for engaging with the soul, personal destiny or helper-spirit(s) (as the case may be for the individual) is identified as *Aklama kpakpe*, a figurine⁴⁵ which is configured into a personal sacred space for religious devotion (Quarcoopome, 2016; Nelson-Adjakpey, 2008; Fiawoo, 1959).

⁴⁴ Engaging with the soul through a physical medium, especially the quintessential *Aklama* figurine also called the *Se*, is not voluntary. It is necessitated by the dire need to carter to one form of a life crisis or another.

⁴⁵ *Aklama* figurines are usually executed in the medium of clay or wood.

While it is not necessarily mandatory to create physical mediums to accommodate individuals' accompanying spiritual entities, as is discussed in subsequent chapters, some groups of persons including chiefs, special artisans, and priests may need to have *Aklama* figurines at some point in life. For example, in many Ewe societies *zikpuitɔwo* (i.e. stool-fathers) are considered not only as traditional chieftains but also spiritual leaders just like the priests (e.g. Tsikata, 2012, pp. 91-92). Thus, according to tradition, such individuals may need to actualize the "spiritual-self" to hone in their professional expertise or statuses considered to have been established by their *Gbetsi* at *Dzɔfe*, or a special calling by some deities (Gavua, 2015, p. 142). Mainly bothering on religious faith, the need for *Aklama* figurines as media to engage with the spiritual-self and the supernatural for guided execution of a person's purpose in life is usually established and/or confirmed through divination (e.g. Drewal, 1996, pp. 313-314). This is usually the case in the context of life-threatening crisis where redemptive rites become necessary to inquire from the realms of the spirit what the actual cause(s) might be. Thus, spiritualists facilitate oracular consultations with the supernatural to ascertain the state of a person's spiritual-self, and to identify the particular requests of other divinities that may be adversely or positively involved in the life of the individual (as indicated in Domain 3 of Diagram 2; see also Friedson, 2009, pp. 128, 164; Fiawoo, 1959, p. 47).

Specifics for the *Aklama* figurines, when they are required, are therefore identified by the means of oracular divination. It is in such contexts of necessity that the functional attributes of *Aklama* becomes critically important over the aesthetical considerations of the figurines. Thus, the form and style of *Aklama* figurines may only serve as a booster to their efficiency in ritual engagements. In other words, the aesthetic properties of *Aklama* figurines may vitally facilitate the needed affective relations with metaphysical entities the figurines represent, but they are not the

ultimate defining essence. However, in the absence of a need for *Aklama* figurines, especially among adherents of Ewe traditions and customs, there are natal day practices observed particularly on the day of the week that mark the person's birth. Also there are occasional celebrations where the individual is joined by others who share a natal day.⁴⁶ These observances are intentional means to appreciate individuals' *Aklama*⁴⁷ to be more propitious. Some *Aklama* figurines may however serve only an ephemeral purpose in some remedial rites⁴⁸ (e.g. Spieth, [1906]2011, pp. 506-507, 517; Cudjoe, 1969, p. 52. Spiess, 1922, pp. 145-154). For instance, *Aklama* figurines are used as surrogates in rites for longevity to exchange for the lives of babies believed to have been destined for just a short stay on the earth (Pese-Kumah, 1991, p. 24). Similarly, in situations where rampant infant mortality is assigned spiritual causation, women who experience bouts of recurrent loss of their children may need ritual interventions involving some kinds of *Aklama* figurines to remedy their plight. Again, as tokens to acknowledge one's spiritual spouse, *Aklama* figurines may be required to assuage the jealousy of a person's partner believed to be spiritually present at *Bome*⁴⁹ (e.g. Spieth, [1906]2011, pp. 533-534). For such individuals, the figurines are made to acknowledge those spiritual partners to allow for their successful marriage life on the earth. Thus, with notable exception of destined chiefs, priests and priestesses of the Ewe indigenous religion who may necessarily have to possess some form of *Aklama* figurines in acknowledgement of their special calling, the necessity for the possession of *Aklama* figurines for religious devotion is not voluntary. This implies that when an individual's life is largely in harmony with the *Aklama* as the

⁴⁶ People who share the same day of birth, as for example Friday, are believed to be identified with the same *Se*, the dispatcher of individual to the earth, and are as well identified with the same *Dzɔdzɔme*.

⁴⁷ This observance ranges from personal preference for some colors of clothing, sexual abstinence, to food restrictions. A common practice however is a weekly ceremonial eating of an egg on the day of birth.

⁴⁸ Among the Ewe in the Midwest especially, *Aklama* figurines are presented as tokens at designated sacred spots to pacify *Gbetsi*, the advocate at *Bome* to renegotiate a person's destiny for more propitious one.

⁴⁹ Every individual is believed to have had a spouse at *Bome*; men have their *Dzɔgbesro* while women have their *Dzɔgbemetsui* to be acknowledged.

abiding spiritual-self and *Gbetsi*, the personal advocate at *Bome*, one may not have need for *Aklama* figurines to serve as the focal medium for the otherwise metatypical soul/and or the personal destiny. Generally, however, to strengthen the *Aklama* for more exploits in an individual's life, it is believed that *Aklama* requires of its ward to be optimistic and be ever cheerful; *Aklama* does not want the individual to be sorrowful or brood over personal losses (Nelson-Adjakpey, 2008).

2.5. Reincarnation and Spirits of the Dead.

Ewe cosmologies postulate an afterlife in the spirit world referred to as *Tsiefe*, *Avlime* or *Dolife*. Traditionally, it is believed that at death, the soul survives as a spirit and transitions to the spirit world (Nukunya, 2016, p. 73). Thus, if a person had fulfilled his/her destiny at *Kodzogbe*, and most importantly, had died a good death, the spirit goes to *Tsiefe/Avlime*. The spirit of that individual becomes an ancestor and also a potential candidate for reincarnation (Friedson, 2009, pp. 104-105). On the contrary, if one's *Aklama* is not accomplished, especially as a result of tragic death, the spirit is believed to be held at *Dolife* as *Ametsiava*.⁵⁰ From the perspective of indigenous African philosophy, Wiredu for instance, explains that a common belief among most West African societies is that "a person whose life is cut short by an accident or an "unclean" disease or any other untoward circumstances does not gain immediate access to the country of the dead" (Wiredu, 1992, p. 143). Among the Ewe, such are considered disgruntled, lingering spirits that must be contained in some ways on the earth until such a time they may be due for entry into *Tsiefe* (e.g. Jehle [Westermann], 1907; and Spieth, [1906]2011; Friedson, 2009, pp. 97-98). However, pending an entry to *Tsiefe*, the spirit may be allowed to reincarnate into the lineage to complete the unfinished business at *Kodzogbe*. In spiritual possessions whereby an individual becomes a

⁵⁰ *Ametsiavawo* are persons who suffer tragic and untimely deaths.

medium, are sometimes attributed to *Ametsiava* spirits that seek some attention from their living relatives (Friedson, 2009; Rosenthal, 1998). In this vein, a member of the family in whom such a spirit takes a particular interest may thus be targeted; that person may be troubled or afflicted with some maladies to compel him or her to domicile the disgruntled spirit to ‘rejoin’ the family during ritual performances (Rosenthal, 1998, p. 112).

Customarily, one of the means by which disgruntled spirits of the dead are domiciled is the *Aklama* figurine. In this context, *Aklama* figurines are made to serve as repose, and also to provide the avenue to acknowledge, placate or to pacify such a spirit.⁵¹ Again, in some instances, the spirit may demand from the family a proper burial. This implies that although the body might have been buried, the supposed ‘loitering soul’ of the dead person must be recovered from the spot of the tragic death, usually by an *Amegashie*, a spiritualist, for a befitting burial (e.g. Amoaku, 1975, pp. 196-200). When such demands are ignored and requisite rites are not performed, stories abound about instances where such persons exhibit their state of misery to their families by causing some havoc. The cause of some illness, especially mental distress and restlessness of family members, which often defy medical treatment may be attributed to the aggrieved spirits of the dead (Venkatachalam, 2012, pp. 56-57). Such afflicted individuals may need to consult the oracles to ascertain the causes of their ailment and possibly placate the responsible spirit through prescribed rites or rituals.

Similarly, apart from ceremonial ancestral stools, erstwhile founders of a lineage may require special acknowledgement from their families (e.g. Avorgbedor, 1986, p. 116). As the nexus of a lineage, those are ancestors considered to have been extremely brave warriors or hunters who

⁵¹ In some communities among the *Anlo* especially, individuals who become host to disgruntled spirit of a family member are referred to as *Dzogbeshiwo*. Figurines that serve as the repose for those spirits are called *Dzogbe*.

defied both wild animals and fierce enemies. Again, in the process of establishing a village, and subsequently a lineage or clan it is believed that some ancestors might have suffered casualties from enemies. Thus, in many Ewe villages there are marked sacred sites⁵² usually around the homestead to recognize the bravery of such ancestors and, possibly harness their courageous adeptness for successive generations.⁵³ At the same time, these sacred spots are meant to contain possible reprisals from the spirits of animal and human casualties of ancient times believed to be the cause of some manifestations of spiritual possession on members of a family. This is perhaps underscored by the traditional Ewe belief that every wrong must be atoned for, and justice served to innocent victims (Friedson, 2009, p. 99-102; Nelson-Adjakpey, 2008, pp. 17-19; Abotchie, 1997, pp. 66-67; Nukunya, 1990, pp. 67-71). Thus, individuals may vicariously be liable to the eternal debts of their ancestors as well as the moral indebtedness of other family members⁵⁴ (e.g. Jenkins, 2017; Akpabli-Honu, 2014; Agbanu, 2011; Meyer, 1998; Rosenthal, 1998).

2.6. “Supra Human Beings”: Twins’ Spirits and the Twins’ Fraternity.

Children are considered to be visitors on a mission to the earth; they may only be passing through however. Traditionally, among the Ewe, like many Ghanaian cultures, children are only recognized as part of the family after the eighth day of their birth when they are customarily welcomed and given a name (e.g. Ammah, 2016, pp. 84-85, 98; Spieth, [1906]2011, pp. 539-540; Amoaku, 1975, p. 192-193). However, twins are considered to be very special. As Nukunya points

⁵² These sites dedicated to the spirits of brave-hunter ancestors are called *Adekpɔ*.

⁵³ Usually when a hunter overpowers dangerous animals like the lion, leopard, buffalo, crocodile among other, those animals are believed to be spirited and therefore their spirits must be pacified and contained. The *Adekpɔ* is established for such purpose. Again, the *Adekpɔ* is meant to acknowledge the *Aklama* of the hunter as being powerful.

⁵⁴ This is the core customary principle on which such practices as *Trɔkosi/Fiasidi* which require vassal servitude of innocent virgin girls in dealing with the family’s moral indebtedness to the gods. In the Midwest Volta the custom of *Kuxaxa* in which the family of the deceased are interrogated, it is done to ensure that any outstanding issues and grievances are appropriately taken care of.

out, the normal thing with human beings is single gestation, hence twins being the ‘unusual’ evokes religious attention (Nukunya, 2016, p. 82). Thus, in some Ewe societies, twins are associated with the *Afa* god of divination and are therefore considered to be spiritually foresighted and fortified (e.g. Jenkins, 2012, pp. 86-87; Cudjoe, 1969, p. 49). Similarly, in other cultures of West Africa such as the Mende and Yoruba, twins are associated with deities and spirits (e.g. Ferme, 2001, pp. 213-214; Blier, 1998, p. 92). Hence, their birth is attended with elaborate rites and rituals (Nukunya, 2016, pp. 82-83; Batulukisi, 2000, p. 27). However, it is important to point out that, beliefs and attitudes towards twins vary within different faiths and traditions in many Ewe societies particularly in contemporary times. While twins are usually regarded as individuals with supernatural abilities and spiritually positioned for good fortune and prosperity, according to Amoaku, for instance, in some Ewe communities, “if a woman’s first pregnancy results in the birth of twins, the children are generally referred to as *Totoeve* and looked upon as bad omen” (Amoaku, 1975, p. 188). Generally, however, among the Ewe the birth of twins is considered as a blessing to the family.

Customarily, like other Ghanaian cultures such as the Akan and Ga, the sex and the order of birth determine the special names reserved for twins to indicate the seniority and specific names of each of them. The first to come out of the womb is considered the junior twin and is usually named *Attakuma/Kuma* or *Etse*; the one to come out the last is considered the eldest and so named *Atta* or *Atsu*. As pointed out by Nukunya for instance, in some Ewe traditions, when twins are born it is believed that a hole has literally been punched in the lineage that exposes the family to supernatural beings from whom the twins had broken away (Nukunya, 2016, p. 83). Those spirits are believed to make frantic attempts to take the twins back. Thus, the spirits need to be placated and the twins properly received to live among the family. As part of the customary rites to pacify

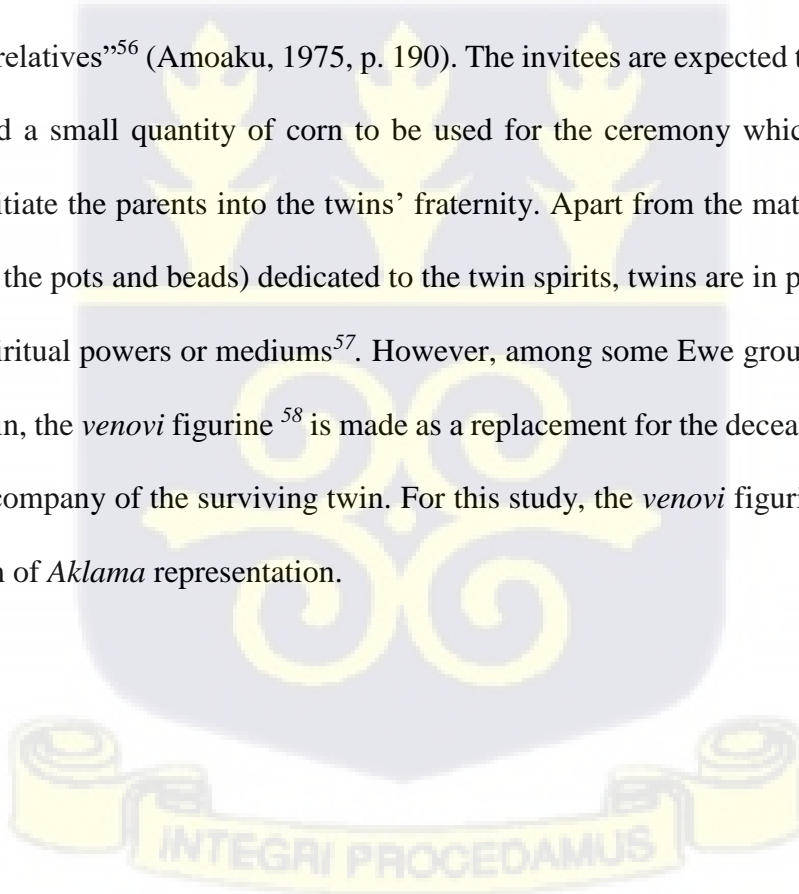
the twin spirit to truly ‘humanise’ the twins, the immediate child born after the twins is named *Doe* or *Tawia* considered to seal off the punctured hole. Thus, traditionally, after a twin birth, a child or two more are expected to be born by the parents. In the meantime, in order to appease the spirits of the twins to enable them to settle peacefully with the family and live fully as ‘humans’, the *venoviwo* ceremony is performed. Customarily, there are two major rites, namely *alɔtɔtrɔ* and *evewowo* associated with the *venoviwo* ceremony each of which has particular intended purpose (Nukunya, 2016, p. 83; Amoaku, 1975, p. 189). According to Nukunya, the *alɔtɔtrɔ* which implies the “changing of hands” is done to enable the twins to identify themselves fully with human life” (Nukunya, 2016, p. 83). It is primarily intended to ensure that the twins stay and do not die away into the spirit world. The *evewowo*, on the other hand, is meant to restore normalcy to the parents following their ‘unusual experience’ with multiple birth (Nukunya, 2016, p. 83). In addition, it is intended to bring prosperity to the parents. Ultimately, the parents are adopted into the fraternity of twins where the mother and the father assume the statuses of *vena* and *venatsu* respectively. Among the *Anlo*, for example, Nukunya points out that parents who have gone through both rites are believed to also acquire the power of bone-setting. Apart from the twins and the parents, at least the two successive children born after the twins are considered bona fide members of the twins’ fraternity and are expected to adhere to taboos associated with it.⁵⁵ Amoaku succinctly describes the two-part *venoviwo* ceremony as the following:

As a first part of the twin-rite, two clay pots are placed on tripods or the ground at the main entrance of the building where the twins live. Each of the pots is filled with water, herbs, and seven palm nuts known as “*sede ku*” literally, the

⁵⁵ Apart from the ascribed names to identify individuals with the twins’ fraternity, there is also a special bead, the *venovi dzonu* that is supposed to be worn by members. The beads are meant to particularly help to readily identify an individual as one with the twin spirit and to also prevent sexual relations among themselves. Sexual intercourse between members of the twins’ fraternity are forbidden; it is believed to result in *alɔkple*, a non-curable spiritually contracted illness.

palm-nuts of destiny. The life and safety of the twins depends on how well the pots are kept. They may be bathed with water from the pots when they are indisposed or be embalmed [or washed with it when dead]. Offerings in money, usually in coins are put in the pots for the twins of which only them or their parents or others whom the twins give special permission may expend. It is believed that any unauthorized use of the offerings made to the twins in the pot may result in habitual thievery; the individual offender becomes kleptomaniac until confession is made and purification rites are performed for the culprit (Amoaku, 1975, pp. 189-190).

For the second and final part of the rite, Amoaku notes that “the parents of the twins send *edza* invitation with ritual payment to *venagawo* the ritual specialists, [and to] parents of twins, twins, and other relatives”⁵⁶ (Amoaku, 1975, p. 190). The invitees are expected to bring along four cowries each and a small quantity of corn to be used for the ceremony which is symbolically dramatized to initiate the parents into the twins’ fraternity. Apart from the materials or mediums (for the example the pots and beads) dedicated to the twin spirits, twins are in principle forbidden to court other spiritual powers or mediums⁵⁷. However, among some Ewe groups, in the event of the death of a twin, the *venovi* figurine⁵⁸ is made as a replacement for the deceased to be cared for and to keep the company of the surviving twin. For this study, the *venovi* figurine is of particular interest as a form of *Aklama* representation.



⁵⁶ Individuals who administer the rites must themselves be members of the twin fraternity. The *venagawo* are senior twin mothers of twin fraternity in a particular village or town.

⁵⁷ Twins are considered to be spiritually strong and fortified. There are peculiar rites for twins that preclude them from engaging with other supernatural.

⁵⁸ The *venovi* is particularly common among the Southern Ewe.

2.7. Community and Collective Responsibility.

Among the Ewe, each individual is considered a vital link of the well-being of the community. Thus, challenges faced by individuals are considered a hitch in the communal welfare and are therefore mediated by customs and rites. Occasions of apparent maladjustments in personal lives and disruptions in social harmony are remedied by the means of religico-social engagements ranging from personal devotion, to community-wide ceremonial rites. Hence, extra-ordinary favours or luck that a person encounters are considered positive influences of *Aklama* that need to be ceremonially acknowledged (Ganusah, 2008, p. 28). Therefore, notable experiences of good fortune by individuals are acknowledged and celebrated for the want of more from *Aklama*. The flipside is also critically considered; incessant misfortunes in an individual's life serve as flash points for enquiry to ascertain if those are the results of a laxity of the *Aklama* that needs to be invigorated. Thus, personal sacred space in the household, usually the bedroom, may be required for the individual to directly engage with his/her *Aklama*, the soul or abiding personal helper-spirit, through a physical medium.

Similarly, sacred places for engaging with the supernatural may be established for individuals involved in the various traditional trades⁵⁹ to have fortune with their activities. Although, individuals may voluntarily partake in periodic ceremonial rites, the founding of such fraternities is facilitated by deities associated with those trades who recruit their stewards through spiritual possessions. Individuals are so chosen usually through some spectacular feats or the survival of severe afflictions, especially ill-health. Such are believed to be signs of the 'calling' of the individual by the deities; something believed to be largely related with a person's destiny and pre-ordained occupation. However, general misfortunes are attributed to justice meted out on an

⁵⁹ On the olden days these were primarily hunting, fishing, farming and the various handicrafts, especially potting and carving. Thus, there are sacred spaces or alters for the various trade fraternities; a form of cultic.

individual's wrongdoings, or as vicarious liability for the wrongs of close relations as moral debts that need to be propitiated or pacified (Akpabli-Honu, 2014; Nelson-Adjakpey, 2008; Rosenthal, 1998; Abotchie, 1997). Further still, one may suffer orchestrated spiritual accidents by sorcery or witchcraft. Thus, it is possible that an otherwise productive *Aklama* may get entangled or enervated by an individual's choices and other contingencies. Hence, when a person narrowly escapes an otherwise fatal accident, or survives a deadly illness, there is the need to cleanse the soul to strengthen the *Aklama* for more favorable prospects (Ganusah, 2008). The soul cleansing is a rite usually administered through herbal baths at designated places considered as spots of the deity, or as may be determined by the spirit through divination (e.g. Friedson, 2009, p.74).

In sum, the Ewe cosmology could be characterized as monotheistic as well as pan-deistic as it primarily acknowledges a Supreme God, *Mawu* and, in addition, the divinity of nature and categories of spirits. Thus, natural elements and material things may be deified to serve as the abodes of the gods or channels through which one communicates or engages with *Mawu* and other divinities. Periodic rites and ritual performances therefore serve the means to dialogue with the supernatural as efforts to harmonize activities in the physical-spirit world order (e.g. Murove, 2009; Bloom and Ottong, 1987; Gelfand, 1964). Again, it is noteworthy that Ewe worldviews about their relations with *Mawu*, the ancestors and the deities contribute to their symbolic representations of divinity for perceptual engagements (Geurts, 2003). Ewe deities may therefore be represented in material mediums or constituted into sacred spaces in the environment, and in some cases inside the household (Greene, 2002; Gilbert, 1982; Cudjoe, 1971). At the level of personal interactions with divinity, especially in connection with the imbued quality of *Mawu* expensed with the individual as the *Se*, *Aklama* figurines particularly serve as a point of contact to domicile and/or engage with the supernatural (e.g. Quarcoopome, 2016; Wicker and Opoku, 2007).

As demonstrated in chapters three, four and five, on one hand *Aklama* figurines reflect the transposable qualities of metaphysical forces or spirit entities identified with some natural elements. On the other hand, the figurines represent the subjectification of the divine in perceptible forms to enable physical interaction with divinities and spiritual forces believed to be directly involved in the general life of a community and the well-being of the individual⁶⁰.



⁶⁰ Subjectification of spirit entities implies the acknowledgement of peculiar spirit(s) or deity as well as the strict adherence to ritual protocols to engaging with them.

3.0. CHAPTER THREE: Local Conceptualizations of *Aklama* in the Midwest Volta.

In this chapter I present indigenous conceptualizations and materiality of *Aklama* in the Midwest Volta, the designated *Ewedome* Zone. The chapter outlines engagements with key informants and highlights indigenous worldviews in which notions of *Aklama* are expressed. In connection with personal experiences of respondents, *Aklama* figurations are explained as elements of relations with spiritual phenomena in search for insights into personal destiny or fate, and also as a means for self-actualization. Furthermore, the chapter throws light on focalizations of *Aklama*, particularly as a crisis point remedy, to symbolize and mediate certain relational entanglements in which individuals and perceived metaphysical entities are enmeshed in the spirit-physical universe maintained by the indigenous religion.

3.1. Accessing Key Informants: Reconnaissance and Fieldtrips to the Midwest Volta.

In January 2020 when in Peki sampled opinions suggested that *Aklama* figurines and their associated practices were rare, my principal supervisor suggested I re-strategized to explore other areas in the Midwest Volta where there are carvers who are commissioned to make items for religious purposes. His conviction was based on his knowledge that there were still individual adherents of the indigenous religion in the area who engage with deity mediums and, perhaps, those carvers might serve as pointers to key informants. Thus, through some relations, in March he arranged for me to be hosted at Wusuta, his hometown, to begin a ten-day reconnaissance survey in the North Dayi District of the Volta Region.

In keeping with traditional protocol, with a copy of an official letter from my Department at Legon in which I was identified as a student researcher interested in *Aklama*, and two bottles of Castle Bridge branded gin, my hosts, Mr. Kofi Arne and Mr. Yao Ahorlu, introduced me to the traditional leadership of Wusuta. At the time of the visit, the paramount chief was out of town on

duty for the Volta Regional House of Chiefs at Ho, the regional capital. I was therefore received by the *Zikpuigato*, the paramount-stool father, Togbe Kotoku at his residence with an *Asafoatse*, an elder of the town. On behalf of the paramount chief, they received me warmly and in assurance of their support to my mission, they highly recommended one Mr. Michael Adanuvor to be my assistant to facilitate my movements and interactions with prospective informants in the area⁶¹. For the rest of the afternoon, I took Mr. Adanuvor through my research proposal and instruments, especially the question guide for interviews. I particularly explained to him that my ultimate goal was to find people who could talk about *Aklama* and might have the *Aklama kpakpe* as well. Thus, our work to identify individuals who might have information or personal experiences with *Aklama* figurines began in earnest the following day.

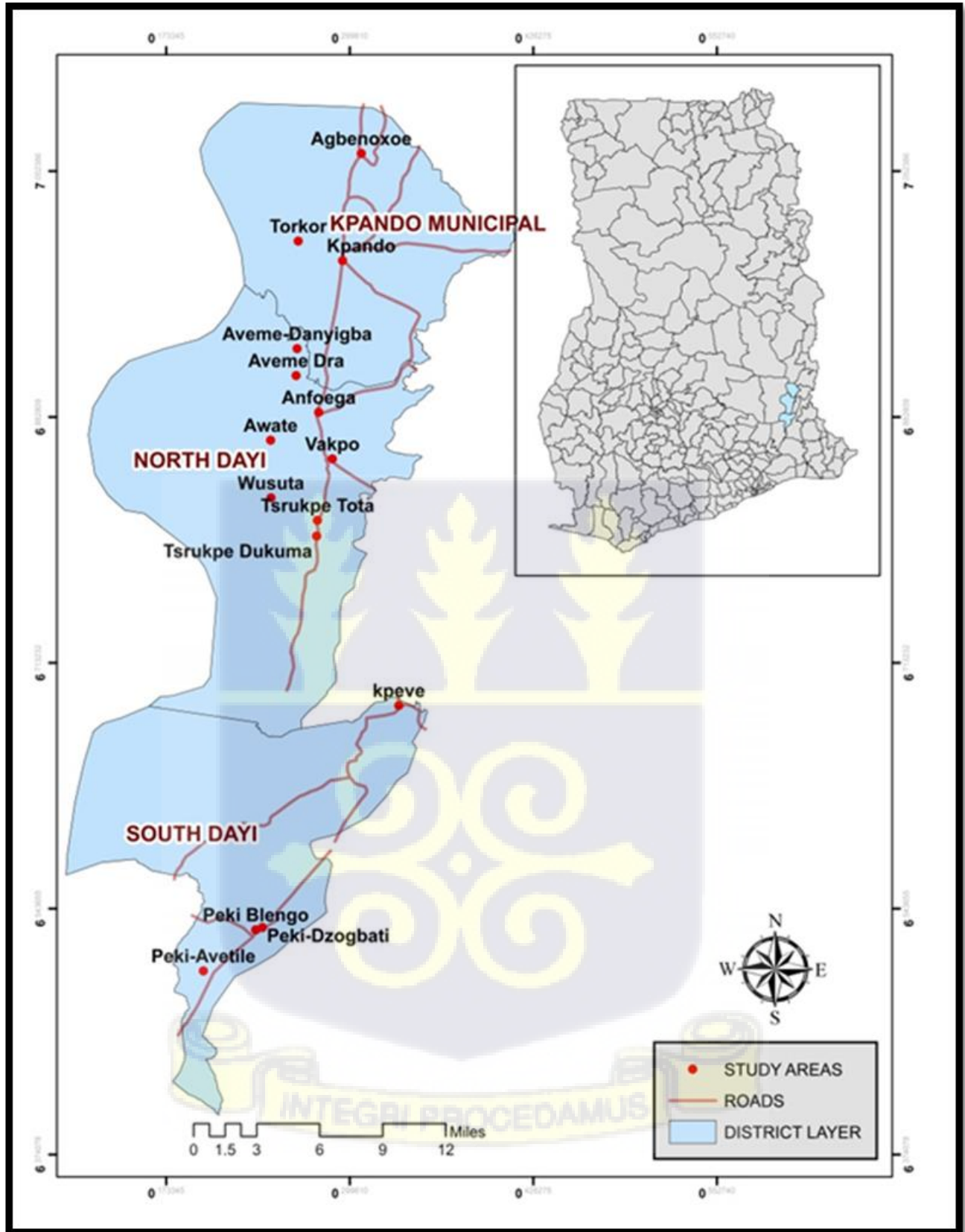
Following the advice of Mr. Ahorlu to be unsophisticated to negotiate easy access to informants, I carried with me only a mobile phone and an A4-size envelope in which were copies of the introductory letter from my Department, pen and a note pad. In many instances, it was after a couple of minutes into a conversation with a respondent that I would pause to seek the permission to audio-record, take photos or make short videos with the mobile phone. In the events of accessing shrines and regal spaces, moderate provision in cash equivalent to two bottles of Castle Bridge branded gin was made for traditional protocols and for appreciations. I kept a daily recording of my observations and summary of the key points of the interviews in a journal.

For the first three days we trekked through different sections of Wusuta for interviews and appointments as Michael made inquiries about prospective key informants. Our informants mainly included older folks, priests and priestesses of the indigenous religion and such others who had

⁶¹ Mr. Michael Adanuvor as 34 year-old professional electronics technician and the District Youth Organizer of the New Patriotic Party, one of the two major political parties in Ghana. I observed that he knows the area very well and he is also well-known.

experienced ceremonies and rites related to *Aklama*. Although my initial plan was to focus on Wusuta, Vakpo and Anfoega towns, we ventured out to other towns and villages by means of a hired motorbike as we followed up on people recommended by others. As the days unfolded, our journeys therefore snowballed uphill the Awate Traditional Area, and further the Kpando Municipality as we looked for carvers' workshops, shrines and stool-fathers for interview appointments (see Map 2).





Map 2. Showing towns and villages visited in the *Ewedome Zone*.

Crucially important during the reconnaissance survey was a particular instance when on one Thursday our trip to Anfoega did not yield the expected result; our prospective informant had just lost a family member and therefore could not grant the interview. Being a market day as well as a day of rest for many people around the area, Michael suggested that we climbed the hills to the Awate and Aveme areas. That trip resulted in our visit to a shrine at Awate and the opportunity to interact with a priestess. After a brief ‘consultations’ with her deities to seek their permission to engage us on the subject of enquiry, she was very generous with information on *Aklama* as she had experienced it. Although at the time we could not be permitted to see the *Aklama* figures she claimed to possess, she described to us their forms and material media as well as their significance. This shrine later served as an important site where at the invitation of the priestess I observed first-hand aspects of a week-long ceremonial performance and ritual ‘feeding’ of her *Aklama* and *Togbetɔ* deities later in September.

Having secured clearance from the University of Ghana for my fieldwork, I considered the invite as an opportunity to continue with the fieldwork. Again, the invitation was an indication to me that I could be permitted more room to further interact with the few informants who claimed to have *Aklama* figures but were somehow unwilling to allow ‘more than enough’ access to them during the reconnaissance. Thus, for this trip, still maintaining Wusuta as my working base, I was equipped with better recording equipment including a professional camera and a voice recorder for the impending ceremony at Awate, and also in anticipation of a better access to new informants. Subsequently, during one of the events at Awate which was attended by scores of audiences many of whom were priests, priestesses and devotees, I had the opportunity to meet key informants whom I followed up later at their shrines or residences. In what follows, I present the information

on *Aklama* provided by respondents during the earlier ten-day reconnaissance, and the fieldwork undertaken in September, 16 to October, 16, 2020 in the Midwest Volta.

3.2. *Aklama* among the *Ewedome*.

In the broader perspective, among the *Ewedome* the human being has spiritual relations that precede the physical presence on earth. Every person is therefore believed to be on a mission predestined and/or negotiated in the metaphysical plane of existence at *Dzofe* before life on the earth ensues. Thus, essentially, on the earth the individual is considered to continue his/her life and occupation from *Dzofe*. In this frame of the indigenous worldviews, the human being is considered to have interlinked physical and spiritual qualities. Consequently, it is that notion about the human person as being spiritually endowed and characterized by peculiar destiny that constitute the frame of reference for the indigenous conceptualizations of *Aklama* as expounded in the rest of this chapter.

3.2.1. “*Amesia meglo Dzɔgbe*”: *Aklama* and the Individuality of Destiny.

As already indicated, within indigenous worldviews among the Ewe, the physical essence of the human being is only a container foreshadowed by its metaphysical origins. In particular, the local parlance “*amesia meglo Dzɔgbe*⁶²” expresses a popular belief among the *Ewedome* about the individuality of human destiny. According to Dadaga Bako, an 82 year-old informant, traditionally it is maintained that every person has a unique purpose or role on the earth (Dadaga Bako, KII #6, 12/03/2020, Wusuta). Thus, a person’s success is considered to be seeded in the skills, special abilities and dispositions endowed him or her at *Dzofe*, the place of origin. Without exception, this view was confirmed by other informants who further provided some explanations

⁶² This is translated as “everyone has a unique destiny assigned on the day of birth” (KII #6 interview with Dadaga Comfort Bako, 12/03/2020, Wusuta).

about individuals' destiny in similar terms to moral principle of communal well-being and harmony locally referred to as the *Du-Se* (Mama Uutasi and Elders., FGD #3, 20/09/2020). Again, the *Du-Se* as that which ensures such values as integrity, resourcefulness and respect for authority is also identified with another feature called *Dzɔdzɔme*⁶³. In a focus group discussion, *Dzɔdzɔme* was basically explained to me as the nature of human beings with the capacity to live and to relate in a community.

With particular focus on individuals however, still according to Dadaga Bako, each person has specific obligations with certain prohibitions as well; a predestined outline for personal life referred to as *Dzɔgbese or Aklama*. *Dzɔgbese*, I was told specifically refers to the day of birth, a person's natal day, hence *Dzɔgbese* literally implies the particular assignment of moral principal or law to the individual on the day of his or her birth. Again, to ensure that the individual is successful, a guardian-spirit is assigned. Thus, each person is considered to be entangled with spiritual phenomena and is believed to be always accompanied by spiritual entities. Unanimously, all my informants mentioned *Dzɔgbese* and subscribed to the belief that a person's *Dzɔgbese* is determined prior to his or her birth. However, their opinions were divided on whether *Dzɔgbese* constituted a person's destiny otherwise referred to as *Aklama*, or some special gift(s) for life on the earth. It appears however, that *Aklama* as was explained to me indicated the influences of the guardian-spirit on a person's life. Again, the alluded preordained disposition or abilities believed to set the individual on certain paths or occupations was variably referred to as *Dzɔgbese* or *Aklama*. It is noteworthy that Spieth observed a similar ambiguity about the meaning of *Aklama* (Spieth, [1906]2011, p. 649). Puzzled by the paradoxes in the various explanations provided by

⁶³ *Dzɔdzɔme* is explained as the nature of humans which also extends to relations with other beings (natural and supernatural). Thus, in some contexts, *Dzɔdzɔme* links a person with, for example, some totemic animals, plants as well as spirits of terrestrial or aquatic origins (e.g. Togbe Buaku, KII #14, 18/03/2020, Wusuta).

the natives about the concept of *Aklama* at Ho, for example, Spieth remarked that “whether there is, in fact, a difference between *aklama* and *dzogbe*, I leave undecided” (Spieth, [1906]2011, p. 538).

In a further explanation, according to Togbe Buaku⁶⁴, *Aklama* is the “spiritual-self of the individual which is in the nature of a ‘shepherdess or mother-like’ spirit also known as *Dada Se*” (Togbe Buaku, KII #14, 18/03/2020, Wusuta). He maintains that for a child if “*Dada Se* dislikes certain things, it must be known by the parents and subsequently, the individual person [as he or she ages] must be aware of that” (Togbe Buaku, KII #14, 18/03/2020). In his experience, personal prohibition for a person’s life may for example include something as basic as the abhorrence of the active engagements with a particular colour, say white on a person’s natal day⁶⁵. Thus, a person may suffer some impediments in life when the prohibitions associated with his/her *Dzogbe*, *Dzogbese* or *Aklama* is unknowingly contravened repeatedly. Hence if things of that sort are not enquired and are largely unknown, a person may suffer some misfortunes when he/she encounters or is involved with those prohibitions at his or her blind side. Togbe Buaku echoes a popular belief expressed by other informants that an individual may take an early exit from the earth and die as a child for not adhering to some proscriptions if the parents had not cared enough to identify them, for example through divinatory consultations (e.g. Togbe Dra IV and Elders, FGD #5. 11/10/2020, Aveme-Dra; Mama Alanusi, KII #34, 01/10/2020, Kpando-Agbenorxoe).

Hence in certain times of distress in a person’s life, there is the need to ritually consult with the individual’s *Aklama* in the spiritual realm in order to bring relief as well as direct the person towards the fulfilment of his/her destiny. It is in such quests for propitious *Aklama* that certain

⁶⁴ Togbe Buaku, priest and a registered psychic healer interviewed at Wusuta, 18/03/2020 and 01/10/2020.

⁶⁵ The particular day of the week on which the person was born, for instance Monday or Friday.

rites and rituals are performed along the various stages of personal and shared-communal lives. This perhaps explains why in Ewe indigenous worldviews it is very critical to engage with a person's *Aklama* at various life's milestones, especially at birth, to determine what the individual's spiritual needs may be. Thus, among the *Ewedome* there are ways that individuals are expected to acknowledge and relate with their *Aklama*. Moreover, in order to ensure the effectiveness of the means to engage and to keep track with *Aklama*, individuals are noted to observe some dos and don'ts as a necessary requirement to fulfilling personal destiny.

3.2.2. *Dzɔgbese* and/or Propitious *Aklama* for the Business of Life.

In the indigenous viewpoint commonly expressed in the Midwest, humans differ in abilities and talents because of *Aklama* and/or *Dzɔgbese*. Notably, it is believed that how a person bids farewell and covenanted with his or her *Aklama*⁶⁶ at *Dzɔfe* affects the kind of life he or she will have on earth. As is elaborated below, there are good *Aklama* as well as bad ones with which a person is associated. A greater number of my informants indicated that if a person had had a bad *Aklama* and certain rites were not performed to remedy it, the individual's life on the earth might be miserable.

In a related view which identifies *Aklama* with destiny, Togbe Dra IV⁶⁷ expressed that “*Dzɔgbese* makes the human being” and further explained that, “the path of life the *Dzɔgbese* sets for the individual is *Aklama*” (Togbe Dra IV and Elders, FGD #5, 11/10/2020, Aveme-Dra). Put differently, while *Dzɔgbese* constitutes a person's destiny as preordained at *Dzɔfe*, *Aklama* relates to the means to achieving that on the earth. Hence *Dzɔgbese* may be said to broadly

⁶⁶ *Aklama* is here conceptualized as the person's chosen destiny at *Dzɔfe* to be unfolded on earth. A person spells out what his life's purpose shall be including set times for the achievements of certain feats; getting married, giving birth to a number of children, becoming a prominent leader and the eventual return to *Dzɔfe* through physical death. It is believed that this takes place before the person is born. However, on the day of birth those words and promises are personified and assigned to the individual as his or her *Dzɔgbese*.

⁶⁷ Focus group discussions with Togbe Dra IV with some elders and old women at Aveme-Dra, 11/10/2020.

represent a person's destiny or fate while *Aklama* constitutes the details of how one fulfils that destiny especially with the help of divinity. In certain contexts, however, *Aklama* and *Dzɔgbese* are expressed to mean the same and may therefore be used interchangeably to refer to a person's true self in the spiritual realm of which the life on earth is a reflection (e.g. KII #39, 07/10/2020, Kpeve-Tornu⁶⁸).

Again, since it is traditionally held that prior to birth, children choose which parents they want to be hosted by on the earth, the family into which a person is born is as critical to fulfilling destiny. Thus, by association, potential good fortunes or vicarious liabilities of the individual are also considered to be a part of a person's *Aklama*. For instances, in connection with unpacified wrongs, particularly a vicious crime committed by a member which involves the death of innocent victims, others of the family may suffer misfortunes. In this light, some unconfessed crimes may result in a moral debt and with that a lingering generational curse. Thus, until there is a confession and the requisite rites performed to atone for blood-shedding crimes for example, some members of a family may experience a twist in their otherwise propitious destiny. Cases of incessant misfortune including mental illness, untimely deaths, unsuccessful marriages, infertility and unproductivity in business ventures that might be evident in a particular family may be interpreted as manifestations of a twisted or bad *Aklama*. During a FGD at Aveme-Dra, for example an herbalist described one such scenario with a client; a pupil who needed to have his 'twisted head' secured in a rite referred to as '*dolita*', 'the changing of the head' (FGD #5, 11/10/2020, Aveme-Dra). He narrated his experience as follows:

A boy was brought to me two years ago from Kpando-Dafor, [a village in Kpando] and according to the parents the body never stays in the classroom when he goes to school. He goes to the bush [and be] throwing stones at animals.

⁶⁸ Interview with Xunuɔ Gatupke at Kpeve-Tornu.

According to the parents who had consulted [with a spiritualist], it was revealed that the boy's situation is related to a reincarnated grandfather who was an executioner. I therefore took the boy through some rituals in which I [first] gave him a knife, [and then] took the knife from him and gave him a pen before he was able to stay in class. . . . In the rites, I gave him a sword used by our forefathers and soaked some herbs for him. In a prayer [through libation] I invited all our ancestors and then bathed the boy with the herbs. I [then] took the knife and replaced it with the pen. After this, with a white cock the parents prepared rice with groundnut soup for the boy and others who have same day of birth. After they finished eating, [not washing their hands] they rubbed their hands on the boy's head for the [executioner's] spirit to disappear from the boy for a new *Aklama*" (FGD #5, 11/10/2020, Aveme-Dra).

3.2.3 Fraternal Privileges and Proscriptions: *Aklama* and the Twins' Fraternity.

Multiple births are considered to indicate good fortune to the family, a notable moment of *Aklama*. Thus, the birth of twins is extremely desirable and greeted with excitement. Generally, the birth of twins is associated with a visitation by divinity (e.g. Togbe Egorta⁶⁹, KII #7, 12/03/2020, Wusuta; Xunuɔ Gatupke, KII #39, 07/10/2020, Kpeve-Tornu). Thus, twins are traditionally believed to be connected with strong spiritual fortitudes and are considered to be powerfully endowed at birth; to the extent that some twins are believed to have the ability of transmogrification⁷⁰ (e.g. Atsu, KII #9, 13/03/2020, Wusuta). However, twins are not necessarily revered but treated carefully with some recognition and favours.

While most respondents were not very certain about the nature of the *Aklama* of twins, whether it was jointly shared or was individuated and personal to each one of them, their *Aklama* is nonetheless acknowledged by a prescribed rite that draws all twins in the town into a common fraternity (cf. Togbe Egorta, KII #7, 12/03/2020, Wusuta; Atsu, KII #9, 13/03/2020, Wusuta; Togbe Agbe, KII #13, 18/03/2020, Wusuta). Customarily, the parents and the immediate child

⁶⁹ Togbe Egorta is the most senior twin and leader of the twins' fraternity in Wusuta.

⁷⁰ A number of anecdotal references are made to the ability of the twin spirit to manifest as rodents to destroy the farms of vicious individuals who hurt or offend them unjustly (e.g. Atsu, a twin and carver, interviewed at Wusuta, 13/03/2020).

born after twins are bona fide associates of the twins' fraternity and bound by its privileges and proscriptions. According to Togbe Egorta⁷¹, the common rites for twins include the installation of the *venovize*, separate pots for each twin. With the *venovize* is another receptacle, usually made of raffia in which money and other kind donations are kept for the twins and the mother in particular (Togbe Egorta, KII #7, 12/03/2020, Wusuta). As pointed out by informants, the installations of the *venovize* for twins is in recognition of the 'twin spirit' which also preclude them from procuring other deity mediums.

Additionally, as a sign of identity, a special white-and-brown patterned wrist-band of beads, the *venovi dzonu*, is made for twins and their associate beneficiaries (see Figure 3.1). In a conversation with an *Atsufe*, the female twin of a male and female pair, at Kpando, she pointed out that the patterns of the *venovi dzonu* indicate the gender of the twins. According to her, the wrist-band serves to honour the special spiritual endowments of twins, and to particularly mark members of the fraternity who are prohibited from 'blood mixing'; the abominable taboo of sexual intercourse and intermarriages among members. This also underscores the indigenous tradition that any twin is related to another twin anywhere by spiritual kinship (Togbe Egorta, KII #7, 12/03/2020, Wusuta). Again, from my interviews with some members of the fraternity, I gathered that the wrist-band which is usually worn on the left hand must be in place or at least kept close. However, it appears that not all twins in any particular village visited strictly observe these 'rules' about the *venovi dzonu*. For example, in Wusuta, I observed a set of adolescent male twins who did not wear the beads. Again, in a conversation with a middle age twin woman at the Anfoega Market whom I noticed was wearing two of the *venovi dzonu* at the same time on the right wrist,

⁷¹ Togbe Egorta, interviewed at Wusuta, 12/03/2020.

she explained to me that the additional one was actually for the other twin now amputated in the left arm⁷².



