

‘Let No Black Cat Cross Our Path’: An Introduction to Ga Rituals of Affliction

Gyau Kumi Adu

University of Ghana, Legon, Ghana

joewykay55@gmail.com

Abstract

Although much has been said about Ga rituals by earlier scholars such as Ammah, Kilson, and Field, no direct and comprehensive literature exists that deals specifically with Ga rituals of affliction. Rituals of affliction are measures by which cultures attempt to deal with the problem of ‘affliction’. All cultures have a different way in which affliction is explained and dealt with. This article explores Ga rituals of affliction based on an analysis of one text line in Ga libation prayers, ‘Let no black cat cross our path’ (*abnte diŋ ko akafo wɔteŋ*).

Keywords

affliction – black cat (*abnte diŋ*) – rituals of affliction – spiritual world and spiritual cause – *kla* – *sususma*

1 Introduction

In their religious worldview, the indigenous Ga people of Ghana, who occupy a territory extending from the Gulf of Guinea in the south to the feet of the Akuapim Hills (Odotei 1989), offer a profound way of looking at affliction. Affliction is ultimately caused by the medium of spiritual agency.¹ An affliction is simply ‘a state of pain, distress, or grief; misery’ (Collins 2016). It signifies a condition in which the affected suffers a form of pain or trouble. It is a ‘state of severe distress associated with events that threaten the intactness of the person’ (Malpas and Lickiss 2012, v). In the Ga context affliction sometimes takes the form of diseases (*helai*) such as fever, paralysis, diarrhea, and strange diseases that defy scientific diagnosis (*helai gbonyo*), and at other times bodily

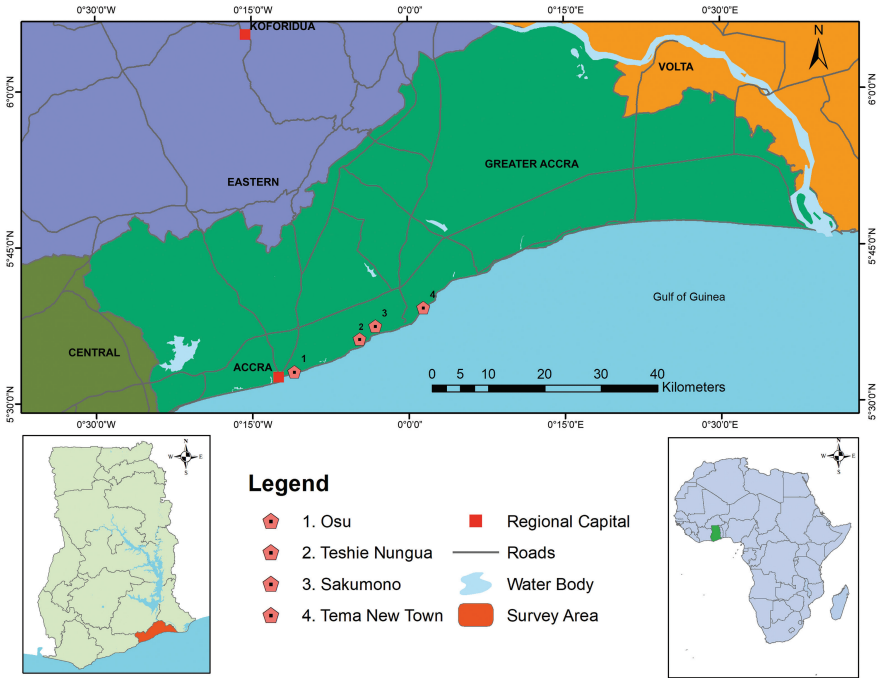


FIGURE 1 Map of Southern Ghana

weaknesses and physical pain, including head and stomachaches. In other cases, affliction comes as psychological problems such as madness (*sekeyeli*), fear (*gbeyeishemɔ*), and even some abnormal behaviors. Some of the cases are so severe that they lead to the death of the victim (*gbele*).

Understanding the nature of affliction is very significant to comprehending rituals of affliction, since these rituals are ways in which cultures attempt to deal with the problem of affliction. Every culture has a way in which affliction is described, along with the associated rites to deal with it. In Victor Turner's work *The Ritual Process*, 'rituals of affliction' in the context of the Ndembu tribe of Zambia attempts to alleviate the influence of ancestral spirits that cause people harm. The performance of the *Isoma* ritual is based on the belief of ancestral veneration. When people in the community fail to honor ancestral spirits by performing their social obligations, the ancestors punish them by inflicting them with some misfortune (Turner 1969).