Figure 3.1. *Venovi dzonu*. Photographed by the researcher.

Furthermore, a common tradition in connection with the ‘twin spirit’ is that members of the twins’ fraternity are expected to avoid dead bodies as much as possible; even to the extent that when a twin dies the surviving twin is proscribed to see the dead body. However, according to Xunuɔ Gatupke for instance, to make it customarily permissible for fellow twins and others who identify with the fraternity to attend the funeral of a deceased twin, certain rites are performed (Xunuɔ Gatupke, KII #39, 07/10/2020, Kpeve-Tornu). Such rites, according to him, usually involve concoction of certain herbs or kaolin that is applied on their bodies as a means to pacify the ‘twin spirit’ and to maintain spiritual purity. Being a father of two sets of twins and a member of the fraternity, he explained that if that was not done, bad omen might follow vulnerable members of the twins’ fraternity that could result in contracting non-curable diseases. He therefore remarked

⁷² She did not explain why she wore the beads on the right wrist except to say that she comes from the *Tongu* area in Southern Volta but lives at Anfoega, in the Midwest Volta. Perhaps being “amputated in left arm” was figuratively used to indicate that she had lost her twin-pair.

that “so normally twins don’t want to attend funerals of other twins [in order] to avoid bad omen and sickness that could lead to [untimely] death” (Xunuɔ Gatupke, KII #39, 07/10/2020, Kpeve-Tornu). He also explained that such vulnerability to ‘spiritual pollution’ in connection with the dead is not limited to twins but also for priests like him who are also related to the *Afa* divination. According to him, the diviner is forbidden to attend the funeral of another identified with the same *kpoli*, which is the ‘order of path’ usually communicated through their *Afa* system of identity marking at their premises and shrines.

Again, in the event where the spirit of a deceased twin is considered to be disturbing or threatening the life of the surviving twin and the mother, other prescribed rituals are performed. While these rituals may include some kind of a token of acknowledgment for the departed twin, *venovi* figurines which are common in other zones of the Volta Region as a replacement of deceased twins are not as conspicuous in the Midwest.

3.3. *Bad Aklama* or *Gbetsi* as Trailing Misfortunes from *Dzɔfe*.

Quintessentially, *Aklama* is supposed to be propitious. In some scenarios however, according to some informants, a person might have covenanted at *Dzɔfe* that if he/she contravenes certain prohibitions as had been pronounced, the spiritual sanctions must apply (e.g. Mama Uutasi, KII #10, 14/03/2020; KII #21, 19/09/2020, Awate⁷³; Togbe Dzomefe and Elders, FGD #4, 05/10/2020, Tsrukpe). In other words, oblivious about the demands and values of the living community into which the individual is to be born, in the pre-natal world a person might have ‘cursed’ him/herself by unexamined commitments. For example, before the earthly sojourn, a person might have convinced the spiritual audience that he/she was going to stay chaste and would

⁷³ Interviews with Mama Uutasi, a priestess at Awate on 14/03/2020 and 19/09/2020.

never bear children on the earth (Mama Uutasi, KII #9, 14/03/2020, Awate). Ironically however, as Friedson points out in the local worldview when the individual “cross[es] the threshold from *Bome* [or *Dzɔfe*] into *Kodzogbe* (this world), all is forgotten, nothing is remembered” (Friedson, 2009, p. 104; see also Ferme, 2001, pp. 199-200; Dzobo, 1992a, p.78). Alluding to the Ewe proverb “*nunya mele aklama me o*”, translated as “man is not born with the [gift of] knowledge” Dzobo maintains that “whatever a person knows is acquired through experience and deliberate effort on his part to know” (Dzobo, 1992a, p.78).

However, in explaining the implications of pre-natal vows and commitments in Ewe worldviews, Mama Uutasi, expressed that “a would-be woman might have dug some trenches at *Dzɔfe* and had promised to ‘send back’ every child born to her on the earth”. This according to her is “commonly believed to be the reason for stillbirths and loss of children suffered by some women [who had so covenanted]”. In another explanation offered by the priestess Mama Fofie Yentumi⁷⁴, “*Aklama* is a spirit; the spirit that accompanies the human being [and therefore] if somebody has a bad *Aklama* it means a bad spirit is following him/her from birth. It is therefore the duty of the priests/priestesses to detect such bad spirits and change them for good ones” (Mama Yentumi, KII #28, 27/09/2020, Aveme-Danyigba). As such, oracular consultation with the spirits is paramount to establish whether or not a good *Aklama* follows an individual.

Moreover, in other situations it is maintained that a person might have unceremoniously sidestepped the farewell-bidding process or absconded from his/her responsibilities at *Dzɔfe*. Such individuals might be beckoned to return to *Dzɔfe* as soon as possible. According to some informants, for example, such individuals who may have some serious health issues attributed to

⁷⁴ *Trɔnsi* Fofie Yentumi, priestess and herbalist, Aveme-Danyigba.

Gbetsi who is frantically beckoning the individual to return. Again, children who cry more than usual, especially at night without any apparent cause may be considered to be haunted by *Gbetsi*, the strict advocate at *Dzɔfɛ*. In their individual work at the Midwest, Pese-Kuma, Ganusah and Gavua point out similar observations (Gavua, 2015, p. 146; Ganusah, 2008, p. 28; Pese-Kuma, 1999, p. 23). Under the circumstance, the child is supposed to yield to *Gbetsi* if the family does not intervene (e.g. Mama Uutasi, KII #10, 14/03/2020, Awate; Mama Baanuyena and Co., FGD #1, 12/03/2020, Wusuta⁷⁵). In similar vein, people who supposedly absconded from their responsibilities at *Dzɔfɛ* may suffer the curses of their aggrieved spouses and children so neglected in the realms of the spirit.

The general explanation given for the different scenarios of non-propitious *Aklama* is that such individuals are entangled with bad *Aklama* and are therefore susceptible to the negative influences of *Gbetsi* which trail them with hard-luck and misfortunes. Non-propitious *Aklama* and ill-suffered family curses could however be atoned and transformed by means of pacification and purification rites popularly called *Gbetsi lele* (*dɛdɛ*) and *Klatsi lele* respectively (Gavua, 2000, p. 91; Togbe Gidi-Yiboe II, KII #12, 16/03/2020, Anfoega⁷⁶).

By the agency of certain spiritual adepts, especially priests/priestesses, who engage in oracular divinations as means to consult with the spirits, possible spiritually-caused impediments may be diagnosed. Through the *Gbetsi lele* pacification rites, for example, priests and priestesses are particularly noted to administer requisite rituals to ‘turn the head’ of victims of bad *Aklama*⁷⁷.

At the village of Tsrupke-Dorkuma, for instance, I was shown a community shrine where the

⁷⁵ In a FGD at Wusuta Mama Baanuyena narrated her personal experience with *Gbetsi* 65 years ago of which she undertook a remedial rite administered by her father who was a priest.

⁷⁶ Interview with Togbe Gidi-Yiboe II, *Adamefia* (a divisional chief) of Anfoega-Adame.

⁷⁷ The process of remedying a person’s plight with non-propitious *Aklama* is locally referred to as *dolita*, which simply translates “the changing or turning of the head” (e.g. FGD #4, 05/10/2020, Tsrupke).

rituals for ‘the changing or turning of the head’ referred to as ‘*dolita*’ are performed to remedy supposed non-propitious *Aklama* (Togbe Dzomefe and Elders, FGD #4, 05/10/2020, Tsrukpe). For this ritual there is a white enamel basin containing water sourced from several streams and rivers around the area, for cleansing the person after which by the offering a token of *agɔku* (i.e. the *borassus* nut), the ‘bad-head’ of the victim is changed for a good one from *Dzɔfe*. In the libation prayer that preceded our visit to the shrine area, the mountain range at Tsrukpe considerably covered by *borassus* palm trees, was acknowledged as Togbe Agɔku which provides *agɔku* nuts used for ritual rites⁷⁸. This example of dealing with *Gbetsi* presents another illustration of pacification rites in which the *agɔku* nut served as homologous surrogate substituting for the



⁷⁸ Incidentally, the other side of the same mountain range at Wusuta is called Togbe *Doto*. In personal conversation with Fo Yaw, my 85 year-old host at Wusuta, the reference to Togbe *Doto* is in connection with a cave around the mountain believed to have provided refuge to people especially during times of war and slave raiding in the past.

spiritually fragile or ‘twisted’ head of the individual (see Figure 3.2). In this context, the *agɔku* nut is considered as a form of *Aklama kpakpe*—an expendable form presented as offering.



Figure 3.2. *Agɔku* nut used to negotiate for a ‘propitious head’ or a renewed *Aklama*. Photographed by the researcher.

In some situations, however, in the stead of priests or priestess, *zikupitɔwo* (custodians of ancestral stools), were considered the most appropriate to administer the pacification rite through the ancestral stools. In this, the ancestors are supplicated to look with favour on their descendants especially those “that do not seem to find their feet on the path of life” (Togbe Gidi-Yiboe II, KII #12, 16/03/2020, Anfoega). Following the requisite rites of pacification and purification, a positive change is anticipated for the lives of afflicted individuals and their families.

3.4. Distinguishing Natural Ailments and Spiritual Maladies: *Aklama* Rituals as a Dialogue.

Ewe worldviews categorize illnesses into natural diseases and spiritual ailments (e.g. Togbe Afram, KII #1, 09/01/2020, Peki-Dzogbati⁷⁹; Efo Bogya, KII #3, 12/01/2020, Peki-Avetile⁸⁰; Togbe Buaku, KII #14, 18/03/2020, Wusuta; Xunuɔ Gatupke, KII #39, 07/10/2020, Kpeve-Tornu). Generally, normal diseases are considered to have natural causes, especially from fatigue and old-age common to human beings. Normal illnesses include common headaches, fevers and rheumatisms of the body of which there are natural remedies; usually curable by herbs that are easily accessible. Bad illnesses, on the other hand, are those considered to have spiritual causality. These may include barrenness, epilepsy, mental illness, ulcerating infirmities and some injuries from accidents (Togbe Afram, KII #1, 09/01/2020, Peki-Dzogbati; Efo Bogya, KII #3, 12/01/2020, Peki-Avetille).

According to my informants, especially the herbalist Mama Fofie Yentumi (KII #28, 27/09/2020, Aveme-Dangyigba) and the physic-healers Togbe Agbe (KII #13, 18/03/2020, Wusuta) and Togbe Buaku (KII #14, 18/03/2020, Wusuta), people suffer spiritual ailments as a result of contravening their own pronouncements at *Dzɔfe*; a predicament which emanates from the person's paralysed *Aklama*. However, other such ailments according to them, could be the results of evil inflicted by witchcraft or sorcery against susceptible individuals whose *Aklama* had become weak. According to Xunuɔ Gatupke, "spiritual sickness is a spiritual attack so it requires purification rites [. . .]. Its cure involves the mixing of some herbs for the person to undergo spiritual bath" (Xunuɔ Gatupke, KII #39, 07/10/2020, Kpeve-Tornu). He maintains that "the spiritual bath drives away the spirits behind the ailment [after which] the person comes back to be in term with his own spirit, the *Aklama*" (Xunuɔ Gatupke, KII #39, 07/10/2020, Kpeve-Tornu). In

⁷⁹ An interview with Togbe Afram, a 'dwarf' host and herbalist at Peki-Dzogbati.

⁸⁰ An interview with Efo Bogya, a bone-setter at Peki-Avetile.

many of the local communities I observed the *kpɔtikpɔti*, and *avenya* plants within the precincts of homes as well as shrines. I was informed that those plants are particularly intended to foil spiritual attacks and to also provide cure for some maladies⁸¹. It is therefore fair to assert that Ewe indigenous aetiology provides certain parameters to characterise ailments to be a normal one or spiritually caused, and accordingly prescribes curative measures and/or ritual procedures for remedy.

Normal ailments are generally considered as ‘occasional visitors’ that do not overstay their welcome. Moreover, even in situations of natural sickness, it is desirable that by certain ritual performances the individual’s *Aklama*, being the spiritual-self, is strengthened to get over the sickness as early as possible. Hence, an otherwise normal illness may be considered spiritual when it lingers and seems to defy normal treatments. Thus, beyond a certain limit of endurance or period of expected recovery, a person’s ailment presents a cause for concern. Consequently, the need to look beyond the ordinary for explanations becomes urgent where the individual or the family engage in oracular consultations with diviners, priests or priestesses. Mostly, for spiritual maladies, the individual is required to be reconnected to a stronger *Aklama* by undergoing purification rites (Xunuɔ Gatupke, KII #39, 07/10/2020, Kpeve-Tornu). When necessary, other rituals may also be undertaken to pacify spiritual entities considered to be associated with a person’s illness. It is the search for explanations to people’s predicaments and uncomfortable circumstances that ritual performances constitute a means to dialogue with metaphysical agents believed to be actively involved the people’s life.

⁸¹ The plants *kpɔtipɔti* (*jatropha*), oil-palm and the *avenya* (*newbouldia locuis*) are considered to have potent curative and protective powers. The *kpɔtipɔti* is commonly used for fencing the house. The *avenya* is identified as one among a number of plants considered to have supernatural powers called “*amma*” which gives potency to all ritual performances. In some places I was informed that a certain numbers of the *avenya* leaves, usually seven, nine or twelve may be placed under the pillow of a child who seem to be under some evil attacks.

According to Togbe Afram for example, in his practice with ‘dwarf’⁸² spirits to diagnose cases of desperately ill clients, spiritual maladies attributed to the *ametsiava*, (i.e. disgruntled spirits of the dead) are considered ‘ghost illnesses’ (Togbe Afram, KII #1, 09/01/2020, Peki-Dzogbati). He further maintains that for such sickness there could be healing only when the *ametsiava* spirit is duly pacified usually in a prescribed ritual at the cemetery at midnight. At the villages of Aveme-Danyigba and Kpando-Torgome for example, in separate interviews with two priests who identified themselves as devotees of the *ametsiava*, similar views were expressed about redemptive rituals connected with the spirits of the dead (Amega Afewo, KII #24, 21/09/2020; Kpando-Torgome⁸³; Togbe Azubi, KII #29, 27/09/2020, Aveme-Danyigba⁸⁴).

Furthermore, within the worldviews of the *Ewedome*, babies who die shortly after birth are considered to have been individuals who sidestepped the procedure to transition from the spiritual home at *Dzofe* to stay with the earthly family. In the traditions of some of the local communities, if a woman experiences the loss of her newly born babies repeatedly, at least two times in a roll, it is called *dzikui-dzikui* which requires redemptive rites to secure the lives of subsequent births (e.g. Mama Alanusi, KII #34, 01/10/2020 Kpando-Agbenorxoe; Mama Yentumi, KII #28, 27/09/2020, Aveme-Danyigba; Mama Uutasi, KII #10, 14/03/2020, Awate). In a related rite described by the *trɔnsi* Fofie Yentumi, when a baby is born after two episodes of loss, that baby may be put in *kle*, a woven basket made with palm fronds, to negotiate with Benevolence⁸⁵ for his/her survival. In that rite, the baby in the basket is placed at a cross-path in the bush. After the requisite ritual, somebody from the family is sent to bring the baby home to the mother. At that point, certain

⁸² The ‘dwarf’ spirit is identified as *aziza*, associated with esoteric knowledge about herbs and their curative potencies. *Aziza* spirits or deities a very popular with priests and priestesses who identify themselves as herbalists.

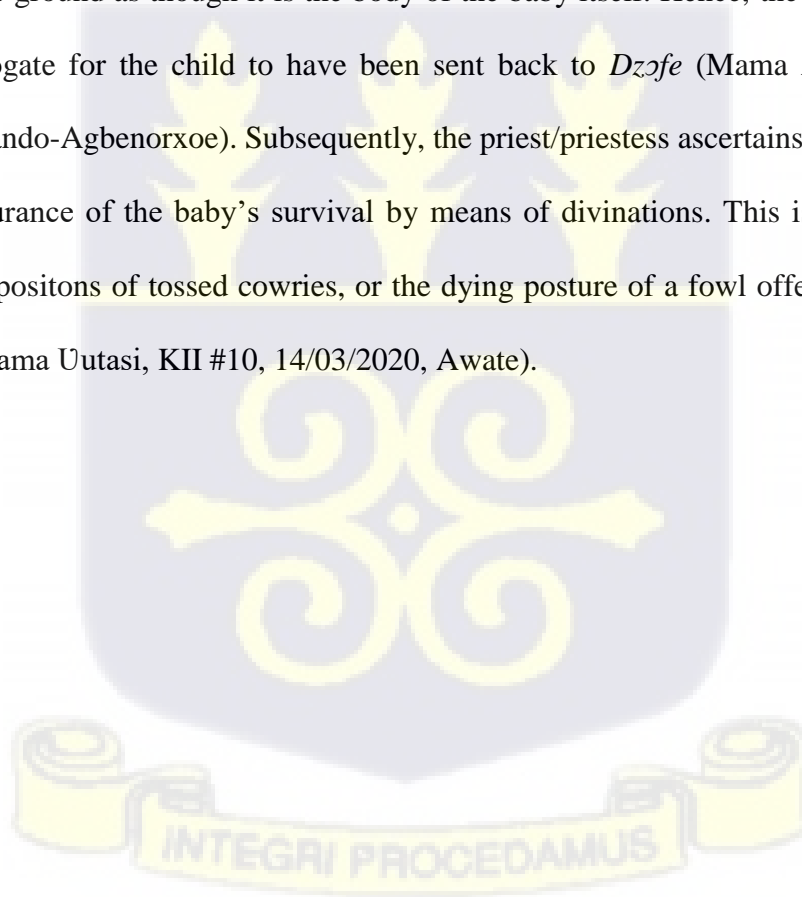
⁸³ An interview with Amega Afewo, an initiated priest who deals with *ametsiava* spirits, Kpando-Torgome.

⁸⁴ An interview with Togbe Kofi Azubi, another initiated priest who deals with *ametsiava* spirits, Aveme-Danyigba.

⁸⁵ Benevolence here connotes *Mawu* (the Creator God), or *Bomenɔ* (the spiritual mother at *Dzɔfe*) or *Aklama* as the true spiritual-self retained at *Dzɔfe*.

marks or scarification are made on the face of the child to identify him/her as *Donko*⁸⁶. Such children are usually given some unusual names which allude to the ordeal of the repeated bouts of child loss by their family. According to Mama Fofie Yentumi, these are done to supposedly disguise the baby from being identified by *Gbetsi* who strictly adheres to the instruction to take back the baby to the spirit world through death.

According to the *tronsi* Mama Alanusi, who also described a similar rite to address the phenomenon of *dzikui-dzikui*, normally *nyakpekpe*⁸⁷ (the fruit of *Kegalia Africana*) is buried as part of the ritual performance. She explained that the *nyakpekpe* is neatly wrapped in a white cloth and buried in the ground as though it is the body of the baby itself. Hence, the fruit serves as the homologous surrogate for the child to have been sent back to *Dzɔfe* (Mama Alanusi, KII #34, 01/10/2020, Kpando-Agbenorxoe). Subsequently, the priest/priestess ascertains the success of the rite and the assurance of the baby's survival by means of divinations. This is usually done by interpreting the positions of tossed cowries, or the dying posture of a fowl offered as the sealing sacrifice (e.g. Mama Uutasi, KII #10, 14/03/2020, Awate).



⁸⁶ *Donko* loosely translates as a slave.

⁸⁷ The *Nyakpekpe* fruit is commonly used for fertility medicine; it is boiled and decocted. Moreover, in some communities among the *Ewedome*, childless women are buried with the *Nyakpekpe* fruit.



Figure 3.3. Mama Uutasi demonstrating the tossing of cowries to ascertain the status of ritual, Awate. Photographed by the researcher.

At the FGD at Tsrupke-Dorkuma, it was indicated that children who survive the phenomenon of *dzikui-dzikui* are usually identified with a shrine where until puberty they may undertake some basic chores. According to them, such children are those who are usually called upon to fetch water from appropriate rivers and streams for purification rites at the shrine (Togbe Dzomefe and Elders, FGD #4, 05/10/2020, Tsrupke-Dorkuma).

3.4.1. *Klatsi Lele* Rituals and the *Gbetsi Lele (ƉeƉe)* Rite.

Particularly critical to ensuring productive and well-resourceful *Aklama* for the individual is the maintenance of spiritual purity. For many people, certain things are done or avoided especially on the day of the week that mark their birth as a way of acknowledging the *Aklama*⁸⁸. Also, in ushering the individual into adulthood, favours are sought from Benevolence for the person's vocation and the prospective matrimonial home—blessings for work, marriage and family. In some cases, there is the slaughtering of animals, especially chicken and sheep for feasting to acknowledge spectacular feats chalked by individuals attributed to their *Aklama/Dzɔgbese*. Those subtle routine observances (including the barely noticeable rituals such as ceremonial egg-eating and non-indulgence in some activities on a person's natal day), and the occasional feasting constitute the *Klatsi lele* rituals among the *Ewedome*.

From the personal experiences of some informants who observe annual feeding of their *Aklama* in a ceremony, the *Klatsi lele* serves as a supplication feast for prosperity and success with their vocations. For this, the individual prepares towards a set date on which he/she invites people (usually those who share a natal day, the *Dzɔbge*) to feast with him or her. During the feast, a very successful individual or distinguished person among the guests is asked to pray for the person. Togbe Gidi-Yiboe II, the *Adamefia* of Anfoega, for instance, explains that “with the *Klatsi lele* it is the *Aklama* of the individual that is being celebrated with the understanding that the person has identified with his/her star, the *Aklama*, and hence the acknowledgement of the successes so far chalked” (Togbe Gidi-Yiboe II, KII #12, 16/03/2020, Anfoega). Thus, in a sense, this ritual brings to bear individuals' consciousness as well as the support of others to ensure the well-being of

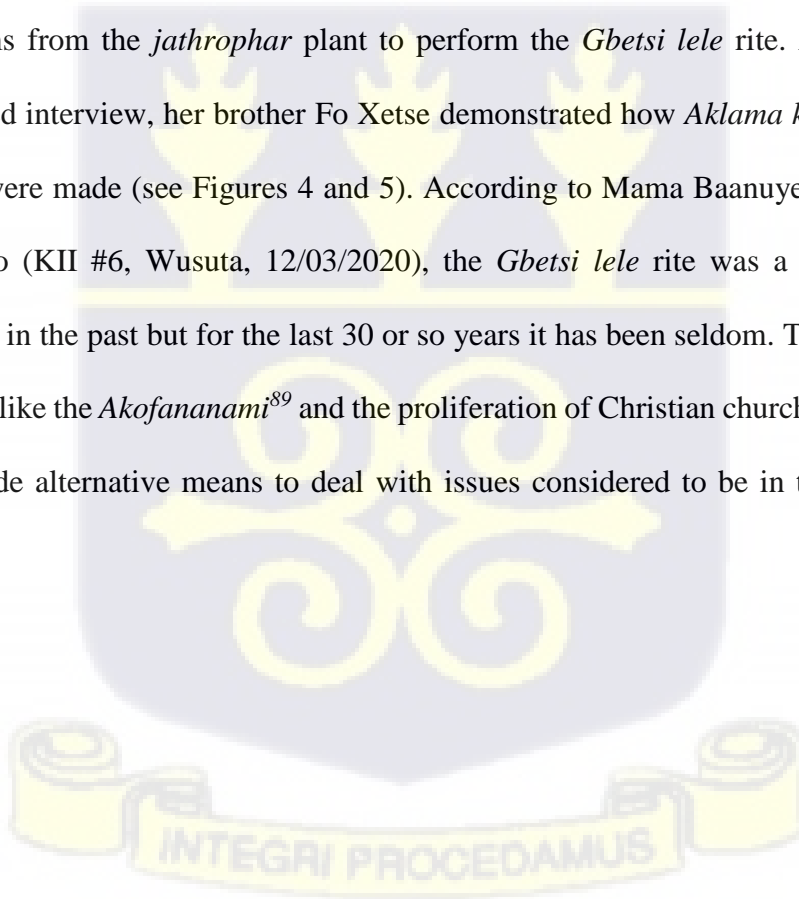
⁸⁸ The common practice is the ceremonial eating of an egg, either as an individual or with other members of the family who share the same day of birth. There might be occasional feasting to acknowledge and express appreciation to a person's *Dzɔbge/Aklama*.

individuals and the fulfilment of personal destiny. Individuals are therefore encouraged and are by such ceremonies assisted to fit well into the community to play their peculiar roles which eventually qualify them to become veritable ancestors.

On another breath, individuals faced with more than usual challenges may be attributed to some blemishes on their *Aklama* that place them in the grips of *Gbetsi*. In the views of some informants, such a person's *Aklama* might have been slighted by indulging in certain prohibitions (e.g. Togbe Gidi-Yiboe II, KII #12, 16/03/2020, Anfoega). Again, the view is also expressed that an individual's *Aklama* may be enervated as the result of vicariously suffering the moral debts of other relations. Therefore, to ensure propitious fate for individuals, persons considered to be entangled or associated with certain unpalatable events or circumstance must undergo spiritual cleansing. In such situations, the individual undertakes the *Gbetsi lele* rites --which involves both pacification and purification. As could be noted, there is a difference between *Klatsi lele* which appears to be routine observances, and the *Gbetsi lele* which seems to be specific prescribed purification rites episodically undertaken. Some examples from my respondents are presented here to throw more light on the *Gbesti lele* primarily as a redemptive rite.

Still according to Togbe Gidi-Yiboe II, when a man marries, the children born to him are believed to come from *Dzɔfe* (Togbe Gidi-Yiboe II, KII #12, 16/03/2020, Anfoega). Thus, especially in the past, parents consulted to know the destiny each child had come to the earth with. He explained that if it seemed that a child was frantically wanted back into the spiritual world, the *Dzɔgbese* of the child could be consulted through oracular divination and possibly be placated. Usually, following the directives of the *Dzɔgbese*, the spiritual-self of the individual, surrogates may be made as tokens of replacement for him/her. These tokens meant to represent the individual are anthropomorphic figurines also called *Aklama kpakpe*, usually made from the *kpɔtipɔti* plant.

The figurines together with other items are left in the bush, usually at a cross-road, for *Gbetsi*, the personal advocate at *Dzɔfe* to acknowledge them as a redemptive offering. Thus, a family could bank their hope for the survival of such persons when they were certain that the offering had been acknowledged and duly accepted by *Gbetsi*. Consequently, by the *Gbetsi lele* rites, a child who is considered to be beckoned to return may be allowed to stay with the family and not to readily return to *Dzɔfe*. In a focused group discussion at Wusuta, Mama Baanuyena, an 80 year-old woman, shared her personal experience with the phenomenon of *Gbetsi* when she was a teenager some 65 years ago (Mama Baanyena and Family., FGD #1, Wusuta, 12/03/2020). According to her, the father who was a priest himself made the required number of the *Aklama kpapke* in male and female forms from the *jathrophar* plant to perform the *Gbetsi lele* rite. At my request, in another scheduled interview, her brother Fo Xetse demonstrated how *Aklama kpapke* meant for the *Gbesti lele* were made (see Figures 4 and 5). According to Mama Baanuyena and confirmed by Dadaga Bako (KII #6, Wusuta, 12/03/2020), the *Gbetsi lele* rite was a common publicly showcased ritual in the past but for the last 30 or so years it has been seldom. This is perhaps due to other avenues like the *Akofananami*⁸⁹ and the proliferation of Christian churches in the Midwest Volta that provide alternative means to deal with issues considered to be in the domain of the spirits.



⁸⁹ The *Akofananami* is a form of local 'spiritual church' operated mostly by woman prophetesses who combine some elements of the herbal practices of the indigenous religion with faith in angelic operations, particularly the Angel Michael identified in the Christian Bible.



Figure 3.4. Demonstrating the making of *Aklama kpakpe* with the *kpɔtikpɔti* tree (*jathrophar*), Wusuta. Photographed by the researcher.



Figure 3.5. Male (upper figurine) and female forms of *Aklama krapke* of the *kpɔtikpɔti* tree, Wusuta. Photographed by the researcher

Again, as pointed out especially by my priests and priestesses informants, a common indication for the ripeness of the time for some individuals pre-destined for occupations in the priesthood of the indigenous religion or practice in herbal medicine is the experience considered to be the nudges of *Gbetsi*. Under such influence of *Gbetsi*, by which the individual is considered to be chosen as a ‘wife’ of a deity, almost unconsciously the person begins to behave strangely. In their personal experiences as a prelude to their priesthood, a person in such a situation manifests some mental distress and general restlessness. According to them, individuals ‘so-married’ and recruited by deities are usually of ages ranging from the pre-teens to the middle age whose otherwise normal life seem momentarily interrupted by *Gbetsi*. When such experiences become rampant for a particular person, the *Gbetsi lele* rite is performed to restore normalcy. However, in instances where the individual is considered to be possessed by *Togbetɔwo*, ancestral deities, their

lives take a completely new course; after the purification rites the person might undergo training to be initiated into the priesthood or herbal medicinal practices associated with the deities. Notably, while the purification ritual usually involves only expendable *Aklama* figurines formed with clay or the *kpɔtikpɔti* plants offered as homologic surrogates of the victim, it is rather in these special situations of spiritual possessions that the person might need to manifest his/her spiritual companions altogether referred to as *Aklama kpakpe* in a durable medium to constitute a shrine⁹⁰.

Furthermore, from the perspective of Togbe Dra IV, the chief of Aveme-Dra, some children for whom the redemptive rites are performed might not necessarily be under the negative influence of *Gbetsi* or spiritual possession. Rather, such may be important persons at *Dzɔfe* whose earthly predicaments may be the result of their “expressed conditional will” for their *Dzɔgbese*; that they only “wanted to briefly pay a visit to their relations in the physical world and depending on how they are hosted they might prolong their stay” (Togbe Dra IV and Elders, FGD #5, Aveme-Dra, 11/10/2020). Thus, if such children are well-received and honourably acknowledged, they will stay with their earthly family. If grossly neglected at any point of their formative stages, they would be falling sick frequently and eventually bid farewell by death to join their spiritual relations. In that sense, such sufferings of the individual are to draw the attention of the family to identify and appreciate the status of the person in order to better treat him or her as such.

⁹⁰ Common among the objectifications of personal spiritual counterparts—*Aklama/Dzɔgbese* are ceramic pots also called *Aklama*, and in some cases carved figurines (either to match or oppose the sex of the individual) or a geometric wooden structure designed in an anthropomorphically abstracted shapes various called the *Mawuti* or *Aklamati*.

3.4.2. “*Dzɔgbese menyanya*”: Insight into Destiny for Success in Life.

Clearly, the urgency to search into one’s destiny is usually heightened by certain unexpected incidences which threaten the life and livelihoods of individuals, and by extension the community. In other words, recurrent misfortunes and narrow escapes of situations of accidents and certain deaths necessitate a search into the spiritual realm for explanations. This is where oracular consultations and divinations are usually embarked on. As oracles of the gods and the supernatural, priests and priestess are considered to have the ability to dialogue with the spirits to diagnose spiritually-induced afflictions and thereby provide requisite prescriptions.

As already indicated, an important step to remedy ‘spiritual afflictions’ is through rites of pacifications and purification to blot out spiritual ‘blemishes’ or ‘pollutions’ from the victim. As indicated by some respondents, for instance, when a woman has suffered miscarriages or stillbirths for the third time, it calls for supplication to the spirit world to secure the life of the next baby to be born. According to the *trɔnsi* Mama Alanusi, *Aklama* of the victim is appeased by a certain number of moulded clay in the form of pregnant women coated with a mixture of water and white corn-flour (see Figure 3.6). An explanation offered is that *Mawu*, the Creator God, used clay to form the human being, hence the use of clay for the ‘pacificatory’ figurines. She however points out that in order to make the figurines effective, they must be moulded by a woman who has already passed her reproductive age; menopausal woman. Alternatively, *nyakpekpe* fruit (i.e. *Kegalia Africana*) if readily available may be offered instead of the clay figurines. The ‘pacificatory’ figurines or the fruit is wrapped in a white cloth and buried in the earth; this is intended for an exchange for propitious *Aklama* for the expectant mother and anticipated children (see Figure 3.7).



Figure 3.6. *Aklama* clay figurines, Kpando-Agbenorxoe. Photographed by the researcher.



Figure 3.7. *Nyakpekpe* fruit, Kpando-Agbenorxoe. Photographed by the researcher.

In other situations, at the throes of death when the soul of a person is believed to be struggling with *Gbetsi*, the duty bearer tasked to bring the individual to *Dzofe*, a certain number of *Aklama kpakpe* made from the *kpɔtipɔti*⁹¹ plant (*jathrophar*) are offered after a purification rite. Consisting of both male and female forms, the figurines are supposed to be surrogates for the person and other relations⁹² (see Figure 3.5). In order to ensure a successful acquittal of the victim's soul, it is believed that a supposed jury in the spiritual realm must be satisfied with the receipt of those figurines with other reconciliation offerings, usually mashed yams with eggs.

In some particular instances which are elaborated later, to ensure that the person is no longer harassed by *Gbetsi* after his or her recovery, a personal alter for the person's *Aklama* is mounted. Usually in a form of a carved anthropomorphic figure from a prescribed tree, the figurine serves as the focal point to regularly engage with the person's *Aklama*. These kinds of *Aklama kpakpe*, as I was told by some informants, is usually kept in the bedroom or a place considered appropriate to make offerings and supplications through it. However, according to the various carvers interviewed, apart from those typical crude forms of anthropomorphic figurines, other forms of carving including very fine and proportionally well-executed ancestor images or tutelary spirits engaged in religious rituals are also considered as *Aklama kpakpe*⁹³ (e.g. Tsekpo, KII #25, 25/09/2020, and KII #11, 14/03/2020, Kpando; Dzakpo, KII #35, 02/10/2020, Wusuta; Agbo, KII #31, 28/09/2020, Vakpo).

⁹¹ The *kpɔtipɔti* is commonly used as a fence for the homestead. It is considered to have some protective spiritual elements; the sap is especially comparable to the substance of blood.

⁹² According to my informants the required numbers of the mixed forms of male and female *kpɔtipɔti* figurines are usually in the total of three, seven, twelve or thirteen. While they maintain the totality was meant to represent the person at *Dzofe* in the exchange for his physical well-being on the earth, concrete explanations could not be given why those numbers were particularly required.

⁹³ The exception however are the carvings of popular Roman Catholic iconic figures such as the crucifix, and the nativity scene of Mary, Joseph and Jesus which the carvers excluded as idol images.

In the North Dayi District and the Kpando Municipality where I identified six carvers' workshops (i.e. two each in Wusuta, Vakpo and Kpando towns), I observed that almost all the shops specialize mainly in the carving of stools, walking sticks, ornamental animal figures and lampstands. In my interactions and interviews with carvers in five of those workshops, I noticed that not all of the carvers could or might accept to carve what they considered as *Aklama kpapke* (e.g. Fo Atsu, (Wusuta), Emma Dzakpo, (Wusuta), Agbo and Acheampong, (Vakpo), and Francis Tsekpo, Kpando). Three carvers namely Dzakpo (Wusuta), Agbo (Vakpo) and Tsekpo (Kpando) who identified themselves as capable of carving the *Aklama* figurines informed me that they strictly abide by the directives and specifications by their clients. Again, according to Agbo and Dzakpo, clients who commission *Aklama kpapke* provide drinks and a fowl as a customary requirement for prayers before they commenced the work, and also at the time of delivery (Dzakpo, KII #35, 02/10/2020, Wusuta; Agbo, KII #31, 28/09/2020, Vakpo). Dzakpo particularly explained that, since the carver could not be very certain about the intended use of the figurines, the ritual performance (i.e. the libation) at the moment of handing the objects over to the client is to absolve themselves from responsibility of any malicious use thereafter (Dzakpo, KII #35, 02/10/2020, Wusuta). However, Tsekpo, pointed out that he does not border so much about any rites except a basic requirement to abstain from sex during the carving process of any object intended for religious purpose as a consideration to ensure their ritual efficiency (Tsekpo, KII #25, 25/09/2020, Kpando).

In many of the workshops visited, I observed that they did not seem to have detailed information about *Aklama* figurines. In most cases, apart from the general name *Aklama kpapke*, and two specific ones including the *venovi* for the twins, and the mermaid figures referred to as *Mami Wata*, no other *Aklama* figurines were discretely identified. For example, in two workshops

at Vakpo and Kpando, I observed a similar form of *Aklama* figurine which is a human figure depicted on a horse back. At both workshops, the horse-borne figures seemed to be ‘garbed’ in Northern Ghanaian smock and wields a weapon in one hand, and the palm of the hand is opened as though to demand something. However, no specific name was provided by the carvers when I asked about the figurines. But from the typical ‘opened-palm’ styles of the figurines, Tsekpo only identified it as “the messenger” *Aklama kpakpe* (Tsekpo, KII #25, 25/09/2020, Kpando). It is perhaps fair to suggest that those figurines were possibly commissioned by clients from Southern Volta where that particular form, which is relatively common, is called the *Ablɔ*. More on *Ablɔ* figurines is presented in chapter four.

3.5. Focalizing Spiritual Phenomena: Spiritual Possessions and the Proliferation of *Aklama Kpakpe*.

According to my informants, in the past it was common to find miniature houses in most homes in which the *dzogbe*, (the soul) of each individual of the household was represented by an anthropomorphic clay figurine. During my fieldwork, except one priest who had the *dzogbexɔɛ*, the miniature house for *dzogbe*, *Aklama* figurines kept by individual were seldom⁹⁴ (Xunuɔ Gatupke, KII #39, 07/10/2020, Kpeve-Tornu,). While in other zones of the Volta Region I observed it is relatively common to find figurations of the spiritual-self identified as the *Se*, or *Dzogbe*, spirits of the dead, and *Venovi*, replacements for deceased twins as forms of *Aklama kpakpe*, among the *Ewedome* these are not as conspicuously evident. That notwithstanding, for certain persons considered to have the peculiar obligation to actively engage with the spirits of ancestors, the gods, or some deities, they are typically expected to have certain mediums for the deities or sprits to connect with them. Such people include some traditional leaders and

⁹⁴ Togbe Gatupke (interviewed at Kpeve-Tornu, 07/10/2020).

priests/priestesses. These mediums that serve as focal points to engage with the spirits are variously called *Aklama*,⁹⁵ *Aklamati*, *Mawuti* and *Togbeti*⁹⁶.

Thus, although material figurings of *Aklama* are not as common in the Midwest Volta, there are certain circumstances which demand that the individual maintains a focal element, a medium to engage with spiritual phenomena. Even though those deities or spirits are not necessarily identified as *Aklama*, their representational mediums are commonly referred to as *Aklama kpakpe*. Hence, as the individual establishes him/herself as a spiritualist or an adept of other deities in the course of time, *Aklama kpakpe* may proliferate at his or her shrine as and when more deities are hosted.

Aklama according to respondents, does not excuse ignorance. Hence, a person may suffer the consequences of the decisions of their relations as well as their own negligence that bring them into situations of contravening the proscriptions of their *Aklama/Dzɔgbese*. In a personal experience as an example, Togbe Dra IV narrated that in 1958 when he was in the third year of middle school, he experienced bouts of severe headaches to the extent that he was feared dead at one time when he fell into a comma. It was when the parents consulted the oracles for explanation that it was revealed he had been a chief at *Dzofe*. However, his earthly family had failed to acknowledge him as such. Therefore, through the ailment he was being demanded back at *Dzofe* to resume his chiefly duties. The hitch so identified was mediated by the priest who administered a redemptive rite where miniature forms of the typical chiefly regalia including a stool, an umbrella and a pair of sandals with other items were offered to the relations in the spiritual realm. According

⁹⁵ These are mostly ceramic pots containing water and sometimes herbs, representing the spiritual-self of the individuals who own them.

⁹⁶ The *Mawuti*, *Aklamati* or the *Togbeti* are usually wooden sculptures objectifying a metaphysical being, the spiritual-self of the individual or domiciled deities.

to him, he was still ill and in a very weak state but immediately the platter of the offering was placed on his head to carry, he was hurriedly moved under the influence of the spirit into the bush where the items were dropped off to be “dispatched” to *Dzofe*. The rite was deemed successful; indicating that he had indeed been acknowledged and enstooled as a chief by his family, which enabled his recovery speedily⁹⁷ (Togbe Dra IV and Elders, FGD #5, 11/10/2020, Aveme-Dra).

However, it was a couple of years later after he had survived that ordeal when he actually became the chief of his village, Aveme Dra. He pointed out that it was rather his subsequent position as the occupant of the ancestral stool that required him to have the *Mawuti*, an altar unto his personal abiding-god, the *Aklama*. The *Mawuti* is made of a hardwood and placed in the veranda at the entrance to the bedroom of the chief. It is geometrically structured but essentially abstracted of the human person and thus largely anthropomorphized. It seems to symmetrically appropriate the features of the human face or the head on a limbless torso and a base altogether measuring about 6 feet (i.e. 1.8 metres) in height. Its smoothly-textured surface is unpainted. The striking feature of this seemingly anthropomorphized figure is the appropriation of two cowries, each held by strings unto an old silver-coin, for the “eyes” symmetrically placed on the “head” board (see Figure 3.8). At the base of the *Mawuti* are pieces and clippings of the cloths of the chief offered to the *Aklama*. It is worthy of note that the idea of making an altar unto one’s personal God is also evident among the Akan for example. Especially in the past, and still in some villages the household is identified with the *Nyamedua* (i.e. the “tree of God”) which is usually a forked branch of a tree stamped into the ground on which was a pot hoisted (e.g. McCaskie, 1989, p. 422; Rattray, [1927]1959, p. 271).

⁹⁷ Togbe Dra IV, (FGD #5, Aveme-Dra, 11/10/2020).



Figure. 3.8. The *Mawuti*, Aveme-Dra. Photographed by the researcher.

Other cases in point with similar forms of ailments or circumstances of afflictions considered to be spiritual maladies which required the figurations of the *Aklama* for personal possession involve all the priests and priestesses interviewed for this project. While fundamentally their need to directly engage with their *Aklama* is the same, the respective mediums or figurines for their individual *Aklama* varies significantly. Consequently, there are some similarities as well as significant differences in the figurations and iconologies of *Aklama*. For the purpose of comparison, the cases of three priestesses and three priests are presented as a cross-sectional representation of *Aklama* in the Midwest Volta.

3.5.1. 'Aklama pots' and/or the *Mawuti* as Spirit Mediums for Initiated Priestesses.

A priestess is referred to as *trɔnsi* which translates as “the wife of a deity”. Practicing priestesses are therefore individuals who have undergone prescribed rites and are duly initiated; conditions that bring to fore their express engagements with their *Aklama* as their spiritual companion and/or other deities focalised in some physical mediums. For the priestess Mama Alanusi,⁹⁸ she points out that her *Aklama* is represented by a water-bearing ceramic pot exclusively kept in the bedroom⁹⁹ (Mama Alanusi, KII #34, 01/10/2020, Kpando-Agbenorxoe). According to her, the “*Aklama* pot” is however connected to another wooden figure, also identified as the *Mawuti*, placed overhead on the sidewall outside the shrine room of her deities¹⁰⁰. This *Mawuti* is also a rectangular structure of about 30 by 60 centimetres in dimension. The figure is symmetrically apportioned into two halves like a face marked by a nose. It however does not have any ‘torso’ and limbs. The *Mawuti* is painted white (perhaps periodically with kaolin) and set below the inscription “MAWU ME DLO, ETOWOBLE O”¹⁰¹ on the wall where it is placed (see

⁹⁸ The oldest and longest serving priestess in the Kpando Municipality.

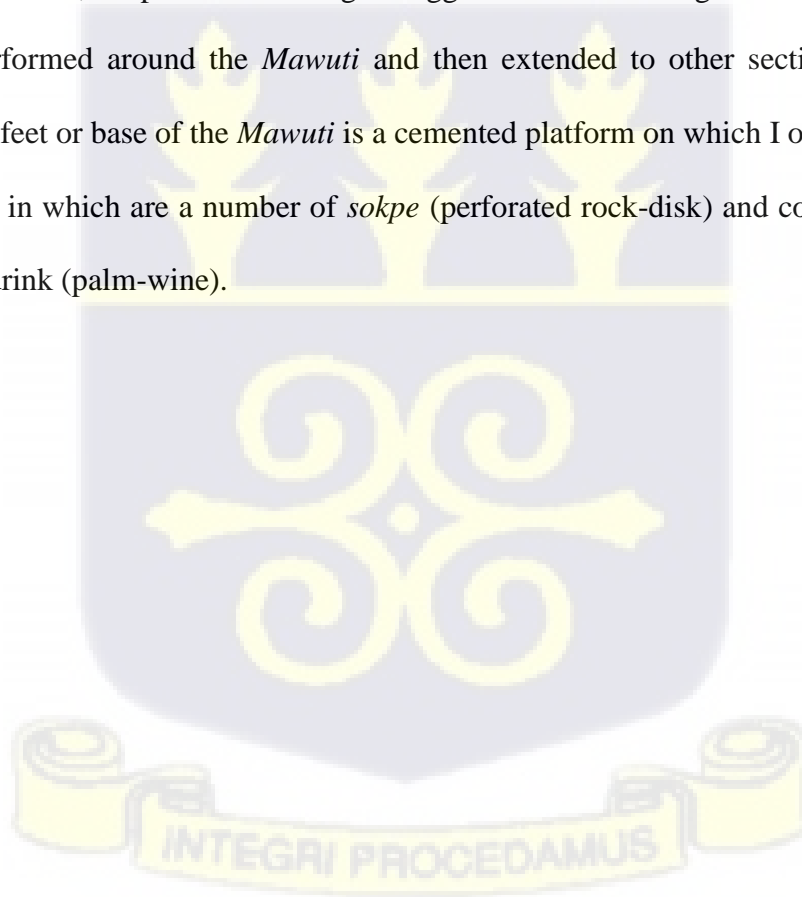
⁹⁹ All the five priestesses interviewed except one identified their *Aklama* with a pot.

¹⁰⁰ The shrine room was notably distinguished by tri-colour scheme with white, black and red strips of cloth.

¹⁰¹ This translates as “God does not forget His own people”.

Figure 3.9). She explains that in her over sixty-years of practice, the pot has remained the same but the wooden structure has had to be readjusted over the years.

In terms of accessibility and significance, she pointed out that the clay pot represents her very self and must never be allowed to run dry of the water in it just like the blood in her physical body. In this context, the *Aklama* pot provides a memetic or homologous representation of herself to be ritually cared for. Thus, the pot is refilled frequently and she could drink from the pot, and could also use the water to cure certain conditions especially convulsing children. Her other deity mediums representing ancient ancestral spirits and alien deities are housed at different section of the shrine¹⁰². However, for periodic offerings of egg and annual feeding/sacrifices to the *Aklama*, the rites are performed around the *Mawuti* and then extended to other sections of the shrine complex. At the feet or base of the *Mawuti* is a cemented platform on which I observed a ceramic bowl with water in which are a number of *sokpe* (perforated rock-disk) and cowries, and by it a bottle of sweet-drink (palm-wine).



¹⁰² The ancestral deities are identified as ancient Ewe gods represented by the colour black to which goat is the sacrificial animal offered to it. The alien deities are mostly riverine spirits from the Akan areas and are represented by the colour white and take ram as sacrificial food.



Figure. 3.9. The *Mawuti*, Kpando-Agbenorxoe. Photographed by the researcher.

For another priestess, Mama Uutasi,¹⁰³ although she has a number of pots which contain water with different herbs at several vantage points at her shrine complex at Awate, according to her, none represents her *Aklama*. Among the mediums for her deities and other spirits, she identifies her *Aklama* with a *Mawuti/Aklamati*¹⁰⁴ which is kept from public view in the outer room to her bedroom chamber (Mama Uutasi, KII #21, 19/09/2020, and KII #10, 14/03/2020, Awate). This *Aklamati* is also constructed with wood; it is a wooden geometric figure set over a plywood placed at window length. Similar to the other *Mawuti* already described, it seems to project the facial features of a person; two cowries, one each on a nail appears to be the ‘eyes’ of the figure. Unlike the rectangular structure of Mama Alanusi’s *Mawuti*, this figure looks like a long triangle cut at the apex by about one-third of the height. Thus, it slightly broadens to about an inch to the base. It is ‘torsoless’ and ‘limbless’ and not painted (see Figure 3.10).

During the grand durbar of Mama Uutasi’s ceremonial rites in which I participated as a guest, Michael and I were served our food in the room where her *Mawuti/Aklamati* is mounted. Earlier, following the slaughtering of a goat and a sheep, I noticed that two bowls of corn-flour; one plain and the other mixed with palm oil were brought from that room for the ceremonial feeding of the deities at the shrine. Facing directly the *Aklamati*, this was the first time I personally saw it and could somehow observe it. I noticed that portions of the corn-flour, an egg, and little hides and feathers of the sacrificial animals were placed in the *Aklamati*. Again, what seems to be

¹⁰³ Mama Uutasi is a priestess at Awate, in the North Dayin District. She identifies herself as spiritually-married to an ancestral spirit but with the permission of her *Aklama* 17 years ago. She has, however, been practicing as initiated priestess to a host of Ewe and Akan deities domiciled at her shrine for 14 years now. She can initiate other people into the priesthood of both Ewe and Akan deities.

¹⁰⁴ She specifically refer to it as the *Aklamati*. However in our conversations she sometimes called it *Aklama* or *Mawuti* (Mama Uutasi, interviewed at Awate, 14/03/2020 and 19/09/2020).

a solution of corn-flour or kaolin had been splashed on the wall below the *Aklamati* as if to mark the throat and the stomach areas of her *Aklama* (see Figure 3.10).

The following day where in the company of her husband and a few other guests, I had the permission to interview her in that room, I also noticed that her ceremonial stool (the symbol of her status as a *trɔnsi*) and a basin in which personal effects including cloths, beaded jewellery, perfumes and scented powder among other things are kept.¹⁰⁵ According to her, while the shrine space for her “deity-husband”, the *trɔxɔ*¹⁰⁶, is only accessible during the annual feeding ceremony, the area of the *Aklamati* is always accessible to her except on days where she had had sexual intimacy with her husband, and during her menses when she was reproductively active (Mama Uutasi, KII #10, 14/03/2020, Awate). She demonstrated how she makes supplications through the *Aklamati* and expects to receive information from her *Aklama* usually through dreams and premonitions. According to her, it is before the *Aklamati* she takes deeper reflections when she gets puzzling dreams and thoughts; such may concern the requisite preparations for prospective individuals who may need to come to the shrine. Similarly, she points out, when she unknowingly incurs the displeasure of her *Aklama*, her inextricable spiritual companion, it is through such means she is prompted. She recounts that as a novice priestess she had unknowingly displeased her *Aklama* when she had put the *Aklamati* with other deity medium in the same room. She however asserts that over the years she has learned to distil information from her *Aklama*.

¹⁰⁵ The priestess explained to me that the space of the *Aklamati* is for her the most important place at the shrine complex. It is in that room where her ceremonial stool and priestly regalia are also kept. During the reconnaissance survey when I interviewed her for the first time, I could not access the space. However, by adhering to a prescribed protocol during my subsequent visit for the fieldwork I had her permission to document her engaging with the *Mawuti*. However, I could not access the shrine room of the deities without the offering of a goat and sheep respectively at the appropriate time for the Ewe and Akan originated spirits at the shrine. She could not also describe the nature and focal mediums of her deities because “I could not be allowed to see their nakedness”, she explained.

¹⁰⁶ Pronounced *tronhor*, ‘the house of the deity’.



Figure 3.10. The *Aklamati*, Awate. Photographed by the researcher.

Notably, in the cases of Mama Alanusi and Mama Uutasi, the primary focal element for their religico-professional practices is what they identified as their *Aklama*. However, the mediums that focalize or represent their *Aklama* differ remarkably. Thus, while for Mama Alanusi, it is the “*Aklama pot*” that represents her spiritual-self, for Mama Uutasi it is rather the *Aklamati/Mawuti*. Again, their *Aklama* figures are kept separately from the shrine rooms where the deity mediums are hosted. However, in another scenario, the *trɔnsi* Fofie Yentumi apparently presents another dimension to the representations of *Aklama* in the Midwest Volta.

Trɔnsi Fofie Yentumi is exclusively initiated into herbal medicinal practice associated with the *Fofie* deity, identified as a *Blutrɔ*; a deity of Akan origin. She explains that the origins of deities that seek the attention of devotees are critical determinants of specific vocation a would-be priest or priestess is initiated. While some deities are identified as celestial, others are terrestrial/forest or marine/riverine based. A person may be possessed by more than one deity of different origins. In her case, forty-years ago, she was possessed by two deities identified as *Blutrɔwo*; the *Densu* and *Fofie* deities of riverine and terrestrial origins respectively.

According to the herbalist-priestess, her experience with spiritual possession took the form of mental derailment; she lost the sense of herself and would go into the bush and other places she had never been. She added that search parties have had to look for her on some occasions. She recounts that it was when several avenues for help had failed to provide succour for her situation that the family reluctantly considered oracular consultations with the gods through a priest to seek explanation. According to her, it was an answer to that search for meaning into her mental distress that it was revealed that those two “*Blutrɔwo* seek to live with her”¹⁰⁷ (Mama Yentumi, KII #28,

¹⁰⁷ Mama Fofie Yentumi, interviewed at Aveme-Danyigba, 27/09/2020.

27/09/2020, Aveme-Danyigba). Meanwhile her father, an Akan, had been very hesitant because he did not want the daughter to continue the path which the grandmother had long denounced—the traditional priesthood. However, in settling for a compromise, the family decided to accept only the initiation into the priesthood of the *Fofie* deity for which she practices with herbs only. She only prepares herbal medicine, especially for people with fertility problems and sexual impotence; she does not do divinatory consultations for people. However, individuals possessed by the *Fofie* deity could be brought to her to be initiated and trained into the priesthood. According to her, in consequence for rejecting to host the *Densu* deity, she is forbidden to cross the River Densu anywhere it is found.

Unlike Mama Alanusi and Mama Uutasi, Mama Fofie Yentumi does not differentiate her *Aklama* from her *Fofie*-deity mediums for her herbal medicinal practice at her shrine. She describes her *Aklama* as a composite medium with different elements; it consists of three ceramic receptacles including two little pots on a wooden platform and an earthenware-bowl partially buried by the base in the ground. They are kept not actually in the bedroom but at a shrine space secured away from the contact and pollution of goats¹⁰⁸. According to her, she does not possess any other mediums of deity representation. She however specifically identifies the *Fofie* deity with one of the pots which is filled with water (Mama Yentumi, KII #28, 27/09/2020, Aveme-Danyigba). That water must be sourced from rain water, a flowing river or a stream. She pointed out that the water for the ‘deity-pot’ is fetched by some children, especially young girls yet to experience menarche. From the other pot she prepares herbal-based medicine for her patients.

¹⁰⁸ The *Fofie* deity abhors goats.

Furthermore, she described how at a visit to her shrine clients dip their hands into the “deity’s pot to bath themselves three times,” after which the appropriate herbs and directives for their use are prescribed (Mama Yentumi, KII #28, 27/09/2020, Aveme-Danyigba). As could be noted, perhaps the deity’s pot essentially serves the purpose of cleansing the individual of ill-fortune or spiritual filth to facilitate the curing of the ailments. Additionally, she maintained that the partially buried earthenware is where offerings of drinks are made to the deity. She however pointed out that although she strictly observes a proscription from alcoholic drinks, there must always be an unopened bottle of schnapps by the earthenware that gets “sipped away” by the deity and other spirits. According to her, as a fully initiated priestess, her spirit or *Aklama* is identified with the *Fofie* deity just as any other priest or priestess so initiated; they are associated with the colour white and use ram as the sacrificial animal¹⁰⁹. Moreover, in her explanation, any *Fofie* adept or devotee readily responds to the drum beat of the deity when it is sounded at a ceremony or during the performance of a rite. Clearly Mama Fofie Yentumi’s shrine configuration differs from those of Mama Alanusi and Uutasi who are devoted to more than one deity. Perhaps, this is a result of her resisting initiation into the calling of other deities except the *Fofie* deity.

3.5.2. *Aklama* *Kpakpe* as Spirit Mediums for Initiated Priests.

As counterparts of the *trɔnsiwo*, wives of the deities, the priests generally referred to as *trɔnuwo* are not necessarily considered the “husbands” but the mouthpiece of their deities. Providing a link with ancestral spirits and deities, the priests bear the honorary title *Togbe* usually ascribed to the ancestors, chiefs and the very aged men. Similar to the recruitment of their female counterparts, the calling of the *trɔnuwo* into the indigenous priesthood is usually through spiritual

¹⁰⁹ According to the priestess, individuals who have had the experience of spiritual possession and have undergone the purification rite are identified with a string of three white beads indicating that the god’s have accepted the person into the priesthood. However, when the initiation is complete and the individual is duly recognized as a priest or priestess, he or then replaces it with a full-beaded white wrist band and/or anklets of white beads or cowries.

possession. Again, like the *trɔnsiwo*, their particular vocations as priests vary. While some are particularly noted for oracular divinations, others are associated with herbal practice for curing ailments, or better still considered as custodians of ancestral spirit-mediums and thus mediate their interactions with other people. However, it is not uncommon to find a priest who is multi-vocational; serving as herbalist, divinatory ritualist and custodian of household/communal deities. Such are usually referred to as *xunuɔ*¹¹⁰ or *amega*.

Unlike the priestesses who identify their *Aklama* mainly with water-bearing ceramic receptacles, the priests are mostly noted for their possession of figurines—carved in wood or moulded in clay or cement as spirit mediums. Thus, as a priest may be devoted to many spirits and could as well explore to court more deities to domicile, proliferation of their spiritual mediums is often the result. As discussed in more details hereafter, the call into the indigenous priesthood is attributed to the *Dzɔgbese* of the individual, and in many cases with other spirits thereafter as auxiliaries. While the particular medium substantivizing the personal guardian-spirit is singularly acknowledged as the *Aklama*, other deity mediums may by association also be identified as *Aklama Kpakpe* or distinguished as *trɔ*¹¹¹. Among the nine priests interviewed only two of them claimed they did not have their *Aklama* focalized in an anthropomorphic figurine at their shrine. However, drawing on notable similarities as well as significant differences in the figurations of *Aklama* and/or deity mediums at different shrines observed, the cases of three priests and their shrine ensembles are here again presented as cross-sectional representation¹¹².

¹¹⁰ Pronounced 'hunuor'.

¹¹¹ *Dzɔgbese* and its auxiliary spirits are considered to have been pre-destined to unfold along the life of the individual. The *trɔ*, on the other hand, is mostly considered inherited household or communal deity that seeks to partner with the individual in a sort of spiritual marriage. However, the difference is very thin and blur depending on how the deities and spirits are configured and hosted at a particular shrine.

¹¹² These cases are chosen because of the details in analysis they afford. For two of the priests I had multiple interview sessions with them during both the reconnaissance and the fieldwork and also had the opportunity to

3.5.3. Focalizing *Dzɔgbese*: *Aklama Kpapke* at the Request of the Abiding Personal God.

Togbe Buaku describes *Aklama* as “the *Dzɔgbese* that comes with a person into the world; the personal spirit/god who leads the individual into the particular vocation assigned him or her” (Togbe Buaku, KII #14, 18/03/2020, Wusuta). He explains however that it is usually in the case of life’s crisis that a person’s *Aklama* clearly shows up to bring the individual along the paths of life predestined for him/her. Thus, the manifestation of *Aklama* connotes a crisis point remedy; the invitation to step into a gap to perform an assigned duty. This however, according to him, is the experience of a few people who are spiritually evaluated to be appropriate stewards of a family’s host of ancestors, deities or spirits. According to him, a range of items may be used to symbolise the *Aklama*. He for instance, identifies *togbe zikpu*¹¹³, *sokpe*¹¹⁴, strung beads, carved figurines (especially in human forms), the placenta/umbilical cord and some special clay pots as symbols of *Aklama*. Emphasizing the peculiarity of the placenta as the *Aklama* in the generally sense for every person, he explains how the individual is accompanied at birth by the placenta. According to him, the search for one’s *Aklama* is indeed an enquiry into “the specific message [the covenanted destiny] the placenta had taken with it to *Dzɔfe* after it had successfully ushered the individual to the earth”¹¹⁵. It is in that light that a person is considered to maintain existence in both the spiritual and the physical worlds simultaneously. Hence, if it is discovered through divinatory revelations

enter their shrine rooms to see their *Aklama* with other deity mediums. The third example, which I could only have the shrine ensemble described to me, rather presents an unusual case for a priest whose *Aklama* is identified with a mounted pot.

¹¹³ Ancestral stool to which traditional authority is ascribed. It is usually owned by a family or a clan.

¹¹⁴ Perforated rock disc traditionally believed to have a celestial origin. It is also considered to be the female counterpart of the thunderbolt, the “axe” of the thunder god *Xebieso*.

¹¹⁵ The placenta is usually buried. The common belief is that when it is buried in the earth, it takes an earlier leave for *Dzɔfe* to wait for the ward who has successfully be ushered into the world until such a time that it was agreed he/she brings ends the earthly sojourn. The placenta is therefore considered the immediate like from and to the spirit world; it accompanies and ushers the individual to the world and also by its burial, it goes before the individual to the land of the spirits (Togbe Buaku, interviewed at Wusuta, 18/03/2020 and 01/10/2020).

that the terms on which the placenta returned were not favourable, there is the need to re-negotiate a person's fate through rites of pacification. Apart from the placenta which is only an ephemeral representation of *Aklama* for everyone, its enduring representations are occasioned by some circumstances an individual might experience.

Togbe Buaku narrates that he comes from a family of 'spiritually strong' men of the indigenous priesthood; his grandfather had been an acclaimed herbalist so was his father from whom he inherited the shrine elements. In the meantime, before he was initiated into the priesthood, the focalization of his *Dzɔgbese* was required when he became restless and sometime very violent towards people during his final year of the middle school. At that time, when his father consulted with the family's deities to seek explanation for his situation, it was confirmed that his *Dzɔgbese* demanded for an *Aklama kpakpe* to be hosted with him. Thus, at age nineteen when he had just completed school in 1986 his *Aklama* figurine was carved for him. He identifies his *Dzɔgbese* with *Dada Se*, a female spirit and hence the figurine is a female anthropomorphic figurine carved in wood and particularly highlights the secondary feminine features including a rounded face and protruding buttocks. The figurine measures about 17 cm in height and does not proportionately represent the head and the torso (see Figure 3.11). It is relatively smooth in surface texture and unclothed but adorned with four strings of coloured beads, and a red-tail feather of a parrot. According to him, the beaded strings across the body of the figurine indicate that he had been reincarnated four (4) different times. Also, the real nature of his *Dzɔgbese* as female being counter-balances his physical being as a destined priest. He points out that after his initiation into the priesthood, by the means of dreams, his *Dzɔgbese* encouraged him to acquire other spirits or deity-mediums needed to support his vocation in herbal practice and psychic healing.



Figure. 3.11. *Aklama kpakpe* (female form)¹¹⁶, Wusuta. Photographed by the researcher.

Thus, in addition to his *Aklama* figurine and the physical mediums of the spirits already inherited from his father, he domiciles other spirits and deities some of which are considered closely related to the *Aklama* while the others are completely alien. Particularly related to his herbal practice, and with the *Dzɔgbese/Aklama* are spirit beings identified as *Age* and *Adiepoe* represented by a set of one-legged and a bi-footed anthropomorphic figurines with two zoomorphic figures in

¹¹⁶ The *Aklama Kpakpe* was brought in isolation (in a brass basin) during the reconnaissance survey on 18/03/2020 at Wusuta.

the forms of a monkey and an alligator. According to him, each of these set of related *Aklama kpakpe* could be engaged verbally when the appropriate spirit is invoked¹¹⁷. Crowning his shrine ensemble is a stool identified as the *Aklamafia*, “chief of *Aklama*”, a white painted stool together with a set of clothing, hats, and a walking stick (see Figures 3.12 and 3.13). From the set of regalia associated with the *Aklamafia*, he selects the appropriate adornment for ritual and ceremonial performance¹¹⁸ (see Figure 3.14). He explained that in the course of his priesthood and practice it was established that his spiritual status had been elevated; he had been enthroned in the spiritual realm. The *Aklamafia* therefore signifies his elevation and enthronement in the spirit. Thus, the *Aklamafia*, according to him, is the head figure of the shrine working together with the other *Aklama kpakpe* as a unit¹¹⁹. Again, a strikingly real but less than a life-size figure among the shrine ensemble is a carving he identified as representing the image of his late father. Incidentally, it is the representative figurine of his father by which he displays his certificate (framed in a glass) as a psychic healer (see Figure 3.13).

¹¹⁷ Each figurine is individualized by their specific names by which they could be summoned to manifest. The *Age* and the *Adiepoe/Asizar* are identified as forest-dwelling spiritual beings invisible to the uninitiated. They are particularly noted for their prescriptions of appropriate herbs to cure different ailments, as well as their directions to devotee hunters into the forest for games.

¹¹⁸ He wears those cloths and other accessories at their appropriate times for rites and rituals in and outside the shrine. At different times of my interactions with him he wore different cloths from those kept with the *Aklamafia* at the shrine room.

¹¹⁹ The *Aklama kpakpe* as one unit separated from then non-*Aklama* related *trɔwo* (i.e. those identified as alien deities), work together and share a common bowl of water. I observed a number of *sokpe*, perforated rock discs, in the water bowl. Some of the *trɔwo* are partitioned off from *Aklama kpakpe* unit in the room by red and white curtains.



Figure 3.12. The *Aklamafia*, Wusuta. Photographed by the researcher.



Figure 3.13. The *Aklama* in association with elements of the *Aklamafia*, Wusuta. Photographed by the researcher.



Figure 3.14. Togbe Buaku in his *Aklamafia* regalia, Wusuta. Photographed by the researcher.

Another priest whose shrine ensemble presents similar and yet a different case of *Aklama* figurations is Togbe Yao Agbe. Togbe Agbe is also a registered psychic healer. He identified *Aklama* as personal destiny otherwise known as “*Dzɔgbese Aklama* which every individual possesses and must be acknowledged and revered”¹²⁰ (Togbe Agbe, KII #26, 25/09/2020, Wusuta). He asserts that just as there are different human characters and personalities, *Aklama* also differs from one individual to another. According to him, representations of *Aklama* generally referred to as *Aklama kpakpe* is always in human semblance; an *Aklama kpakpe* must reflect the person who needs to have it¹²¹. He describes *Aklama kpakpe* as a very simple carving; “it just has to show the most important part of the human body which is the head; the seat of knowledge and conscience”. Thus, he identifies the eyes and the ears as the most important features of *Aklama kpakpe*. He points out that the *Aklama kpakpe* is not required by everyone. He however confirms what other informants have expressed that “for priests it is a must to have the *Aklama kpakpe*”. Togbe Agbe narrates the circumstance for the acquisition of his *Aklama kpakpe* as below:

When I was thirteen years, I took ill seriously and was almost dead. I was taken to Tamale in the Northern Region to make enquiries through divination about the cause of the illness. I was told it was my *Aklama* that was responsible for that [ailment]. So, they told me what I needed to do; they showed me the pattern for the construction of my *Aklama kpakpe*. Then I came back to the Volta Region to have the *Aklama kpakpe* carved for me. I was instructed to use the wood called *kpomi* in Ewe, also known as *sesewo* [soft wood] to carve it” [. . .]. “So for my own it was *sesewo* that I used for the carving. It was done on 4th April, 1961, some 59 years ago. I engage with my *Aklama* every day because it works every day. However, when it rains or there is a dead body in the neighbourhood, as a priest when I consult the *Aklama* and the associated spiritual agents, they will not come. It must be after the dead body is buried that they will come when you consult [with] them (Togbe Agbe, KII #26, 25/09/2020, Wusuta).

¹²⁰ Togbe Agbe, interviewed on 18/03/2020, and 25/09/2020 at Wusuta.

¹²¹ This implies that the features of the figurine must conform to the gender of the owner. His is a male form anthropomorphic figurine. However, other priest-informants identified their figurines as female figures.

At his shrine the figurine identified as the personal *Aklama kpakpe* is an anthropomorphic carving with male features measuring about 20 centimetres in height (see Figure 3.15). Except for the face which is given more attention, the figurine is rough in surface texture. The *Aklama kpakpe* together with other anthropomorphic figurines are installed on an altar amidst other spirit mediums at different sections of the shrine room marked by tri-colour scheme¹²². According to him, *Aklama* is particularly identified with the colour white and therefore his *Aklama*, the representation of his *Dzɔgbese* is placed on a table with white covering with assorted perfume and ‘six flower’ brand of powder (see Figure 3.15). He further explains that the other material mediums are auxiliary to *Aklama* and are therefore “different things added with the *Aklama*” (Togbe Agbe, KII #26, 25/09/2020, Wusuta). He indicates that “some of them, [the auxiliaries,] are dwarf spirits, and the others are *Mami* spirits from the sea. Those spirit [mediums] or *trɔ* [idol figures] are agents of *Aklama*. They are invoked into their respective mediums which are usually in wooden form that are kept separately from *Aklama*” (Togbe Agbe, KII #26, 25/09/2020, Wusuta). He further explains that the different spirits/deities have their respective taboos and special preference that must be observed, hence the reason they could not be put together on the same altar and treated as one. He however points out that during the annual cleansing and feeding rites he treats all the material mediums for the deities together; “they are bathed and their cloths are changed [i.e. replaced with new ones] and fed with their favourite food which is rice and pigeon”.

¹²² The other figurines added to his representative *Aklama* figurine include what seems to be a Roman Catholic iconographic figurine, another proportionately naturalistic but less of a life-size male form anthropomorphic figurine and a figurine wrapped-up in the tri-colours of black, red and white stripe of cloth.



Figure 3.15. A male form of *Aklama* with other figurines on an altar¹²³. Photographed by the researcher.

He identifies the *Aklama* as his “personal god” which also instructed him to procure the other deities in the course of time. Although the *Aklama* figurine does not talk (i.e. it could not verbally articulate), it is the most important medium at the shrine that “gives instructions to the rest which serve as agents of the *Aklama*” (Togbe Agbe, KII #26, 25/09/2020, Wusuta). In an answer to the question of how the instructions of *Aklama* are discerned and acknowledged, he remarked that “there are things to do for the *Aklama* to ask him about things; . . . we [as priests] have eyes and the ear [to see and hear from the spirits]. So, when you make requests, the things you see or

¹²³ A section of the shrine ensemble where I had the consent of the priest to photograph with my mobile phone during the reconnaissance survey on 18/03/2020 at Wusuta.

hear from *Aklama*, especially those you see in your dreams, you ask the dwarfs or the *Mami* spirits and if it is true, they will confirm it and then you take action. So, the dwarfs and the *Mami* spirits work together with *Aklama*". He then continues that "it is actually the *Aklama* that gives them [the other spirits agents] power and authority to respond or not to attend to a person's request" (Togbe Agbe, KII #26, 25/09/2020, Wusuta).

He however points out that those spiritual agents are deities of themselves and could "take retributive actions on their own when their taboos are violated"¹²⁴. He maintains that, although the associated spirits of the mediums are invisible, they are very real and active; they could for example punish an offending priest by real slaps and cane lashes. This suggests a rather complex and entangled relations between *Aklama* and auxiliary spirit/agents on one hand, and with the individual priest/devotee on the other hand. The person needs to carefully co-ordinate the operations of *Aklama* as the spiritual-self and the auxiliary spirits by appropriate rites and rituals. While the eminence of *Aklama* at the shrine is mostly highlighted, the autonomy of the other spirits is at the same time acknowledged.

The third case of illustration below, which involves a priest dedicated to assuaging the spirits of individuals who suffer tragic deaths adds another layer to the complexity of the conceptualizations of *Aklama* in the Midwest Volta.

Togbe Azubi is a devotee of the *ametsiavawo*, spirits of individuals who had suffered tragic deaths (Togbe Azubi, KII #29, 27/09/2020, Aveme-Danyigbe). In the town of Aveme and its environs he is identified among the priests in charge of rites and rituals to appease the spirit of individuals who suffer tragic accidents or untimely death by such tragedies as drowning, murder,

¹²⁴ Togbe Agbe, interviewed at Wusuta, 25/09/2020.

snake bite, and gun-shot. He describes himself as herbalist and priest. His major priestly duty, however, is to ward-off tragic incidences and possible recurrences usually considered reprisal incidents attributed to disgruntled spirits of individuals who had died tragically. Unlike Togbe Buaku and Togbe Agbe who respectively associate their priesthoods to reincarnations and predestination of their *Dzɔgbese/Aklama*, Togbe Azubi alludes to a situational possession by a restless spirit of an otherwise noble elder of the family who drowned. He recounts that the said elder was an *Asafoatse*¹²⁵ called Kofi Azubi, whose name he assumed as an initiated priest and thus serving in the capacity as an incarnate of him in the last ten years. According to the account, in the distant past¹²⁶, the said elder had led a delegation to another village to contract marriage for a member of the family. While returning, their watercraft, a dugout canoe, capsized and some of them got drowned. It is one of those victims of circumstance who is believed to have sought host with this priest; an otherwise professional mason. Thus, in his view, *Aklama* connotes a relationship with *gbɔgbɔ*, a spirit.

According to him, he was far away in Accra where for many years he worked as a mason. Unexpectedly, he experienced what he describes as spiritual afflictions which necessitated that he was brought home to his village to seek appropriate remedy. It was during the search for relief that it was discovered by divinatory consultation that an *ametsiava* spirit was the cause; that Kofi Azubi, a distant relation's restless spirit wanted to settle with him. Thus, he was sent to Aveme Gboxome, a nearby village where a priestess devoted to the *ametsiava* initiated him into the priesthood and herbal medicinal practice. According to him, he does not possess any *Aklama*

¹²⁵ The *Asafoatse* is a unit of traditional leadership under local chiefs. They are particularly noted to ensure that peace and harmony prevail in the interactions of the people in the village or the town.

¹²⁶ The story is not within the memory of the priest; this was revealed during oracular consultations in the event of his spiritual possession ordeals.

kpapke, carved or moulded anthropomorphic figurines. He points out that his shrine unit consists of two small pots and a depression on the ground for offerings to the *ametsiava*. He describes the properties and configuration of the shrine space in the room as the following:

“There is a table and under it is one pot in a depression [made in the ground] where prayers to the spirits are made. The other pot, also under the table, is filled with water for the sprits. The water pot is placed on a platform of a clay ring made with [the matrix/mortar of] clay, two eggs and a bottle of schnapps, [instead of water as the solvent used to mix the mortar]” (Togbe Azubi, KII #29, 27/09/2020, Aveme-Danyigbe).

He explains that apart from the practical support of the clay ring to the water pot, the base of that pot is not supposed to touch the floor. The water pot is re-filled when the water is considerably below the rim; the *ametsiava* drinks from it and it must never be empty. According to him, the *ametsiava* spirits are very active at midnight and that is precisely the time he needs to fetch water from the river/stream when he has to re-fill the pot¹²⁷. Also, as an initiated devotee of the *ametsiava* he is proscribed from consuming goat meat. Dog and sheep are identified as the appropriate sacrificial animals for the rites and rituals associated with those spirits. In the contexts of rituals when there is an incident of tragic death, while the sheep is offered at the spot of death to cleanse and pacify the dead person, the dog is executed at the secluded place of the village where bodies of such deaths are buried as offering to the *ametsiava*.

¹²⁷ Nobody other than this priest is permitted to access that shrine elements or attend to it. Thus, except for his effort to vividly describe the configuration of the shine, he could not permit my access to the room and the shrine space. However, there is a separate pot which contains water with herbs in a fenced space on the compound where he engages with individuals who comes to him to be cured of ailments considered to be spiritually caused.

3.4.4. Focalized *Aklama* as the Opener and Closure of Rites and Ceremonies.

In summation, according to informants, for individuals who are by fiat required to engage in periodic dialogue with the spirits through certain rites or rituals, it is the *Aklama* which serves to ‘open’ and ‘close’ the ritual performance. Thus, it is through the figurations of *Aklama* that the gods and/or the ancestors are engaged. For priestesses in particular, the *Aklama* is mostly represented by a ceramic pot that must always contain water as long as the owner is alive. However, for some priestesses, priests and certain traditional leaders, as pointed out already, the *Aklama* is represented either in anthropomorphic figurine (i.e. *Aklama kpapke*) or anthropomorphorsized wooden structure (i.e. *Aklamati/Mawuti*) normally separated from deity mediums which are not directly related to *Aklama*. As noted at several shrines, while the *Aklama kpapke* or the *Aklamati* is almost interacted with daily by their owners, the deity-mediums are only attended to periodically and when the need to activate them arises.

Again, although purification rites and sacrificial offering to the *Aklama* are done annually, offerings in the form of pieces of cloth from the person’s dress, sweet drinks and other food items are often presented to the *Aklama/Mawuti*. Furthermore, customarily, before the annual purification rites and the ceremonial feeding of ancestral stools and spirit mediums, the *Aklama kpapke*, *Aklamati* or the *Mawuti* (as the case might be) is the first to be fed¹²⁸. Thus, in the outdoorings of new yam, in particular, during the traditional harvest festivities it is the *Aklama* that is the first to be ceremonially fed before the priest/priestess can eat of the new yam.

More importantly, although physical mediums for spirits may be added on to particular shrine ensemble as more deities are hosted, the *Aklama* medium usually remains the one so personalized with the status and peculiar destinies of their owners. As such, personalized *Aklama*

¹²⁸ I was privileged to witness this at a week-long ceremony at the shrine of Mama Uutasi at Awate.

mediums that clearly serve as homologic indices of their owners are hardly transferrable or inherited. Thus, while the entire shrine ensemble is inheritable, the *Aklama/Aklamati* is “sent” with the individual to carry to the other world when he or she dies¹²⁹.

3.4.5. Installation and Decommissioning of *Aklama Kpakpe*.

Notably, *Aklama* figurines differ and are particularly personal. Thus, in accordance with the perceived nature of their owners and more so their statuses in the spiritual realm, significantly different forms of *Aklama kpakpe* were evident in the Midwest Volta. Again, to ensure the effectiveness of the *Aklama kpakpe* the specific materials and their procurement follow required ritual protocols. According to some priests and confirmed by some carvers interviewed, there are for instance, appropriate days for the acquisition of wood and other materials for making *Aklama kpakpe*. Regarding the wood for carving *Aklama* figurines in particular which must be from a living tree, before it is cut, the person must make an offering and speak to the tree about the intention to use that piece for carving his/her *Aklama*. A prayer is then said where the individual asks that the intended carving will be effective and fit for the purpose of engaging with the supernatural. According to my informants, the offerings usually include drinks, perfumed powder or a token of money in old coins or currency (e.g. Togbe Agbe, KII #26, 25/09/2020, Wusuta; Tsekpo, KII #25, 25/09/2020, Kpando).

Just like the setting up of physical mediums for spirits or deities, the installation of an *Aklama* figurine follows prescribed processes to activate the requisite spirits into it. Thus, each *Aklama* figurine is named just like a human person and connected with the owner who, according to informants, usually swallows a certain kind of seeds or concoctions over the figurine as part of

¹²⁹ The figurine is not actually buried with the person. It is ritually discarded or rather dispatched at certain places in the bush where the spirit of the person is called upon to redeem it. .

the initiation process. This implies that the spirit is not inherent with the *Aklama kpakpe* and therefore to engage with the spirit, it is summoned by its name and appropriate ritual protocols to mount the figurine. And since the link between *Aklama* figurines and their owners are considered to be that of a relation with the owners' spiritual-selves, they preclude transfer to other persons. However, in certain situations as pointed out by informants, some elements of the *Aklama kpakpe* of a late owner may be inherited; though not as the *Aklama* of the successor but a *trɔ*, a deity medium (e.g. Togbe Buaku, KII #14, 18/03/2020, Wusuta). In such situations, the successor must have served as an apprenticed priest or priestess in training to take over from the original owner who must be a priest or priestess. Consequently, as personalized and individuated as *Aklama* figurines are, they are in principle decommissioned and 'sent with' their dead owners to be 'carried over' into the spirit world. This is done by discarding the figurines at designated places usually in the bush. However, at a shrine I observed that the 'decommissioned' *Aklamati* of the late priest is kept on the compound which also has the tomb of the priest (see Figures 3.16 and 3.17). The said *Aklamati* is painted the same colour of the tombstone architecture of the late priest on the compound of the shrine. Although, the tombstone and the associated *Aklamati* have become part of the shrine complex, they were not considered as representing the *Aklama* of the substantive priest who happens to be one of the children of the late priest. According to Friedson for example, such appropriations are likely when the late priest is considered very powerful to the extent that, by association, any element of his body or spirit mediums could be transformed into powerful deity-mediums called *dzoka* which translates as "fire rope" (Friedson, 2009, p. 111).



Figure 3.16. The *Aklamati* of a late priest incorporated into a shrine complex, Wusuta. Photographed by the researcher.



Figure 3.17. The tombstone of a late priest incorporated into a shrine complex, Wusuta. Photographed by the researcher.

Similar appropriation of ‘decommissioned’ *Aklama kpakpe* was observed at Togbe Buaku’s shrine where a monkey-form figure which he identified as his late grandfather’s personal *Aklama kpakpe* was kept in addition to the naturalistic carving of his late father. In an explanation about why the monkey-form *Aklama kpakpe* of his late grandfather was part of his shrine ensemble, he maintained that although he could not inherit it as his personal *Aklama kpakpe*, there were some elements, particularly the *sokpe* tied to the figurine with a red cord, which according to him served as a link with his predecessor priests (see Figures 3.18.a and 3.18.b).



Figures 3. 18a and 3.18b. Front and side views of a ‘decommissioned’ *Aklama kpakpe* with elements appropriated as spirit-mediums, Wusuta. Photographed by the researcher.

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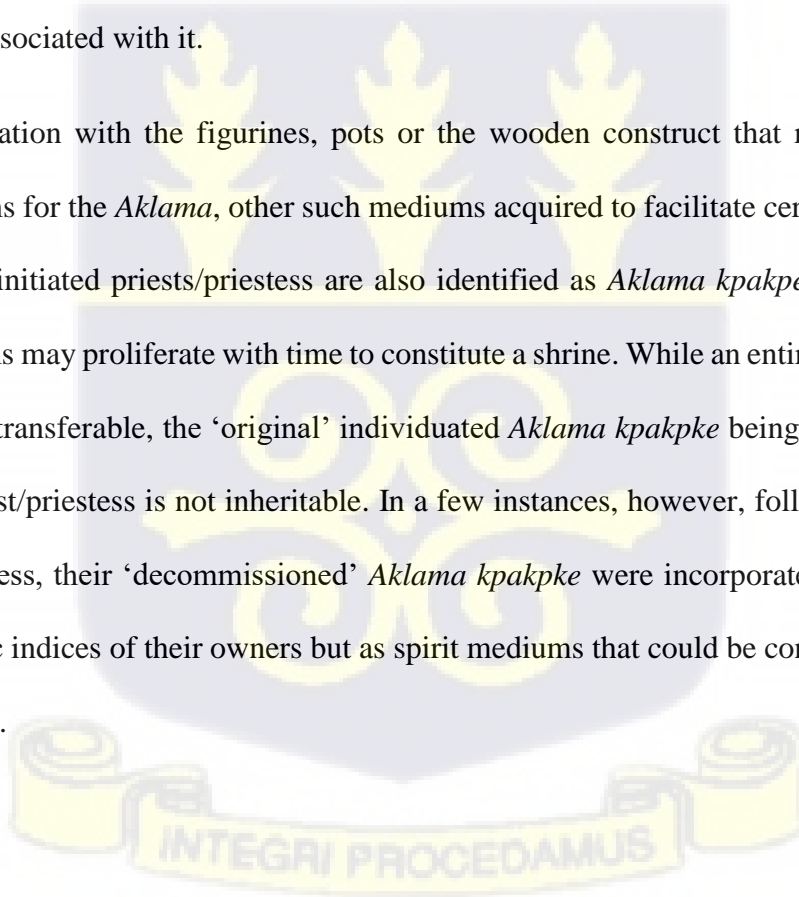
3.5. Summary and Conclusion.

In sum, among the *Ewedome Aklama* relates to personal relations with metaphysical beings; one's spiritual-self (i.e. *Dzɔgbese*) or guardian spirits who ensure a person's success in life. Closely associated with individual's destiny and purpose on a sojourn to the earth, considered to be different and varied among people, *Aklama* representations are equally varied and context specific. In the contexts of rite performances, especially in pacification and purification rituals, *Aklama* representations are largely ephemeral and expendable mediums used as homologic surrogates to re-negotiate favourable term of life for an individual experiencing undesirable conditions of life, misfortunes or lingering ill-health. Notably, homologic *Aklama* surrogates identified in communities in the Midwest Volta included carved anthropomorphic figurines particularly from the *jathrophar* plant, as well as unfired anthropomorphic clay figurines, and fruits of the *borassus* palm (i.e. *agɔku*) and *Kegalia Africana* (i.e. *nyapkekpe*). Collectively referred to as *Aklama kpakpe*, these expendable forms of *Aklama* are made to represent the individual, and then deposited as tokens of offering at appropriate designated ritual spaces/spots. From the indigenous religious practice, offerings of those homologic surrogates are considered to be redeemed by the metaphysical agent(s) believed to be responsible for propitious life of the individual supplicant.

Again, in some situations, permanent forms of homologic representations of *Aklama* are maintained. For certain cadre of people including stool fathers (*zikpuitɔwo*), priests (*trɔnuwo*) and priestesses (*trɔnsiwo*), whose vocations place them as a critical link between spirits (of the ancestors, the dead and/or the deities) and the living, their spiritual-self (identified as *Aklama/Dzɔgbese*) are materially represented to foster periodic and perpetual alignments of their physical and spiritual selves to facilitate dialogue and interactions with the supernatural. Kinds of permanent *Aklama kpakpe* are varied in form and material mediums. However, there are some commonalities and well as differences in their characteristic features. For most of the priestesses,

small water-bearing pots kept in their bedrooms served as homologous indices of themselves. Considered to be representing the spiritual-self, *Aklama* pot must always have water in it just like the circulation of blood in the physical body of the person as long as she lived. In a few instances, however, some priestesses maintained a wooden structure which is a memetic construct of themselves (in ritual context) referred to as *Mawuti/Aklamati* as their *Aklama kpakpe*. Most priests, on the other hand, maintained anthropomorphic carvings of male or female forms depending on the characterization of the supposed gender of their spiritual-self (the *Aklama/Dzɔgbese*). To ensure its potency, each figurine is individuated to assume a unique personality homologous to the individual initiated priest who must know the specific ritual name to invoke the spirit into it, as well as taboos associated with it.

In association with the figurines, pots or the wooden construct that represent the core physical mediums for the *Aklama*, other such mediums acquired to facilitate certain aspects of the practices of the initiated priests/priestess are also identified as *Aklama kpakpe*. Such associated physical mediums may proliferate with time to constitute a shrine. While an entire shrine ensemble is inheritable or transferable, the ‘original’ individuated *Aklama kpakpe* being homologous with the initiated priest/priestess is not inheritable. In a few instances, however, following the passing of a priest/priestess, their ‘decommissioned’ *Aklama kpakpe* were incorporated into the shrine; not as homologous indices of their owners but as spirit mediums that could be consulted or invoked in ritual contexts.



4.0. CHAPTER FOUR: Local Conceptualizations of *Aklama* among the *Tongu*.

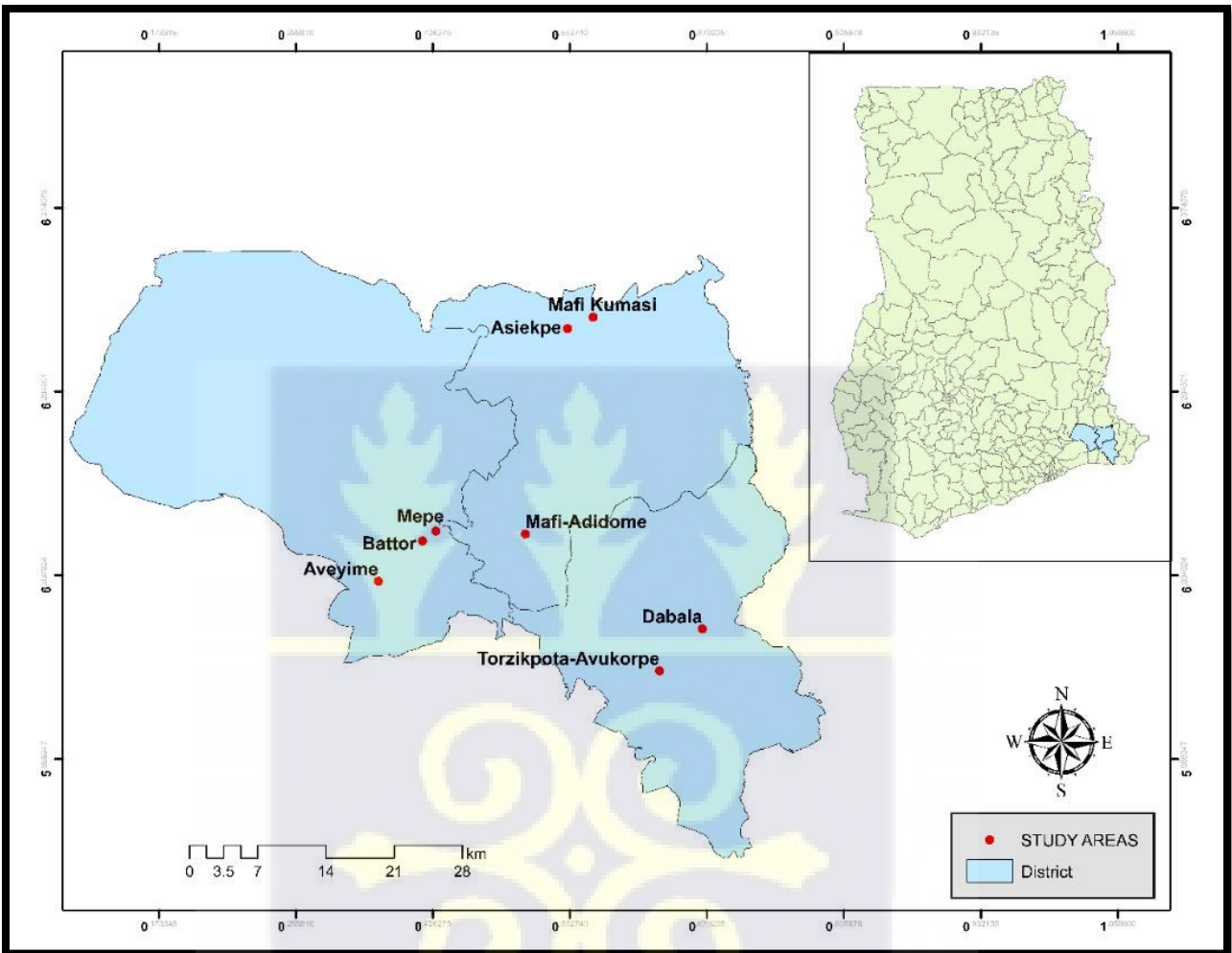
This chapter presents indigenous conceptualizations of *Aklama* in the Southwest Volta among the *Tongu*. It particularly highlights a common notion of the human being as a created individual with a designated assignment and destiny. However, drawing from varied experiences of key informants with the phenomenon of *Aklama*, notable particularities and differences are also presented. Accordingly, contextual representations and meanings of *Aklama* are discussed as the background for variability in its figurations and significances. Additionally, some *Aklama* figurines are discussed in the contexts of identified clan cults and household shrines.