Elsewhere among the Krobos of Ghana, a closely related ethnic group to the Ga people, the *Kodaa Kpami* ritual generally employs 'ritual cursing' to prevent spiritual causative agents² from creating harm that will lead to the destruction of life (Ossom-Batsa 2008). Since the nature of affliction is of a spiritual cause, its remedy, that is 'rituals of affliction', also has spiritual roots.

2 Reflections on the Notion of a 'Black Cat' and Affliction

In anticipation of the New Year, Gas greet each other in the following way:

Afi oo, Afi!	Happy New Year!
Hiao!	May it be so!
Ŋɔwala! Ŋɔwala!	Long life to you
Afi naa akpe wɔ!	The year is gone around!
Gbii kpaanyɔ anina wɔ!	May we see the eighth day!
Wɔye Gbo, ni wɔye gbienaa!	May we enjoy the heavy and the lesser rains
Alɔnte diŋ ko aka fo wɔteŋ	May no black cat separate us!
Wɔfee momoomo!	May we applaud each other!
Wɔsɛɛ afi bene wɔtara	May relations between us be good
Shi neke neŋŋ!	At now a year at this time!
Koni afi aya, ni afi	That the year may go (Amartey 1995, 54)

The Ŋɔwala greeting reveals two things in relation to rituals of affliction. In the first place, blessings are desired. The blessings include enjoying long life, a bumper harvest, and harmony. On other hand, evil is to be avoided or prevented. This is summed up in the text line 'Let not a black cat cross our path', which also appears in Ga libation prayers.

Mensah writes, 'When our elders and traditional rulers pour libation in prayers to the Supreme Being, the ancestors and gods, among other things, they say, "Alonte din ko aka fo wo ten". This means that no black cat should pass between us; for in their minds, the black cat signifies misfortune' (Mensah 2013, 247). Misfortunes include accidents, death, drought, famine, infertility, illness, and conflicts in relationships. Moreover, the colour black in the indigenious Ghanaian setting is usually associated with evil things, although in certain circumstances it can have a good connotation. For instance, when a person dies an 'unnatural death'³ black is worn to funerals to symbolize a time of great sorrow and pain, but in the Akan setting a black stool is the symbol of spiritual power (Blay 2009). The variety of interpretations in colour symbolism reveal the multiplicity and complexity of African systems of beliefs.

A 'black cat separating us' or 'crossing our path' refers to a situation of evil in the form of conflict that destroys harmony, severing healthy relationships. This is a serious repercussion since in all Ga communities, rituals are aimed toward bringing harmony between the spiritual world and physical world (Kilson 1971). A Ga elder explained that the expression '*alɔnte diŋ ko akafo wɔteŋ*' has to do with unseen trouble that separates people or causes friends and family

to quarrel.⁴ This usually concerns gossip, which disrupts healthy relationships. The nature of gossip is such that it is something very hard to detect. Just as it is hard to identify a black cat that causes destruction in darkness, it is also very hard to identify people who destroy healthy relationships through gossip. This problem of identification with the significance of 'black' is further expressed in the proverb 'If it is night all men are black' (*ke dzen na le gbomei fee dio*) (Zimmerman 1858, 158). To put it another way, at night it is difficult to identify a person or differentiate one person from another because of darkness.

The Ga word '*fo*' means to separate, cut, cross, or divide. Hence '*abnte diŋ ko aka fo wɔteŋ*' means no unseen gossip or trouble should cross our path. Unseen trouble is not only limited to the physical sphere or the sociological settings, but also the spiritual world that is full of invisible causes. Therefore, it can be applied to supernatural causes such as curses (*lomɔ*), the use of spiritual medicine (*wɔŋ*),⁵ witchcraft, and punishment from the ancestors or gods (retribution) (Hampton 1982). For instance, witches (*ayei*) are believed to leave their body at night and feed on the *kla* (soul) of their victims (Field 1961). This weakens the *kla* and can lead to death. Such an affliction is a 'black cat' since it is unseen with the naked eye. It takes those who have trained their metaphysical abilities (of the *kla* and *susuma*) to be able to detect such causes and apply the appropriate ritual of affliction. At this point it is important to briefly discuss the Ga concept of a person in order to understand the Ga belief system surrounding rituals of affliction.

3 The Ga Concept of a Person

A person is comprised of the *gbɔmɔtso* (body), and the immaterial '*kla*' (soul) and the '*susuma*' (spirit). The composite word '*gbɔmɔtso*' combines the Ga terms '*gbɔmɔ*' and '*tso*'. *Gbɔmɔ* is a generic term for a person or human being, whether male or female. '*Tso*' refers to a tree or 'figure of a body'. This implies the corporate expression of the body made up of the blood (*la*), bones (*wui*), and flesh (*heloo*), which are responsible for all the biological processes of the human body such as birth (*fɔmɔ*), breathing (*mu*), and so on. At birth a person takes on a temporary house that is associated with the *susuma* and *kla* that he or she leaves at death.

Before a person is born it is believed that the *kla* goes to see the Creator (*Nyɔmɔ*) and chooses a destiny. 'Destiny' here refers to the message or specific life purpose of an individual that the *kla* brings into the world. Hence the *kla* is responsible for a person's destiny. The *kla* is also a person's protector. Failing to follow one's life mission (destiny) can make the *kla* retreat from its proper

function of protection. This exposes that person to harmful danger such as physical illness and attacks from evil spirits. *Gbeshi* is one of them. This spirit (*mum*) can cause a person to commit very disorderly actions that distract a person from fulfilling his or her destiny. These behaviors include excessive drinking of alcohol, madness, murder, and theft. This does not mean that the Gas attribute all bad behavior to the *gbeshi*, since this account is only plausible after ruling out the possibility of these deviant behaviors to hereditary (i.e., genetic) factors, and is not identified within one's close family ties, as the following quote explains:

Any form of socially unacceptable behavior which does not occur in a man's immediate family, and thus cannot be attributed to heredity, is liable to be attributed to a *gbeshi*. It is regarded as a disruptive force which interferes with the links binding the *kla* and the *susuma*, and prevents the victim from fulfilling his destiny.

ENGMANN 1992, 174

It is therefore prudent that one works in conformity with the *kla* to enjoy life (*wala*). On the contrary, those who defy the dictates of the *kla* have to undergo rituals of affliction to get rid of the *gbeshi* for the *kla* to return to its normal state and function (*gbeshiedziem*). The *kla* is the principle of life. It may be for this reason that the word '*kla*' is translated as life, energy, or vigor (Glosbe 2015). The departure of the *kla* leads to death.

Unlike the *kla*, the *susuma* is a spiritual entity that can exit the body without causing physical death. Nonetheless, when the *susuma* stays outside the body for too long it leads to death. In a situation where a person dies unnatural death the *susuma* becomes an *otofo*. 'An *otofo* is angry and may haunt passers-by in a rough and frightening manner until it is pacified and its spirit transferred' (Engmann 1992, 165).

A person's *susuma* can travel outside the body without his or her knowledge. It is implied from this that the *susuma* has a will of its own independent of a person's actions. It follows from this that the *susuma* is unconscious.⁶ This is supported by the fact that two *susumas* can interact without people being aware of it. However, there are exceptional cases in which agents are able to subject their *susuma* to conscious control. These agents have trained their psychic abilities well enough, such as witches and medicine men. As Engmann observes:

The term [*sususma*] is intended to cover diverse activities which witches are believed to perform out of the body by night, such as travelling to a meeting-place, taking part in a discussion or feast, and procuring food

by a spiritual attack on a victim. These activities, the reality of which is very widely believed in, are said to be performed by the *susumai* (plu. for *susuma*) of witches which leave their bodies by night.

ENGMANN 1992, 160–161

Engmann notes that witches have the power to control their *susuma* in order to have out-of-body experiences. Witches use their *susuma* to inflict pain on other people. Their victims can suffer physical illness, bodily pains, and all kinds of affliction. The *susuma* is believed to have access to accurate and reliable knowledge about a person. This is because a man may be mistaken about himself, but his *susuma* is never deceived or in error. For this reason, in some instances of affliction it takes the knowledge of the *susuma* to know the cause of the affliction and which kind of ritual of affliction to apply.