4.1. Recruitment of Key Informants.

Taking a cue from my experience in Wusuta where I could win the trust of my informants largely due to the recommendations of my supervisor who comes from the area, I sought similar recommendations and links from Dr. Harry Agbanu who comes from the *Tongu* area and has done extensive research amongst his people. Hosted at Mafi-Adidome by the family of Togbe Kwasiyini Agyeman IV, *Dufia* of Mafi-Adidome, I was connected with informants across several towns and villages in the *Tongu* Zone (see Map 3).

Mr. Justice Adzimah, a professional teacher and the eldest son of the *Dufia* of Mafi-Adidome who worked with me as a research assistant, drew on his contacts and experiences to identify traditional leaders and individuals who had experiences with the phenomenon of *Aklama*. Thus, priests and priestess of the indigenous religion commonly referred to as *Fiesi*, initiated hunters traditionally identified as *Adela* (i.e. male adept) and *Adesi* (i.e. female adept) as well as individuals who owned religious mediums considered as *Aklama kpakpe* were recruited for interviews. Complementing those personal experiences of informants were interviews with some family elders, carvers and a focus group discussion with some traditional leaders (e.g. Figure 4.1).

Except for one priestess from the Agave Traditional Area in Dabala, the perspectives presented in this chapter were gathered mainly from the Mafi Traditional Area during my fieldwork undertaken in November, 2020¹³⁰.



Map 3. Showing towns and villages in the *Tongu* Zone visited for the study.

¹³⁰ Scheduled reconnaissance trip in April to the *Tongu* Zone could not be undertaken due to a mandatory lockdown in Accra and restricted movements to the rest of the country. Incidentally, during the fieldwork in November, there had been a recent skirmishes by a secessionist group identified as the Western Togoland Movement which had generated some apprehensions in the Agave Traditional Area. Thus, expressing some concerns about my actual intentions and, perhaps, also in doubt of my identity as a doctoral researcher, except for the one informant who preferred to meet me at a different location outside her major shrine at Dabala, prospective informants eventually declined their appointment schedules.



Figure 4.1. Focus Group Discussion with Togbe Akpasati (in the middle) and Elders, Battor. Photographed by Justice, research assistant.

4.2. Co-presence of Spiritual and Physical Universe: A Common Expressed Cosmology in Southern Volta.

In their indigenous worldviews, the Ewe in the Southern Volta, like the *Ewedome*, believe there is a spiritual dimension to the physical world. The universe is considered to be constituted by three-spheres of existence which are co-present and also interrelated. *Bome* or *Dzɔfe* is conceptualized as the place of creation and origin, annexed by *Kodzogbe* being the place of physical existence and then *Tsiefe/Avlime*, the world of spirits of the dead. *Bome* is considered the place of divinity

particularly associated with *Mawu* or *Se*¹³¹. Thus, the point of reference for communal lore and eternal principles for life on earth is *Bome*. Hence, realities of life and nature, in general, are considered to derive from a metaphysical base; a divine source attributed to *Mawu* at *Bome*. In those worldviews, the human person originates from *Bome* and is therefore believed to be imbued with spiritual essences identified as *Dzɔgbese* and *Aklama*, an immortal soul and personal destiny. Life is therefore a continuum from the world of spirits to the physical world and vice versa. Therefore, at any point, the human being is considered to relate to both worlds in which he/she participates at different levels through the agency of *Aklama* and/or *Dzɔgbese*.

However, associated with *Dzɔgbese*, the immortal soul which is also considered the ‘spiritual-self’ of the individual is *Dzɔdzɔme*. According to some informants, for each of the days of the week there is a spiritual package for everyone born on a particular day. That gift at birth is what is referred to as *Dzɔdzɔme*, which is also described as a “shared-quality for people born on a certain day of the week” (Togbe Akpasati and Elders, FGD #6, 16/11/2020, Battor). In their explanations, a person’s *Dzɔdzɔme* links him or her with other natural and supernatural beings including some animals, trees and river bodies all of which may influence the individual’s fortunes here identified as *Aklama*. It appears that the concept of *Dzɔdzɔme* underscores a multi-layered conceptualization of *Aklama* as essentially individuated destiny and at the same time a shared fate with other beings. Consequently, in keeping with *Aklama*, whatever happens to a person on the earth is believed to be connected with the unfolding of destiny and/or fate in a sort of cause-and-effect relations. Thus, the individual is impinged with the ultimate responsibility to nurture, maintain and execute the destined assignment established at *Bome*.

¹³¹ *Se* is particularly identified as the part of *Mawu* responsible for dispatching people from *Bome/Dzofe* to *Kodzogbe*. In some contexts, the *Se* is identified as the spiritual mother and law-giver of each individual person. Again, it is often used synonymously or interchangeably with *Dzɔgbese* which concerns the spiritual-self of the individual.

Among the *Tongu*, a person feels spited when the expression “*esti Bome*” which translates “you are remained at *Bome*” is insinuated at him or her; the implication is that the person had not quite come into the world adequately prepared to be responsible enough (e.g. Togbe Adzormahe, KII #55, 14/11/2020, Mafi-Adidome). Customarily, the allusion that a person had left behind the sense of purpose in life at *Bome* is considered a big insult that might attract a heavy fine. Hence, in order to fulfil destiny, the individual must have a sense of duty on the earth and must also be guided to have success in the inevitably complex maze of life. More importantly, however, as a member of society, the family owes the individual the responsibility to be protected from malice and ill-fortunes. Consequently, failure on the part of an individual or the family to properly nurture the destiny of a person to fulfilment accrues a ‘moral debt’ that must somehow be pacified or atoned for. As will be deliberated in the rest of this chapter, it is in such contexts that *Aklama* connotes a predestination of the individual at *Bome*, and by extension the process of actualizing one’s calling to some tasks on the earthly sojourn.

4.2.1. *Dzɔdzɔme* as a Shared Spiritual Nature.

As indicated already, the term *Dzɔdzɔme* was mentioned by most of my informants in their attempt at defining what *Aklama* meant to them. According to some informants, *Dzɔdzɔme* refers to how a person was created; that is, a person’s spiritual makeup (e.g. Yevu Assor, KII #59, 18/11/2020, Bakpa-Todzi; Togbe Adzormahe, KII #55, 14/11/2020, Mafi-Adidome). However, many other informants associated *Dzɔdzɔme* with the cosmic order at the time and hour in which the individual was born (e.g. Togbe Sowada, KII #48, 10/11/2020, Mafi-Asiekpe; Togbe Tsikata, KII #44, 09/11/2020, Mafi-Adidome; Dogah, KII #42, 07/11/2020, Mafi-Adidome). By that conceptualization, it is suggested that “the brighter the ‘star’ of the individual, the most likely that the person will have luck with the pursuits of life” (Dogah, KII #42, 07/11/2020, Mafi-Adidome). From those worldviews which I elaborate later in the chapter, the domain of *Dzɔdzɔme* includes

gender, seasonality of life and the habitational qualities of other entities the individual is considered to be spiritually related. In that understanding, *Dzodzome* characterizes the intrinsic features of natural life as anchored on spiritual roots. Thus, by association, a person is considered to share the qualities of some animals and plants in totemic relations. In this light, an individual may be spiritually associated with aquatic, terrestrial or arboreal lives, or a mix of their habitational qualities.

Furthermore, in a focus group discussion for instance, it was pointed out that by *Dzodzome*, individuals born on a particular day of the week are also considered to have a common ‘spiritual’ kinship. And by the same token, the season and the time in which a person was born are again considered to indicate how the individual is positioned to be effective and efficient in real life situations. For example, some people are believed to be at their best at certain times of the day or in the night when the qualities of their *Dzodzome* are very active. Thus, in establishing cosmological relations with other things of the universe, it is fair to characterize *Dzodzome* as representing the roots of life linking human beings with other entities including animals, plants, the landscape and the heavenly bodies (e.g. sun, moon and stars). The heavenly bodies are particularly associated with cosmic energies considered to be vitally important for sense and meaning of life in Ewe cosmologies (Togbe Akpasati and Elders, FGD #6, 16/11/2020, Battor). However, in distinguishing the individual human being as uniquely endowed with propitious destiny, most informants alluded to *Aklama*; a special gift or package.

4.2.2. *Aklama* as Divinity.

Broadly in the *Tongu* Ewe cosmologies *Aklama* has multivariate connotations for a person's life explained in connection with predestination at *Bome*. In those worldviews, from *Bome* where the individual is believed to have pre-existed, *Aklama* connotes the very essence of *Se* extended to the physical world through human beings. In specific terms however, the *Se* is considered as the spirit-mother and law-giver who regulates the activities of human beings with other spirits of the universe. Hence, as derived and closely associated with the *Se*, *Aklama* may also be referred to as the *Dzɔgbese* which represents a person's spiritual-self in the nature of divinity (e.g. Togbe Adzormahe, KII #55, 14/11/2020, Mafi-Adidome). In other words, *Aklama* connects the individual to the realms of the spirit. In this vein, *Aklama* is conceptualized as a god-like companion inextricably linked with the individual; invisible but abides with the person like a shadow to a spot-lighted object. This notion is particularly evident in the Ewe proverb "*Ame dzɔgbemese manlobe*" which identifies *Aklama* with the *Se* as "the personal god that one dares not to forget" (Adela Kove, KII #58, 17/11/2020, Mepe). The belief therefore is that an effective *Aklama* keeps a person from harm and at same time identify opportunities and accordingly guide the individual into them. According to the informants, *Aklama* as the spiritual-self of the individual is able to see in advance into events that concern the immediate future. Through dreams and premonitions, for example, *Aklama* is considered to communicate to the person to better equip him/her to take expected actions (e.g. Mamisi Amlalo, KII #49, 10/11/2020, Mafi-Kumasi; Togbe Akpasati and Elders, FGD #6, 16/11/ 2020, Battor).

However, according to some informants, while *Aklama* is often synonymised with *Dzɔgbese*, the two terms are not quite the same thing. Among several explanations offered, while *Dzɔgbese* is particularly associated with laws and specific rules for a person's life as constituting the individual's destiny, *Aklama* is identified as only one of the gifts endowed the individual on

the day of birth to ensure good success for the person. Thus, *Aklama* is specifically identified with “an assigned spirit that serves as the guardian of the individual” (Togbe Akpasati and Elders, FGD #6, 16/11/2020, Battor). Consequently, *Aklama* is considered as the companion spirit which protects and intercept evils targeted at an individual. Therefore, in a narrower sense, *Aklama* is often associated with fortunes or luck experienced by an individual in otherwise hopeless situations. As expressed for instance by *Mamaga* Abotchie, a 98 year-old woman at Mafi-Adidome, “*Aklama* is the personal guide sent with a person by *Se*, the dispatcher of humans at *Bome*” (Mamaga Abotsi, KII #45, 09/11/2020, Mafi-Adidome). She however pointed out that *Aklama* does not supersede a person’s will and therefore the individual may forfeit an otherwise propitious destiny when reckless with his or her *Aklama*.

4.2.3. Individuality of *Aklama* and the Call to Duty.

Amegbeto, the human being in *Tongu* cosmologies, is mainly considered a moulded being enabled with thought and special abilities at *Bome* for an assignment on the earth. Each person is therefore believed to be uniquely endowed and introduced into the world through earthly parents for designated tasks. In some contexts, it is that process of purposeful creation of the individual with assigned status and dispositions for earthly occupation that is considered *Aklama*. This popular worldview is particularly anchored by the common expression: “*Se doa ame da ameto*”, to wit, “God sends every person with gifts according to his will” (e.g. Adela Kove, KII #58, 17/11/2020, Mepe). Sealed and seeded in the individual, *Aklama* therefore encompasses talents and qualities considered to commensurate the predestined status and tasks the person is to undertake on the earth. Additionally, the individual is also believed to be accompanied by spiritual aides tasked to facilitate his/her earthly assignments and their accomplishments.

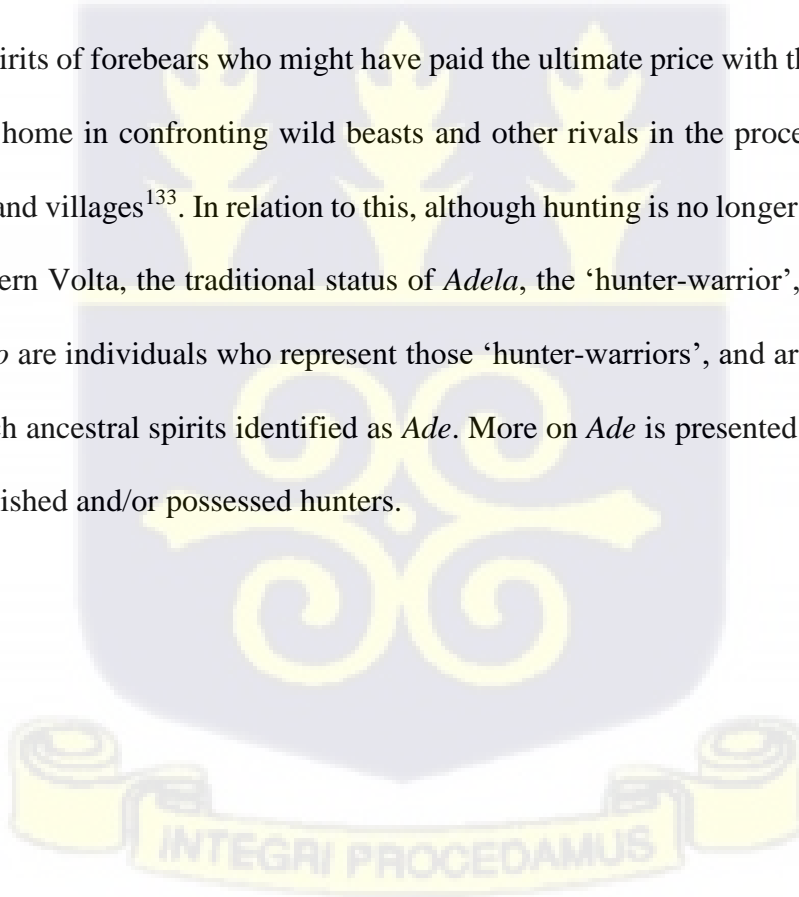
However, notions about the relations between the pre-earthly nature of humans as spirit beings at *Bome*, and the continuation of that spiritual essence in the actual life of an individual on earth has somewhat nuanced conceptualizations among the *Tongu Ewe*¹³². On one breath, the individual person is considered to be essentially a one-time “dispatched sentient being” from *Bome* with a destiny to be fulfilled on the earth. Consequently, at the end of the earthly life, when the individual successfully accomplishes the earthly mission, he or she transitions to *Tsiefe* as a spirit and becomes an ancestor/ancestress. At *Tsiefe*, ancestors are believed to maintain their relationships with their kith and kin on the earth. As spirit beings, the ancestors are believed to have the capacity and ability to sanction their descendants with rewards or reprimand them for grave infractions.

Again, from another point of view, based on the belief in the afterlife, individuals are believed to reincarnate through birth into the physical world. On this breath, the belief is that spirits of veritable souls at *Tsiefe* may be born into the world once more to complete unfinished business or to proffer solutions to pressing challenges. It is under such considerations that the circumstances in which the individual was born are acknowledged as part of *Aklama* and thus the imperative for the family to closely assess the person to be aware of who indeed he or she is, or is meant to be in this life on the earth. These provide the contexts for the significance of oracular consultations at certain stages of the life of the individual to ascertain his or her appropriate status and wellbeing in life. It is noteworthy, however, that this notion of *Aklama* as related to a person’s lot in this life

¹³² Notably among the *Ewedome*, the predominant worldview is that the human being has a pre-earthly existence as a soul who lived with other relations at *Dzɔfe*. And it is particularly upon a personal request that the individual is sent into the world where he/she continues his/her occupation from *Dzɔfe* in the physical world. The contrast here is that, among the *Tongu Ewe*, the predominant viewpoint indicates that the individual was created and readily dispatched on an assigned duty on the earth. Thus, the concept of *Gbetsi* (i.e., the pronouncements of one’s fate at *Dzɔfe*) which is very common among the *Ewedome* is not as obviously discussed in the Southern Volta. Only three among twenty-three informants actually mentioned *Gbetsi* in relation to *Aklama* (i.e. Dorcoo, KII #54, 13/11/2020, Mafi-Adidome; Adela Zutunu, KII #50, 11/11/2020, Mafi-Tsati; Togbe Sowada, KII #48, 10/11/2020, Mafi-Kumasi).

on the earth as something predestined or a continuation of life in the spirit, does not reify social stratifications or privileged individual statuses. Rather, it emphasizes the essential differences in personal abilities and dispositions as prerequisites for various tasks in society which ultimately promote social harmony and perpetuation.

Furthermore, associated with the belief in life after death is the notion that spirits of individuals whose lives are truncated by tragic death are not readily allowed entry into *Tsiefe*. Such spirits are generally considered to be disgruntled and potentially dangerous to society. Relating to the spirits of individuals with unfulfilled destinies, the means to pacify or contain their potentially vengeful spirits are some rites and occasional rituals. Such rites are also undertaken in particular recognition of spirits of forebears who might have paid the ultimate price with their blood and had died outside the home in confronting wild beasts and other rivals in the process of establishing their patri-clans and villages¹³³. In relation to this, although hunting is no longer a major economic activity in Southern Volta, the traditional status of *Adela*, the ‘hunter-warrior’, is highly present. Initiated *Adelewo* are individuals who represent those ‘hunter-warriors’, and are considered to be possessed by such ancestral spirits identified as *Ade*. More on *Ade* is presented as part of *Aklama* cults for distinguished and/or possessed hunters.



¹³³ Ideally, an individual is expected to die peacefully at home to be properly sent off in burial to the spirit world. Individuals who die tragically, especially in cold blood must have the chance for the blood-stains to be rubbed over by purity of white clay. Thus, among possessors of *Aklama* figurines were individuals identified as Avɔɣetɔ (pronounced Avorgetor which means “doing white for the dead”) who are considered to be possessed by the spirit of dead relative (e.g. Adesi Sedekla, KII #56, 16/11/2020, Aveyime; Mama Avɔɣetɔ Agɔdoo, KII #41, 07/11/2020).

4.3. *Aklama* as Individual's Path of Destiny and Conformity to Cosmological Orders.

In Ewe worldviews individuals differ because of the peculiarities of personal destinies. That notwithstanding, in conformity to destiny, each person's life ultimately must contribute to the wellbeing of society; harmonious co-presence and co-existence of people, nature and the supernatural. This cosmological viewpoint presents a teleological conclusion of personal life and fate. However, the individual is not denied the ability and agency to make choices and take decisions in real life situations. Thus, while a person's life is believed to be mainly in keeping with a particular purpose predestined at *Bome*, the individual has the liberty to engage or disengage in actions or activities in real life situations. Consequently, in *Tongu* worldviews, by personal decisions and actions individuals may accelerate, hinder, and in some instances even truncate their destiny. This indicates a rather complex understanding of the concept of *Aklama* in which the purpose of a person's life is predestined and yet its fulfilment is contingent on personal agency in relation to actions and roles negotiated with or without an acknowledgment of that personal destiny.

Furthermore, some informants indicated that babies born in the world were once matured and responsible individuals in the realms of the spirit (e.g. Yevu Assor, KII #59, 18/11/2020, Bakpa-Todzi; Togbe Adzormahe, KII #55, 14/11/2020, Mafi-Adidome). Thus, similar to the concept of *Gbetsi* among the *Ewedome*, in *Tongu* worldviews the *Amegbetɔ*, the human being is believed to be critically interrogated before the leave of *Bome* for *Kodzogbe* is granted. For that, the individual must convince *Bomenɔ*, the supposed spirit mother, about what his/her mission on the earth shall be. It is those reasons one outlines at *Bome* that is believed to constitute destiny for the person and also establishes the path(s) for its fulfilment. The different paths to fulfilling destiny

are identified as *kpoli*¹³⁴. According to them, while on earth the individual is associated with tutelary spirits to assist him or her to navigate the course of life. The influence of the tutelary spirits is also characterised as *Aklama*. Importantly however, the individual is enabled with the will to act in acknowledgement of personal destiny, or even differ from it in ways that may accelerate or truncate the preordained purpose of life. This implies that in fulfilling destiny or purpose of life, an individual may not necessarily keep to a single-path journey throughout life; there might be some detours from the *kpoli*. Thus, a person is said to have a good *Aklama* when he or she seems to have identified his or her path in life and is thriving in a chosen occupation. On the other hand, individuals who are faced with incessant challenges are considered to perhaps have had a weak *Aklama* which is unable to bring the individual who strayed out of course with their *kpoli* to terms with destiny. Hence without certain interventions a person may remain at the wrong side of destiny.

4.3.1. Aligning an ‘Erratic’ Life with a Benevolent Destiny.

As I have already indicated, in the worldviews of the *Tongu* Ewe, individuals are positioned at different paths in the business of life on earth. Therefore, as life of the individual unfolds, there is the need to assess and evaluate how the individual is faring with destiny. However, according to my informants, the ways and means to assess whether or not the individual is keeping up with destiny vary remarkably. While for some families there are established traditions that are observed as rites of passages where the individual undergoes certain performance at certain milestones of life, for others different situations demand corresponding interventions. Hence as a tradition, some families seek to identify the *kpoli* of each individual at birth through oracular

¹³⁴ According to my informants within the *kpoli* there are about sixteen different paths identifiable through the Ewe indigenous divinatory system called the *Afa*.

divination (e.g. Mamisi Amlalo, KII #49, 10/11/2020, Mafi-Kumasi). The identification of the *kpoli* also serves the consideration for the vocation of the person as he or she ages.

Again, to usher the individual into the phases of adolescence and adulthood specific rituals are observed to particularly ensure that, for example, the spirit-spouse assigned to the individual is well catered for to enable productive and successful marriage for the person in real life (Zikpuito Dei-Zanga, KII #51, 11/11/2020, Mafi-Asiekpe). According to the 89 year-old Zikpuito Dei-Zanga for instance, in the past adolescent boys undertook an overnight pre-nuptial rite to acknowledge the spirit-spouse. Subsequently, when the person was of age and got married, he built a miniature house, the *Dzɔgbexɔɛ*, for his “spirit-spouse and his personal *Se/Dzɔgbese*” in acknowledgement of their foremost marriage at *Bome*¹³⁵. He pointed out that this rite was done by young men; adolescent girls did not undergo such rites. He however maintained that in certain circumstances women who had troubles with their marriages, especially those who had reproductive issues needed to seek the favour of *Aklama*, personified as “the owner of good things” (Zikpuito Dei-Zanga, KII #51, 11/11/2020 at Mafi-Asiekpe). Such persons represented their *Se/Dzɔgbese* either in clay or wood carving called the *Ese*. The *Ese*, which is the figurine, is laid in a neat plate and kept by the bedside to be devotionally engaged with. The ritual process of objectifying the *Se* is called ‘*Selili*’, the ‘laying down of the *Ese*’. The process of laying the *Ese* is described later in this chapter.

Furthermore, in the experiences of many respondents, *Nukaka* which is a form of oracular inquiry is done to determine the *kpoli* of a person and the status of his or her *Dzɔgbese*, the spiritual-self, at different times in the life of the individual. Thus, episodic occurrences including the

¹³⁵ In his experience, the *Dzɔgbexɔɛ* always contained two anthropomorphic figurines; a male and female pair *Aklama kɔpɔke* formed in either clay or carved in wood (Zikpuito Dei-Zanga, KII #51, 11/11/2020, Mafi-Asiekpe). The actual wife is forbidden to peep into the *Dzɔgbexɔɛ* and must therefore be covered from her view.

spectacular and the unexpected, are probed by divinatory consultation to establish what the cause or source might be. According to them, such divinatory enquiries are aimed at answering the question whether or not such happenings were within the destiny of the individual. Hence, as might be requested by the “*Se* [of the individual] through the *Nukaka*, the requisite rites or ritual performances are undertaken to acknowledge the status of the spiritual-self of the person” (Togbe Tsikata, KII #44, 09/11/2020, Mafi-Adidome). Accordingly, a person undergoes purification rites and may also need to focalize the *Se* in a medium for devotional engagement with it. As situations of individuals vary, so are the particular requests of the *Se* and possibly other spirit-companions that might be involved in the life of the respective individual (Togbe Tsikata, KII #44, 09/11/2020, Mafi-Adidome).

4.3.2. The *Agbetsi Lele* Rite: “Bathing of Life” and the Rejuvenation of *Aklama*.

An *Amegashie* or a *Fiesi*, the diviner, is usually consulted when a family realizes that a member is not “behaving well”; particularly when the individual is recurrently taken ill or is faced with incessant misfortunes. In such situations where a person is confronted with one trouble after another, the oracle is expected to reveal what the cause of the situation might be. It may be established that the person needs to be reconnected with Benevolence at *Bome*. Thus, when a family identifies that a person had perhaps not quite completely ‘come out of *Bome*’, or that the individual had rather been positioned at the wrong side of an otherwise propitious destiny, there is the need to remedy that. The remediating intervention is a rite is called *Agbetsi lele*, the “bath of life” (Togbe Adzormahe, KII #55, 14/11/2020, Mafi-Adidome). The *Agbetsi lele* is intended to synchronize the present life situation of the person with the gifts and supposed propitious destiny that had been established at *Bome*. Many of my respondents confirmed that the performance of *Agbetsi lele* is a major intervention by a family to ensure that individuals who experience recurrent challenges, maintained normalcy and have their lives fine-tuned with fortune. From his personal

experiences in participating in such rites for individuals who needed that ritual intervention, Togbe Adzormahe, the *Dumega* of Mafi-Dugame describes the process as follows:

The *Fiesi* determines what the individual's spiritual-self, the *Se* requires to restore fortune and wellness for the person. And for the performance of the rite and its various ritual processes, the diviner provides some items and also requests from the family other things demanded by the *Se*. The rite is based mainly on herbs to [spiritually] cleanse the person. The *Fiesi* therefore procures the herbs and must ensure to keep secret the particular ones that would be needed for any particular case; he is not allowed to disclose any information about the herbs to the participants of the rite. The family must acquire a new calabash that has never been used, a chick, a number of cowries/coins, and kaolin.

The first ritual to ascertain the prospect of the rite is done with the chick; the chick is pressed-passed the whole body of the person from the head down to the toes. The chick is then thrown over to die. When the chick lies on the back as it dies, it is interpreted that the rite could proceed. The herbs with the cowries or the coins are put in the calabash, and [then] touched on the head of the person three times at each of the four cardinal positions from the East, North, West, and to the South. The calabash with its contents is then filled with water and placed on the head of the person to carry. The *Fiesi* begins to invoke the spirits by singing and ringing the bell. The person gets into frenzy when the spirit comes over; he or she wriggles and falls with the calabash. At this point it is the orientation of the fallen calabash which determines whether the rite has been successful or rejected by the spirits; it is considered accepted when the calabash falls face-down. The *Fiesi* picks up the calabash and refills it with fresh water for the person to bath with. Finally, the kaolin is used to mark the 'spiritual windows' of the person including the forehead, both sides of the head around the opening of the ears, and at the back of the neck, three marks each. The person then dresses up in new cloth and walks home with the team without looking back; they are to be forward-looking till they get home (Togbe Adzormahe, KII #55, 14/11/2020, Mafi-Adidome).

Most of my informants in the *Tongu* area alluded to the *Agbetsi lele* rite and described similar processes as the foremost ritual after oracular consultation to bring normalcy in erratic lives of individual victims (e.g. Yevu Assor, KII #59, 18/11/2020, Bakpa-Todzi; Togbe Duame II¹³⁶, KII #52, 12/11/2020, Dadoboe). They however indicated that depending on the outcome of the *Agbetsi lele* rite and its success in bringing respite to the individual, other rituals might be required. As pointed out by some informants, in some cases, a number of anthropomorphic figurines are

¹³⁶ Togbe Ayite Duame II is the *Dufia* of Dadoboe, a village near Mafi-Adidome. He is also a sculptor.

used as offerings to take off the negative influence of *Aklama* on the individual (e.g. Mamisi Amlalo, KII #49, 10/11/2020, Mafi-Kumasi; Mama Avɔɛɛtɔ, KII #41, 07/11/2020). According to Mamisi Amlalo, a Fiesi at Mafi-Kumasi, the placatory figurines referred to as *Amenutsuvi* usually comprise of seven (7) male forms and seven (7) female forms which are left at the site of ritual in the bush as offerings to the spirits (Mamisi Amlalo, KII #49, 10/11/2020, Mafi-Kumasi). A similar experience was shared by another Fiesi, Mama Avɔɛɛtɔ Agɔdoo in Mafi-Adidome who explained that in dealing with what she identified as *Sevue*, “a bad *Aklama*”, the forms and number of such figurines may differ for different persons in different situations (Mama Avɔɛɛtɔ, KII #41, 07/11/2020).

Again, for some individuals the *Agbetsi lele* was considered as a threshold rite to usher them into the next phase to be initiated and acknowledged as adept hunters, diviners, possessed craftsmen, care-takers of ancestral spirits, priests and priestesses among others. Thus, in some instances a person may undergo further rituals and initiations to be identified as a host for some deities that seek to recruit him/her as a care-taker, devotee, or a *Fiesi*¹³⁷. Also, in some situations, according to informants, the spirit of a dead relative who has not found rest at *Tsiefe* might be seeking to be hosted by the individual to have a repose. Thus, in keeping with the specific experience and condition of the individual, different responses are evident. In this vein, informants indicated that for most people, the *Agbetsi lele* rite may suffice to restore normalcy. However, for others who may be required to host deities or spirits often domiciled in physical mediums generally referred to as *Nukpakpe* or *Aklama*, further rituals and initiations are undertaken (e.g. Xunuɔ Gble,

¹³⁷ The *Fiesi* whether male or female is considered “a wife” of a deity. An individual may be so married to different deities or spirits at a go or through time.

KII #53, 13/11/2020, Gblekorpe, Mafi-Adidome; Mama Anɔretɔ Agɔdoo, KII #41, 07/11/2020, Mafi-Adidome).

4.4. Dealing with Unusual and Recurrent Problems: Narratives about *Aklama Kpakpe* as Mediatory Intervention.

Among the *Tongu* Ewe, the possession of *Aklama kpakpe* usually indicates an incident or episodes of crises in the life of a person that needed some “spiritual interventions”. In ameliorating the plights of individuals in situations considered to be spiritual ordeals, different forms of *Aklama* figurines may be prescribed. In several scenarios, the need for *Aklama* figurines as mediatory intervention is experienced in a one-time rite or periodic rituals for respite. In the following, the experiences of some individuals who have *Aklama kpakpe* are presented. The contexts and significance of their figurines are also recounted.

At Amegakorpe, a village in Mafi-Kumasi, in a complementary interview with two brothers, Elesem Bokovi (85 years old man) and Elesem Dotsey (55 years old man), *Aklama* figurines were acknowledged as “making peace with their spiritual spouses” (Bokovi and Dotsey, KII #47, 10/11/2020, Amegakorpe). The Elesem brothers related their need for the *Aklama* figurines to experiences with prolonged ill-health and marital problems. Bokovi, recounted that he “was continually ill for a long time” and when the situation was hopeless, he consulted the Fiesi, a diviner. According to him, through divination, the Fiesi was able to diagnose the cause of his ailment. He was told that his incessant illness was as a result of neglecting *Uui*, his ‘spiritual first wife’. And to be restored to good health, he needed to assuage the jealousy of *Uui*. Thus, he was directed to carve a figurine in a female form to represent *Uui* to be committed to her. According to him, when the carving was made, there was also an herbal-based ritual performance to install it

in a *dzɔgbexɔe*, a miniature house. He indicated that the installation process was to activate the figurine to enable “him to engage with the *Uui*”¹³⁸.

Elesem Dotsey on the other hand, particularly identifies with their twin siblings, Atsu and Atsufe who were born before him but were younger than Bokovi. According to the brothers, the twins had died some decades ago while still babies. Dotsey narrated that a little over twenty years ago he often took ill and also had marital problems, and he had thought that perhaps those were indications that the spirits of their deceased twin siblings needed some attention from him. Thus, following his hunch, he commissioned a carver to make *venovi* figurines in male and female anthropomorphic forms to take care of them. However, in need of confirmation of the intention to take care of the spirits of his late siblings, he consulted a Fiesi to do a *dzadodo*, a kind of consultation fee, for divination. He recounted that, during the oracular consultation it was rather revealed that it was *Uui* instead who needed his attention. Thus, similar to Bokovi’s case, he was instructed to build a *dzɔgbexɔe* for *Uui*. Nonetheless, he was directed to incorporate the *venovi* figurines into the *dzɔgbexɔe* to complement *Uui* (see Figures 4.2a and 4.2b).

According to Dotsey, he has maintained the *dzɔgbexɔe* for the past twenty years and continues to make occasional offerings to *Uui*. Offering items in the miniature house included *sokpe* (i.e. perforated rock discs), medicine bottles, and a little skull of an animal, padlock, a cowrie shell and a 50 pesewas coin placed on the right of the outstretched hands of the figurine for the *Uui*. He pointed out that, as part of the rituals to make his *dzɔgbexɔe* active, he procured a black cloth which he has to wear around his waist occasionally at home as a special acknowledgment of *Uui*. He however added that, if he had been a hunter, he could wear that black cloth not only at home

¹³⁸ Although he has maintained the *dzɔgbexɔe* for more than four decades, he still considers the jealousy of *Uui* as incredibly wild. Therefore, unlike his little brother who granted me the permission to document his *dzɔgbexɔe*, he declined to give access and hence I could not observe the figurine.

but also as an under garment when going for games. He explained that for such hunters, *Uui* is much pleased to ensure their successes in hunting expeditions especially when there are drips of blood that stain the cloth as the hunter carries home the game. Incidentally, this view was corroborated by Adela Kove, an initiated hunter, at Mepe. According to Adele Kove, *Uui* may channel her notorious jealousy positively to woo animals to the paths of a committed hunter who is supposed to acknowledge her as the first to be offered a portion of the meat; something which *Uui* is so pleased to taunt *Ego*, 'her' rival (Adela Kove, KII #58, 17/11/2020, Mepe).

Still according to Dotsey, the *venovi* figurines for his late twin siblings, *Atsufe* (i.e. the female) and *Atsu* (i.e. the male), and that for *Uui* in the *dzɔgbexɔe* are examples of *Aklama kpakpe* to which he is committed. Carved with the teakwood (i.e. *teaktona glandis*), the fine-textured figurines are fairly proportional in form with suggested gender features. Each of the *venovi* figurines measuring about 15 cm in height leaned on one of the outstretched hands of the figurine for *Uui* which measures about 18 cm in height. While the figurine for *Uui* is depicted as an adult female with loin-cloth over a string of white waist beads set on a miniature stool¹³⁹, the *venovi* figurines are only differentiated by 'plaited hair' and a long 'rippled' neck traditionally considered as markers of femininity to distinguish the *Atsufe* from the *Atsu* characterized by short neck and broader shoulders as typical signs of masculinity (see Figure 4.2b). However, in the cases of two other informants who possessed *venovi* figurines, they did not consider them as *Aklama kpakpe*. For example, a *venovi* figurine in a female form with clearly defined breasts and adorned with a pair of earrings represented a late *Atsufe* who was a senior sister to the 45 year-old Enyonam, the *Doefe*, who owns it (see Figure 4.3). According to her, she has been taking care of the *venovi* for

¹³⁹ Red loin-cloth and a stool are significant part of the bride worth presented to the bride by groom during the customary marriage rite.

eleven (11) years now; she sometimes baths it and clothes it as well. She also brings it closer when she is eating at home as though she is also feeding it. The other *venovi* observed was a male form figurine owned by an 80 year-old Adela who is also a Fiesi at Mafi-Tsati. According to him, it represented a late twin relative who was in real life a police officer (see Figure 4.4).

Both informants in these two cases maintained that the *venovi* figurines only represented deceased twins and not a deity or spirit being. Thus, in their view, *venovi* could not be considered as *Aklama* figurines. According to them, unlike *Aklama kpakpe*, the *venovi* do not require devotion from individuals who keep them. That notwithstanding, they pointed out that keepers of *venovi* figurines should ensure that the figurines did not suffer any defect or ‘harm’ as a result of negligence or recklessness. According to Adele Zutunu, reckless handling of *venovi* figurines could negatively impact on the mother or the surviving sibling who usually keep them (Adela Zutunu, KII #50, 11/11/2020, Mafi-Tsati).

However, in the view of Togbe Sowada, a 96 year-old *Zikpuitɔ* and a Mamisi who also has the *dzɔgbexɔe*, *Aklama kpakpe* is a means of characterizing a spiritual phenomenon in a physical form. He associated *Aklama* with the *Se* which he described as the “God who sends people to this world”. He however distinguished *Aklama* particularly as the “luck attached to every human being by [the] *Se* at the time of dispatching the person to the *Kodzogbe*, the world” (Togbe Sowada, KII #48, 10/11/2020, Mafi-Kumasi). To illustrate his point, he brought out from his room a winged anthropomorphic figurine measuring about 25 cm in height which he referred to as ‘Jona’. He identified the ‘Jona’ figurine procured recently as his latest *Aklama kpakpe* (see Figure 4.5).



Figure 4.2a. *Dzɔgbexɔe* with tokens of offering for *Uui*, Amegakorpe. Photographed by the researcher



Figure 4.2b. L-R, *Venovi* (for *Atsufe*), *Uui* and *venovi* (for *Atsu*). Photographed by the researcher.



Figure 4.3. *Venovi* (female form), Mafi-Adidome.



Figure 4.4. *Venovi* (male form), Mafi-Tsati.

According to Togbe Sowada, the ‘Jona’ *Aklama* figurine encapsulates his personal life journey and how like the Jona story of the Bible, he had been adamant to his ‘calling’ to be a Fiesi but was eventually aligned to it by his *Dzɔgbese*. About the ‘Jona’ *Aklama* figurine which looks like an angelic figure robed in white and holds what seemed to be an ‘opened book’, he narrated that when he objectionably resisted the call to be a priest of the traditional religion, he once experienced death in 1960. And while his body was being prepared in the customary way for burial, he was restored to life by the *Se*. He maintained that, during that period of his momentary death, in the spirit the *Se* revealed to him what he needed to do when he was brought back to life; he was required to lay the *Ese* and to build the *dzɔgbexɔe* as well. Togbe Sowada described his *dzɔgbexɔe* as a “small box with only a little pot for water to serve *Uui*”. Again, in the *dzɔgbexɔe*

he makes periodic offerings to *Uui*¹⁴⁰. He particularly indicated that there was no figurine in his *dzɔgbexɔe* even though he has other *Aklama kpakpe* which serve as mediums for spirits and marine-based deities he serves as priest and a Mamisi.



Figure 4.5. Togbe Sowada with the ‘Jona’ figurine, Mafi-Kumasi. Photographed by the researcher.

¹⁴⁰ He indicated that offerings to *Uui* are usually edible items like fish or meat. He gives the money to his wife (i.e. the actual one) who goes to the market to buy those items. The offerings are however introduced to the *dzɔgbexɔe* by his own hand or through a son who shares the same birthday with him. According to him, after a few hours of presenting the items in the *dzɔgbexɔe*, the son may take the items and consume them.

Furthermore, in his explanation about the relations between a person and *Aklama*, Togbe Sowada maintained that “it is *Se* who determines a person’s destiny, [but that destiny] is governed by *Aklama* which abides with the individual”. And that “*Aklama* works spiritually on the life of a person which eventually manifests [either] positively or negatively in reality”. Thus, when its impact is positive in the life of a person, *Aklama* is considered a good luck, but a hard-luck when it appears to be negative. Hence, in dire situations where *Aklama* is considered to have responded positively, the favoured individual may say “*Aklama di nam*” indicating that “*Aklama* has done it well with me”. On the flip side, when issues do not turn well for the individual, the person may express that “*Aklama medi nam o*” meaning “*Aklama* had not done it well for me at all” (Togbe Sowada, KII #48, 10/11/2020, Mafi-Kumasi). In his experience, in acknowledging *Aklama* typically as embodiment of “good luck”, an individual could objectify it in unlimited range of forms. Thus, according to him, *Aklama kpakpe* may be any medium including animal and human figures. In this vein, *Aklama kpakpe* collectively represents all forms of figurines and mediums meant to acknowledge good luck or to attract fortune for a person. He therefore maintained that *venovi* figurines are also *Aklama kpakpe*.

4.4.1. A Tradition of Ritual Acknowledgment of *Uui*, the Foremost Wife in the Spirit.

Unlike, the cases of the Elesem brothers and Togbe Sowada who needed to be instructed to build the *dzoḡbexɔe*, other informants presented the acknowledgment of *Uui* mainly as a ritual tradition in somewhat mandatory terms. For instance, Zikpuitɔ Dei-Zanga recounted that for some families in the Mafi Traditional Area, like his own family, it was traditionally mandatory for adolescent boys who were ready to get married to first acknowledge *Uui* in an overnight rite (Zikpuitɔ Dei-Zanga, KII #51, 11/11/2020, Mafi-Asiekpe). In his description of that rite which could be considered as a pre-nuptial initiation, a young adult constructed the “*Aklamaxɔe* with

three stick-polls in a form of a tripod which was tied at the apex with three strings on each of which hanged a cowry shell”. The young man then spread a mat by it and slept overnight. He further pointed out that “subsequently, when the person got married and had managed to build a house, he also saw to it that the *dzɔgbexɔe*, a miniature house was built for *Uui*”. He however noted that while the tradition was not the norm for most families among the Tongu, in most cases men who were considered to be troubled by *Uui*, especially manifested as persistent livelihood challenges, sexual impotence and general marital problems, may be directed by a Fiesi to build the *dzɔgbexɔe* as a mediatory intervention (Zikpuitɔ Dei-Zanga, KII #51, 11/11/2020, Mafi-Asiekpe). As already indicated, in such contexts the *dzɔgbexɔe* was particularly meant to assuage the jealousy of *Uui*, and subsequently served as the focal point to engage with “her” by some periodic rituals and offerings.

Furthermore, in the experience of Mama Adesi Sedekla, a 65 year-old Fiesi, in relation to *Uui*, there are instances where the supposed spiritual-spouse of a person is believed to have also come into the world and had been born to human parents. She cited her own father as an example. According to her, before she was born, her mother experienced bouts of miscarriages. At the same time, her father often woke up from his sleep with some scratches on his upper arms. Those challenges were attributed to *Uui* who “begrudged them spiritually” (Mama Sedekla, KII #56, 16/11/2020, Aveyime). However, through divination, it was revealed that the *Uui* had actually come to the world. Thus, her father was required to look for the supposed spiritual-wife who also lived somewhere in the community as a human person. She indicated that when the woman was identified, his father was obliged to perform the customary marriage rites and to also build a

dzɔgbexɔe to acknowledge her¹⁴¹. She however explained that the performance only served a ritual purpose of acknowledging their nuptial union at *Dzɔfe* and to also pacify the soul of the woman but not to actually make them a couple here on earth. Mama Adesi Sedekla was not sure if the supposed spiritual-wife of her father was required to lay the *Ese* although she suspected that might have been the case. She, however, pointed out that in her experience, men in similar situations like her father were also obliged to perform customary rites as “widowers” if their supposed spiritual-wives passed on.

In the different scenarios so far presented which mainly involved cases of men who possessed some kinds of *Aklama kpapke* considered to be personal ones, it is fair to argue that the characterizations and installations of *Aklama* in the forms of the *Ese* and *dzɔgbexɔe* are particularly influenced by certain worldviews and traditions. Thus, in the different contexts the *Ese*, in particular, served as a medium representing either the “spiritual-self” (i.e. *Dzɔgbe*) or the ‘spiritual mother’ (i.e. *Dzɔgbese/Se*) of an individual. In this vein, local conceptualizations of *Aklama kpapke* as the product or figurations of beliefs about relations between the human being and spirit entities and their influences vary in different situations. Again, in keeping with notions of wild jealousy of *Uui* predominantly evident among the *Tongu*, while some people were only compelled by certain circumstances to build the *dzɔgbexɔe* to appease the supposed spiritual wife, for others the *dzɔgbexɔe* was a mandatory family tradition executed with or without figurines to represent *Uui*. Thus, it could also be argued that for most of the men informants, rather than the *Ese* it was mainly their felt commitment to *Uui* which was considered an important means to ensure peaceful marriage and their success in life. Thus, with or without figurines installed in a *dzɔgbexɔe*, a

¹⁴¹ Similar custom was indicated in interviews with other two informants at Mafi-Adidome (Dorcoo, KII #54, 13/11/2020; Xunuɔ Gble, KII #53, 13/11/2020).

person's singular commitment to *Uui* is so critical that the actual wife is forbidden to get too close to peep through it. Moreover, since the *dzɔgbexɔe* represents a personal "nuptial commitment" to the spiritual-wife, when the owner dies it is decommissioned and discarded. According to informants, like the *Ese* figurine, the *dzɔgbexɔe* is neither transferable nor inherited.