From our discussion on the concept of a person we conclude that spiritual entities such as the *susuma* (including *otofo*) and *kla* have the power to cause affliction or provide useful aids to deal with affliction. The execution of the rituals of affliction requires the coordination of these interrelated parts of a person to ensure full restoration, which demands total harmony of the *kla*, *susuma*, and *gbɔmɔtso* (individual/personal harmony).

4 Functions of Ga Rituals of Affliction

After it has been discovered that a person is suffering from an affliction, 'an implicit or explicit decision is taken collectively [by other Ga family members] as to whether the situation is serious enough to justify the disturbance of normal social relations' (Mensah 2013, 242). If it is serious the afflicted is relieved of all social responsibilities, isolated, and immediately taken to a ritual official such as a priest (*wuɔmɔ*), a medium (*wɔɔntɛ*), or a medicine man (*tsofatɛ*). Ritual procedures known as rituals of affliction proceed in order to restore that person. The reason for this urgent move is that if the situation is not dealt with quickly the harmful effect spreads to other members of the family who are innocent. An elder once noted that 'A Ga does not like to offend in anything to be cursed, because the curse lives on to affect the next generation' (Ganyo sumɔɔ ni ɛtɔ yɛ noko mli ni ena lomɔ, ejaake eya keha seshibii nitsara nɔ lɛ).⁷

Rituals of affliction are therefore to remove the effects of affliction so that the afflicted can return to the normal state of affairs and be reintegrated into society. One Ga expression for rituals of affliction is '*kusum ni hereɔ*'. *Kusum* means custom, or a way of doing things, and '*hereɔ*' connotes to save or deliver. In this context it applies to the ways in which the Gas deal with affliction. The

main aim of all Ga rituals of affliction is to restore harmony. Kilson makes the following point: 'The maintenance and restoration of order in the relations between God and man depend upon the performance of ritual by which mortal Ga attempt to establish contact with divinity and to achieve certain goals through this interconnection' (Kilson 1969, 162). Rituals of affliction are geared toward corporate harmony, that is, between the spiritual world – spiritual beings such as the gods, ancestral spirits, and spiritual entities such as spiritual medicine – and the physical world.

There are basically two processes involved in rituals of affliction. The first is to provide a diagnosis of the patient in which the spiritual cause of the situation is identified through divination. For instance, if the symptom of the sickness is due to the *kla* withdrawing from protecting the person, it is detected at this point. A medicine man can contact his *kla* to retrieve this information. The ritualist can also directly contact the gods through prayer and pouring of libation to receive information regarding the cause of the affliction. A priest once relayed to me that the cause of one person's affliction, who had come to seek redress, was revealed to him while in communion with the spirits.⁸

The next step is to provide ritual instructions on the way to deal with the affliction. It is believed that after these procedures are followed the affliction will cease so that the afflicted person can return to his/her normal state of affairs. Total harmony between the spiritual world and the physical world will be achieved. A sure sign that a ritual is successful is that the person's health is restored to normalcy.

5 The Taxonomy and Religious Significance of Rituals of Affliction

According to Catherine Bell, rituals of affliction perform four main actions – they heal, exorcise, purify, and protect (Bell 2009). In the Ga setting, another purpose of rituals of affliction is to prevent incoming destruction. Rituals of affliction can be classified based on their purposes. Five main types of rituals of affliction based on their objectives are healing, exorcism, purification, protection and prevention.

The first aim of rituals of affliction is to cure a person suffering from a spiritually caused affliction. People may fall sick due to certain spiritual factors.⁹ One example is the case of an 'injured *kla*'. When witches harm the *kla* it weakens it and leads to ill-health. Another is a 'resentful *kla*'. Disobeying the desires of the *kla* causes it to withdraw from its proper functions, causing ill-health. These situations demand curative rituals of affliction since their main aim is to heal the afflicted who is suffering from a disease.

In the case of witchcraft activities, the *kla* of the person has to be strengthened because after feeding on the *kla* the witches either totally consume it, in which case the person is already dead, or leave a portion, which leads to weakness. The only hope for a weakened *kla* is for it to be revived. The ritual official has to call the person's *kla* and determine what happened to it. Upon realizing this, rituals have to be carried out to strengthen the weak *kla*. A blood sacrifice can serve this purpose.