4.4.2. Oracular Divinations and *Aklama* Figurations.

Seeking explanations about why the Elesem brothers seemed to have somewhat different ritual engagements or approaches to dealing with similar situations related to the "wild jealousy" of *Uui*, they unanimously answered that it was the outcome of their respective consultations with the Fiesi. According to them, for other people in similar situations like theirs' they could be directed to "erect the *Ese* instead of building the *dzɔgbexɔe*". In such cases the individual may be required to do the *selili* which they identified as "a *trɔ*, a personal idol laid in a plate" (Bokovi and Dotsey, KII #47, 10/11/2020, Amegakorpe). In their description of the *selili*, they indicated that it involves the making of the *Ese*; a presentation of the spiritual-self of the individual in clay or wood¹⁴². According to them, the *Ese* is usually moulded with *ere* (pronounced *ergeh*, which is white clay) in human form and then a feather of the red-tailed parrot is placed in the "head", of the *Ese*. Also, some quantities of cowries are usually placed by the *Ese* on the plate.

Again, unlike the *dzɔgbexɔe* which is installed outside the room, the *Ese* is kept inside the room, usually by the bedside where the individual engages with it. According to the brothers, the *Ese* is periodically "fed", bathed and smeared with kaolin. They pointed out that the only difference between the *selili* and the *dzɔgbexɔe* is that, while the *dzɔgbexɔe* is solely for men, per the direction of the Fiesi, the *Ese* could be done by both men and women who are spiritually afflicted. They

¹⁴² *Ese* is specifically the figurine; the physical representation of the supposed metaphysical nature of the individual.

however pointed out that the *selili* was predominantly associated with women (Bokovi and Dotsey, KII #47, 10/11/2020, Amegakorpe).

From another perspective, Adela Zutunu, an 80 year-old retired professional teacher who is a Fiesi as well as a carver, *Aklama* is identified as the “soul around the human being, [which is] a gift from God”. According to him, the *Aklama* of an individual may request of the person to be laid as an “idol to be served or worshiped” (Adela Zutunu, KII #50, 11/11/2020, Mafi-Tsati). He maintained that the representations of the *Aklama* in visible forms is what constitutes *Aklama kpapke*. Thus, according to him, “*Aklama kpapke* is made to enable people to have physical contact with *Aklama* [the invisible soul]” (Adela Zutunu, KII #50, 11/11/2020, Mafi-Tsati). He however related that “interactions between a person and God who sends him/ [her] with the *Aklama* is through the [agency] of *Se/Dzɔgbese* which is a part of God associated with each individual”. In other words, in dealing with the soul of the individual, “God operates through the *Se/Dzɔgbese*” (Adela Zutunu, KII #50, 11/11/2020, Mafi-Tsati). Hence, to recognise the spiritual relationship between the soul of a person and the *Se*, the individual may undertake “the ritual act of establishing the *Se*/ [*Ese*] which is the *selili*”. In his experience, the first spiritual foundation that anybody could establish is the *selili*, just like a house may be established on a spiritual foundation called *Afeli*. He argued that since the “*Se* is responsible for dispatching both women and men into this world, it is not only women who may need to establish closer relationship with the *Se* through a medium for worship or personal devotion” (Adela Zutunu, KII #50, 11/11/2020, Mafi-Tsati). Hence, the *selili* could be done by both men and women who may have need of it. He however pointed out that the *Se* is considered to be a female spiritual entity and thus it is always represented in a female anthropomorphic figurine referred to as the *Ese* (see Figure 4.6).



Figure 4.6. An *Ese* figurine, Mafi-Tsati. Photographed by the researcher.

The feminine characterization of *Ese* was indicated by other informants. For instance, Xunuɔ Gble, an 80 year-old Fiesi and a carver, explained that *Dzɔgbese*/[*Se*] represents “a person’s true spiritual mother”. He however pointed out that *Dzɔgbese/Se* is not the same as *Aklama* even

though they are very closely related. He explains that *Aklama* is the spirit that brings good things to people; “it is like a [personal] god which could be worshiped [. . .], it may be moulded or carved as object of worship and animals are slaughtered for it” (Xunuɔ Gble, KII #53, 13/11/2020, Gblekorpe, Mafi-Adidome). In this sense, besides the *Ese* figurine which may be considered as a specific kind of *Aklama kpapke*, he echoed the view maintained by Togbe Sowada that any medium for personal devotion is also *Aklama kpapke* in a general sense. Also corroborating this view is Mr. Dorcoo, a 55 year-old professional teacher and a carver at Mafi-Adidome, who also indicated that the *Ese* is particularly the physical representation of *Dzɔgbese*. In his experience however, figurines for *Dzɔgbese* could either be in a male or female forms depending on the supposed gender of the spiritual-self of the individual¹⁴³ (see Figures 47a. and 4.7b).

Thus, in contrasts to the specific characterization of the *Ese* as a female form figurine representing a person’s spiritual mother as pointed out by Xunuɔ Gble, Mr. Dorcoo characterized the *Ese* as an individual’s ritual engagements with his/her spiritual-self identified as the *Dzɔgbese*. He further pointed out that in relation to *Dzɔgbese*, it was even possible for a person, especially a man, to have both male and female forms of the *Ese* at the same. He asserted that in such a case, while the male figurine identified specifically as the *Dzɔgbe* objectifies the spiritual-self of the man, the female figurine specifically represents *Uui*, the spiritual-wife. In a similar vein, a woman may need to lay the *Ese* in acknowledgment of not only her *Dzɔgbe* but also her *Dzɔbemetsui*, the spiritual-spouse at *Bome* (Dorcoo, KII #54, 13/11/2020, Mafi-Adidome). Apparently, from the various perspectives and the different contexts of possessions, it appears the *Ese* as a typical *Aklama* figurine may be depicted in male and/or female anthropomorphic forms to objectify

¹⁴³ This suggests that the spiritual-self of a person may or may not correspond with the same gender of the individual. Similar views were also expressed in Wusuta for example by Togbe Buako and Togbe Abe already discussed in Chapter 3.

different spiritual relations of the individual. Thus, the *Ese* may represent the “spiritual mother”, “spiritual-self” and/or the “spiritual-spouse” of the individual in different situations.

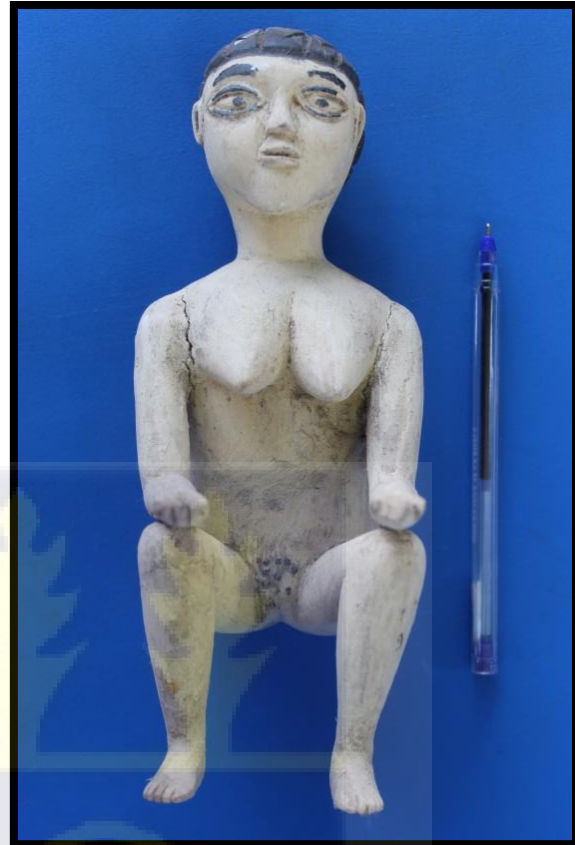


Figure 4.7a. *Ese* (Male form), Mafi-Adidome. Photographed by the researcher.

Figure 4.7b. *Ese* (Female form), Mafi-Adidome.

4.5. “*Selili*”: the Laying of the *Ese*.

Most of the priests and priestesses informants pointed to their possession of the *Ese* as a significant step to their initiations into the priesthood. For instance, Adele Zutunu and Xunuɔ Gble in their experiences as both Fiesi and carvers, particularly indicated that the “laying of the *Ese*” is not done voluntarily. Thus, the need to engage with the *Ese* is often occasioned by some unexpected circumstances which require the individual to make a “search into the spirit to ascertain the specific needs of his or her *Dzɔgbese*” (Xunuɔ Gble, KII #53, 13/11/2020, Gblekorpe). They pointed out that the *selili* is mostly the next step after purification rites for an individual who is faced with

continual challenges associated with the *Se/Dzɔgbese*. In such situations, the *Se/Dzɔgbese* is believed to be seeking the attention of the person in an intimate sense; the individual is required to acknowledge and engage with it ritually.

Unanimously, informants considered the laying of the *Ese* as a challenging ritual that requires strict adherence. For instance, according to Mama Avɔretɔ Agɔdoo, for women especially, the *Ese* is mostly moulded in clay. She indicated that the *Ese* is normally a small figurine installed on a clean plate for personal devotion. To make the *Ese*, the individual is required to find a “person who has already laid her *Ese* to mould it whilst she [the prospective devotee] closely observes the process” (Mama Avɔretɔ, KII #41, 07/11/2020, Mafi-Adidome). Moreover, that aide must also have the same *dzɔgbe* (i.e. birth day, for example, Friday or Sunday) as the prospective devotee. Again, during the moulding and the establishing of the *Ese* which is usually done at dawn on the natal day of the individual, both the aide and the individual shall have abstained from sex the night before. Finally, the *Ese* is bathed with either rain or sea water and then ‘fed’ with mashed yam by the person for the first time (Mama Avɔretɔ, KII #41, 07/11/2020, Mafi-Adidome). Subsequently, the bathing and the feeding of the *Ese* are observed as annual purification rite for the individual.

For men however, as indicated by Adele Zutunu and Xunuɔ Gble, the Fiesi is very crucial as he shall provide specific instructions which are the outcome of divination process to inquire about a spiritual issue. Thus, depending on the case of an individual, wood from a life tree or clay from an active source (i.e. the clay must be collected from a river or stream which does not completely dry out) is procured to either carve or mould the *Ese* (Xunuɔ Gble, KII #53, Gblekorpe). Again, for men another important basic requirement for installing the *Ese*, is an offering referred to as ‘*laka*’ which is the provision of an appropriate animal (usually a fowl or

ram) as the first sacrifice to the *Ese*¹⁴⁴. According to Adela Zutunu, for instance, the ritual performance to activate the *Ese* must be directed by the Fiesi in accordance with the “request or demands of the person’s *Dzɔgbese*” (Adela Zutunu, KII #50, 11/11/2020, Mafi-Tsati). Since it is very personal, an installed *Ese* is only relevant to the owner as long as he lives. Thus, the *Ese* is decommissioned and disposed when the owner is no more. Apart from the *Ese* which must be requested by the *Dzɔgbese*, Adela Zutunu indicated the possibility of an individual engaging with additional spirit mediums (as *Aklama kpakpe*) by his own volition or necessitated by subsequent spiritual possessions. He however, added that such spirit mediums are usually acquired in consultation with the Fiesi who confirms whether or not those were in conformity with the desires of companion spirits of the individual identified with his *Dzɔdzɔme*, *Dzɔgbese* and/or *Aklama*.

4.5.1. Narratives of Female Adepts about *Aklama* Figurations.

Cross-sectional perspectives of my female informants, mainly priestesses who also possessed the *Ese* and other forms of *Aklama kpakpe*, indicated that *Aklama* figurations are particularly a crisis point interventions. Without exception, all of them associated their acquisition of spirit mediums which they identified as *Aklama* to incidences of “spiritual possessions”; some forms of mysterious ailments or restlessness related to a deity or spirits. For the sake of comparison, the experiences and perspectives of two priestesses who identified themselves as Fiesi and Adesi and are also devoted to other deities/spirits are presented. Both priestesses are consulted for *nukaka* (i.e. oracular divination) and also initiate others into the priesthood. The narratives of

¹⁴⁴ In an interview with another informant, Togbe Sowada, the first animal sacrifice serves as the foundation on which the *Ese* or any other *Aklama kpakpe* is established. According to him, while for married men a ram is usually required, for unmarried men fowls are used (Togbe Sowada, KII #48, 10/11/2020, Mafi-Kumasi).

Mama Adesi Sedekla¹⁴⁵ (Dabala and Aveyime), and Mama Tsorme (Mepe) are presented as follows:

4.5.1.1. The Experience of Mama Adesi Sedekla.

According to Mama Adesi Sedekla, “in short, *Aklama* is a *trɔ*, an idol, which requires personal devotion from an individual” (Mama Sedekla, KII #56, 16/11/2020, Aveyime). She explained that each person is related to *Aklama* as a companion spirit from *Dzɔfe*, and that whether or not *Aklama* will be favourable to the life of a person depends on the pronouncements made by the individual to the *Se*, the dispatcher of humans at *Dzɔfe* before he or she was born. According to her, although a spiritual entity, the *Se* is physically related to *amenɔ* (i.e. the placenta) which literally carries the individual to the earth. Thus, for every person, since the *Se* is represented by the placenta, it implies a particular spiritual force responsible for the formation, care and nourishments for the individual to thrive.

Again, Mama Sedekla explained that it was particularly due to incidences of unfavourable situations with *Aklama*, the companion spirit, that the practices of Fiesi as the diviner or a priestess, were instituted. Moreover, the Fiesi herself as an adept is usually recruited by a deity or spirits by means of some ordeals described as “spiritual-possession in which the individual is seized by a spirit or deity to pay attention to it, and to also communicate with other spirits” (Mama Sedekla, KII #56, 16/11/2020, Aveyime). Nonetheless, she indicated that for most adepts, becoming a Fiesi or priestess was considered to be a predestined calling associated with their *Dzɔgbese*, or a continuation of a previous life in that same capacity by the person believed to have reincarnated. Accordingly, a Fiesi assumes the name of the deity she is devoted to, or takes up the title of the

¹⁴⁵ Mama Adesi Sedekla is a 65-year old priestess who identifies with multiple deities and spirits to which she serves as Adesi, Fiesi and a Mamisi. She is from the Agave Traditional Area where her major shrine is located but she preferred to meet us for the interview at her satellite shrine at Aveyime.

supposed priestess-ancestress she resumes. She further pointed out that, still for some adepts, initiation into the priesthood is only a circumstantial occurrence in keeping with a vow or redemption of a “moral debt” of close relations¹⁴⁶, especially the parents of the individual.

Alluding to that metaphorical singularity of the placenta with motherly care, protection and the survival of each child, Mama Sedekla maintained that the *Se* could only be a specific feminine spiritual entity identified as the “the spirit-mother” who functions in a similitude of the placenta. Hence, just like a baby depends on the placenta for life in the womb, everyone depends on the *Se*, personalised as the *Dzɔgbese* for spiritual care and protection of the individual. However, for some people, the *Se/ Dzɔgbese* may need to be physically represented at a certain point in time for an acknowledgment of their dependence on “her”. Consequently, when the *Ese* is required, it is always an anthropomorphic figure in a female form. She therefore indicated that there could be only one *Ese* for the individual. She however, identified all mediums including the *Ese*, which are dedicated to host or express the presences of deities or spirits as *Aklama kpakpe*.

Still according to Mama Sedekla “*Aklama kpakpe* functions mainly as the mould or container for the herbs by which the powers of a deity or spirits are harnessed or activated [by a devotee]”. She therefore, concluded that “it is the [foundational] herbs that are the most important elements connecting the individual with [the *Se/ Dzɔgbese* through the] *Aklama kpakpe*” (Mama Sedekla, KII #56, 16/11/2020, Aveyime). Similar views were expressed by the various carvers I interacted with. According to them, with the exception of the *venovi*, all forms of *Aklama kpakpe* make provision for the insertion or incorporation of some herbs and other elements to ‘activate the spirit meant to be domiciled in the figurine’. According to the carver Agbetsi, for example, a hole

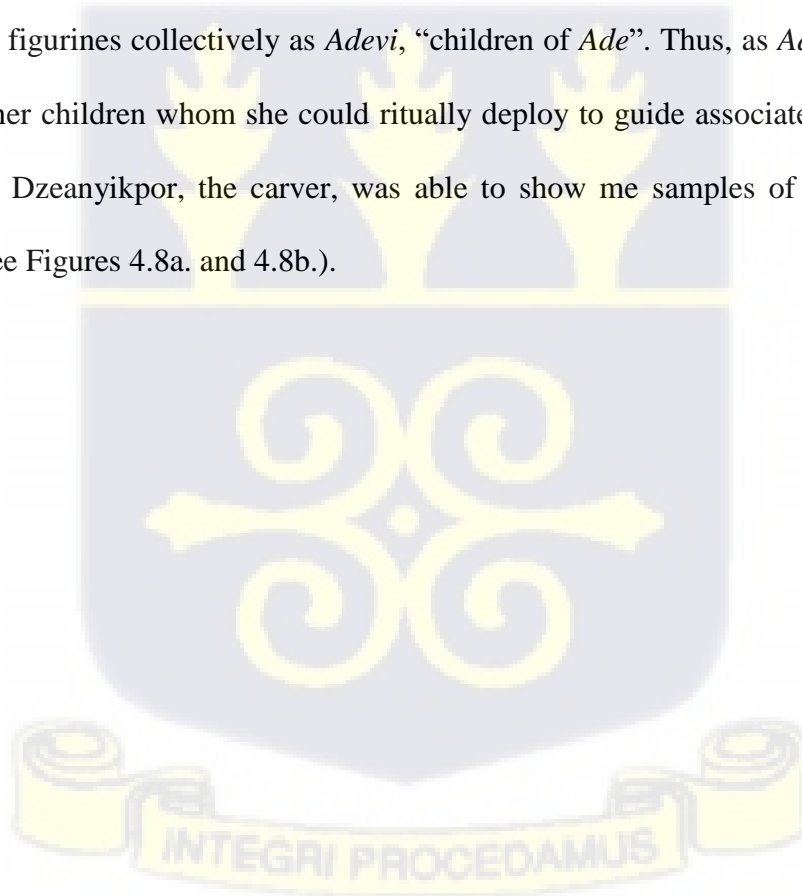
¹⁴⁶ The idea of moral debts is in connection with violations of some norms that need to be pacified or atone for. Notions of moral debts underscored such traditions as the *Trokosi*, the vassal servitude at some shrines, where virgin girls (deemed pure) atoned for wrongs and iniquities of close relations (e.g. Akpabli-Honu, 2014).

is usually drilled from the base or at the back of the figurine for that purpose (Agbetsi, KII #60, 18/11/2020, Mafi-Adidome). He maintained that after the insertion of those herbs, possibly with other elements that might be required, the Fiesi may either seal it off with kaolin or brings it back to the carver to plug it with wood. Alternatively, some allowances are made around the carving for the incorporation of the herbs/elements and subsequently wrapped up with stripes of cloth usually of various colours associated with the requisite deity or spirits (Agbetsi, KII #58, 18/11/2020, Mafi-Adidome).

Narrating her multiple initiations as Mamisi, Adesi and Fiesi, Mama Sedekla described her priesthood in relation to a vow of her parents prior to her birth and her subsequent dedication to the *Yeve* cult¹⁴⁷ as a devotee at birth. According to her, before she was born, the parents suffered the ordeal of miscarriages. And so when the mother was pregnant of her, she was asked to lay the *Ese*. However, much anxious to carry the baby to term, the parents petitioned the oracles that they wanted to defer the *Ese* to when the baby was duly born where they would not only be obliged to establish the medium but also covenanted to dedicate the baby to the *Yeve* cult. Granted, when she survived, as a baby she was given the cult name Dadzengɔ which translates as “the snake has gone before her”, figuratively associated with the snake deity *Da* of the *Yeve* cult. Now in her capacity as priestess and still a devotee of the *Yeve* cult, she identifies herself with a jet-blue colour headgear. She however, indicated that it was eighteen (18) years ago when she was required to lay the *Ese* at a time where she was seized by a deity identified as *Ade*, an ancestral spirit seeking to be hosted.

¹⁴⁷ For information about the *Yeve* cult see Nukunya, 1969; Akyeampong 2001, pp. 108-109.

According to her, under the influence of *Ade*, she was led into the bush several times. She maintained that in most of those moments which she described as “being possessed by *Ade*”, she was not very conscious about herself. Thus, except for a confirmation through oracular consultation which attributed her situation to *Ade*, she could not recollect how she was led into the bush and what she actually did while there. She however indicated that before she was initiated as *Adesi* into the devotion of *Ade*, which she described as a family cult for their ancestral hunters’ spirits, she needed to first establish the *Ese*. Thus, subsequent to “laying the *Ese*”, she established an *Adekpɔe*, a space to acknowledge *Ade*. She indicated that her *Adekpɔe* comprises a set of seven (7) carved anthropomorphic figurines in the forms of hunters with hunting accoutrement. She referred to those figurines collectively as *Adevi*, “children of *Ade*”. Thus, as *Adesi*, she is related to the *Adevi* as her children whom she could ritually deploy to guide associated devotees of the *Ade* cult¹⁴⁸. Mr. Dzeanyikpor, the carver, was able to show me samples of *Ade* figurines for illustration¹⁴⁹ (see Figures 4.8a. and 4.8b.).



¹⁴⁸ Individuals engaged in the occupations of fishing or hunting may be associated with a particular *Adekpɔe* within the locality or in the family’s compound.

¹⁴⁹ In our first meeting with him, he did not bring out any figurine. However during a second visit he dashed to his room and to our hearing he made a prayer to the figurines seeking their permission to be taken out for illustration. He then sprinkled powder on the few figurines he could make available to us, including the *Adela*.



Figure 4.8.a. *Adela* with unmounted musket; Figure 4.8.b. *Adela* with a mounted musket, Mafi-Adidome. Photographed by the researcher.

Furthermore, although she is not a practicing hunter, as *Adesi* she is acknowledged as a “possessed-hunter” and thus could initiate both men and women seized by *Ade* to become *Adele* and *Adesi* respectively. She therefore administers requisite rites and rituals to establish the *Adekpɔe* for others recruited by *Ade*. According to her, after establishing herself as a *Fiesi*, she hosted several other spirits including the *Ametsiavawo* (i.e. spirits of victims of accidental deaths), *Mami* (a marine deity) and *Ablɔ* identified as an ancestral spirit associated with wealth, particularly related to the possessions of slaves in the past. She indicated that for each of those deities she added their representational figures as mediums to host the respective spirit. She however pointed out that, rather than a figurine, the *Mami* deity was represented by the Christian Bible at her shrine.

4.5.1.2. The Experience of Mama Tsorme.

Almost of the same priestly status as Mama Sedekla, the fifty-five (55) years old Fiesi Tsorme also identifies with the *Ade* and *Mami* deities as *Adesi* and *Mamisi*. However, she recounted her precursor priesthood experiences as the unfolding of destiny. According to her, every individual goes through seasons and cycles of life in fulfilment of destiny. However, for some people, their *Dzɔgbese/Se* may communicate significant milestones in manifestations of unusual happenings that usher them into another phase of their lives. She pointed out that such unanticipated occurrences, especially with some kinds of illness, may be the turning point experiences for a person. She maintained that, in such situations, however, it is usually after almost every avenue had failed to yield satisfactory result that necessitate oracular consultations. Thus, in most cases the Fiesi is the last resort who is sought for clarity about the spiritual condition of the person and to also provide guidance about how the individual must proceed thereafter. She therefore believed that it was her *Dzɔgbese/Se* which allowed the other spirits to be domiciled with her as an initiated Fiesi.

In a similar light, all the five carvers whom I engaged on the topic of *Aklama* associated their skill and practice to their *Dzɔgbese/Se*. Each of the carvers therefore recounted an experience at certain point in his life where he had irresistible urge to begin carving. Thus, none of them indicated to have undergone apprenticeship to learn to carve. For instance, Adela Zutunu, a retired trained teacher who also doubled as Fiesi and carver maintained that “from the skills and apprenticeship acquired through training, a person is able to serve the community, but a person fulfils destiny when he accomplishes the [particular] calling on his life” (Adela Zutunu, KII #50, 11/11/2020, Mafi-Tsati). He therefore differentiated his teaching profession (of which he honourably retired two decades ago), from his practise as initiated *Adela, Fiesi* and “possessed-carver” which he associated with his *Se* as his life’s mission. Again, besides Adela Zutunu and

Xunuo Gble, for example, who indicated a connection between their priesthood and their carving abilities as a “calling”, the other carvers including Agbetsi, Dorcoo and Dzeanyikpor, who are not priests, also identified themselves as “possessed-carvers” because they were not taught by anyone the craft of carving which they attribute to their *Dzɔgbese*.¹⁵⁰

In that vein, Mama Adesi Tsorme narrated that while a teenager some forty (40) years ago, she had bouts of severe stomach pains which defied ordinary explanations and cure. Then an oracular consultation indicated that her “*Se* was seeking to be laid for personal devotion” (Mama Tsorme, KII #57, 17/11/2020, Mepe). Thus, she followed through the rite to have the “*Ese*, which was for acknowledging the *Se*, the personal god [assigned to her by destiny]” (Mama Tsorme, KII #57, 17/11/2020, Mepe). However, some years later she was seized by the *Ade* and other deities in successions of different episodes of “spiritual possessions”. According to her, as an indication of her calling into the service of the *Ade* deity, for example, she recovered a “bowlful of cowries that came to her one time” when she was at the very spot which later became her shrine (Mama Tsorme, KII #57, 17/11/2020, Mepe).

Mama Tsorme identified a roofed circular structure at her shrine which is located at the banks of the River Volta at Mangotigame in Mepe as the *Adekpɔe* which is very different from the typical short and open cement structures, common in some villages, dedicated to *Ade* (cf. Figure 4.9a and Figure 4.11). She further indicated that, her *Adekpɔe* is associated with two spirits identified as *Densu* (a three-headed riverine deity) and *Aziza* (forest-based spirits). In that *Adekpɔe* ‘shrine room’ she consulted on behalf of people engaged in the traditional occupations of fishing

¹⁵⁰ Notably, a look at samples of *Aklama kɔpɔke* presented by the various carvers for my observation indicated that they were very talented. However, because they did not undergo training and apprenticeship they seem to lack certain technical skills in furnishing the forms and styles of their figurines. Perhaps being thus challenged, most of their figurines seemed to have been carved in parts, especially the hands, and clued to the body.

and hunting. However, in a separate room at the shrine she hosted the *Mami* deity considered to be associated with wealth. Hesitant to provide details about the actual forms of the deity mediums in the shrine rooms, she pointed to some oil paintings on the walls as indicating the nature of deities domiciled in the separate rooms (Figures 4.9b and 4.9c). Also, at the entrance to the *Adekpɔe* “shrine room” was a black curtain before which was a calabash containing powdered kaolin. However, the curtain at the entrance of the *Mami* “shrine room” was white. Additionally, by her clothing and accessories, she carried on her body symbols and identities of the different deities represented; she wore combinations of colour including white, sea-blue, and black with several strings of beads also of different colours. Although she considered the deities as working together with the *Ese*, she pointed out that she observed different taboos for the respective spirits. But for the *Ese*, she particularly observed a rest from work on Sundays and Fridays. At the Mafi-Adidome market where I identified a vender who sold items associated with the traditional religious practices and rituals, the names and significance of the different beads were identified which confirmed the status of Mama Tsorme as a ‘multi-hosting’ priestess (see Figure 4.10).

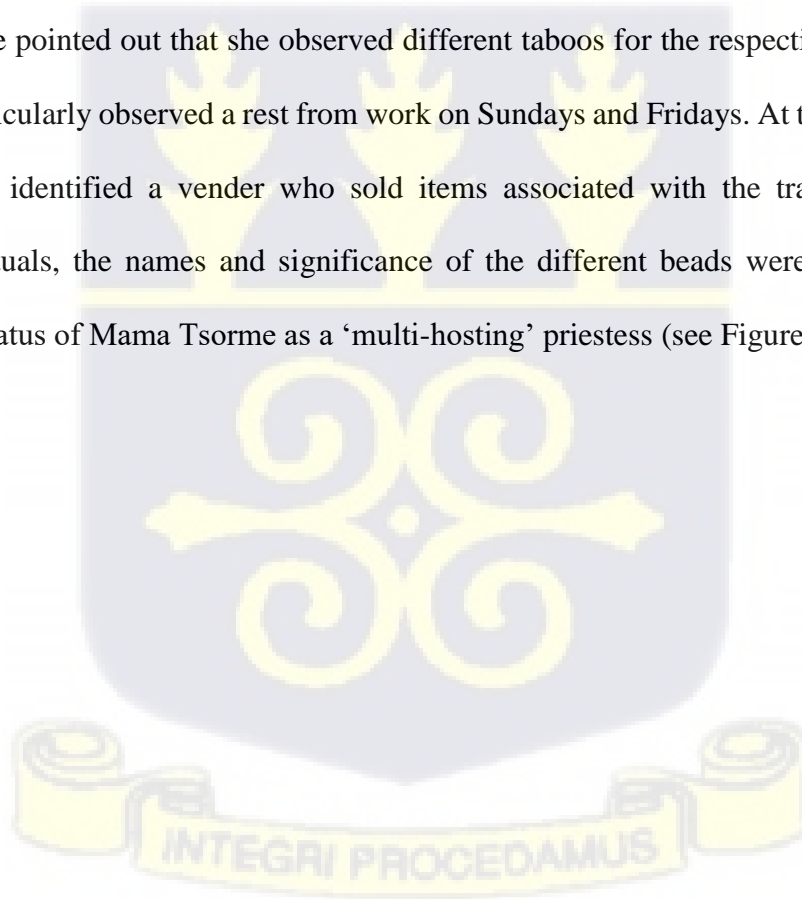




Figure 4.9a. Mama Tsorme in her priestly regalia, Mepe. Photographed by the researcher.

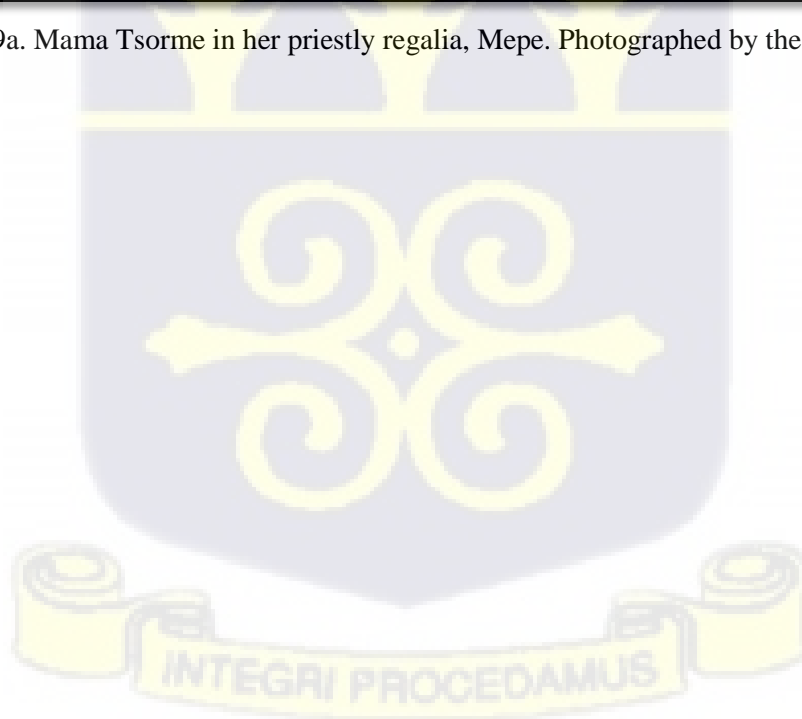




Figure 4.9b. A drawing of the *Densu* Deity; Figure 4.9c. Drawings of *Aziza* (upper) and *Ade* spirits, *Mepe*. Photographed by the researcher.





Figure 4.10. Assorted beads and items for traditional rites on display for sale, Mafi-Adidome Market. Photographed by the researcher.

As observed in the cases of the female adepts, while the *Ese* primarily represented the spiritual-self of the individual devotee, other spirit mediums associated with *Ade* were in acknowledgements of ancient spirits. Consequently, the *Ese* remained relevant as long as the individual lived to engage with it. However, the other spirit mediums may undergo further transformations in meanings and significance. Thus, since the deities/spirits represented by those mediums may recruit different persons at different times to attend to them, erstwhile shrines may be reconstituted with surviving *Aklama kpakpe* (even of their fragments) or replaced with new sets by an initiated priestess.

4.6. Acknowledgments and Continuities of Ancestral Spirits and Deities: *Ade* and *Ablɔ* as Clan Cults and Household Shrines.

Evident in many villages among the *Tongu*, the *Adekpɔe* is also referred to as *Aklama*, especially in recognition of *Ade*, the hunters' spirit. According to most informants, every household is built on the foundations of *Ade*. In their explanations, each village owes its origins to brave hunter-warriors who fought off wild beast and enemies (e.g. Adela Kove, KII#58, 17/11/2020, Mepe; Togbe Adzormahe, KII #55, 14/11/2020, Mafi-Adidome; Adela Zutunu, KII #50, 11/11/2020, Mafi-Tsati). Consequently, it is believed that the footprints of *Ade* is present in every clan. Thus, whether visibly acknowledged with the *Adekpɔe* or completely unacknowledged, some informants asserted that *Ade* is present in every family even if it is non-active (e.g. Togbe Tsikata, KII #44, 09/11/2020, Mafi-Adidome). According to informants, latent *Ade* spirits may be quickened when they require attention from members of a family. An individual is then seized by *Ade* to become its caretaker or priest/priestess.

Again, among the *Tongu*, families that were affluent enough to have acquired slaves in the past to serve them, a stool identified as *Hози*, (i.e. the wealth-stool) is maintained. According to informants, the *Hози* is established with other mediums that serve to acknowledge spirits of erstwhile rich family members as well as those of their slave-servants. Thus, as many rich individuals there were in a family that could afford to own slaves, as many *Hози* with their associated mediums may be maintained as household shrines. For instance, an informant indicated that his family owned three (3) different ancestral *Hози* stools, each with its sets of figurines and spirit mediums identified as *Ablɔ* (Adela Kove, KII #58, 17/11/2020, Mepe). More light is shed on the compositions of *Hози* and *Ablɔ* as a family shrine later in this chapter.

4.6.1. The *Adekpɔe* as Transformations of Personal Shrines to Clan Cults.

Although hunting is no longer a major economic activity in southern Volta, the traditional office of *Adela*, the hunter is still acknowledged. According to Adela Kove, a one hundred-year old veteran hunter, *Ade* represents “the spirits of both human and highly-spirited animals which fell casualties in encounters during the establishments of clans and villages in ancient times” (Adela Kove, KII #48, 17/11/2020, Mepe). He however pointed out that every *Adekpɔe* dedicated to *Ade*, began as a personal shrine when a hunter distinguished himself by killing certain wild animals such as the leopard, lion, buffalo and the crocodile. According to him, initially the *Adekpɔe* is constructed with only post-sticks as a circular fence in which the head of such animals are offered to *Ade*. Subsequently, when that hunter becomes very successful in other expeditions, the *Adekpɔe* is then built as a permanent structure commonly referred to as *Ade-Aklama* which is a personal shrine. In that structure one will usually find some flourishing plants and other tokens of offering. Although initiated by an individual, the *Adekpɔe* eventually becomes a family or clan shrine for the *Ade* deity which could spiritually possess other individuals to become devotees (Adela Kove, KII #58, 17/11/2020, Mepe).

Furthermore, according to Adela Kove, when the founding-hunter was still active, the *Adekpɔe* was associated with the colour black indicating vitality as well as obstacles to overcome when hunting. Thus, black cloth may be tied around the *Adekpɔe* to indicate “the cover of darkness and death associated with hunting” (Adela Kove, KII#58, 17/11/2020, Mepe). An annual offering of a goat is presented to *Ade*. However, with time when the hunter grows very old and retires from active hunting, the colour associated with his *Adekpɔe* changes to white and the annual goat offering is also replaced with sheep (Adela Kove, KII #58, 17/11/2020, Mepe). Again, acknowledged as a shrine, other individuals who anticipate similar feats as the accomplished founding-hunter may be associated with the *Adekpɔe* through supplicatory rituals. Thus, the

prospects of a highly successful and proficient hunter may be at the center for establishing a cult for hunters in his clan or village (e.g. Figure 4.11). In this vein, Togbe Adzormahe, for instance described the *Adekpɔɛ* as “hunting-cult fence, a shrine constructed for a person who has been possessed by the hunting spirit of a revered hunter” (Togbe Adzormahe, KII #55, 14/11/2020, Mafi-Adidome).



Figure 4.11. *Adekpɔɛ/Ade Aklama* located at the homestead, Amegakorpe. Photographed by the researcher.

Thus, in some villages in *Tongu*, individuals committed to such shrines through periodic rituals and annual offerings, are considered to belong to the cult of *Ade* (e.g. Adela Kove, KII #58, 17/11/2020, Mepe; Togbe Adzormahe, KII #55, 14/11/2020, Mafi-Adidome; Togbe Tsikata, KII #44, 09/11/2020, Mafi-Adidome). For instance, at Samlefeme, a house identified as an important

site for *Adelewo* in Mepe, a funeral banner for the late Dumega who was also an *Adela*, highlighted his traditional office as a hunter with his musket poised for action (Figure 4.12). Even more elaborate was another banner, a commemorative banner of the late *Adelaga*, leader of the *Adelawo* in Mepe, indicating some scenes of rites and rituals of the *Ade* cult (Figure 4.13).



Figure 4.12. Funeral banner of a late *Adela*, Mepe. Photographed by the research.



Figure 4.13. Commemorative banner of the late *Adelaga*, Mepe. Photographed by the researcher.

4.6.2. “Family’s Linguist” at the Portal of Wealth Perpetuation: *Hoz*i and *Abl*o Compositions as Household Shrines.

According to informants, in the past anyone who was rich and once bought a slave could create the *Hoz*i. As already indicated, *Hoz*i is identified as the “wealth stool” which also represented the spirit of a late slave. However, as indicated by some informants, the *Hoz*i was created in contexts where a slave had died before the person who had procured him/her—the “owner” (Adela Kove, KII #58, 17/11/2020, Mepe; Togbe Adzormahe, KII #55, 14/11/2020; and FGD #6, 16/11/2020, Battor). According to Adela Kove, to make the *Hoz*i, the death of the individual must never be induced. Giving the fact that the *Hoz*i was made in commemoration of a slave whose death had preceded his/her “owner”, not all families that once had a slave necessarily

has the *Hozɪ*¹⁵¹. Consequently, the unique feature of the *Hozɪ* as pointed out by Adela Kove is that, “it is imbued with portions of the hair and nail clippings of the slave and some cowries” (Adela Kove, KII #58, 17/11/2020, Mepe; see for examples Figures 4.14a and 4.14b). In my FGD with some elder at Battor, for example, the *Hozɪ* was typically described as a five-columned stool whitewashed with kaolin and particularly distinguished with a string of cowries normally tied at the central column (Togbe Akpasati, FGD #6, 16/11/2020, Battor). They further indicated that, the *Hozɪ* is meant to harness the spirit of the dead slave to assist the “owner” in his economic activities. Subsequently, however, when the original owner of the *Hozɪ* died the stool was complemented with other mediums in acknowledgment of the “owner”. According to them, it is the added mediums that are collectively referred to as *Ablɔ*.

The *Ablɔ*, was described “as a set of elements installed with the *Hozɪ* when it had become a *trɔ* to recruit its *Zinuo* [the caretaker] at the passing of the original owner of the stool” (Togbe Akpasati, FGD #6, 16/11/2020, Battor). Thus, the *Hozɪ* with the *Ablɔ* is particularly considered a household shrine; a spiritual force acknowledged to bring more wealth to the family. The acquisition of *Ablɔ* by a family is therefore conditioned on the possession of the *Hozɪ* just like in the customary chieftaincy practice where “there can never be a linguist if a chief had not yet been installed” (Adela Kove, KII #58, 17/11/2020, Mepe). From the metaphors of linguist and servants to a chief, the forms of *Ablɔ* installed with the *Hozɪ* reflect quite a range of representations. Thus, the *Ablɔ* which include a range of figures in the medium of clay or wood were considered in

¹⁵¹ In a personal conversation about the topic with Togbe Kwasinyi IV, he pointed out that slaves were not necessarily considered as property of the family; they were meant to be incorporated into the family to expand its prospects. Acknowledged as members of the family, slaves were however euphemistically referred to as “children born during daylight with teeth already in place”.

metaphorical terms as “the installations of linguist [i.e. chief’ spokes-person] and servants to the [*Hози*] stool” (Adela Kove, KII #58, 17/11/2020, Mepe).



Figure 4.14a. *Hози*, wealth stool (Source: Quarcoopome, 2016, pp. 94).

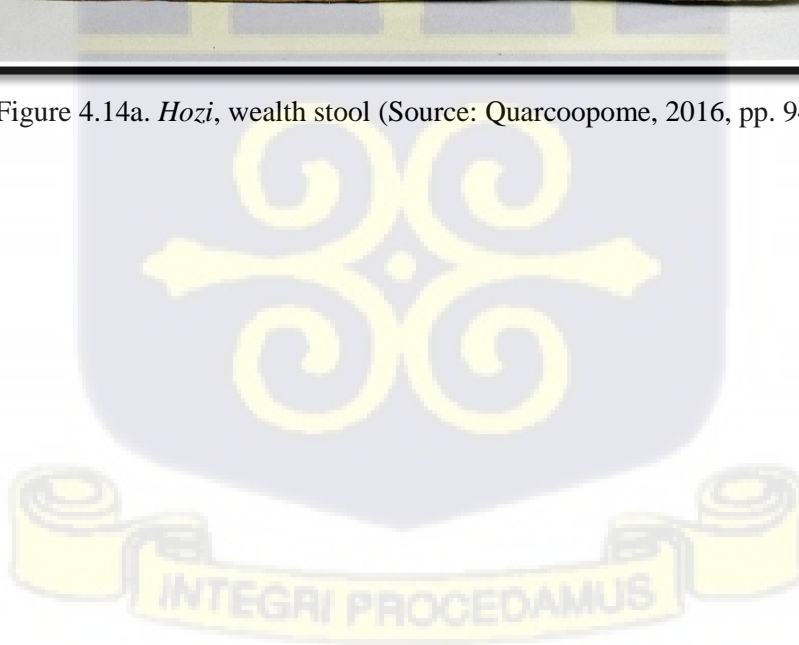




Figure 4.14b. *Hosi* with an anthropomorphic figurine (Source: Quarcoopome, 2016, p. 107).

Again, Togbe Adzormahe, for example described *Ablɔ* as “prestigious [set of] carvings; admirable figures which may include a horse, a woman carrying a pan, and a person on a horse” (Togbe Adzormahe, KII #55, 14/11/2020). However, a sample of *Ablɔ* presented for illustration by the carver Dorcoo was a seated male figure depicted as a fish monger (see Figure 4.15). Again, some informants indicated that amongst *Ablɔ* installations is usually a receptacle, a form of cup referred to as *abɛɛ*, which must all the time contain water (e.g. Yevu Assor, KII #59, 18/11/2020, Bakpa-Todzi; Mama Tsorme, KII #57, 17/11/2020, Mepe). However, the primary and most common form of *Ablɔ* identified by most informants was the *amelesɔdzi*, the horse-riding figurine (see Figures 4.16a, and 4.16b; and 4.17, samples of *Ablɔ* figurines presented by carvers Dzeanyikpor, Mafi-Adidome, and Fiesi Zutunu, Mafi-Tsati respectively for illustration).

According to informants, while the *Hozɪ* as a spirit medium usually recruits a man through spiritual possession to be its *Zinuo*, the caretaker, many others may get possessed by the *Ablɔ* to become devotees. Mama Tsorme, for example, indicated that any element of the *Ablɔ* including the *abɛɛ* (i.e. water container), the *essɔ* (the horse figurine), *kevi* (a little raffia basket for cash donations) or the *amelesɔdzi*, (i.e. the horse-riding anthropomorphic figurine) could potentially possess a member of the family to be initiated as *Ablɔsi* who may be consulted by people who want to have success with their businesses or economic ventures. According to her, while a *Zinuo* may not necessarily become a priest even though he may be consulted by his family members to make prayers and offerings to the *Hozɪ* on their behalf, an *Ablɔsi* is usually an initiated priest or priestess (Mama Tsorme, KII #57, 17/11/2020, Mepe). Thus, individuals whose families do not own the *Hozɪ* may consult the *Ablɔsi* on matters regarding their businesses.