Blood is the source of life that is used as a means of sustaining, strengthening, and saving life. Shedding blood grants healing and restores the spiritual power of the *kla*. Gas believe that witches feed on their victim's blood to receive more power. Blood also strengthens the power of a *wɔŋ* (spiritual medicine) (Akroing 1978). It is therefore very common for ritualists to regularly offer the blood of a fowl to revitalize their *wɔŋ* and alleviate affliction. However, only sheep and cattle are accepted as sacrifices to the gods.

The colour of the animal for sacrifice is usually white because white stands for purity. The pureness of the animal's colour is a reflection of the purity of the sacrifice needed to make amends. Other colours such as red or brown are allowed for sacrifice if those are the only available choices for the offender. However, black is never allowed for any sacrifice since it symbolizes sorrow and death. This is in contradistinction to Talensi animal sacrifice of northern Ghana in which red is used when victims are in danger, and black-coloured animals are used to get rid of darkness or evil that has been orchestrated to destroy the victim (Insoll 2010). These various African religious images with its interpretations of colour in sacrifices reveal the power of the sacred to impose religious ideals on secular objects (De White 2008), which in turn inform the kind of objects that qualify for the performance of rituals of affliction for redress.

The ritual official offers blood for the *kla* to purify it. One priest stated that the 'shedding of blood washes away any evil and expels bad spirits from the town' (*Kɛji la shwie shi, ejieɔ nibii fɔji kɛ mumɔ fɔji fɛɛ shiɔɔ maŋ mli*).¹⁰ Hence blood sacrifices break evils omens, cleanse the spiritually impure person, and release the victim from the state of affliction. In addition, the person may be told to eat what his *kla* likes. Every person's *kla* has preferences pertaining to morality and food. Following these instructions aids in strengthening the *kla* back to full health.

At other times the afflicted may be troubled with an evil spirit. Such circumstances demand that rituals of affliction exorcise or take away troubling spirits (*gbeshiedziemɔ*). *Gbeshiedziemɔ* involves the removal of a spirit called *gbeshie* that interferes with the proper functions of one's *kla* and leads to many misfortunes. Gender differentiation applies in the removal of the *gbeshie*

since the gender of the animal used for the blood sacrifice is very significant. If the person afflicted is a male, then a male fowl must be offered. Similarly, if the victim is female a female fowl is received since the animal stands in for the person (Akrong 1978). After rituals are carried out to remove the *gbeshie* from the victim, a sheep is then slaughtered and the blood is rubbed over the body of the sufferer to take away the entire affliction caused by this intruding spirit (Akrong 1978). This restores the *kla* back to its proper function of protecting the individual.

Rituals of affliction are also performed for purification purposes. Awolalu explains that one consequence of sin in African indigenous religions is to make the offender ceremonially impure (Awolalu 1976). Such a state attracts punishment from the gods and other spirit powers. Some time ago in the Ga community of Tema Manhean, a Ga man ate *kpokpoi*¹¹ that had not been dedicated to the gods and was struck by the spirit powers with severe diarrhea, leading to his death. To avoid such mishaps, African societies have a 'system of putting prohibitions and restrictions on certain acts and utterances in a society' (Agyekum 1996, 6), called taboos, which act as a constitution to govern moral behaviour. Most African religions regard incest, suicide, and murder as grave offenses that attract very serious misfortune.

A troubling feature of the nature of affliction is that it has collective consequences. Affliction is never an individual problem. Ga family units are connected by blood (Kilson 1969), making an affliction transferable. Hence the consequences of a taboo (*musu*) is transferable, first to immediate family members. If proper purification rituals proceedings are not followed to stop the affliction, it spreads like a plague from the immediate family to the whole community. In Tema Manhean a Ga man once reported a case of stolen items to a ritualist. The priest required the offender, who was identified, to confess within a certain number of days in order to prevent harmful consequences, but he refused. Within three weeks five of his family members died under very strange circumstances. After his family inquired about the matter, they were told the offender had to go and make a confession before this death plague would stop.¹²

Such a case demands that the officiating priest first appease (*kpata*) the gods by offering a sheep (*too*) or a cow (*tsina*), preferably a white one. The shedding of the blood of a cow or sheep particularly mends the broken relationship between the god (*jemawɔn*) that is causing the affliction and the offender. In addition to that, the victims involved have to be cleansed. Purification is performed with a concoction of *nyanyara*¹³ leaves called *aworke*, and blood to cleanse the sufferer. Although it is true that blood stops the wrath of the gods, and hence affliction must cease after appeasement (*kpatamɔ*), this is not

always the case. This is because the destructive influence that causes the affliction set in motion by the gods is independent of the gods themselves (Field 1961). Hence aside from the shedding of blood to appease the wrath of the gods, blood must be shed again to cleanse the offender. This is what neutralizes or stops the source of power that causes the affliction and frees the victim.

Rituals of affliction for protection are done to guard people from potential threats of affliction. In many African cultures most people believe that spiritual powers can be generated to harm other people. In his discussion of a 'wɔŋ' (spiritual medicine/power), Philip Laryea describes it as an unseen power that can work wonders (Laryea 2004). It can be used to cause harm such as stealing and cheating without being caught, or the destruction of another person's *susuma*. For this reason, many Gas have protective medicine (wɔŋ) against all of these potential threats. These medicines include those that protect against spiritually caused diseases, spells, and the protection of property and life. There are conditions attached to protective medicine. One is that a protective medicine is made to serve only one purpose (Field 1961). Hence the more things a person wants to secure through the protective medicine, the more protective medicines must be utilized.

Lastly, rituals of affliction also have a preventive function. This has to do with the interception of impending danger. Unlike rites of protection whose aim is to shield the victim, preventive rituals aim at destroying harmful events from reaching the victim. In the case of protective rites, the destructive influence of the wɔŋ is neutralized when it gets to the victim because he/she is armed with a higher spiritual power. On the other hand, preventive rituals stop the destructive influence from even being executed. In other words, while protective medicine stops the destructive power set in motion from reaching the victim, in the case of preventive rites it does not even start in the first place. Ritual officials enter into the future dimension of time and cause neutralize the power of the destructive influence.

Prayer is a prevalent preventive ritual of affliction. Ga prayers are directed toward preventing impending harm that might come on the community. The following libation prayer supports this assertion:

Everything that will happen to us. Avert it and throw it away for us
 Because you are like a god that we worship. So as many times as we are
 able to stand We must call you, so you may help us with helping. If any-
 thing is happening to us, avert it and throw it away for us ... But don't sit
 down for danger to flood us. So what we have seen, may we not see any
 again. May Jehovah help you so that everything That would happen to us,
 you may avert it and throw it away ... Your eyes are many but ours are only

two. So this Saturday Come and get some drink to drink, that you may give us blessing. Strike. Let there be peace.

DAKUBU 1987, 523–524

In this prayer the Ga medium (*wɔyo*) pleads to the spirit powers to destroy any form of evil that will happen. One underlying principle here is that the Gas believe that the future can be altered in one's favor if higher powers are contacted.

Another person whose work is connected to preventive rituals is the medicine man (*tsofoastɛ*). Among the Ga ritual officials, the *tsofoastɛ* is one who is vested with much spiritual medicine so that cases of impending spiritual harm can be prevented. One elder in Tema Manhean shared an example with me. There was a time in Tema Manhean when a medicine man intercepted a spiritual medicine that was supposed to destroy the chief he was protecting as he sat on his stool.¹⁴ He was sick for about two weeks after that incident. This sickness was supposed to cause the chief to die, but the medicine man took on the sickness instead. He altered the factors that were needed to cause the destructive medicine to harm the chief.

6 Conclusion

This article explores Ga rituals of affliction by examining the implications of the *Nɔɔwala* text line 'Let the black cat not cross our path' (*abɔnte diŋ ko akafo wɔten*) in a religious context. A 'black cat' is a misfortune or an affliction that threatens the foundation of the Ga community. This is because Ga societies are built on the ethic of maintaining the bond of unity and good relations between the physical and spiritual world.

Any time a 'black cat' crosses people's path this healthy relationship is broken, leading to affliction. This is a severe matter because affliction can affect both the individual and the immediate family, bringing the entire community under threat. Family units are connected by blood, so a member of a household who offends by violating spiritual rules brings serious punishment not only on him/herself but on other members of the family. Hence affliction is essentially collective in nature, and demands collective concern and efforts to redress it.