Furthermore, according to informants, the ownership of the *Hози* is considered a status label. At Mepe for example, as part of an annual festival called *Afenɔto* celebrated in August, families that own the *Hози* take turns to bring their stools out for “ritual bathing at the river to rejuvenate the spirits they represent” (Adela Kove, KII #58, 17/11/2020, Mepe). Again, as a family ‘heirloom’ the *Hози* with the *Ablɔ* is passed from one generation to another, especially when the spirit recruits individuals to serve as *Ablɔsi* or *Zinuo*. Thus, rather than decommissioning, as it is with the very personal kinds of *Aklama kpakpe* such as the *Ese*, the *Hози* and *Ablɔ* constitute the kind that are inheritable. With time, an inherited *Ablɔ* could possibly be added on with more figurines by subsequent *Zinuo*wo and *Ablɔsi*wo as part of their respective initiation rites.





Figure 4.15. *Abla* figurine in a form of a fish monger, Mafi-Adidome. Photographed by the researcher.



Figures 4.16a. and 4.17b. *Amelesodzi* (seperated anthropomorphic and zoomorphic compoments), a male form, Mafi-Adidome. Photographed by the researcher.



Figure 4.17. *Amelesodzi* (a composite female form), Mafi-Tsati. Photographed by the researcher.

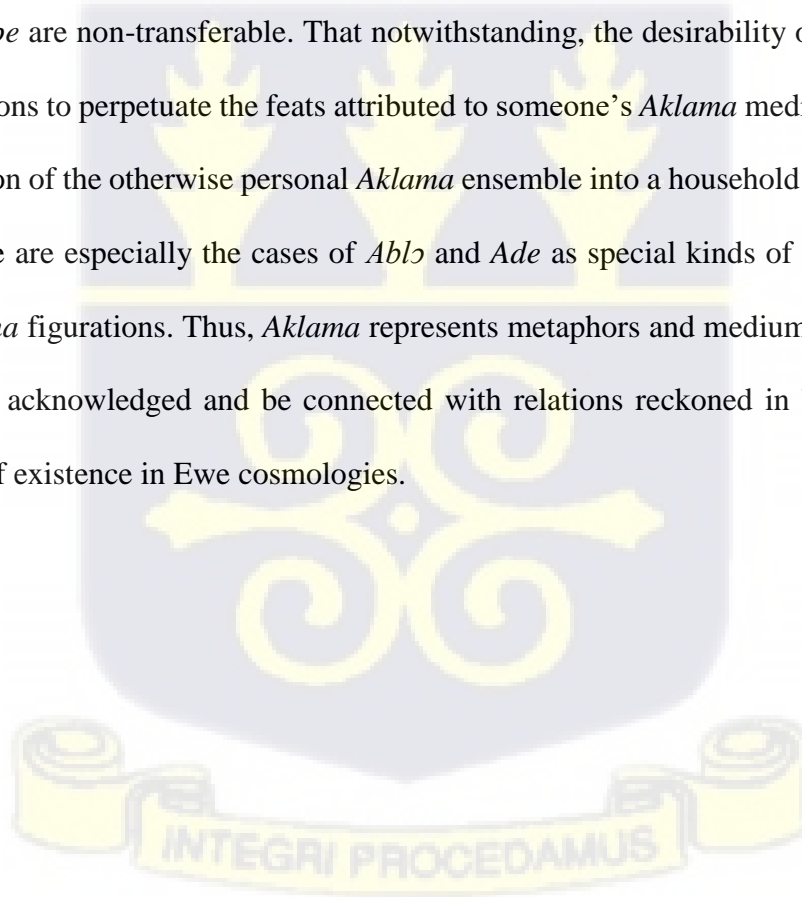
4.7. Summary and Conclusion.

In summary, among the *Tongu*, *Aklama* is a multivariate concept associated with the indigenous worldviews and religious practices. However, *Aklama* is primarily conceptualized as metaphysical relations of the human being who is considered to be essentially physical and spiritual concurrently. In the light of life on earth which is particularly considered to be transitory for the individual, indigenous *Tongu* worldviews maintain that each person is set on a preordained path of personal destiny. Moreover, considered to be enabled with the capacity of free-will in addition to a propitious destiny, the individual is expected not only to fulfil personal destiny but to also negotiate a harmonious social life and the wellbeing of others in the society. Thus, in situations where an individual did not seem to be faring well in life, rites of purification and, possibly other rituals, were administered to seek favours of benevolence for the person to thrive. In this context, *Aklama* connotes rituals and performances aimed at spiritual re-invigoration and repositioning of the individual for success in life.

Again, in the business of life, spectacular feats by individuals are often attributed to *Aklama*; a preordained roadmap and the unfolding of destiny. In this viewpoint, to hone in special abilities of the individual for success, certain incidences or challenges may confront the person who shall be required to recognize and acknowledge supernatural entities considered to be involved. Such milestone or episodic individual experiences may necessitate some forms of representation of deities and spirits to foster continual interactions with the individual. Particularly for a relatively few individuals considered to have a special calling on their lives to serve as facilitators and mediators between the physical and the spiritual realms of life, *Aklama* manifests in “spiritual possessions” as the instantiation to establish a person to be a devotee of a deity or some spirits. For such persons, especially diviners, priests and priestesses, *Aklama* therefore involves figurations of otherwise spirit beings including the (*Dzɔgbese/Se*), the spiritual-self, in various forms for continual engagements in rites and ritual

performances. Given different contexts and individual situations, requisite instructions for *Aklama* figurines as abodes of deities or spirits and their significance vary. However, as a means to assuage grievances of identified spiritual relations, especially the supposed ‘spirit-mother’, ‘spiritual spouses’ and the ‘spiritual-self’ of the individual, requisite mediums and installations generally referred to as *Aklama kpakpe* are established. For such individuals who may not necessarily become priests or priestesses, *Aklama kpakpe* provide focal spots for personal devotion and engagements with the spirit(s) concerned.

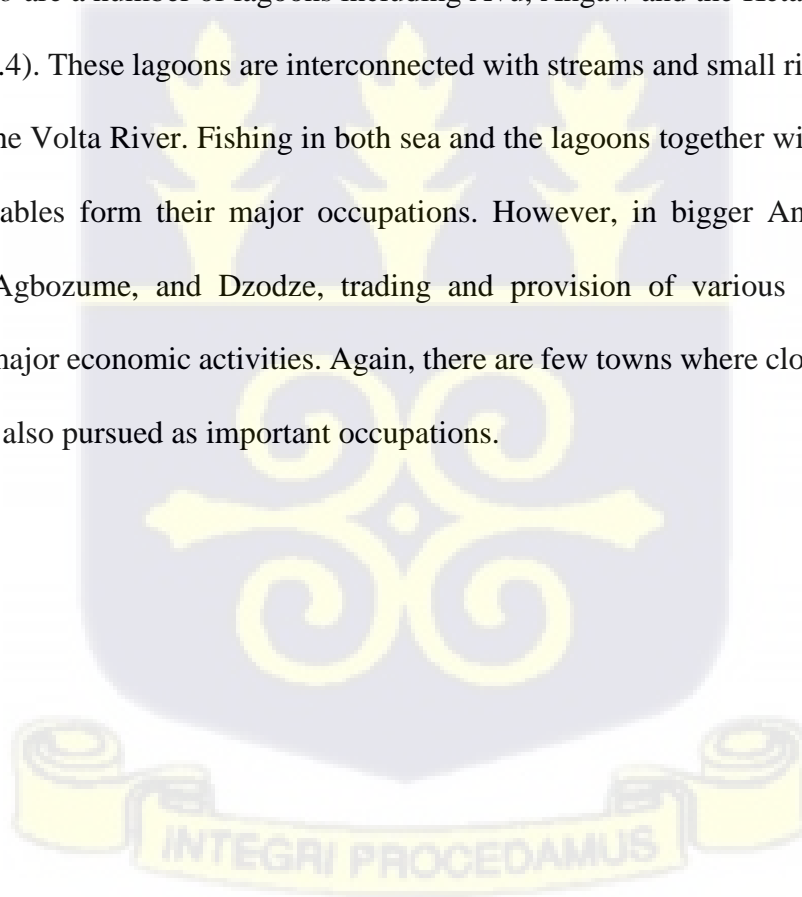
With notable exception of the *Venovi* figurines which represent deceased twins that need to be maintained and cared-for by a family as though they were real persons, most personal forms of *Aklama kpakpe* are non-transferable. That notwithstanding, the desirability of either a deity or prospective persons to perpetuate the feats attributed to someone’s *Aklama* mediums may result in the transformation of the otherwise personal *Aklama* ensemble into a household shrine or clan cult with time. These are especially the cases of *Ablɔ* and *Ade* as special kinds of household shrines and cultic *Aklama* figurations. Thus, *Aklama* represents metaphors and mediums which allow the individual to be acknowledged and be connected with relations reckoned in both physical and spiritual states of existence in Ewe cosmologies.

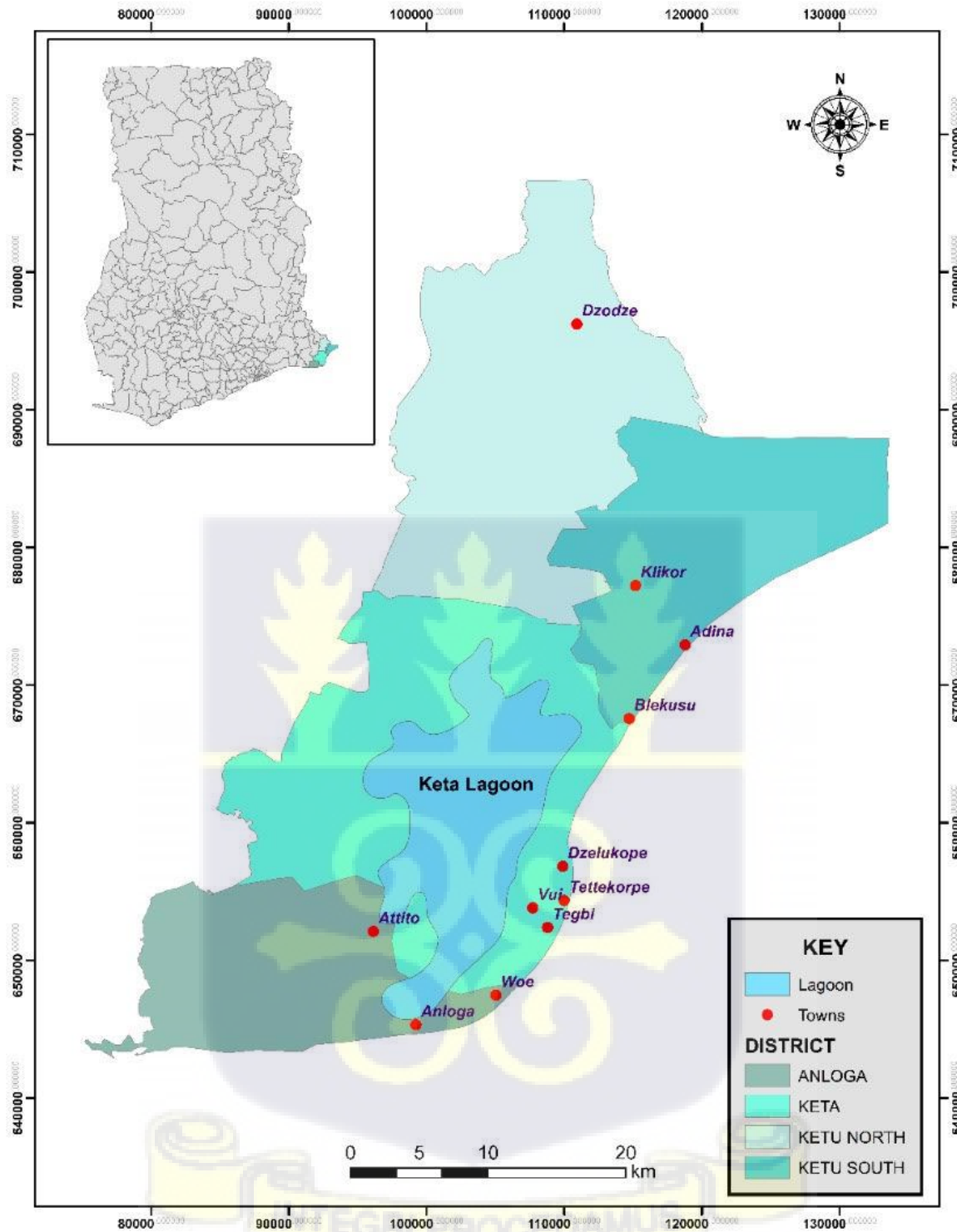


5.0. CHAPTER FIVE: Local Conceptualizations of *Aklama* among the *Anlo*.

In similar trend with chapters three and four, this chapter presents my fieldwork on local conceptualizations and figurations of *Aklama* among the *Anlo*-speaking Ewe. The information presented are drawn from interviews with priest/priestess, herbalists/diviners, carvers, some elders and personal observations during interactions with informants across the *Anlo* area of the Volta Region.

The *Anlo* lies in the extreme south eastern part of Ghana. It occupies much of the coastal landscape between the Volta River and the border of the neighboring country, Togo. On the coastal landscape of *Anlo* are a number of lagoons including Avu, Angaw and the Keta Lagoon being the largest (see Map.4). These lagoons are interconnected with streams and small rivers which in turn link them with the Volta River. Fishing in both sea and the lagoons together with farming of root crops and vegetables form their major occupations. However, in bigger *Anlo* towns such as Anloga, Keta, Agbozume, and Dzodze, trading and provision of various kinds of services constitute their major economic activities. Again, there are few towns where cloth weaving and/or salt weaning are also pursued as important occupations.





Map 4. Showing Anlo Towns visited for the study.

The *Anlo*, like other Ewe groups, are patrilineal. Recognized as a kinship-based society, membership is traditionally reckoned through patrilineal descent. Thus, the *Anlo* lineage system is characterized by various degrees of paternal relations that culminate into clanships at the higher level (e.g. Nukunya, 1990, p.21; Asamoah, 1986, pp. 22-24). There are fifteen patrilineal clans including Lafe, Amlade, Adzovia, Bate, Like, Bamee, Klevi, Tovi, Tsiamé, Agave, Amɛ, Dzevi, Uifeme, Xetsofe and Blu¹⁵² around which *Anlo* is organised (e.g. Fiawoo, 1959, p. 55). Every *Anlo* belongs to one of these clans. As pointed out by Nukunya, for example, the *Anlo* term for clan is ‘*hlo*’, which indicates that members are related by consanguinity. Thus, members of a clan are “believed to have descended in the male line from a common putative ancestor and [also] share the same totems, taboos and other observance” (Nukunya, 1990, p. 21). However, the *Anlo* patrilineal system does not preclude the individual from his or her matrilineal associations. Thus, a person may have the right to matrilineal lands, for example, and may as well be entitled to inheritance of some property or traditional offices through the maternal blood line (Togbui¹⁵³ Kumassah, KII #59, 19/03/2021, Keta; see also Venkatachalam, 2012).

5.1. A Perspective on *Anlo* Concept of the Human Being.

In the words of Togbui Kumassah, among the *Anlo* the human being is called *Ame*, meaning a molded being. According to him, in the traditional belief “there is a garden where that process of molding [the human person] takes place” (Togbui Kumassah, KII #61, 19/03/2021, Keta). The creator in that garden is called *Bomenɔ*; (*Bo*—garden, *me* – residence, and *nɔ*—female/woman). Thus, “*Bomenɔ* means the woman residing at the garden (*Bome*)” (Togbui Kumassah, KII #61,

¹⁵² *Blu* is the *Anlo* term for the Akan, especially the Asante. As the name of an *Anlo* clan, *Blu/Eblu* represents people who historically were ‘strangers’ with Akan, Ga, or Adangbe origins adopted or assimilated into the *Anlo* society (see Nukunya, 1990, p. 21).

¹⁵³ *Togbui* in the *Anlo* dialect is the same as the *Togbe* in the *Ewedome* and *Tongu* dialects expressed in chapters 3 and 4.

19/03/2021, Keta). This view was echoed by other informants. Furthermore, others also pointed out that in the *Anlo* worldview, creation is a complementary process at *Bome* by *Bomenɔ* and her husband identified as *Bometsui*. Thus, *Bomenɔ* is responsible for forming the physical being, the '*Ame*, while *Bometsui* breathes life into it to become *Amegbetɔ*-- *gbe* means life which is also synonymous with articulations of sound, vibration and movements (e.g. Togbui Agbeli III, KII #72, 28/03/2021, Blekuso). In support of this view, Togbuiwo Latsu and Agbeli III, for example, explain that *Amegbetɔ* basically implies the human being as having the spirit of life from *Mawu*, the Supreme Being (Togbui Agbeli III, KII #72, 28/03/2021, Blekuso). Thus, while the *Ame* is essentially the flesh and blood, otherwise identified as *ɲutila*, the *gbe* embodies the articulations and actions of the imbued spirit variously identified as *luvo* or *gbɔgbɔ*. The *luvo* or *gbɔgbɔ* is also likened to breath or a spoken word; an entity although unseen, provides directions and also effects actions (Togbui Agbeli III, KII #72, 28/03/2021, Blekuso; Togbui Kumassah, KII #61, 19/03/2021, Keta).

In this *Anlo* cosmological frame, the human being is conceived as a relation between the physical form (i.e. human body) and the articulation of spirit(s) as the vital force indwelling or abiding with the person. It is the vital force which constitutes the "spiritual-self" or the "soul" of the individual. Thus, in *Anlo* worldviews the human being is fairly conceived as being constituted by plurality of "selves"; involving the physical and spiritual "selves" simultaneously. As shall be elaborated later in this chapter, this perspective underlies the fashioning of *Aklama* religious sculptures or figurines as intermediary mediums connecting the physical and the spiritual "selves" of the individual by which the anthropomorphic forms are particularly referred to as *Ame kpakpe* (i.e. figuration of the human person) by the carvers interviewed (Togbui Asentsi, KII #76,

02/04/2021, Anloga; Akyimfoli, KII #74, 31/03/2021, Dzodze; Akpe, KII #73, 30/03/2021, Klikor).

5.2. Soul and Destiny of the Individual: *Anlo* concepts of *Ese/Se* and/or *Dzɔgbese*.

According to my informants, the *Anlo* believe that each person is connected to a spiritual footprint identified as the *Ese/Se* (Togbui Asentsi, KII #76, 02/04/2021, Anloga; Mama Afortude, KII #71, 27/03/2021, Anloga; Mama Senaza, KII #69, 25/03/2021, Blekuso; Togbui Kumassah, KII #61, 19/03/2021, Keta). Generally, the *Ese* is likened to the womb or the placenta that carries and nourishes a baby. Thus, as a spiritual entity, the *Ese* is considered to be particularly responsible for guiding the course and successes of a person's life (Togbui Asentsi, KII #76, 02/04/2021, Anloga; Togbui Nanashie, KII # 63, 21/03/2021, Keta). As pointed out by Ras Makao, for example, the *Ese* represents “ones’ [spiritual] mother who is interested in the person’s welfare, and wants him to prosper” (Ras Makao, KII #15, 04/06/2020, Anloga). Similarly, Togbui Nanashie, indicates that in the performance of rites, the *Ese* is often given the appellations “*Amenɔ-dzi-ame-ahɔka-alele*” identifying it as the “true mother with womb and the placentas of her children” (Togbui Nanashie, KII # 63, 21/03/2021, Keta).

However, in characterizing the relations between the *Ese* and the physical state of a person, varied conceptualizations of the *Ese* were presented. Broadly, the *Ese* was conceptualized either as a “god-like” mother and thus referred to as ‘*Dada-Se*’ (e.g. Mama Afortude, KII #71, 27/03/2021, Anloga; Mama Senaza, KII #69, 25/03/2021, Blekuso; Nanashie, KII #63, 21/03/2021, Keta; Ras Makao, KII #15, 04/06/2020, Anloga), or “the spiritual-self”, a counterpart of the individual in the spirit realm, otherwise called the *Dzɔgbese*, which foreshadows the physical (Togbui Asentsi, KII #76, 02/04/2021, Anloga; Togbui Kumassah, KII #61, 19/03/2021 Keta). According to Mama Taroshie for example, the “*Ese* cares for the individual like a mother cares for

the child [. . .] and such is the regard for the *Ese* to be engaged with” (Mama Taroshie, KII #20, 09/06/2020, Blekuso). In further explanations, most of my informants indicate that in everyday considerations, the influence of the *Ese* in a person’s life constitutes his or her *Dzɔgbese*. In this sense, *Dzɔgbese* represents personal destiny (see Fiawoo, 1959, pp. 49-50). Agozie (2000) also points out, the *[E]se* is “the force . . . [that] controls the things that happen to the bearer” (p.39). Hence, “the worship of *[E]se* is an intensely personal affairs” (Agozie, 2000, p. 39). And that “as God does not change, so also is one’s destiny”; aptly expressed in the popular parlance “*Semado o*” (Agozie, 2000, p. 39).

Furthermore, related to the mission of the individual on the earth as a call to destiny, *Dzɔgbese* is also referred to as *Du*¹⁵⁴. According to Togbui Kumassah, this implies that each person shares the nature of God to accomplish a purpose on earth (Togbui Kumassah, KII #61, 19/03/2021, Keta). Thus, the popular *Anlo* saying “*edui dzine le*”, alludes to “the purpose of one’s existence” (Togbui Kumassah, KII #61, 19/03/2021, Keta). Hence, *Dzɔgbese* which is ideally propitious, encapsulates the spiritual essence of a person and his/her purpose in life all of which are considered to be preordained at *Bome*. However, in my various interviews and discussions, I observed that the terms *Ese* and *Dzɔgbese* are in many instances used interchangeably. Whether representing a person’s “true mother” in the spirit, or the very “spiritual-self” of the individual, or yet still the pre-ordained purpose of persons life (i.e. destiny), as was variously indicated by informants, the state of a person’s *Ese/ Dzɔgbese* is considered to have enormous influence on the actual life and prospects of the individual. Thus, as elaborated in the rest of this chapter, these

¹⁵⁴ The concept of *Du* as pertains to personal destiny expresses the concept of the nature of God imbued with the individual, and the divine purpose associated with the existence of the person on earth. In some contexts, *Du* also refers to the village or town a person comes from.

variabilities in the conceptualizations of the *Ese* are also significantly reflected in the figurations and material representations of it.

Accordingly, the *Ese* is recognized and engaged in the performance of some rites and rituals. That is to say that *the Ese* can be “invoked or consulted in ritual contexts at any stage of the person’s life” aimed at aligning the life of the person in question with his/her preordained spiritual footprints (Togbui Nanashie, KII #63, 21/03/2021, Keta). According to the priestess Senaza, for instance, she is consulted to administer rituals to individuals who may be seriously ill whose *Ese* are believed to be “leaving and is set on the path of death”. By that ritual, the “path of death is blocked and the *Ese* is called back to the person” (Mama Senaza, KII #69, 25/03/2021, Blekuso). Subsequently, the *Ese* is strengthened by “a combination of some powerful herbs with water drawn from multiple sources [as may be required] to cleanse the person” (Mama Senaza, KII #69, 25/03/2021, Blekuso). Thereafter “the person is expected to have favorable life” (Mama Senaza, KII #69, 25/03/2021, Blekuso). Again, to be able to instantiate such ritual interactions with the *Ese*, individuals may be required to domicile the *Ese* in a medium, usually in a molded clay or carvings (e.g. Mama Tettevi, KII # 64, 21/03/2021, Keta).

Informants who possessed mediums for the *Ese*, and carvers of the figurines, mostly identified the *Ese* as a female anthropomorphic figurine to suggest a relationship and dependability on it like a child with the mother (e.g. Togbui Nanashie, KII #63, 21/03/2021, Keta; Ras Makao, KII #15, 04/06/2020, Anloga). There are also others who have male anthropomorphic forms equally identified as the *Ese* (e.g. Akyimfoli, KII #74, 31/03/2021, Dzodze; Atikela Abotsivia, KII #70, 29/03/2021, Woe). That notwithstanding, as indicated by informants, the *Ese* is traditionally associated with the colour white to signify fortitude, purity, success and the desirability to court fortune (e.g. Togbui Asentsi, KII #76, 02/04/2021, Anloga; Mama Afortune, KII #71, 27/03/2021,

Anloga; Mama Senaza, KII #69, 25/03/2021, Blekuso). Ultimately, effigies of the *Ese*, either in clay or carvings are meant to intermediate and ensure harmony between the physical and the conceived spiritual relations of the individual.

5.3. The Successful Life: Upholding Cosmic Laws vis-à-vis Identification and Fulfilling of Personal Destiny.

In *Anlo* cosmologies, successful life entails negotiating a balance among cosmic laws, free-will and destiny. Cosmic laws are acknowledged as unchangeable universal principles; for instance, the day follows the night, and the movement of the sun is observed from the east to the west, children are given birth by women, and plants produce fruits of their kind in their due seasons etc. (Togbui Agbeli III, KII #72, 28/03/2021, Blekuso; Togbui Kumassah, KII #61, 19/03/2021, Keta;). These eternal principles are called *Se*¹⁵⁵. Similarly, individuals are bound by sets of rules including obligations, privileges and responsibilities also referred to as *se* (i.e. *Dzɔgbese*) to govern their lives¹⁵⁶ (e.g. Eggen, 2002).

As already indicated, in the scheme of things on the earth, with the *Dzɔgbese* every individual is assigned a unique destiny that is unalterable until its complete fulfilment; even if it requires multiple episodes of existences through reincarnations. Despite that preordained destiny, the need for different possible episodes of individual's life on the earth through reincarnations, stems from the fact that the individual's disposition and the free-will to act and perform may necessitate some detours in fulfilling an assigned destiny.

¹⁵⁵ The capitalization of the *Se*, eternal principle or cosmic laws, distinguishes it from the lower case *se* which concerns the assigned rules as the personal destiny of a person in *Anlo* worldviews.

¹⁵⁶ It is worthy of note that in many instances, respondents used the *se*, *Dzɔgbese* and *the Ese* interchangeably and seem to suggest that they represented that same thing but with different emphasis on their functions in varied contexts.

Again, in *Anlo* worldview a person may be vicariously liable to the mistakes and misdeeds of other relations particularly evident in the *Fiasidi* customary practice (e.g. Akpabli-Honu, 2014; Jenkins, 2005). Additionally, according to informants, there are people who have knowledge into spiritual laws and mystics who could be malicious; they manipulate others by the key to esoteric knowledge by invoking some words or some formulas of incantations (Togbui Asentsi, KII #76, 02/04/2021, Anloga; Togbui Kumassah, KII #61, 19/03/2021, Keta). In this vein, the mysterious and the unexpected in the life of a person or the family are causes for concern as they may potentially hinder the fulfilment of one's preordained destiny. Thus, although a propitious destiny is expected to unfold in real life of the individual, it may only represent a good intension. In other words, the fulfilment of preordained destiny is not automatic since a person may be influenced, induced or suffer vicariously from prevailing circumstances (i.e. social and spiritual) to fare well or be at variance with his or her destiny.

Thus, the state of normal life in the social environment and potential obstructions may engender a diversion or departure from the *se*. However, within the perimeters of comic laws and the *se*, a departure may be positive or negative to fulfilling personal destiny. According to informants, this explains the necessity for the individual to do "spiritual" self-evaluation through divinatory inquiry from time to time to ascertain whether or not one is on the good path with destiny. The inquiry into the realms of the spirit usually begins with the parents when a child is born. Parents are expected "to go" to the spiritual realm to find out who really that child is, and what is permissible or not for him or her as a person in his or her life-time. This suggests that a person must be spiritual enough to know and benefit from the spirit realm. This also explains why *Aklama*, as relating to the spirit about a person, must be consulted to know the state of his or her spiritual-self (the soul) in order to align it with the life in the physical world. Hence, for adherents

of the indigenous religion and traditions, to align one's life and occupation with propitious destiny, regular "check-up" on the person's spiritual status and supplications for favourable experiences are part of the routine rites and rituals. Again, in keeping safe from malevolent manipulations, moral debts (i.e. as vicarious liability) and maintaining reasonable moral purity and spiritual verve of a person, the assistance of spiritualists including *Atikelawo* (i.e. herbalists), *Bokowo* (i.e. herbalist cum *Afa* diviners), *Trɔnuawo* and *Amegashiewo* (i.e. priests and priestess) are sought.

5.3.1. Divinations and Oracular Consultations.

As already indicated, in the local worldview, there is a spiritual dimension to the human being. Sena for instance, points out that "another significant aspect of the African cosmology is the relationship between personhood and the spiritual world. [And that] . . . , a person is not simply a mass of flesh, muscles and bones; he/she also possesses spiritual elements often invoked in times of ill health or death (Sena, 2013, p. 291). Thus, one must be spiritual enough to know the spirit realm, observes its requirements and to benefit from the treasures of the spirit (Adjei, 2019; Dogbe, 1980; Kumassah, KII #59, 19/03/2021, Keta; Awoonor-Williams, 1965). According to Togbui Kumassah, "this is why the spirit about the person must be consulted to know the state of his spiritual-self [or the soul] in order to align it with the life in the physical". He therefore maintains that it is the "spirit of the person that can also be invoked or consulted ritually" (Kumassah,). In post-mortuary rituals, in particular, *nukaka* which is an oracular consultation with spirits, is usually done "either to facilitate the transition of the spirit of the dead into the realms of the departed and/or invoke the spirit to avenge his/her death if foul play was suspected as the cause of death" (Sena, 2013, p. 291; see also Nukunya, 1990, pp. 34-35).

In *Anlo* worldviews, communities thrive when individuals find their place in life and fulfil destiny. Thus, the need to identify one's *du* (i.e. life's purpose) and to periodically evaluate how

one's spirit is faring is of paramount interest (e.g. Van Eck and Sakitey, 2019). Hence, parents are expected to identify the preordained vocation or destiny of each of their children. For example, while I was at a shrine at Avate in Agbozume, a mother had brought a child for oracular consultation with the Boko. I was informed that through such divinatory consultations, parents access specific information in the *kpoli* (paths of destiny) of the individual child from *Bome*. Again, as Nukunya points out, one of the responsibilities of the head of the patrilineage among the *Anlo* is to assist individual members who have come of age to identify the appropriate shrine or deities they may worship (Nukunya, 1990, p. 23). This is also done by means of engaging with the ancestors and the supernatural through divinations and supplications for their inputs and interventions in the life of the individual in question.

Furthermore, answers to puzzling and unexpected conditions such as recurrent misfortunes, certain illnesses and mental distresses in the lives of people are partly sought in divinations (e.g. Akpabli-Honu, 2014, pp. 35, 84-86; Fiawoo, 1959, p. 47). Thus, through divinations mysteries, hidden secrets, and matters of grave importance happening at the blind spot of the individual are uncovered and attended to. For instance, according to some of my informants, their asserted identities as 'reincarnated ancestors' or as 'chosen ones' favoured to become priests/priestesses, succeeding 'master carvers' and so forth were established and/or confirmed by means of divination and oracular consultations with the spirits (Dadaga Nutsugah, KII #80, 05/04/2021, Keta; Atikela Abotsivia, KII #70, 29/03/2021, Woe; Adela Ray, KII #62, 19/03/2021, Attito). At a royal household in Dzelukope at Keta, for example, the 84 year-old Dadaga Nutsugah recounted how as a child she was identified as an "*amedzɔdzɔ* and the *etɛ* of the father", hence a "reincarnated aunty" of her father (Dadaga Nutsugah, KII #80, 05/04/2021, Keta). She was therefore acknowledged as such and was presented a beaded necklace of the said ancestress as part of the ritual to "welcome

her back” into the family (Dadaga Nutsugah, KII #80, 05/04/2021, Keta). Similarly, in the cases of Adela Ray who identified himself as initiated hunter and master carver, and Atikela Abotsivia, an initiated herbalist, who succeeded their fathers and equally inherited their respective crafts, were so established by oracular consultations with the spirits of their departed fathers (Atikela Abotsivia, KII #70, 29/03/2021, Woe; Adela Ray, KII #62, 19/03/2021, Attito). While Ray, at age fourteen inherited his father’s carving toolkits and *Adekpɔ* to become its caretaker as *Adela* and master carver, Abotsivia at age seven, in keeping with the “will of the ghost of the father” inherited his otherwise to-be-decommissioned *Aklama kpakpe*, a male form of the *Ese* (see Figure 5.1), and was subsequently initiated to become *Atikela* like his father was. In both cases, *Adela* Ray and *Atikela* Abotsivia were the youngest of their siblings but were chosen to succeed their parents in their “sacred crafts”. Perhaps it was within their designated destinies to begin their vocations from where their fathers had left off.

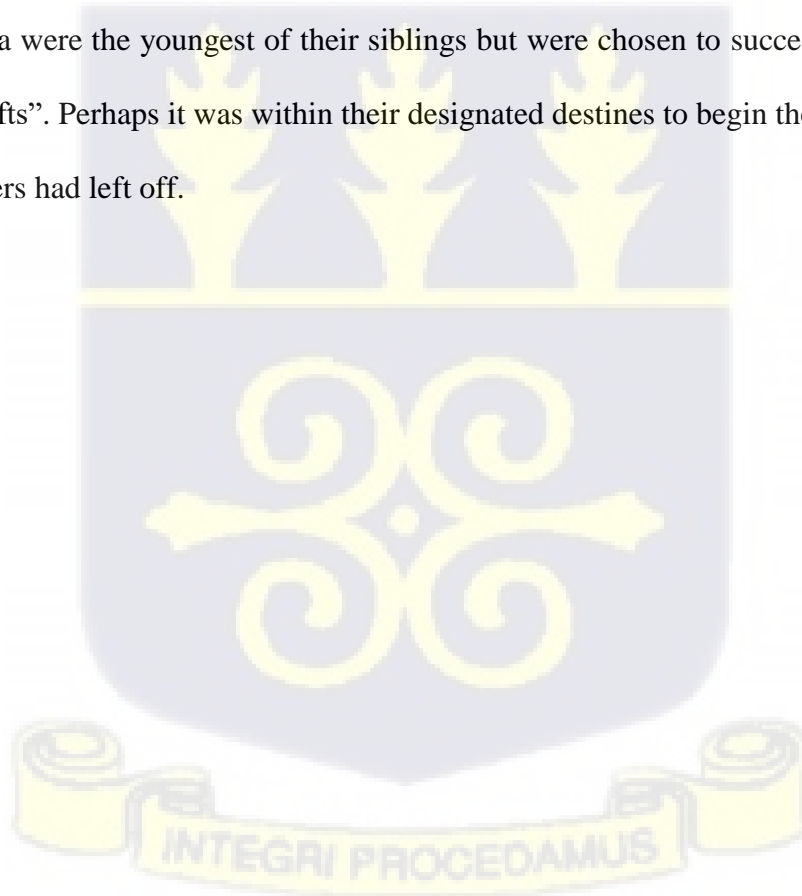




Figure 5.1. The *Ese*, a male form, Woe. Photographed by the researcher.

However, Klugah (2020) suggests that such successions are not unusual. In connection with possible inheritance and succession of younger persons rather than the eldest as heir apparent to traditional offices of authority, she alludes to a local parlance that “a man does not install his eldest son as chief; he installs the younger one who is to receive counsel from the older ones” (Klugah, 2020, p. 22). Again, as Wiredu points out, such considerations may be a way of doing the dead the honour of carrying through their will (Wiredu, 1992, p. 138). It is worthy of note, however, that it was only in a few cases that individuals observed to possess *Aklama kpakpe* indicated their acquisition in connection to similar fashions of “smooth” transition in continuity and inheritance from antecedent “owners” ¹⁵⁷(e.g. Togbui Asentsi, KII #76, 02/04/2021, Anloga; Mama Tettevi, KII #64, 21/03/2021, Keta; Togbui Nanashie, KII #63, 21/03/2021, Keta). While almost all of such persons already served as shrine attendants or devotees of those deities, for most informants their need for the figurines were in the contexts of recurrent interruptions in their livelihoods and, in some case life-threatening crises attributed to spiritual agency (e.g. Mama Taroshie, KII #20, 09/06/2020, Blekuso; Mama Afortude, KII #16, 05/06/2020 & KII #69, 27/03/2021, Anloga; Ras Makao, KII # 15, 04/06/2020, Anloga). Thus, *Aklama* figurines are mostly religico-spiritual mediums that provide the means to remediate livelihood crisis, misfortunes and serious scenarios of ill-health associated with spiritual causation.

¹⁵⁷ Even with that, except Fo Abotsivia, who inherited his late father’s *Ese* figurine and by adoption considers it as his personal one, each of the others successors needed to make their personal *Ese* figurine as an addition to the inherited shrine ensemble.

5.4. *Aklama* in Anlo Perspective.

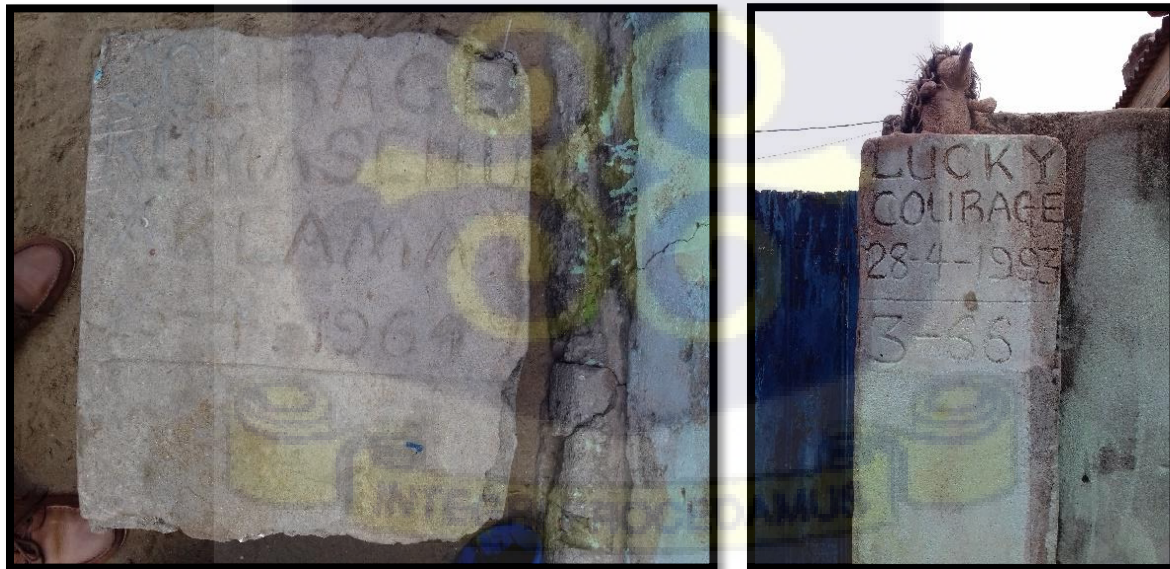
In my interactions and interviews with informants, I observed that the term *Aklama* is not very common in *Anlo* expressions¹⁵⁸. Apart from the religious sculptures that are generally referred to as *Aklama kpakpe*, other terms used by informants as synonymous with *Aklama* include *Ese//Se*, *Kpoli*, and *Dzɔgbese*. However, as already indicated, according to Togbui Kumassah, while *Dzɔgbese* connotes a preordained destiny of the individual, *Aklama* relates to the subjective experiences with one's sense of personal destiny and purpose in life. He therefore asserts that “[*Aklama* [. . .] could be *Dzɔgbenyuie* (i.e. fortune) which indicates a good [*Aklama*], or *Dzɔgbevue* (i.e. misfortune), which implies a bad [*Aklama*)]” (Togbui Kumassah, KII #61, 19/03/2021, Keta). In this vein while *Ese/Dzɔgbese* particularly concerns a person's spiritual essence or destiny, *Aklama* is conceptualized as fate; an event and its aftermaths in the life of the person in question (cf. Mama Afortude, KII #71, 27/03/2021, Anloga; Togbui Nanashie, KII # 63, 21/03/2021, Keta; Togbui Kumassah, KII #61, 19/03/2021, Keta; Togbui Asentsi, KII #17, 06/06/2020).

5.4.1. *Aklama* as fortune and its performative memories

Notably, *Aklama* is often associated with fortune, and subsequent engagements with supernatural agencies considered to be related with it (e.g. Togbui Nanashie, KII #61, 21/03/2021, Keta; Togbui Asentsi, KII #17, 06/06/2020, Anloga). At Blekuso, for instance, I observed a memorialization of such incidents of fate acknowledged as *Aklama*. Our attention was drawn to a house on which were the inscriptions “AKLAMA” and “ALL SHALL PASS” by an attached corn-

¹⁵⁸ Some informants expressed the view that the term *Aklama* is not particularly native to the *Anlo* dialect, but it is synonymous with *Dzɔgbese*, the spiritual status of a person. Some are also of the opinion that the term was introduced through the translation of the Bible into Ewe in which the soul (*gbɔgbɔ*, *ɲolime*, or the *se*) was referred to as *Aklama*. However, Togbui Kumassah indicates that “[*Aklama*” represents an archaic *Anlo* concept which implies episodes of favourable (i.e. accelerated) or negative (i.e. hindered) diversions from a person's preordained destiny. According to him, the term is better presented as *Klama*; a divergence from a point of reference to a stage considered abnormal or extra-ordinary (Togbui Kumassah, KII #61, 19/03/2021, Keta).

mill. We were told by the residents that one Courage Kumasenu, the owner of the house, had a fortune in lottery in the 1960s to build the corn-mill. In acknowledgment of his fortune, he had laid a cement memorial dated 28-4-1964 on which he had added “AKLAMA” to his name (see Figure 5.2a). Similarly, almost three decades later, his son who was called Lucky Kumasenu also won a good amount of money in lottery. Like his father’s monument, the two lotto numbers “3 - 66” and the date 28-4-1993 (perhaps the day of the fortune) have been “immortalized” by a cement pillar which according to the informants was part of the house extension undertaken with some of the cash from the lottery. Incidentally, on that pillar the first names of the father and the son are put together with the winning numbers (see Figure 5.2b)¹⁵⁹. Thus, in the *Anlo* context, *Aklama* fairly suggests episodic encounters, and often the performative memory of such extraordinary personal experiences through rituals and ceremonial performances. Hence, *Aklama* largely relates to means by which a person acknowledges or recognizes supernatural entities considered to have enormous influence on his or her life.



Figures 5.2a and 5.2b. Commemorative “*Aklama*” monuments, Blekuso. Photographed by the researcher.

¹⁵⁹ At the time of our visit, both Courage Kumasenu and the son, Lucky Kumasenu had passed on. Thus, except for the information given by the residents contacted, further insights from the original owners could not be accessed.

Again, illustrating *Aklama* as fate and one's commitment to requisite rites to ensure fortune and successes in life, two characters Abotsi and Tailor portrayed by Awoonor-Williams in the short story "*the Funeral*" is a case in point (Awoonor-Williams, 1965). As a recollection of a childhood experience in an *Anlo* township, the story portrays the bitter consequences of abandoning one's call to destiny, or neglecting to observe rites associated with it. According to the story, Abotsi is a veteran of the WW II, and Tailor a sympathetic friend, once a very successful business man. However, for wanton appetite Abotsi squanders his money and neglects to observe a very important purification rite after his return from the warfront. For that neglect, he is "spiritually" afflicted and becomes a social outcast. Tailor on the other hand, an otherwise thriving businessman had shipwrecked his fortunes in an illicit trade of locally brewed alcohol which was then contraband. However, after serving his jail terms he goes back to his craft in dress-making and gets by modestly. Awoonor-Williams thus relates the fates of the two friends in the story as below:

People said when he [Abotsi] returned from Burma he did not perform the purification ceremony which all the local [*Anlo*] boys performed when they returned. That was why the ghosts [. . .] had followed him to torment him and finally make him mad. It is true that Abotsi did not perform the ceremony because he did not have any money. Anything he saved was used on his food" (Awoonor-Williams, 1965, p. 24).

This implies that Abotsi's failure to observe the purification ritual meant that he did not absolve himself of the "spiritual pollution" associated with deaths in warfare and therefore was liable to suffer the consequences. Thus, an otherwise noble man, he had become a loathed "mad" man and a social outcast who gets only the attention of children and his sympathetic friend, Tailor. It was Tailor who will eventually shoulder the responsibility for Abotsi's burial and "funeral" rites which the story recounts. However, about Tailor, Awoonor-Williams notes that:

Tailor is a middle age man, [. . .], he had been rich once. He had worked with the famous D.C. John Miller to build the road from Keta to the Volta at Sogakope. You could see he had been a strong man once. After that he made his money by smuggling *akpeteshi*, that local gin which was declared illicit by the government. But one day a lorry which was carrying a large quantity of his gin to Accra was arrested at the river-side. The drink was poured into the river . . . After two years in prison, he came back, lonely and changed. [. . .]. Tailor fell back on the trade he learnt as a young man, hired a sewing machine, and set up a store . . . [And at time when his craft and style was considered old fashioned] he could only sew school children's uniforms and patch torn cloths [. . .]. So, his life went on its dreary course, joyless yet satisfactory, because he could make enough money to buy his food and pay the rent" (Awoonor-Williams, 1965, p. 25).

Both cases indicate that in *Anlo* cosmology, one does not change the course of destiny, either by personal actions or by circumstances, without dire consequences. However, unlike the 'unsalvageable' fate of Abotsi after a long while of neglect, Tailor's case implies that after a bout of misfortune, one can make amends by reconciling with his 'preordained' destiny to continue to do duty.