The type of rituals of affliction is always dependent on the nature of the affliction. Healing rituals are administered if the person has offended the gods and has been struck by a disease. A cow or sheep can then be offered to stop the destructive influence so health can be restored. In certain circumstances

rituals of affliction take the form of exorcism to remove any spirit negatively influencing a person and bring restoration. Rituals of affliction also exist to purify a person who has committed an offence that makes him/her ceremonially impure, thus attracting punishment. Other times people pursue ritualists to stop future affliction from occurring. The 'ritual cursing' rite of the Krobos discussed earlier falls within this category since it has the purpose of preventing spiritual causative agents from causing harm in the coming year.¹⁵ Protective rituals of affliction are geared toward guarding the intended victim from harm. They work by neutralizing the effect of the destructive influence on the victim.

In the context of the Ga people, rituals of affliction are measures to remedy any harm. It must be looked at not only as a mechanical measure of redress but the effect and impact it has on families must also be taken into account. Some time ago during a series of visits to a medicine man,¹⁶ I usually had to wait in a long queue because others had come before me for consultation. I always observed an expression of comfort and joy on the faces of those whose problems were resolved. Rituals of affliction are thus the ways in which Gas seek to restore the balance between the physical and spiritual world so that blessings can return since all afflictions are destructive in nature.

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Notes

- 1 This does not mean that indigenous Gas do not have the idea of physical causes; it is just that more emphasis is placed on the spiritual world, as most indigenous African cultures do.
- 2 The ritual specifies three main categories responsible for spiritually induced mishaps: people who use magical spells to harm others, evil spirits, and witches.

- 3 A death that has a natural cause includes old age or regular sicknesses. However, in certain cases when sickness is believed to have a supernatural cause then it is an unnatural death. Unnatural deaths are usually sudden and unexpected, and merit spiritual factors. For instance, a person can die as a result of breaking taboos of the spirit powers, which in return afflict the person with a strange disease leading to death.
- 4 I am indebted to Nii Sowah who provided useful insights on the notion of the black cat during an interview. However, this conversation turned into a group discussion when he invited many knowledgeable people that he knew to join. This enriched the conversation by adding a variety of voices and granted the opportunity to compare views.
- 5 There are various meanings of the word ‘wɔŋ’. It sometimes means a ‘god’ and at other times a spiritual force or power. Field sums up this point: ‘A wɔŋ, by Ga definition, is anything that can work but not be seen and includes the smaller beings of specified and limited activity associated with medicines and magic (Field 1961, 4). It is in this context that I use this word in this work, as an invisible force or power.
- 6 Caution must be taken here not to reduce the *susuma* to an unconscious property of the ‘soul’. In Western thought this subconscious part is made up of psychological states such as the emotion of fear, and intellectual properties such as thought. These emotional and intellectual capacities in the Ga setting would be attributed to the heart (*tsui*) and mind (*Ʒwemɔ*) respectively. In contrast, although the *susuma* is unconscious it is still an entity that exists on its own and has unique properties.
- 7 Focus Group discussion, Osu, 19 July 2014.
- 8 Focus Group discussion, Nungua, 23 August 2014.
- 9 Field mentions seven causes of these spiritual illnesses: (1) injury to the *kla*, (2) resentful *kla*, (3) absence of *susuma*, (4) resentful *susuma*, (5) breaking of taboos either religious or magical, (6) action of big *dzemawon*, (7) anger of the dead (Field 1961, 120).
- 10 Interview, 2014, Nii Kofi Ashiboi II, Sakumɔ Wulɔmɔ.
- 11 It is also known as *kpekple*. This is the sacred food of the gods and ancestral spirits during Homowo. It is mainly made from corn that has been mixed with palm oil. It is a taboo to eat this food when it has not been dedicated to the gods. Focus Group discussion, Tema Manhean, 18 July 2014.
- 12 Interview, 17 July 2014, Awudun Korkor Ago, Tema Manhean medium, Tema Manhean.
- 13 Dakubu translates it as *Momordica Charantia* herb. This herb has many medicinal purposes, including dealing with cancer, infectious diseases, and blood diseases. (Dakubu 2009). In my fieldwork, all the Ga priests I visited either wore the *nyanyara* leaves around their necks or grew it around their homes to ward off evil spirits. Hence the *nyanyara* component in the concoction strengthens the work of the blood to cleanse the victim from spiritual impurities.
- 14 Focus Group discussion, Tema Manhean, 27 April 2016.
- 15 See page 3.
- 16 Observation, Tema Manhean, 8 July 2014. The ritualist, Nii Agbokome, happens to be chief ritual assistant of Tema and the head of the Traditional Psychic and Healers Association (TPHA).