5.4.2. A Family's Tradition of Carving as *Aklama*.

According to Togbui Asentsi who doubles as *zikpuitɔ* (i.e. the stool father of the family) and *atikpala* (a carver), one could hardly count more than five carving centres or homes that carve *Aklama* figurines in the *Anlo* area¹⁶⁰. Like Adela Ray (Attito), and the Akpe brothers (Klikor) whose families have traditions of carving, Togbui Asentsi attributes his family's carving acumen to some deities. According to him, there are two *trɔwo* (i.e. deities) identified as *Egu* and *Vanyievi* that are associated with his family's craft of carving. He recounted that those spirits were hosted by their great-grandfather who once "encountered" them in the form of *nukpekpe* [i.e. mysterious objects of power] at his farm. Ever since then, in three generations "each male of the family is a

¹⁶⁰ In fact apart from Klikor and Dzodze where we located a workshop each by the roadside, for the other carvers like Togbe Asentsi and Ray they undertake their carvings within their household settings away from public sight.

potential carver” (Togbui Asentsi, KII #17, 06/06/2020, Anloga). Hence, his grandfather, his father, uncles and siblings had all been carvers. Thus, he identifies the inherited tradition of carving as *Aklama*. He also asserts that amongst them there is a master carver chosen by the spirits and confirmed by his possession of a particular short knife, the “*ehe*”, sacredized by his predecessors. He points out that the knife is not actually handed over to the person but “comes to be in the possession of the individual by [the agency] of the spirits” (Togbui Asentsi, KII #17, 06/06/2020, Anloga).

Chosen amongst uncles, cousins and siblings, the master carver may need to establish a personal altar for the *Ese* “constituted by a seated female figurine, *Dada Se*, with two *Avele* figurines as her messengers” when it is so demanded¹⁶¹ (Togbui Asentsi, KII #17, 06/06/2020, Anloga). In his case, barely at age seventeen he was picked by the spirits when his uncle who was then the master carver passed on. He therefore considers himself as a “possessed carver” who is given the directives and inspirations by the spirits to undertake each of his carvings meant for religious purposes (Togbui Asentsi, KII # 17, 06/06/2020, Anloga). He observes a number of ritual protocols and rules as a master carver and the stool’s father of the family. For example, he undertakes periodic “feeding” of his working-tools where after an animal sacrifice, the tools are set before the *Egu* and *Vanyievi* deities for a couple of days. He points out that the “feeding of the tools even becomes urgent when as a carver you experience unusual injuries and cuts at the workshop” (Togbui Asentsi, KII #17, 06/06/2020, Anloga).

¹⁶¹ Togbe Asentsi did not disclose whether or not he has the *Ese*. He however indicated that the *Ese*, being the spiritual companion may request to be ‘seated’ in which case the individual has to carve it and establish an altar for it.

Again, for the acquisition of wood for each work commissioned, there are appropriate procedures. According to him, the required wood for *Aklama kpakpe*, which is requested by the *Ese* or afflicting spirits, is procured from a live tree at night. He however points out that moonlit nights are not appropriate for the acquisition of wood for carving which he indicates may render the intended carving ineffective. Also, to ensure the efficacy and potency of each carving, not only does he abide by those protocols and other rituals for the acquisition of the wood but he also follows specific instructions about the form, and activation of the carvings as mediums for religious purposes. In his experience, for each client, it is the express ‘request’ of the *Ese* of the person and/or the ‘demands’ of other spiritual entities associated with the individual that will inform the nature as well as the number of *Aklama kpakpe* to be done. To ensure that the appropriate medium is established for the requisite spirits, in addition to instructions from the Amegashie consulted by a client prior to the commissioning of the carving(s), he also undertakes some rituals to get the “specific spirit or deity to reveal the form to be carved either in clear visions or dreams” to him (Togbui Asentsi, KII #17, 06/06/2020, Anloga). For this reason, he usually begins his carving late at night after such confirmations are realized.

5.5. *Aklama Kpakpe*: Figurations and Properties of *Aklama*.

The *Anlo* belief about destiny highlights the *Ese* as spiritual footprint for each individual which serves to ensure that the person executed his/her assigned task on earth. It also projects possible episodes of reincarnation as essentially a continuation of one’s assigned purpose at different times of existences on earth. However, most informants asserted that there is always a unique *Ese*; that is to say that there is a new and particular *Ese* that accompanies the individual in each instance of existence or reincarnation (e.g. Togbui Asentsi, KII #76, 02/04/2021, Anloga; Mama Afortude, KII #71, 27/03/2021, Anloga; Mama Senaza, KII #69, 25/03/2021, Blekuso). In their explanations,

the singularity of the *Ese* is like the placenta associated with each conception of babies even by the same woman for the different times of births (e.g. Togbui Nanashie, KII #63, 21/03/2021, Keta).

Thus, *Aklama* is framed as a set of relations with *the Ese* conceptualized as a person's 'true spiritual mother' or the 'spiritual-self', and with *Dzɔgbese* (i.e. destiny) and other spirit agents associated with them as 'messengers'. Messenger spirits identified by informants include , for instance *Ade, Avle, Nunuwo, Tatoroe, Trɔwo* some of which find expressions or representations as assemblages at personal altars and household shrines I observed during my fieldwork (e.g. Mama Taroshie KII #20, 09/06/2020, Blekuso; Ras Makao, KII #15, 06/06/2020, Anloga). *Aklama kpakpe* therefore embodies various spirits or supernatural entities ritually engaged by their owners.

5.5.1. *Aklama* as Acknowledgments of Spiritual Relations.

According to informants, *Aklama* concerns individuals' responsibility to be aware of his/her spiritual make-up and to fulfil destiny. They point out that in *Anlo* worldview, apart from the *Ese*, each individual is believed to be associated with a guardian-spirit identified as *Tatoroe* who is to ensure accountability and the ultimate fulfilment of a person's call to duty. *Tatoroe* is described as a child of the *Ese* who together with other set of 'servant/messenger' spirits variously identified as *Avle, Nulɔlɔwo, Trɔwo or Voduwɔ* undertake specific tasks directed by the *Ese* (c.f. Togbui Asentsi, KII #76, 02/04/2021, Anloga; Akyimfoli, KII #74, 31/03/2021, Dzodze; Akpe, KII #73, 30/03/2021, Klikor).

According to Togbui Asentsi, for example, helper-spirits constitute *Trɔ* and/or *Vodu* deities noted for particular tasks (Togbui Asentsi, KII #76, 02/04/2021, Anloga). He however points out that while the elements used to host those supernatural entities are generally referred to as *Aklama* (i.e. *Aklama kpakpe*), those that could be acquired voluntarily as opposed to those

necessitated by spiritual-possession (as it is the case for the *Ese* and *Trɔ*), are properly called *Vodu*. Notably, however various terms including *Aklama kpakpe*, *Nudzɔdzɔ* and *Nukpakpe* were used by informants to refer to various kinds of personal religious sculptures or mediums that serve to provide abode for the *Ese* and the other function-specific ‘*Trɔ*’ and ‘*Vodu*’ associates (c.f. Togbui Asentsi, KII #76, 02/04/2021, Anloga; Togbui Nanashie, KII # 63, 21/03/2021, Keta; Adela Ray, KII #62, 19/03/2021, Attito). But for the reason of consistency, *Aklama kpakpe* is adopted for this narrative to generally refer to all the different kinds of personal religious sculptures and figurines observed during the fieldwork.

5.5.2. *Aklama Kpakpe* as *Trɔ/Vodu*: Temporalities, Spiritual Possessions and Mediumships.

From accounts of informants, usually priests, priestesses and other initiated spiritualists are recruited through spiritual possessions. According to them, a common indication of the ‘calling’ of individuals to do duty for a deity is through spiritual possession (Mama Afortude, KII #71, 27/03/2021, Anloga; Mama Senaza, KII #69, 25/03/2021, Blekuso; Togbui Nanashie, KII #63, 21/03/2021, Keta). In spiritual possession, an individual personifies and manifests a spirit or deity. They also indicated that more than one spirit may spontaneously or at different times recruit and establish relationships with an individual (e.g. Togbui Asentsi, KII #76, 02/04/2021, Anloga; Mama Afortude, KII #71, 27/03/2021, Anloga; Mama Taroshie KII #20, 09/06/2020, Blekuso). Aside the possessed individuals who serve as spirit mediums and thus temporarily manifest those spirits, altars are also established to host the spirits. Thus, at spaces or shrines where the spirits are domiciled, they can be invoked by means of ritual performances. The spirits can also be engaged with as and when appropriate, or when they are needed for interactions.

However, it was noted that a person who is not recruited by a deity may establish relations with *Vodu* spirits by association with a shrine or membership of a cult in which the individual

participates in rites and ceremonies. Such a person may establish abodes for *Vodu* spirits to serve as mediums by which they are supplicated (e.g. Togbui Gaddah, KII #78, 03/04/2021, Woe; Ras Makao, KII #15, 04/06/2020, Anloga). Subsequently, a supplicant may be recruited through spiritual possession at which point the person undergoes initiation rites and some training at designated shrines to become *Amegashie/Trɔnu* (i.e. priest/priestess) or *Vodusi* (i.e. spiritualist).

In the *Anlo* Zone, *Vodu* spirits of diverse origins including terrestrial, riverine and marine territorialities noted for various functions are hosted by devotee priests and priestesses. At various shrines visited, *Densu*, *Mami* and *Vodu-Da* represent popular riverine and marine deities (e.g. Togbui Gaddah, KII #78, 03/04/2021, Woe; Mama Afortude, KII #71, 27/03/2021, Anloga; Mama Senaza, KII #69, 25/03/2021, Blekuso). Other *Vodu* spirits included the *Kɔku* (an anti-machete spirit), *Egu* (a spirit for artisanal crafts) and a host of others, especially for traditional curative medicine collectively referred to as *Gorovodu* (e.g. Atikela Abotsivia, KII #70, 29/03/2021, Woe). It was also noted that *Vodu* spirits work with their respective “messenger-spirits” mostly represented by anthropomorphic and/or animal figures such as the alligator, monitor lizard, tortoise and birds. The *Mami*, a marine deity, for instance had a wide representation including mermaid and white-washed anthropomorphic figures in both male and female forms (cf. Amegashie Abiashie, KII #65, 23/03/2021, Keta; Mama Tettevi, KII #64, 21/03/2021, Keta). The *Mami* is also associated with the messenger-*Vodu* particularly identified by informants as *Ablɔ* (e.g. Mama Afortude, KII #71, 27/03/2021, Anloga; Mama Senaza, KII #69, 25/03/2021, Blekuso; Mama Tettevi, KII #64, 21/03/2021, Keta).

The *Mami* with the *Ablɔ* are associated with wealth-creation for their devotees or supplicants. Incidentally, while *Ablɔ* is also considered to be related with wealth in the *Tongu* area as already pointed out in chapter four, among the *Anlo* wealth attributed to *Ablɔ* is rather associated

with marine deities; it is not in connection with spirits of erstwhile family slaves identified with the *Hози* stool as it is the case among the *Tongu*. Again, it is worthy of note that figurines identified as *Ablɔ* were very different in form than the popular horse-riding figurations observed in the *Tongu* Zone (e.g. Amegashie Abiashie, KII #65, 23/03/2021, Keta; Mama Tettevi, KII #64, 21/03/2021, Keta, see also Figures 5.3 and 5.4). For instance, at a shrine where *Ablɔ* was mentioned as one of the marine-related spirits hosted, I asked to see it. A three-headed anthropomorphic figurine was brought out to be shown to me as the *Ablɔ* (Amegashie Abiashie, KII #65, 23/03/2021, Keta). I was wondering if that was not rather the *Densu* which has similar features observed elsewhere. Thus, I also requested to see the *Densu* figurine. When the respondent went inside once more to bring the *Densu*, it was another three-headed figurine which was slightly different in what seemed to be “snake head-gear” of the *Ablɔ* (see Figure 5.5).

Moreover, according to Togbe Asentsi, *Ablɔ* is essentially an elevation of a person’s status in the spiritual realm. Thus, he points out that the *Ablɔ* is sometimes called *Ablɔ-se* to indicate the promotion of the *Ese* of the individual. Hence, the figurines of *Ablɔ* are usually hosted or put together with the *Ese* of their owners (Togbui Asentsi, KII #76, 02/04/2021, Anloga). On two different altars at a shrine (shown in Figures 5.3 and 5.4), the *Ablɔwo* (pl.) were identified by the priestess as the head of the separate units. In both cases the *Ablɔ* was closely positioned either on or with a set of stools identified as the *Hози*. (Mama Tettevi, KII #64, 21/03/2021, Keta). She



however indicated that the *Ablwo* were related to the marine/riverine deities that were also hosted on the altar than the *Hози* which is elsewhere associated with the institution of slavery.



Figure 5.3. An altar for (L-R) *Ablwo* on *Hози* stools, *Esei* and *Mami* spirits, Keta. Photographed by the researcher.





Figure 5.4. An altar for (L-R) *Ade*, *Hosi*, *Ablɔ*, and a set of figurines in cement for the *Mami* spirit, Keta. Photographed by the researcher.



Figure 5.5. A display of marine related *Aklama kpakpe*; (L-R) *Mami*, *Ablɔ* and *Densu*. Keta. Photographed by the researcher.

Regarding the general figurations and hosting of spirits, Adela Ray, the master carver, maintains that “a person comes to have need for *Aklama kpakpe* [as spirit mediums] when he/she is being disturbed by a spirit or a number of spirits often considered to be a sign of spiritual possession” (Adela Ray, KII #62, 19/03/2021, Attito). The cause of such disturbances is usually sought through divinatory consultations with spiritualists. In his experience, depending on individual’s situation, there may be just one figurine (usually the *Ese*) or as many as nine *Aklama kpakpe* required at a go to deal with a particular case (Adela Ray, KII #62, 19/03/2021, Attito). This was confirmed by the Amegashie Afortude who indicated that for her initiation into the priesthood she needed to at once domicile her *Ese*, a *Dzogbe*¹⁶², and the spirit of an identified wealthy ancestress who was eloped from *Ewedome* to *Anlo* during war time in the 1870s (Mama Afortude, KII #16, 05/06/2020, Anloga).

Furthermore, according to informants, with the directive or the permission of the *Ese* and/or the *Trɔ* deities often ascertained through dreams or divinations, *Vodu* spirits may also be hosted by an individual (e.g. Mama Afortude, KII #71, 27/03/2021, Anloga; Mama Tettevi, KII #64, 21/03/2021, Keta; see also Drewal, 1996, p. 313-314; Fiawoo, 1959, p. 56). Consequently, a typical *Amegashie* may be possessed by different spirits and may thus accommodate different forms of *Aklama kpakpe* to serve as abodes of such spirits for different functions as and when they are acknowledged or hosted. Thus, typically a set of *Aklama kpakpe* at a shrine may include various mediums of clay or carvings by which *Trɔ* and *Vodu* spirits are hosted (e.g. Mama Tettevi, KII #64, 21/03/2021, Keta; Mama Afortude, KII #16, 05/06/2020, Anloga). It is however worthy of

¹⁶² The said *Dzogbe* according to Amegashie Afortude, was a member of her family who had died in an accident. She asserted that prior to her initiation, while on her way to the market to sell her wares she encountered a strange man who seemed to know everything about her and her challenges. In her account, that man was later identified as *Dzogbe*, and that he had been sent to inform her about her calling into the priesthood and her commitments to the ancestors and other spirits (Mama Afortude, KII #16, 05/06/2020, Anloga).

note that, while the *Ese* and *Trɔ* religious mediums are not voluntarily commissioned or done for devotion, the *Vodu* mediums could be obtained voluntarily to be established as a personal shrine to which the individual and others may be devoted as supplicants (e.g. Togbui Gaddah, KII #78, 03/04/2021, Woe; Amegashie Abiashie, KII #65, 23/03/2021, Keta). For example, at Blekuso, we observed the priestess Mama Taroshie, a member of the *Yeve* cult and a practicing *Amegashie*. She narrated how her experience of severe episodes of asthmatic attacks which for several years defied treatment, was eventually ‘diagnosed’ to be related to her *Ese* with some ancestral spirits from her maternal family that needed her attention and commitment. According to her, after going through the required rites and her initiation, the asthma was gone. Thus, for the last two decades she has had her *Ese* ‘laid’ and also hosts a number of ancestral deities and *Vodu* spirits including the *Mami*, a marine deity. At the time of our interview with her, she was in the process of hosting another spirit which she identified as *Hoeza* (Mama Taroshie, KII #20, 09/06/2020, Blekuso). She indicated that as part of the process of hosting that spirit, she wore a brown-and-white beaded necklace to be identified with it.

Similarly, at a shrine complex at Woe, I observed Togbui Gaddah Sunday who specifically identifies himself as *Vodu* priest. According to him, his initiation into the priesthood was not as a result of spiritual possession but a desire to assist a colleague at his workplace in Keta “who had been seized by the spirits to serve as the custodian of a host of clan deities” several kilometers away at Anyako (Togbui Gaddah, KII #78, 03/04/2021, Woe). Thus, in 2016, three years after the initiation of his friend, he was also initiated. He hosts different *Vodu* spirits identified by their respective totems and “ritual” colours of red, white and jet-blue. At separate spaces within the shrine, different spirits including *Densu*, a riverine deity, are domiciled. There are also inscriptions

and images in oil paintings on the shrine walls symbolizing the *Voduwo* (pl.) hosted at the shrine (e.g. see Figures 5.6).

According to Togbui Gaddah, the different colours and the images serve as reminders to him and other devotees about the requisite observances, rites and taboos associated with each of the spirits hosted at the shrine. He indicated that *Vodu* mediums require strict adherence to ritual protocols to be effective; violations may not only compromise their efficacy but also endanger the lives of the devotees (Togbui Gaddah, KII #78, 03/04/2021, Woe). Incidentally, in my quest to get him to describe the forms of media representations of the spirits mounted inside the rooms which I could not readily access, there was a noise of what seemed to be a knock on the door, from inside the shrine room by which the interview was being done. He told me that he was being cautioned by the spirits and thus we had to bring the session to a close

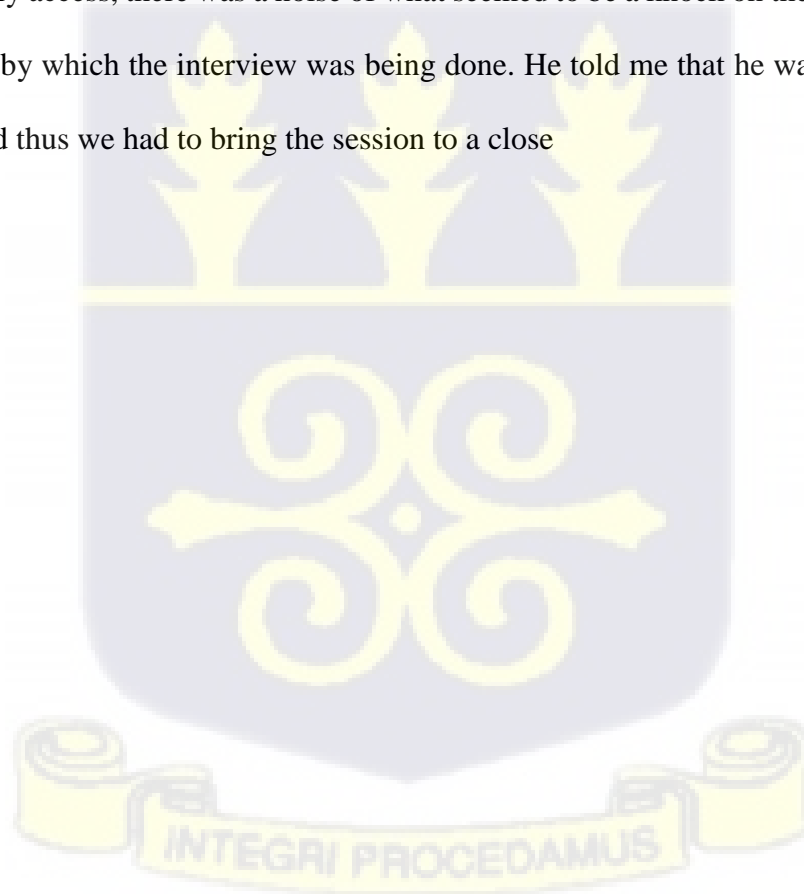




Figure 5.6. Paintings on a wall at shrine depicting *Voduwo* hosted, Woe. Photographed by the researcher.

In another interaction with the priestess Mama Tettevi, she indicated that there could be a corporate form of *Aklama* which is a sort of a cult for members of a clan (Mama Tettevi, KII # 64, 21/03/2021, Keta). At her shrine, for example, any member of the *Blu* Clan could become a devotee of the *Aklama* cult. According to her, each devotee has his/her *Kla*, represented by a kaolin-decorated calabash, kept at the shrine. On the upper walls of one of the shrine rooms I noticed there were several of the *Kla*, each wrapped in a net and hanged on the white-washed walls (Figure 5.8). Mama Tettevi also indicated that to personalize the *Kla*, for each of the calabash the name of the individual owner/devotee is written inside of it. Again, just like the *Ese* for other people, devotees engage with their *Kla* in periodic rituals and rites. She pointed out that, at least the individual is to engage with it during the annual rites of purification and feeding of the ‘soul’

(Mama Tettevi, KII #64, 21/03/2021, Keta). It is worthy of note that it was only at this shrine that this calabash form of *Aklama kpakpe* was observed.



Figure 5.7. *Kla* of devotees at a shrine, Keta. Photographed by the researcher.

However, similar descriptions of *Aklama* figuration were observed by Westermann in late 19th century in some Ewe communities (Jahle [Westermann], 1907, p. 407). Westermann remarked that apart from the carved effigies, the *Aklama kpakpe*, there was also “a calabash with two strokes cut in the form of a cross, one red with blood, one white with clay [. . .] called *klamtre*, *aklametre*” (Jahle [Westermann], 1907, p. 407). This suggests that such a cult and practice is not fairly recent or unique. Moreover, Togbui Asentsi points out that *Aklama* cult as exhibited by Mama Tettevi’s shrine is common in *Anlo* where individual devotees keep their *Ese* figurines with the Amegashie and periodically attend to them collectively or individually. According to him, in Anloga for

example, in mid-year (i.e. sometime in June) devotees usually go to their respective shrines to participate in rites to “welcome” the deities who shall be returning from “their annual meetings with the league of other spirits and deities” (Togbui Asentsi, KII #17, 06/06/2020, Anloga).

5.5.3. *Aklama* Kpakpe and the Memory of “Hunter/Warrior” Forebears.

In another dimension expressed by Xunovia Goku, a caretaker of a clan’s shrine at Anloga, *Aklama* mainly pertains to a ritual space in commemoration of notable fortune/misfortune. He therefore identifies *Aklama* as memorialization of both spectacular feats and adversities. He however maintains that *Aklama* is usually associated with a commemorative household shrine variously referred to as *Ade*. *Adekpɔ* or *Ade-Aklama*. The identified *Adekpɔ*¹⁶³ or *Ade-Aklama*, is a white-painted circular structure with its elements consisting of miniature effigies and ceramic receptacles for offerings (see Figure 5.8). According to him, each of the various *Anlo* clans hosts the *Ade-Aklama* and thus characterizes it as “deified ancestral spirits in acknowledgement of the founding ancestors, especially the hunter-warriors who died while contending with carnivorous animals and other adversaries in their efforts to establish their settlements” (Xunovia Goku, KII #18, 06/06/2020, Anloga).

Similarly, the Amegashie Senaza indicates that “*Ade* came about when in the ancient past during hunting expeditions some hunters mistook their fellow hunters for game”. Thus, according to her “*Ade* is to take care of the spirits of those accidental deaths” (Mama Senaza, KII #69, 25/03/202, Blekuso). She further points out that “the *Adekpɔ* [the space dedicated to *Ade*] also applies to the spirits of individuals generally referred to as *Dzogbe*, who represent any kind of ignoble deaths from ulcers of the limbs, drowning, gunshots, vehicular accidents, and assassination

¹⁶³ In the Anlo *dialect* the sacred structure is referred to as *Adekpɔ*. The same was identified among the *Tongu* as *Adekpɛ*.

[for example]” (Mama Senaza, KII #69, 25/03/202, Blekuso). Other informants also expressed similar views and their experiences with the *Ade* (e.g. Togbui Dzokasare, KII #67, 24/03/2021, Attito; Togbui Nanashie, KII #63, 21/03/2021, Keta; Adela Ray, KII #62, 19/03/2021, Attito). According to Togbui Dzokasare, however, there are some *Adekpɔ* that are not for hunters’ spirits necessarily but are particularly established for sea-faring and fisher folks (Dzokasare, KII #67, 24/03/2021, Attito).



Figure 5.8. *Adekpɔ*, Anloga. Photographed by the researcher.

Hence, in their perpetual memory and to also pacify the spirits of erstwhile hunters and others who had suffered casualties in some dangerous activities, periodic rites and rituals are done in the *Adekpɔ*. It is worthy of note that the concept and manifestations of *Ade* in *Anlo* are similar to those shared by our *Tongu* respondent presented in chapter three. Again, like the popular view observed among the *Tongu*, Xunovia Goku maintains that “each household in *Anlo* is considered to be built on the foundations of *Ade-Aklama* considered as the hunters’ spirit” (Xunovia Goku, KII #18, 06/06/2020, Anloga). This view was corroborated by the experiences of other informants who indicated that, every now and then, the *Ade* as an “ancestral spirit” manifests in spiritual possession to recruit caretakers of the *Adekpɔ*, or to seek some sort of attention from a family, lineage or clan in ceremonial performances (e.g. Mama Senaza, KII #69, 25/03/202, Blekuso; Togbui Nanashie, KII #63, 21/03/2021, Keta).

Furthermore, according to Togbui Nanashie, there may be more than one *Adekpɔ* or different *Ade* spirits hosted in a particular household. He asserts that different hunters’ spirits that may come from a person’s paternal and/or maternal lineages may need to be acknowledged. He therefore indicates that for most people in *Anlo*, *Aklama* is essentially the *Ade*; which is given the appellation “*Ade Aklama xoxo*” which is “*Ade Aklama* of ancient times”. He points out that he attends to four different *Ade* spirits he had inherited from both his maternal and paternal families. One of them is hosted in an *Adekpɔ* which contains some parts of animals, especially the horns and fragments of the skull, wood carvings, and receptacles for drink offerings—palm wine, water and sweet drinks (Figure 3.9a). Prominently featured is a carved figurine of a “hunter” dressed with hunting accoutrement including headlight and cartridge belt, with a set of other figures collectively identified as *Adevi*, children of *Ade* (see Figure 5.9b). According to Togbui Nanashie, the *Adevi* are responsible for the “carriage of game from the hunt to the house” just like in real

hunting scenario a hunter may engage the assistance of others to carry home the game (Togbui Nanashie, KII #63, 21/03/2021, Keta).

Similarly, Fo Akyimfoli, the carver, explained that the cluster of ‘spirit objects’ that make up the *Ade* must at least include a stool and two other figurines. He also points out that a complete set of the *Ade* which is commonly called *Nulɔɔ*, may be constitute by about twenty individual units (Akyimfoli, KII # 74, 31/03/2021, Dzodze). He therefore maintains that a typical set of *Nulɔɔ* includes the *Adela* (a figurine of a hunter with his hunting equipment), the *Adenyonu* (which represents the wife of *Ade*), and *Agbateme* (which represent porters of *Ade*). However, at another shrine (already shown in Figure 5.5), instead of the *Adekpɔ*, the *Ade* is rather hosted on an altar in a room. That *Ade* is represented by a white-clad anthropomorphic figurine among other spirit mediums/figurines associated with marine spirits (Mama Tettevi, KII #64, 21/03/2021, Keta). While this confirms the largely recognized relationships with *Ade* as foundational lineage or household deity among the *Anlo*, it further reveals the dimensions of variability in its figurations and configurations at different sacred spaces or shrines.

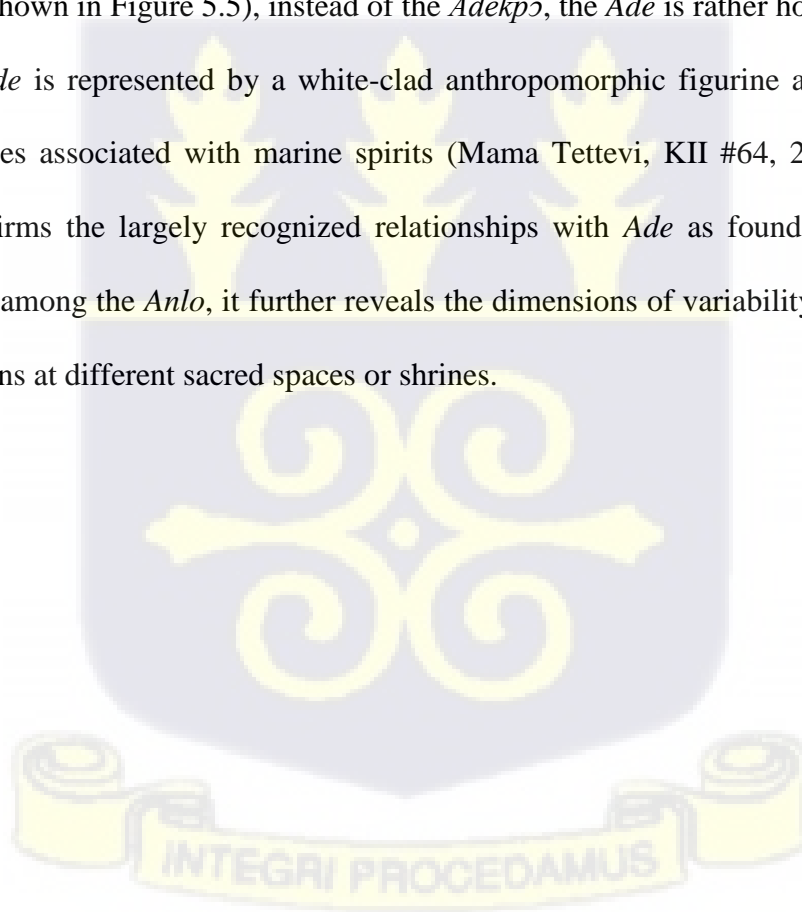




Figure 5.9a. *Adepɔ* at a shrine, Keta. Photographed by the researcher.



Figure 5.9b. *Adela* with *Adevi* figurines in the *Adepɔ*, Keta. Photographed by the researcher.

5.5.4. *Aklama*, the Afterlife and Reincarnation.

According to informants, at death the *luvo*, the soul of the individual, survives and transitions to *Avlime*—a purgatorial place. In relation to personal life and general well-being of the individual, *Tatoroe* is conceived as the spirit agent who records one's accomplishments (Togbui Kumassah, KII #61, 19/03/2021, Keta). At *Avlime*, *Tatoroe* is supposed to give a full account of the person's life on earth. Thereafter, the soul secures entry into *Tsiefe*, the world of spirits as an ancestor/ancestress when satisfactory account is given. To suggest that a process of accountability and transitioning of the dead to joining the ancestors is anticipated, the *Anlo* mortuary rite called *yɔfofo* is performed between 5th and 8th day after the burial of the individual to ensure that the *luvo* is eventually sent off into the ancestral world (Nukunya, 1990, p. 200). In some instances, however, while still living, some individuals, especially women, may suffer the strict policing of *Tatoroe* on their lives. A token may be needed to contain or placate *Tatoroe* especially by individuals whose experiences of marital failures are specifically attributed to it (e.g. Togbui Asentsi, KII #76, 02/04/2021, Anloga; Akyimfoli, KII #74, 31/03/2021, Dzodze). According to Togbui Seade Dzokasare, for instance, a complementary set of carvings for *Tatoroe* are usually kept under the beds of their owners (Dzokasare, KII #67, 24/03/2021, Attito). In his view, the rites and containment of *Tatoroe* in material mediums also constitute *Aklama*. Again, from two different carvers at Anloga and Dzodze, Togbui Asentsi and Fo Akyimfoli, it was confirmed that *Aklama kpakpe* for *Tatoroe* are a set of two anthropomorphic figurines leaned against a carved piece. Of what both carvers identified as the reposing piece of the *Tatoroe* set of figurines are Figures 5.10a and 5.10b. Again, according to Togbui Asentsi the two anthropomorphic figurines are “servants” spirits identified as *Avele* (see. Figure 5.10c). He however pointed out that the *Avele* is usually related to *Hebieso*, the thunder deity, which may also

indicate that the individual is associated with that cult (Togbui Asentsi, KII #76, 02/04/2021, Anloga).



Figure 5.10a. *Tatoroe, Aklama kpakpe, Anloga.*



Figure 5.10b. *Tatoroe, Aklama kpakpe, Dzodze.*



Figure 5.10c. A set of *Tatoroe, Aklama kpakpe* including the reposing piece and *Awele* figurines, Anloga. Photographed by the researcher.

Again, in the *Anlo* cosmology about the afterlife, in keeping with a person's destiny, an individual may be sent from *Avlime* or *Tsiefe* through *Bome* once again to be reincarnated (e.g. Fiawoo, 1959, pp. 61-62). According to Togbui Kumassah, *amedzɔdzɔ*, the *Anlo* concept of reincarnation, is a principle of purification by which a person atones for some wrongs done, or completes unfinished business on the earth (Togbui Kumassah, KII #61, 19/03/2021, Keta). Also, Westermann suggests that depending on a person's accomplishments in life and, most importantly the nature of his/her death, Ewe worldviews postulate different afterlife destinations for the spirit/soul as well as possibilities of reincarnation (Jahle [Westermann], 1907, pp. 408-409). Similarly, Nukunya indicates that among the *Anlo*, it is commonly believed that a newly born baby is potentially a reincarnated person (Nukunya, 1990, pp. 47-48). Thus, efforts are often made by the family to establish a child's antecedent ancestor (i.e. the one he/she supposedly represents as an incarnate) by means of divination and "to ensure that he/she exhibits the best of that ancestor" (Nukunya, 1990, p. 48).

The concept of *amedzɔdzɔ* therefore indicates that a person may undergo cycles of birth, death and reincarnations to accomplish a given purpose (e.g. Fiawoo, 1959, p. 62; Togbui Kumassah, KII #61, 19/03/2021, Keta). Other informants also point out that not only individuals who are yet to complete their assignments on earth reincarnate. According to them, there are cases where fulfilled ancestors are "sent back" to the earth by *Mawu* to help others to identify His ways to be better appreciated. Thus, priests and priestess are, for example, considered among veritable individuals who might have reincarnated to bring people who are diverting from their paths of destiny in line (e.g. Nukunya 1990, p. 47). Again, some informants maintain that there may be individuals who might have established a deity to protect their families. Thus, when such persons die and their shrines are unattended, they may be requested to come back to operate them, or just

to “manifest the deity to benefit the family” (Togbui Kumassah, KII #61, 19/03/2021, Keta). A case in point shared by Togbui Kumassah is as follows:

“In our house, there is a young lady who only gives water to people who are ailing and they get relief. She is called Mama, not because she is a priestess but she manifests the ancestral deities of the house [or the family]” (Togbui Kumassah, KII #61, 19/03/2021, Keta).

Furthermore, in connection with the concept of reincarnation, as Quarcoopome points, individual reckoned among those believed to be preordained to accomplish a special task related to the spiritual well-being of society are mostly identified in situations where:

“they have had some rare or rather unexplainable encounter with the supernatural and subsequently trained and initiated for the ability to communicate with the spirits and to decipher the state of affairs concerning a matter or persons in realms of the spirit that need to be translated/reflected in the physical plain of reality” (Quarcoopome, 2016, p. 49).

Thus, the indigenous religious practices of divination and oracular consultations which are largely in the domain of priests/priestess and *Afa* diviners are considered to be a special calling; they are not voluntarily chosen vocations. A number of the priests and priestess interviewed claimed to represent erstwhile ancestors who once served in those capacities. As Nukunya points out, “the Anlo attribute immortality to their ancestors through their belief in the doctrine of reincarnation” (Nukunya, 1990, p. 47). Hence, for some of the priests and priestesses, they consider their shrines, particularly the elements, as being reconstituted or rejuvenated old shrines to host the deities hitherto served by their antecedent ancestors (e.g. Mama Afortude, KII #71, 27/03/2021, Anloga; Togbui Nanashie, KII #61, 21/03/2021, Keta; Mama Taroshie, KII #20, 09/06/2020, Blekuso). Acknowledging ancestral deities and spirits, the mediums that serve as their abode collectively

constitute *Aklama kpakpe*. Thus, *Aklama kpakpe* of an individual devotee, priest/priestess or a particular household may proliferate as new deities or spirits are recognized and hosted¹⁶⁴.

5.5.5. *Aklama* and *Dzogbe*: Entrapped/Disgruntled Spirits of the Dead.

Parallel to the concept of *amedzɔdzɔ*, for individuals who suffer tragic deaths before their destined time on earth, traditionally referred to as *dzogbe ku* (i.e. “death at the desert”) or *vumeku* (“hot-blood deaths”)¹⁶⁵, the story is very different. According to informants, the spirits of people who die violently are neither admitted readily into *Avlime* or *Tsiefe*. Thus, entrapped on earth, the spirits of such individuals are called *Dzogbe*¹⁶⁶ and are considered to be disgruntled and vengeful. Similar conceptualization of death and the spirits of the dead are evident among other ethnic groups such as the Akan (e.g. Wiredu, 1992, p. 143; Christaller, 1933, p.429). For instance, in his ethno-historical account which formed the basis for compiling the Akan lexicon, Christaller identified such a spirit as “*ɔsaman twentwen*; departed spirit that is not admitted to the *asamon* [land of the spirits] [. . .] but must hover about behind the dwelling” (Christaller, 1933, p. 429). Among the *Anlo*, the *Dzogbewo* (pl.) are noted to have a penchant to avenge their violent deaths and thus the need to assuage that through prescribed rites. Rituals to pacify and calm such disgruntled spirits are also conceptualized by the informants as *Aklama*.

In some situations where through divinatory consultations *Dzogbewo* are identified to be the cause of havoc or misfortunes for a family or an individual, one of the ways to pacify then is the provision of a repose by the means of sculpted mediums. Thus, in rituals contexts, *Dzogbewo*

¹⁶⁴ A set of carved shrine ensembles so accumulated by an individual priest/priestess or a household is usually referred to as *Trɔnugbazdi* (e.g. Togbui Asentsi, KII #17, 06/06/2020, Anloga)

¹⁶⁵ Customarily, a person is supposed to die peacefully at home. Thus, sudden or accidental deaths are considered as “hot deaths”; a situation where the spirit did not take the time to weaken and eventually leave the body for the spirit world. Spirits of such individuals are considered to be retained on earth under conditions synonymous with harsh life on a desert for which reason they are referred to as *Dzogbe*—“those of the desert”.

¹⁶⁶ It is noteworthy that *Dzogbe* (i.e. associated with untimely death) is different from *Dzɔgbe* which relates to a person’s natal day (i.e. the day of birth) and destiny.

are manifested and/or contained by such representative mediums. In personal stories and experiences of some informants, a relative may get possessed by a *Dzogbe* to serve as a host (e.g. Mama Afortude, KII #69, 27/03/2021, and KII #16, 05/06/2020, Anloga; Mama Tettevi, KII #62, 21/03/2021, Keta; Mama Taroshie, KII #20, 09/06/2020, Blekuso). According to Togbui Nanashie for example, the relationship established between a host and *Dzogbe* is like a marriage relation (Togbui Nanashie, KII #63, 21/03/2021, Keta). He however indicated when a host had passed, the *Dzogbe* could be inherited by a successor. Again, a particular *Dzogbe* could once more possess another person in the family when the original host passes on (Togbui Nanashie, KII #63, 21/03/2021, Keta).

Many of the priestess interviewed identified themselves as *Dzogheshie*; hosts or human mediums of *Dzoghewo* which they indicated was part of their initiation process into the priesthood. According to them, after going through the requisite rites, the *Dzogbe* is eventually ‘domiciled’ in the sculpted anthropomorphic medium called by the same name (i.e. *Dzogbe*) which is also considered as a kind of *Aklama kpakpe*. *Dzogbe* is associated with the colours white and red. Thus, during the entire period of the rite of initiation for a *Dzogheshie* which may range from a few months to several years depending on the resources and the ability of the individual to complete the process to repose the *Dzogbe*, the individual is always clad in white and the body smeared with kaolin. However, in a particular instance at Anloga, I noticed a *Dzogheshie* who was clothed in white and red combination¹⁶⁷. Again, at two shrines where I observed *Dzogbe* figurines, they were

¹⁶⁷ Upon enquiry from Mama Afortude, my *Amegashie* informant at Anloga who has showed me an old photograph in which she was adorned in the white and red colour combinations, she noted it indicated that *Dzogheshie* had gotten to the stage when she had slaughtered a ram to pacify the *Dzogbe*; almost at the final stage to complete the rite and to possibly become an *Amegashie*.

distinguished from other mediums such as the *Ese* and *Ade* by their association with the *Atamka*—the oath sword (Figure 5.11).



Figure 5.11. An altar for a set of *Dzogbewo* at a shrine, Keta. Photographed by the researcher

5.5.6. *Aklama* and the *Venovi*: Mystery of Multiple Birth and the “Twins’ Spirit”.

In indigenous worldviews, conception and the process of birth are likened to warfare; a battle for the life of a baby and of the mother as well (e.g. Ganusah, 2008, p. 27). Thus, a woman in labour is considered to be between and betwixt life and death. Like the *Ewedome* and the *Tongu* discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, among the *Anlo* the birth of twins is an extraordinary incidence (Nukunya, 1990, p. 202; Gaba, 1965, pp. 231-234). Twins are considered to be associated with the supernatural and are traditionally marked by their special names *Atsu* and *Etse*, or *Atsu* and *Atsufe* according to their sexes and the order in which they were born to be easily identified. The twins, their parents and the two subsequent siblings born after them are acknowledged as members of the twins’ fraternity. However, in some communities, the antecedent sibling before the twins is

acknowledged as the one who paved the way to “attract” the twins and is thus called *kplovi* who is also recognized as a bona fide member of the twins’ fraternity (Vena Dogbatsey, KII #79, 05/04/2021, Anloga).

Customarily, like the *Ewedome* and *Tongu*, in the *Anlo* communities members of the twins’ fraternity are bound by some taboos. However, among the *Anlo* especially, mothers of twins (*vanawo*) and the twins themselves are accorded certain privileges as individuals believed to possess special spiritual abilities. Thus, not only are the spirits of the twins occasionally pacified through prescribed rites but they are often given gifts by people who want to be associated with their ‘blessings’. According to informants, ceremony and rites for twins and their parents are complicated and may take some time, even years, to complete (see also Nukunya, 1990, p. 202). For example, at Tamakloe-Bome in Anloga I witnessed a ceremony for seven-year old *Atsu* and *Etse* in which the community was well represented to give cash and kind gifts to the twins who had just been ‘clean-shaved’ for the rite (see Figure 5.12). According to Batulukisi, in many West African societies there are rituals to observe the first shaving of children (Batulukisi, 2000, p.27). In Yoruba tradition for example, parents are expected to keep the hair of *ibeji*, twins, until the appropriate time when they are cut in a special ritual (e.g. Houlberg, 1971). As an observer and a part of the enthusiastic participants of the ceremony for the twins, I received confectionaries as our share of partaking in the blessings of the twins’ fraternity.





Figure 5.12. A ceremony for twins, Anloga. Photographed by the researcher.

In an *Anlo* myth related by Togbui Kumassah and echoed by other informants about twins, in anticipating the birth of a child, two individuals (the *venovi*) had instead been delivered. Hence, *venovi* which means “two siblings” are also considered as *Aklama*; an extraordinary phenomenon (Vena Dogbatsey, KII #79, 05/04/2021, Anloga; Lawoe and Lawoetey, KII #66, 23/03/2021, Keta; Togbui Kumassah, KII #61, 19/03/2021, Keta; Mama Afortude KII #71, 27/03/2021, and KII #16, 05/06/2020, Anloga). According to the myth, mystified by the multiple birth and its possible implications, the community consulted the oracles. It was thus indicated that the birth signaled the desire of a deity, the ‘twins’ spirit’ to reside with the family. For that, a receptacle must be provided to serve water to the spirit every time it visited the family. Considered to have had favour with the gods, the family provided a space where a pair of *venovize*, twins’ pots, were set up to acknowledge and welcome the ‘twins’ spirit’ (see Aronson, 2007, p. 81; Nukunya, 1990, p. 202). According to

Nukunya, for example, “each [of the twins’ pots] contains water and herbs including seven palm nuts, *sede ku*”. He points that “the safety of the twins is identified with the safety of the pots, and [. . .] must be kept in a very good state” (Nukunya, 1990, p. 202. Also, the water in the pots serves as a balm for the twins; when they are sick, they are bathed with it.

Additionally, for perpetual recognition of the ‘twins’ spirit’, miniature anthropomorphic figurines of the babies (i.e. the twins) were also made. Thus, the figurines serve as a means to ritually engage and to care for their spirits in routine observances. The figurines also called *venovi* could therefore be carried around, birthed and ‘fed’ just like the babies are cared for. Accordingly, twins have ever since been acknowledged and treated as special guests with whom are the ‘twins’ spirit’ considered to be related to the *Afa* spirits of clairvoyance and divination (Vena Dogbatsey, KII #79, 05/04/2021, Anloga; Mama Afortude, KII #71, 27/03/2021, Anloga; Lawoe and Lawoetey, KII #66, 23/03/2021, Keta). As others have pointed out, among the *Anlo* twins are conceptualized as being connected to the metaphysical realm in a way others are not, and as having potential spiritual power (Jenkins, 2005, pp. 86-87, Gaba, 1965, pp. 231-234). In the traditions of Klikor, for example, as Jenkins has noted, the legendary twins Atsu Dzra and Etse Lilivo, and their sons are credited for leveraging on their “spiritual kinships” to establish the Adzima and Mama Vena shrines (Jenkins, 2005, pp. 85-87). Similarly, at Tegbi in Keta, there is a vibrant *Afa* cult maintained by the twin siblings Lawoe and Lawoetey who serve as Hunuo (i.e. priest) and Torbokor (i.e. high-ranking diviner) respectively (Lawoe and Lawoetey, KII #66, 23/03/2021, Keta).

Furthermore, according to Togbui Kumassah, customarily the *venovi* figurines which are usually carvings in wood are installed with the *venovize*. Perhaps due to this *Anlo* tradition, it was only within the *Anlo* zone I observed a good number of pre-fabricated *venovi* figurines (i.e. already

carved male and female figurines) displayed for sale (see Figure 5.13). Togbui Kumassah however points out that in most cases, a *venovi* figurine is acquired when one of the twins had passed on. Thus, the figurine serves “mainly as a companion for the [‘twinless’] twin who needs to convince the ‘hovering spirit’ of the departed twin that he [or she] is not feeling lonely” (Kumassah, KII #61, 19/03/2021, Keta). He also maintains that depending on a family’s tradition, *venovi* figurines may be discarded or retained as part of a household shrine after the deaths of the twins they originally represented. In contexts of engagements with the *venovi*, my observations about two of the figurines representing two different twin pairs and of different generations at the residence of an Amegashie indicated the possibility of the *venovi* being incorporated into the ensemble of a household shrine.



Figure 5.13. *Venovi* figurines for sale, Anloga. Photographed by the researcher.

At my first visit to Amegashie Afortude's house at Anloga in June, 2020, in our conversation about *Aklama* she pointed to a 'well-dressed up' female anthropomorphic figurine measuring about 12 cm in height as an example of *Aklama kpakpe* (Mama Afortude, KII #16, 05/06/2020, Anloga). According to her, the figurine is over sixty years and represents a younger sibling who was the *Atsufe*, the female pair of a mixed twin set. Even though the *Atsu* who is the surviving male twin was around, being the big sister, she has the responsibility to take care of the figurine like a true member of the family; she bathes 'her' and changes the clothes when she feels 'she' is dirty (see Figure 5.15a). She revealed that the figurine "even wears a loin cloth over a string of waist beads just like an adult female would do" (Mama Afortude, KII #16, 05/06/2020, Anloga.). And later in April, 2021 when I visited again, a 'twinless' niece who is married and lives in Accra had brought another 'female' *venovi* figurine to her. The niece had had the figurine representing her late pair for several years but currently as a public servant, her work schedule and other family commitments did not allow her to take good care of 'her' as she ought to (Mama Afortude, KII #71, 27/03/2021, Anloga). Therefore, together with the first *venovi*, the Amegashie now takes care of the two figurines as a relation (see Figures 5.14a and 5.14b).

Similarly, on an altar at a shrine, two *Aklama* figurines placed alongside the *Ese* and other deity mediums were identified by the Amegasahie as *venovi* (Mama Tettevi, KII #64, 21/03/2021, Keta; see Figure 5.15). These cases in point, suggest that a family's commitment to the 'twins' spirit' as well as the desirability to perpetuate its positive influence, *venovi* figurines may be appropriated into a shrine. Hence, the *venovi* may represent a significant component of a family's inheritable *Aklama kpakpe*.



Figure 5.14a. A *venovi* figurine, Anloga. Photographed by the researcher.



Figure 5.14b. *Venovi* figurines, Anloga.



Figure 5.15. Altar for (L-R), the *Ese* and *Mami* with *venovi* figurines, Keta. Photographed by the researcher

5.6. Summary and Conclusion.

In summation, similar to the *Ewedome* and *Tongu*, *Aklama* among the *Anlo* is a multivariate concept. It encompasses worldviews and beliefs about relations among people, deities and spirits as well as material mediums that constitute such engagements and interactions. Essentially however, the overarching concept that drives the various notions about the phenomenon of *Aklama* is the indigenous belief about the human person as being simultaneously spiritual and physical. Characterized to have an immortal soul, each person is conceived to be on a temporal/temporary mission on earth to fulfil a preordained destiny. Thus, *Aklama* cogitate around the need to align the life and prospects of a person with their metaphysical foundations. In this, an individual's relationship with the *Ese/Dzɔgbese* variously defined as the 'spiritual-self', 'true mother in the realm of the spirit' or the 'sealed roadmap or destiny' of the individual is instructive to navigate this life. Hence, episodes of favourable encounters and notable feats are attributed to *Aklama* and are duly acknowledged. Life's challenges, on the other hand, are accordingly mediated through prescribed rites and ritual performances. Ultimately, in this pursuit of life, fulfilled and successful persons transition to the spirit world as ancestors and continue to maintain relations with their families, reckoned across the spiritual and physical divide.

Again, the environment and the universe, in general, are framed within a divine cosmic order in which individuals are tasked to embark on the business of life in harmony with others; including the supernatural and the supramundane. Established customs, folklore and traditions which define and regulate these relationships and interactions constitute essential figurations of *Aklama*. While breaches are atoned in placatory and purification rites, restless and disgruntled spirits are contained or given repose in appropriate mediums at designated sacred spaces and shrines. Mediums of clay, calabash, carvings and sometime the bodies of individuals and altars

serve as abodes for spirits. Thus constituted, they are recognized and engaged as *Aklama kpakpe*—the embodiment of deities, destiny, fate, or metaphysical agency.



6.0. CHAPTER SIX: Discussions and Conclusion.

In keeping with the overarching aim of the study, which is to deepen our understanding about *Aklama* in Ewe material culture and spirituality, this chapter elaborates on the hypotheses taken as points of departure for the study. The chapter therefore reflects on the indigenous conceptualizations of *Aklama* and discusses the character and properties of *Aklama kpakpe* as figurations of Ewe worldviews on personhood and community, and their embedded relationships. Ultimately, in confirmation of the research hypotheses, the conclusion is drawn that variability in the forms and functions of *Aklama kpakpe* are significantly influenced by their subjective appreciations and contexts of engagements by their owners.

6.1 *Aklama* as an Intermediary: Remediating the Undesirable and Providing Assurance of Success.

In Ewe cosmologies presented in chapters three, four and five, *Aklama* is generally conceptualised as a shared essence of the human being with divinity, nature and the supernatural. In its basic expression, however, it represents a transcendental pre-existence of the human person, and subsequent life on earth as transitory. Thus the human being is believed to have an ethereal soul which is considered to afford the individual eternal existence through transitory physical and spiritual realms of life. In this conceptualization, the link and relationships between the physical and spiritual realms are facilitated by circle and/or cycles of birth and death. I am aware that similar worldviews have been observed in many African societies by other scholars (Assimeng, 2010; Munyaka and Motlhabi, 2009; Dube, 2006; Aduyoye, 2004; Wiredu, 1992; Dickson, 1984). These societies have thus been described as moral communities and are largely characterised by relationships of individuals' responsibilities and reciprocities towards a common good (Gyekye, 1997, pp. 228-229).

Ewe worldviews, as elaborated in previous chapters, emphasize pre-ordination of the individual at *Bome*, the spiritual home of origins, prior to birth. In keeping with that and the notion of *Dzɔgbese* in particular, birth serves as the threshold by which the individual is ushered on earth to execute a task and to fulfil a pre-negotiated destiny. Thus, *Aklama* as a concept is primarily the search and the realization of the terms on which a person assumes life on earth, as well as limits to that existence. *Aklama* therefore connotes the nature of one's soul and destiny and, by extension how those are negotiated in relationships with others in a community. Resonating with other researchers, my research findings have indicated that indigenous cosmology presents a mediated relationship between the human being and other entities (natural and supernatural) in ways that are simultaneously physical, spiritual and ecological (e.g. Agbanu, 2011; Greene, 2002; Akyeampong, 2001). In agreement with Akyeampong, Ewe cosmologies are aptly described as a moral ecology characterized by relationships of interdependence, responsibility and reciprocity (Akyeampong, 2001, pp. 104).

Within that moral ecological framework as I have highlighted in previous chapters, fulfilment of destiny is particularly related to maintenance of community and healthy relationships. Clearly, the sense of community among the Ewe, as Wiredu has also noted to be a significant feature of many African societies, humans are in community with the yet-unborn, the environment and the supernatural, and crowned by ancestorhood (Wiredu, 1992, pp. 137-138). Ultimately, ancestorhood is upheld as an achieved status when one successfully fulfils destiny. In particular, the transition of the individual to the ancestral world of spirits is not a given or a privilege but a merited status upon successful life and fulfilled destiny on earth. Thus, any life short of success, and potential obstructions to the achievement of ancestorhood are mediated through appropriate rites and prescribed rituals.

Again, it is clear that Ewe conceptualizations of personhood and ancestorship indicate that while a person may be remarkably successful in the pursuit of life, it does not necessarily imply fulfilment of destiny. A fulfilled destiny therefore involves achievement of assigned duty on earth, and more importantly a ‘peaceful’ transition of the individual from the physical plane to the spiritual world (e.g. Gavua, 2000, p. 96). Hence, a person ultimately fulfils destiny when his/her life’s success is appended with ‘good’ death; a situation where the soul or the spiritual-self of the individual is at peace to leave the body and safely makes the journey back to the spirit world to become a veritable ancestor. (Adjandeh, 2019; Rosenthal, 1998; Nukunya, 1990; Amoaku, 1975). In this light, regarding the phenomenon of *Dzogbe* in particular as illustrated in chapter five, when a person’s life is truncated by sudden death, his/her yet to be fulfilled soul must be appropriately placated or pacified and contained. Here *Aklama kpakpe* in the form of *Dzogbe* in some instances served as the material mediums to repose the spirits of victims of accidental deaths until such a time they may be considered to be due for reincarnation to continue the unfinished business, or be given entry into the ancestral world. It is noteworthy that such concerns to avert truncated destiny, in part, account for Ewe traditional oracular consultations such as the *Nukaka* where individual periodically assess and evaluate whether or not they are on course with destiny, and are also better protected from mishaps. It can therefore be argued that *Aklama* generally relates to beliefs and customary practices that ensure that individuals are propitiously aligned with their pre-ordained spiritual footprints to duly fulfil destiny in their temporal/temporary business of life on earth.

Spirits that guide and protect the individual from all kinds of adversity are not only considered to enhance the prospects of the individual to fulfil destiny, but also become homologous indices for a certain category of people who mediate other’s interactions with spirits and deities. For example, priests/priestesses, diviners and certain craftsmen including carvers and healers are

considered to be vehicles through whom benevolent spirits manifest, move and do business with people in a community. Ultimately, *Aklama* represents the intersections of the concept of personhood, destiny and relationships in a community, and how these are negotiated for harmony and continued co-existence. In my view, among the Ewe, these conceptualizations are particularly important for understanding customs and religious practices aimed at negotiating relationships in general, and to specifically ensure the success of the individual.

Nelson-Adjakpey, (2008), Ferme (2001) and Wiredu (1992) have also indicated similar worldviews shared by the Akan and Ewe of Ghana, and the Mende of Sierra Leone, in which individuals are considered to have spiritual-doubles. The spiritual-double is described as spiritual entity, more or less the soul of the person, which also indicates that the human being is a simultaneous participant of both physical and spiritual realms of existence. Moreover, among the Mende as Ferme points out, a child's double includes the namesake who is the individual after whom he/she is named which also establishes a link with their ancestors (Ferme, 2001, pp. 199-214). Again, as other have indicated, indigenous Ewe traditions maintain that spirit entities inhabit certain features on the landscape such as rivers, trees and mountain range. In connection with the concept of *Dzodzome* as a part of the broader considerations of the phenomenon of *Aklama*, a person is at peace with himself or herself when the physical-self aligns with the spiritual-double and is also in healthy relationships with fellow humans and the supernatural (Agbanu, 2011; 1999; Nelson-Adjakpey, 2008; Wiredu, 1992; Duerden, 1975). As Wiredu, for example indicates:

the ontologically interesting thing about this spiritual entity [i.e. the spiritual-double] is that although it is conceived in the image of a person, it is exempted from the grosser characteristics of the material body. Thus, it can appear at, or disappear from place without regard to speed limit for matter or the law of impenetrability (Wiredu, 1992, p. 139).

Thus, while it is not perceptibly sensible, the spiritual-double is considered to be inextricably related to the individual such that he/she is significantly affected by the status of that spirit-companion.

Consequently, customs and traditions provide appropriate means to relate with the spiritual-double and other spiritual entities. Regarding the question of perceivability and desirable relationship with the supernatural, as highlighted in the previous chapters, dreams and premonitions provide significant access. However, those expressions received through dreams and visions are only occasional windows which provide a person some perspectives into the world of the spirit and how well he or she fares within it. Moreover, diviners, priests and priestesses are noted to have the ability to see into the spirit and to communicate with spiritual entities. Thus, the practice of divinations by those initiated persons provide even far more avenue where spiritual entities become discernible and confirmed for material or physical expressions in *Aklama kpakpe* to foster requisite relationships between a person and spirit agents. From the narratives presented in chapters three, four and five, *Aklama* encompasses the characterization and/or material expressions of expected relationships amongst individuals and spiritual entities. Therefore, *Aklama* figurines are particularly necessitated when an individual is required to engage the supernatural in the contexts of rites or ritual performance usually as a part of religious devotion, pacification, purification or appreciation ceremonies.

6.1.1. *Aklama* as Homologic Surrogates in Rituals of Reconciliation and Re- invigoration.

Unaccounted illnesses, incessant misfortunes, narrow escapes from situations of otherwise certain death are instances that call for inquiries into the spirit (e.g. Ganusah, 2008, p. 26-28; Nelson-Adjakpey, 2008; pp. 17-19). Barrenness, infertility and infant mortality are among notable issues that individuals seek meanings and respite through divinations as well as performances of

some rites or rituals. Thus, unexpected and undesirable events serve as flash points when people try to find out from the spiritual plane the cause and meaning in order to take steps to remedy possible breaches, or foil potential disasters lurking on the path of the individual. When oracular consultation with spiritual entities reveal that the general unproductivity of an individual is related to a loss of bearing with the person's spiritual companion(s), required rites and rituals are accordingly administered (Friedson, 2009; Nelson-Adjakpey, 2008; Pese-Kumah, 1991). To align the individual with his/her spiritual-self, for example, surrogates of the individual in appropriate forms and mediums are usually presented in the contexts of ritual performances.

According to Dzobo for example, customarily it was required of a groom to present a stool to the bride as a means to settle her soul in the new home (Dzobo, 1992b, p. 90). He further explains that "the stool as a symbol of the individual's soul has become a highly valued personal property" (Dzobo, 1992b, pp. 90-91). Metaphorically, as my research findings have brought to light, *Aklama kpakpe* serves as the seat to host or domicile an individual's soul and/or other spiritual entities to enable periodic engagements through rites and rituals. As indicated in previous chapters, *Aklama* figurations are mostly executed in situations where individuals are required to host such spiritual entities. Notably, however, as local traditions and individuals' experiences vary so also are the expressions and physical representations of *Aklama* as spiritual phenomena.

From narratives and observations especially in the Midwest, most of such figurations are ephemeral mediums to administer the *Gbetsi lele* redemptive or reconciliation rituals intended to re-invigorate the prospects of the individual to be productive and successful. Employed mainly in the contexts of one-time ritual performance, notable forms of the ephemeral kind of *Aklama* include hurriedly carved miniature anthropomorphic figurines from the *jathrophar* plant, moulded miniature anthropomorphic figurines in clay, the nuts of *borassus* palm (as substitute for the head

of the individual) and the fruit of *Kegalia Africana*. As homologous surrogates, these kinds of *Aklama kpakpe* serve to coalesce the physical and the spiritual dimension of the individual as well as important spirit agents temporarily in the liminal stage of the ritual performance (e.g. Turner, 2018). In such events the physical and the spiritual are transposed and merged. Morgan, for example, describes this liminal process as enchantment and thus points out that;

enchantment is like this: it combines making and becoming, human agency and the agency of another. The slippage between the two is the moment of enchantment. We make the gods, and the gods make us (Morgan, 2018, p. 21).

Thus, *Aklama kpakpe* provides the means to transcend the physical plane to interact with the supernatural. Beyond the presentation of *Aklama* as tokens for redemptive rituals, in instances where the status of the individual (for example, initiated priest, priestess or stool-father) requires regular interactions with spirit agents, more permanent mediums are procured to serve as seats for spirits or deities involved. Incidentally, *venovi* figurines for deceased twins which were observed to be a common tradition among the *Tongu* and the *Anlo*, were not so conspicuous among the *Ewedome*. However, in the *Tongu* and *Anlo* areas perspectives about *venovi* figurines differed on whether or not they were *Aklama kpakpe*. To some informants *venovi* figurines were only commemorative and did not particularly host spiritual entities and therefore could not be considered as *Aklama kpakpe*. On the contrary, others maintained that *venovi* figurines are certainly spiritual mediums that serve to maintain the blessings of twins' spirits in a family. Thus, there were instances where *venovi* figurines had been set on altars in the home and at the shrines.

Furthermore, it is worthy of note that in the *Tongu* and *Anlo* areas although redemptive rites such as the *Agbetsi lele*, *Nukaka* and *Dzadodo* rituals, similar to the *Gbetsi lele* are common, except for a few cases mentioned by informants, the use of the ephemeral kinds of *Aklama kpakpe* which is fairly observed among the *Ewedome*, is not the tradition. Rather, the major emphasis is on the

need to ritually cleanse the soul or the spiritual-self of the individual which is administered mainly through the use of appropriate herbs and supplications. Thus, unlike the *Ewedome* where the major emphasis is on placating *Gbetsi* with the miniature surrogates, the *Tongu* and *Anlo* traditions indicate differences in engagements with *Aklama* in remedial rituals. Relatedly, however, among the *Tongu* and *Anlo*, like the *Ewedome*, *Aklama kpakpe* broadly represent a range of religious and physical mediums to host spirits or deities especially for initiated priests and priestesses.

6.1.2. Focalized *Aklama* as Indices for Spirits for Perceptible Interactions.

Of the more permanent kind of *Aklama kpakpe* such as the *Ese*, *Dzɔgbexɔe* and *Ade*, most of the informants associated their acquisition to specific moments in their lives, and in particular, their experiences with supernatural phenomena. Recruited by deities/spirits usually through spiritual possession, individual adepts engage with a variety of material ensembles at their shrines or designated sacred spaces that embody their interactions with deities and spirits. Thus, servings as abodes for spirits, *Aklama kpakpe* facilitate and/or mediate relationships with individual devotees and spiritual entities. As Morgan (2018) and Engelke (2012) have demonstrated, through enchantments spiritual phenomena are indexed and materially constituted to mediate devotional interactions.

In agreement with Engelke who aptly points out that in ritual performance material things have contextual significance, and that connections between things and their meanings are particularly effected through speech and invocation (Engelke, 2012, pp. 49-50, see also Gavua, 2000, pp; 91-92). Similarly, among the Mande in Mali, as Kedzierska Monzon notes, in fabricating physical mediums for spirits to be engaged in personal devotion, “specific magic formulae (*kilisi*) must be recited (Kedzierska Manzon, 2013, p. 1128). Similar to the role of the *kilisi* which consists of putting into play or activating the object, and defining the field of its future actions, as Kedzierska

Manzon has observed, *Aklama* figurines are made potent and effective by invoking into them the requisite spirits through the ritual of enchantment.

As I have elaborated in previous chapters, most *Aklama* figurines are not voluntarily acquired. Among the Ewe, misfortunes are generally considered to be raptures in communal relationships and/or misalignments between a person and his companion-spirit(s) that need to be restored. Thus, the making of *Aklama kpakpe* for a person is usually necessitated by the customary requirement to address crisis situations in a family, or life-threatening encounters associated with spiritual or supernatural agency. *Aklama kpakpe* therefore serves to maintain a balance, and with that the expectation to protect the person from harm and untimely death, as well as to guided him or her to success. Particularly in the contexts of restoring harmony, and to ensure that the individual is at peace to accomplish his/her expected social responsibilities, oracular consultations with the spirit world are pursued for details and specific directions. Accordingly, the different kinds of *Aklama* figurines outlined in previous chapters represent outcomes of particular demands and requests of spirits ascertained through divinations to appropriately deal with individual situations.

Thus, in establishing the character of spiritual entities and their place in the life of the individual through divination, *Aklama* figurines embody such features and thus serve as indices for the otherwise non-sensible spirits. Again, in acknowledgment of an elevation of a person's status in the spiritual realm, individuals including diviners, priests, priestesses, some healers and stool-fathers are required to be initiated as such. An important part of the initiations process involves a set up of requisite physical medium(s) to manifest and engage with the spirits. The ability to engage with spirits thus honed and sharpened, individual devotees, priests and priestesses are able to invoke and maintain their relationships with spiritual entities through periodic rites and rituals. In many instances, when an individual who is so recruited proves to be effective and

efficient in dealing with issues of spiritual nature, others might be associated as petitioners who make supplications through the person and the deities hosted (Adjei, 2019, pp. 112-113; Jenkins, 2012, pp. 81-82). As Jenkins points out, the link created between petitioners to a deity are usually without further commitments as would be expected of initiated devotees (Jenkins, 2012, p. 85). She however notes that “petitioning may be a precursor to the formation of subsequent established relationships” (Jenkins, 2012, p. 85). Thus, petitioners may become devotees, for example by voluntarily requesting to be initiated as adepts who may not necessarily become priests/priestesses. As already pointed out in chapter five, individuals may have certain physical mediums which are considered a kind of *Aklama kpakpe* hosted on their behalf at shrines which they periodically attend to, especially during the annual purification and “feeding” ceremonies. Such acquisitions of *Aklama kpakpe* were distinguished by informants as *trɔ* or *vodu*. This does not preclude the fact that *trɔ* or *vodu* spirits usually recruit devotees through spiritual possessions.

Across the Volta Region, river and marine based deities including the *Afram*, *Densu* and *Mami*, and various kinds of forest based “dwarf” spirits identified as *trɔwo* with different functions and activities are hosted at shrines with their requisite ritual protocols. With attested potency and the ability to recruit others who may undergo a period of training and apprenticeship to become priests, priestesses or diviners, similar colour symbolisms and material configurations of *Aklama kpakpe* were generally observed both within and across the various zones. However, in full agreement with Drewal (1996), this research has shown that due to the almost limitless outcomes of divinations which provide specific directions for hosting a deity or a spirit, there are significant variations and, sometimes major differences among shrines of similar deities such as the *Mami Wata* cult even within a particular zone. Accordingly, figurations of marine spirits, for example, included miniature stools, anthropomorphic figurines of diverse forms (e.g. mermaid and multiple-

headed figures), appropriations of exotic materials and colour codes, especially the colour white which symbolizes cleanliness and spiritual purity expected of devotees. However, as a form of a cult for adepts and devotees, such shrine ensembles and their related *Aklama* mediums are both transferrable and inheritable. Again, in some instances, abandoned shrines dedicated to the *Ade* for example, are reconstituted and resumed by initiated priests or priestesses who are considered to have been either reincarnated or manifest the spirit of erstwhile owners to serve as caretakers.

6.2. Efficiency of *Aklama Kpakpe*: Assemblages and Configurations of *Aklama* as Engagements with Spiritual Entities.

Customarily, interactions with the spirit world are through acknowledgments of the ancestors by offerings of libation, and periodic rites of dedication, pacification and/or purification. However, some mishaps attributed to spiritual causation require particular attention. As discussed in chapters three through five, *Aklama kpakpe* may be required as part of the intervention process to alleviate misfortunes and/or to secure success. While similar situations may necessitate *Aklama kpakpe*, no two *Aklama* figurines are the same. The ultimate purpose of *Aklama kpakpe* as observed in the various zones is to proffer solutions to crisis situations particularly involving an individual or a family that are attributed to spiritual sources. Especially expressed in such concepts as *Dzɔdzɔme*, *Dzɔgbese* and *Gbetsi*, there are variability in Ewe conceptualizations of human nature and individuals' destinies. Relatedly, expressions and forms of *Aklama kpakpe* as means to mediate interactions and relationships with spiritual phenomena as others and this research have indicated, are significantly influenced by various factors (e.g. Spieth, [1906] 2011, pp. 463-468; Agorsah, 2010, pp. 14-15; Nelson-Adjakpey, 2008; pp. 36-40; Fiawoo, 1959, pp. 51-57). Decidedly however, *Aklama kpakpe* in various forms executed in several material mediums such as wood, clay and vegetal substitutes like calabash, *agɔku* nut and *nyakpkpe* fruits, facilitate ritual dialogues

and secures critical balance and interactions with the supernatural (Nelson-Adjakpey, 2008, pp. 56-57). Thus, configurations of *Aklama kpakpe* into ritual spaces or personal altars take after the express character of associated spirits ascertained by divinations. Thus, by means of divination, spiritualists diagnose spiritual statuses of afflicted individuals and accordingly communicate specific demands made by the spirits involved. Consequently, the forms and assemblages of *Aklama kpakpe* are largely the results of meeting the demands by spirits on persons involved.

6.2.1. Focalized *Aklama* as Enchantments of the Soul and/or the Spiritual-Self for Perceptible Interactions.

In response to outcomes of oracular consultations, as already indicated, a person may need to host one or more requisite spirits at a go, or through time as and when a spirit makes a demand through spiritual possession. In most cases, however, individuals were required to provide a seat for their personal soul or spiritual-self variously identified as *Dzɔgbese*, *Ese* or the *Se* to strengthen their virtues for success in life. Incidentally, depending on the local conceptualization of that spiritual entity, it was observed that such a figurine usually in anthropomorphic form was characterized as male or female being to suggest the kind of relationships involved. Across the Volta Regions, especially among the *Tongu* and *Anlo*, these personal kinds of *Aklama kpakpe* referred to as the *Ese* were mostly characterized as female figurines to indicate a relationship with a mother-like spiritual entity. In a few instances however, male forms of *Aklama kpakpe* also identified as the *Ese* or *Dzɔgbese-Aklama* were possessed by priests who rather pointed to a relationship with a self-same double in the spiritual realm. However, among the *Ewedome*, most initiated priestesses maintained a small water-bearing pot as their personal *Aklama*, the spiritual-self. It was also observed that in some cases individuals including priests, priestesses and some traditional office holders, manifested their *Aklama* with a geometric wooden structure variously called *Aklamati*, *Mawuti* or *Togbeti*.

Furthermore, notable parallel to the *Ese and the Mawuti*, is particularly evident among the *Tongu* where some men are required to placate a female spirit identified as *Uui*, the supposed spiritual-wife. Characterized as an extremely jealous spirit, a dissatisfied *Uui* is dreaded. Men considered to be afflicted by *Uui* are noted to experience dire marital challenges, and sometimes sexual impotence. In this particular context, *Aklama* figurations involved a miniature house called *Dzɔgbexɔe* usually with appropriate elements including a female anthropomorphic figurine and/or offering receptacles to ensure that *Uui* is comfortably hosted. While the actual wife of the victim is generally prohibited to go close to the miniature house for the ‘spiritual rival’, depending on the demands made by *Uui* through divination, ritual engagements with the *Dzɔgbexɔe* varied from one person to another. Similarly, among the *Anlo*, some woman with marital and reproductive issues were required to objectify and placate the spirit considered to be responsible, which is identified as *Tatoroe*. That spirit is characterized as a strict record-keeper assigned to the individual, but sometimes gets in the way of the person and thus impedes her progress. *Aklama kpakpe* for *Tatoroe* is usually a set of three carvings including two anthropomorphic figurines with no particular gender specifications.

Given the fact that these outlined kinds of *Aklama kpakpe* are so personalized to address specific situations in individual’s life, it is worthy of note that they constitute personal altars that are hardly sharable. In agreement with Engelke’s observation, my research findings have indicated that physical mediums that serve as abodes for spirits may become ‘dangerous things’ in transition or a change of ownership when their ritual protocols may potentially be violated (Engelke, 2012, pp. 49-50). Thus, in principle the *Ese*, *Mawuti*, *Aklamati*, *Dzɔgbexɔe* and *Tatoroe* figures represent personalized *Aklama kpakpe* that are not inheritable or transferable. As presented in previous chapters, these kinds of *Aklama kpakpe* are decommissioned when their owners die, and are

eventually “sent” over to them through some rites by which the figurines are deposited in the bush to be “recovered” by the spirits of their dead owners. In a few isolated cases however, which are really the exception to the practice, otherwise “decommissioned” *Aklama* figurines were inherited by succeeding legatees who took over the traditional office and occupation of the deceased. Notably, however, those *Aklama kpakpe* were usually incorporated into their shrine ensembles as spirit-mediums and not necessarily as homologous surrogates of the soul or the spiritual-self of their new owner, who more a less, assumes the position of a caretaker.

6.2.2. Obviating Moral Debts and Vicarious Liabilities: Focalized *Aklama* as Containment.

As discussed in chapters three, four and five, Ewe worldviews stipulate that grievous offences committed against innocent victims must be confessed by the perpetrator and duly pacified. In their works, Agbanu (2011), Abotchie (1997), Nukunya (1990), Greene (1985) have similarly observed that in Ewe worldviews crimes such as murder, manslaughter, incest and witchcraft, if not appropriately pacified will accrue moral debts to the individual offender, and by extension to the family who may vicariously suffer retribution of the ancestors (Abotchie, 1997, pp.65-67; Nukunya, 1990, 68-71; Greene, 1985, p. 76). Also, established on local beliefs and narratives that individuals who suffer tragic deaths have their destinies truncated, spirits of ‘bewitched’ or murdered persons, for example are considered to be not readily admitted to *Tsiefe* to rest with the ancestors (e.g. Nelson-Adjakpey, 2008, pp.37-38; Gavua, 2000, 96-97; Rosenthal, 1998, p. 112). Thus, the souls of victims of accidents and disasters are considered to be entrapped on the earth.

Their transition to the ancestral world thus hindered, such spirits, as I have earlier indicated, are referred to as *Ametsiava* (among the *Ewedome*) and *Dzogbe* (among the *Tongu* and *Anlo*) to express the point that those are disgruntled and restless. Particularly highlighted in chapters three and five, there are local customs and traditions to placate and contain disgruntled spirits of the

dead. While the body of the victim is counted ‘unwholesome’ for normal burial at the usual cemetery, basic rites identified by this research include purification of the community, and the ‘recovery’ of the soul from the setting of the tragedy which is then given a repose at an appropriate section of the cemetery. Without the appropriate rites, anecdotes and stories abound about the penchant of such spirits to cause havoc, especially to their own family members.

Among the *Ewedome*, *Tongu* as well as the *Anlo* I observed that there are some priests and priestesses who are consulted for rites and rituals associated with victims of tragic deaths. In my interviews with priests and priestesses, some of them narrated how their initiations into the priesthood were engendered by some spells of ordeals and experiences of spiritual possessions attributed to disgruntled spirits of dead relatives. As my research findings have indicated, in responding to quests for attention from disgruntled spirits, appropriate physical mediums are erected to contain and host such spirits. Elsewhere in East Africa, similar phenomenon is observed among the Miji Kenda of Kenya where memorial sculptures are erected to pacify the spirit of dead relations who are considered to be causing troubles for their families (Brown, 1980).

According to Brown as well as my research findings, commemorative sculptures such as the Miji Kenda grave posts are not merely memorials to the dead. Brown is right in his assertion that “they are the means by which the spirit of the dead are propitiated”, [and that], “they are erected only when an ancestor is causing trouble to the living” (Brown, 1980, pp. 36-37). Similarly, my research findings confirm Smith’s observation that such “African art forms symbolize spiritual authority in a ritual context and bring about an order of reality through their presence in everyday affairs” (Smith, 1980, p. 68). Especially evident in the *Tongu* and *Anlo* zones, anthropomorphic figurines dedicated to restless spirits of dead relatives are generally referred to as *Dzogbe*. Usually not very different in form than the *Ese*, except for some added elements such as the colour red and

the *atamka*, which is the oath sword, each *Dzogbe* figurine is identified and addressed by the name of the individual victim. Again, except for few cases observed among the *Ewedome* where some priests were devoted to spirits identified as *Ametsiava*, among the *Tongu* and *Anlo Dzogbe* spirits are mostly hosted by women who are initiated as *Avɔretɔwo* or *Dzogheshiewo*.

In all cases of dealing with spirits of tragic deaths, however, there are customary purification rites. The erections of effigies for *Ametsiava* or *Dzogbe* spirits are subsequent possibilities only in the events where such spirits are considered to be seeking to ‘rejoin’ the family or comfortable repose. In the *Anlo* zone especially, my research findings show that through the making of *Dzogbe* figurines and related periodic rituals, the otherwise potential ancestral candidates obstructed by tragic deaths are propitiated, calmed and contained. However, unlike the *Ese* and the *Mawuti* which are not inheritable, possessions and relationships with *Dzogbe* may be transferred. For instance at the passing of a *Dzogheshie*, by means of spiritual possession and confirmation through divination, a new person may assume caretakership of a *Dzogbe*.

Parallel to the phenomenon of *Dzogbe* at the lineage and clan levels, pacificatory forms of *Aklama* were *Adekpɔ/Adepe*, which is a sacred space devoted to spirits of erstwhile hunter-warriors, as well as forebears and ‘high spirited’ animals who suffered tragic deaths. These spirits are generally referred to *Ade* and are associated with traditions of hunting and village settlements in the past. Unlike *Dzogbe* where the identity of the dead person is within historical memory, due to considerable lapse in time through generations the identities of *Ade* victims are generally in anonymity. Thus, customarily, among the *Tongu* and the *Anlo*, in particular most lineages and clans have the *Adekpɔ*, an open circular structure with elements of offerings to *Ade*. My observations about different *Adekpɔ* during my research is that their assemblages or elements of offerings varied significantly from one to another. For example, while some contained a few to

several *Aklama kpakpe* consisting of anthropomorphic figures and hunting iconographies, others had none except offering ceramic receptacles. It however came to light in my research that, due to the open nature of the *Adekpɔ* and the exposure of its contents to the weather, *Aklama* figurines hosted in it usually deteriorate and completely decay over time. Again, when *Ade* spirits are not ‘causing’ troubles, an *Adekpɔ* may somewhat be neglected particularly when there is no initiated *Adela* or *Adesi* to serve as its caretaker. However the *Adekpɔ* usually gets regenerated with new sets of *Aklama kpakpe* and offering elements when *Ade* recruits an *Adela* or *Adesi* through spiritual possession.

6.3. Conclusion.

Ewe worldviews position the human being as a sojourner on earth to accomplish a pre-destined assignment. Thus conceptualized, a person is considered to be entangled in physical and spiritual realities. From the inter-zonal local worldviews elaborated in this study, it is fair to posit that *Aklama* broadly represents worldviews and religious approaches to spiritual phenomena to ensure balance and harmony. It is equally fair to surmise that as an indigenous Ewe concept, *Aklama* encapsulates local beliefs about personhood, community, destiny and their interrelationships. In these contexts, individuals are expected to maintain their spiritual bearings, keep faith with destiny to serve the common good of community, and eventually return to the spirit world as veritable ancestors.

Customary rites, traditions and ritual performance that mediate various relationships to ensure the success of the individual and the well-being of community are within the ambit of *Aklama*. Favourable conditions and successful livelihoods are largely attributed to proper alignments of people’s sense of purpose, and synchrony between the physical and spiritual realms of existence. Thus, general unproductivity, social mishaps and personal misfortunes may be

attributed to spiritual causality that need to be addressed appropriately. The process of ‘diagnosing’ problems of spiritual source, and the general quests for supernatural favours as well as protection from mishaps usually require manifestations and/or physical substantiations of responsible spirits for ‘dialogue’ in ritual contexts. Hence, *Aklama kpakpe* represent mediums by which spirits are focalized and/or materially constituted for ritual engagements. As discussed extensively in this study, Ewe worldviews emphasize common humanity and individual uniqueness at the same time. Thus, while there are notable convergences in local conceptualizations of human nature, there are also significant differences in representations of the spiritual essence of individuals and associated agents in the spirit world. Moreover, as the observations within communities in the different zone indicated, shared beliefs and traditions significantly influence the forms of *Aklama kpakpe* and their associated functions.

Furthermore, given the fact that most *Aklama kpakpe* are necessitated by crisis situations where individuals need to engage specific spirits agents in the context of rituals, as much as individuals’ situations differed, so also are the focalizations of responsible spiritual entities. Particularly when divinations provide the major prescriptions for constituting *Aklama kpakpe*, as well as procedure for their activations, there are more variability in meanings and functions than their forms would suggest. Again, established that requisite spirits are invoked or transposed into *Aklama* figurines in moments of ritual engagement, the forms of *Aklama kpakpe* as demonstrated by my research findings are not as significant as the means to ensure their effectiveness to bringing about the desirable outcome. In conclusion, *Aklama* figurines are better evaluated within their contexts of engagements and particular cases they represent than any collectivized generalizations.

List of Focus Group Discussions cited (FGDs)

FGD #1. Mama Baanuyena and Family members (Togbewo Ralph and Xatse), 12/03/2020, Wusuta.

FGD #2. Dada Adenuvor and Family members (i.e. the mother and a sister), 17/13/2020, Wusuta.

FGD #3. Mama Uutasi and Elders (i.e. Fo Kokroko and others.) at the annual celebration, 20/09/2020, Awate.

FGD #4. Some Elders at Tsrukpe-Dokuma, 05/10/2020, Tsrukpe.

FGD #5. Togbe Dra IV and Elders, 11/10/2020, Aveme-Dra.

FGD #6. Togbe Akpasati and Elders, 16/11/2020, Battor.

List of Key Informant Interviews cited (KII)

Respondents	Gender	Age	Date	Town/Village
KII #1. Togbe Afram	Male	70+	09/01/2020	Peki-Dzogbati.
KII #2. Dadaga Adjoa Bansah	Female	93	12/01/2020	Peki-Blengo.
KII #3. Efo Bogya	Male	60+	12/01/2020	Peki-Avetile.
KII #4. Togbe Agubretu IV	Male	58	13/01/2020	Peki-Blengo.
KII #5. Tronsi Yawa Dogbe	Female	45	12/03/2020	Wusuta.
KII #6. Dadaga Baako	Female	82	12/03/2020	Wusuta.
KII #7. Togbe Egorta	Male	80+	12/03/2020	Wusuta.
KII #8. Fiayo Afriyie	Male	70+	13/03/2020	Wusuta.
KII #9. Fo Astu	Male	40+	13/03/2020	Wusuta.
KII #10. Mama Uutasi	Female	56	14/03/2020	Awate.
KII # 11. Francis, Tsekpo	Male	36	15/03/2020	Kpando.
KII #12. Togbe Gidi-Yiboe II	Male	60+	16/03/2020	Anfoega.
KII #13. Togbe Agbe	Male	72	18/03/2020,	Wusuta.
KII #14. Togbe Buaku	Male	53	18/03/2020	Wusuta.
KII #15. Ras Makao	Male	50+	04/06/2020	Anloga.
KII #16. Mama Afortude	Female	70+	05/06/2020	Anloga.
KII #17. Togbe Asentsi	Male	30+	06/06/2020	Anloga.
KII #18. Xonovia Goku	Male	50+	06/06/2020,	Anloga.
KII #19. Dumashie Yaotsey	Male	30	07/06/2020	Dzelukorpe, Keta.
KII #20. Mama Taroshie Mensah	Female	60+	09/06/2020	Blekuso.
KII #21. Mama Uutasi	Female	56	19/09/2020	Awate.
KII #22. Togbe Tongo	Male	40+	20/09/2020	Wusuta.
KII #23. Fo Ray	Male	80	20/09/2020	Wusuta.
KII #24. Amega Afewo	Male	50+	21/09/2020	Kpando-Togorme.
KII #25. Francis Tsekpo	Male	36	25/09/2020	Kpando.
KII #26. Togbe Agbe	Male	72	25/09/2020	Wusuta.
KII #27. Fo Ralph Acheampong	Male	60+	26/09/2020	Vakpo.
KII #28. Mama Fofie Yentumi	Female	58	27/09/2020	Aveme-Danyigba.
KII #29. Togbe Azubi	Male	40+	27/09/2020	Aveme-Danyigba.
KII #30. Efo Sodza	Male	40+	28/09/2020	Wusuta.

KII #31. Ben Agbo	Male	60+	28/09/2020	Vakpo.
KII #32. Fo W.A (acting priest)	Male	60+	30/09/2020	Wusuta.
KII #33. Togbe Buaku	Male	53	01/10/2020	Wusuta.
KII #34. Mama Alanusi	Female	80	01/10/2020	Kpando-Agbenorxoe.
KII #35. Emmanuel Dzakpo	Male	50+	02/10/2020	Wusuta.
KII #36. Togbe Dzomefe	Male	50+	05/10/2020	Tsrukpe.
KII #37. Togbe Akangla	Male	30+	05/10/2020	Tsrukpe.
KII #38. Togbe Gadzedzo	Male	30+	06/10/2020	Vakpo.
KII #39. Xunuɔ Gatukpe	Male	60+	07/10/2020	Kpeve-Tornu.
KII #40. Fiayo Afriyie	Male	70+	11/10/2020	Wusuta.
KII #41. Mama Avɔɖetɔ	Female	90	07/11/2020	Mafi-Adidome.
KII #42. Mr. Dogah	Male	62	07/11/2020	Mafi-Adidome.
KII #43. Dumega Klu	Male	74	07/11/2020	Mafi-Adidome.
KII #44. Togbe Afatsiawo Tsikata	Male	76	09/11/2020	Mafi-Adidome.
KII #45. Mama Abosti	Female	98	09/11/2020	Mafi-Adidome.
KII #46. Efo Dzeanyikpor	Male	52	09/11/2020	Gbedemakorpe.
KII #47. Bokovi E. and Dotse. E (the Elesem brothers)	Males	85, 55	10/11/2020	Mafi-Amegakorpe.
KII #48. Togbe Sowada	Male	96	10/11/2020	Mafi-Kumasi.
KII #49. Mamisi Amlalo	Male	68	10/11/2020	Mafi-Asiekpe.
KII #50. Adela Zutunu	Male	80	11/11/2020	Mafi-Tsati.
KII #51. Zikpuitɔ Dei-Zanga	Male	89	11/11/2020	Mafi-Asiekpe.
KII #52. Togbe Ayite Duame II	Male	70+	12/11/2020	Mafi-Dadoboe.
KII #53. Hunuɔ Gble	Male	80	13/11/2020	Gblorkorpe.
KII #54. Emmanuel Dorcoo	Male	55	13/11/2020	Kpogedɛ.
KII #55. Togbe Adzormahe	Male	74	14/11/2020	Mafi-Adidome.
KII #56. Mama Sadekla	Female	65	16/11/2020	Aveyime.
KII #57. Mama Tsorme	Female	55	17/11/2020	Mepe.
KII #58. Adela Korve	Male	100	17/11/2020	Mepe.
KII #59. Yevu Assor	Male	77	18/11/2020	Bakpa-Todze.
KII #60. Mr. Agbetsi R.	Male	50	18/11/2020	Mafi-Adidome.
KII #61. Togbui Kumassah	Male	78	19/03/2021	Vui, Keta.
KII #62. Adela Ray	Male	30	19/03/2021	Latame, Attito.
KII #63. Togbui Nanashie	Male	60	21/03/2021	Tettekorpe, Keta.
KII #64. Mama Tettevi	Female	83	21/03/2021	Tettekorpe, Keta.
KII #65. Amegashie Abiashie	Female	37	23/03/2021	Tegbi, Keta.
KII #66. Hunuɔ Lawoe and Torboko Lawoetey (twin brothers)	Males	32	32/03/2021	Tegbi, Keta.
KII #67. Togbui Dzokasare	Male	89	34/03/2021	Attito.
KII #68. Efo Joshua K.T.A	Male	36	25/03/2021	Tegbi, Keta.
KII #69. Mama Seneza	Female	70+	25/03/2021	Blekuso.
KII #70. Atikela Abotsivia	Male	68	27/03/2021	Woe.
KII #71. Mama Afortude	Female	70+	27/03/2021	Anloga.
KII #72. Tobuiwo Agbele III and Latsu	Males	69,70+	28/03/2021	Blekuso.

KII #73. B. Akpe and R. Akpe (The Akpe brothers)	Males	35, 39	30/03/2021	Klikor.
KII #74. Fo Akyimfoli	Male	54	31/03/2021	Dzodze.
KII #75. Togbui Awuku	Male	95	31/03/2021	Dzodze.
KII #76. Togbui Asentsi	Male	30+	02/04/2021	Anloga.
KII #77. Amegashie Taroshie	Female	70+	03/04/2021	Woe.
KII #78. Togbui Gaddah	Male	49	03/04/2021	Woe.
KII #79. Vena Dogbatsey	Female	70	05/04/2021	Anloga.
KII #80. Dadaga Nutsugah	Female	84	05/04/2021	Dzelukorpe, Keta.



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