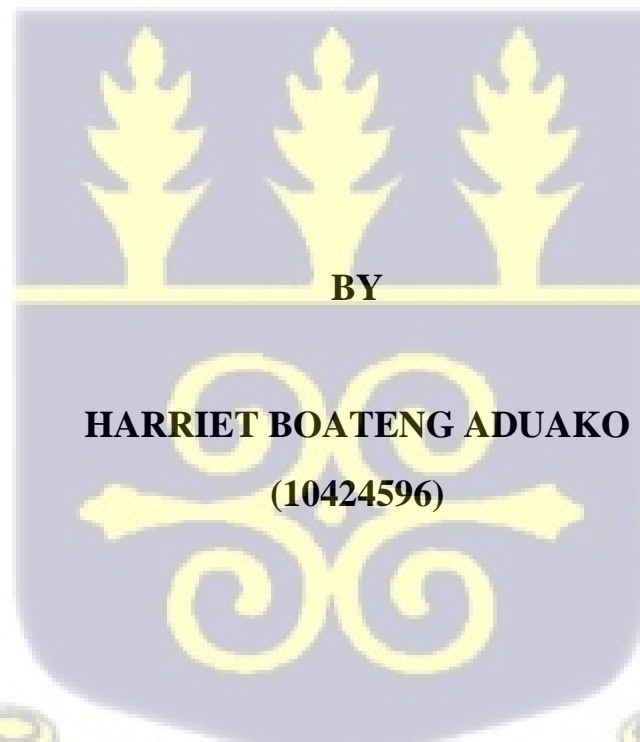


UNIVERSITY OF GHANA
INSTITUTE OF AFRICAN STUDIES

**SACRED SPACES AND WOMEN: A CASE STUDY OF OKOMFO
AKOSUA ATUOBUA IN THE KOANKRE SHRINE**



**THIS THESIS IS SUBMITTED TO THE UNIVERSITY OF GHANA,
LEGON IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT
FOR THE AWARD OF
M. PHIL DEGREE IN AFRICAN STUDIES**

JULY, 2019

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that apart from works cited, which have all been duly referenced, this thesis is my original work produced from research undertaken under supervision, and has not been presented anywhere else either in part or in full for the award of any degree.



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DEDICATION

I dedicate my master thesis to my family, friends, Andrew Mellon Foundation and all my lecturers.

ABSTRACT

The pivotal role of priestesses in traditional religious shrines is not as heavily researched as that of their male counterparts. These shrines regularly adhere to socially constructed gender roles, which reinforces patriarchy. Shrines such as Koankre have male priests who are often the primary focus of many studies on traditional African religion. This is because of cultural norms that prescribe gender roles and responsibilities for men and women in society. Nevertheless, there are shrines that are run by priestesses who defy the traditional concept of womanhood in their communities. This dissertation interrogates the role of priestesses in the traditional priesthood institution based on a case study of Okomfo Akosua Atuobua operating at Koankre shrine in the Eastern region of Ghana. The study examines how her gender impacts her ability to perform the diverse roles that she is obligated to execute as the ultimate spiritual leader in the Koankre shrine and Ohene Akura village. The study is based on field work that consists of interactions with 34 respondents from the Koankre shrine and Ohene Akura village. The research indicates that even though she operates in a patriarchal shrine, she is equipped by deities to perform her roles and duties without being confined or subordinated. The complexity of being a priestess in a predominately male dominated institution presupposes that the priestess must alternate between “genders” to perform her roles to varied groups of people and in diverse spaces. Finally, it suggests that the institution that is male dominated allows limited spiritual space for women to serve as priestesses.

GLOSSARY OF WORDS/PHRASES USED IN THE TEXT

Abosomfo: Servants of deities

Agofoma: Drummers

De-gendering: The transformation from one gender to another.

Efikesiemu: Big house

Gender: Socially constructed roles, behaviors, activities and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for men and women.

Okomfo: Priest/Priestess

Okyeame: Linguist

Re-gendering: The reinforcement of the original gender after de-gendering has occurred.

Sex: The biology of the male and female bodies.

Suman: Spirit

Sumankwafo: Servants in charge of herbs

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CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

Religious leadership in Ghana is diverse with agents from different institutions performing multiple roles in various communities. Religion as an agent of culture is impacted by the social construction of gender and the societal roles that men and women play throughout the nation. Traditional religious institutions in Ghana much like other religious bodies are obstructed by the dominate notion of gender which often prescribes the roles that men and women can hold in these institutions. (Odotei, 2006; Adomako Ampofo, 2013). Generally, men are expected to hold leadership roles with little or no interference from women, and in situations where women are involved in religious leadership, they are often presented as wives that are subordinated to men. This structure may overlook the contributions that women make to religion through their leadership establishments. Interestingly, there are some women in the traditional priesthood institution whose religious roles and leadership are relatively independent (Alou, 2009; Adomako Ampofo, 2013; Ameduime, 2015). Okomfo Akosua Atuobua¹, who performs varied roles in the Koankre shrine despite operating with male priests, is an example.

Recent studies on the traditional priesthood institution present men and women on equal footing, enabling them to perform their duties without restrictions in their various communities (Nrenzah, 2015; Mbiti, 1991; Opoku, 1978). Nevertheless, priestesses' developmental roles have not received the necessary attention in academic circles. Ameduime (2015), Adomako Ampofo (2013), Odotei (2006) Alou (2009) for example, outlined some roles and contributions of women in traditional religious leadership. It is rare

¹ Okomfo Akosua Atuobua is a priestess at Koankre shrine and currently the spiritual head of Koankre shine as well as Ohene Akura in the Kwahu West District in the Eastern Region

for priestesses operating as spiritual heads of shrines and contributors to development in society to be studied. However, scholarly attention to the roles of priestesses' in the traditional priesthood as distinct religious agents is important to understanding women's leadership (Baum, 2016). The paucity of scholarly work on priestesses in the traditional priesthood institution as compared to their male counterparts paints a picture that reinforces the limited roles of women in traditional priesthood. Regardless, priestesses have operated in religious leadership in most African societies (Odotei and Awedoba, 2006; Olupona, 2000; Nrenzah, 2015; Alou, 2009; Mbiti, 1991; Opoku, 1978). They are recognized as equally powerful as their male counterparts in their communities as healers, diviners, trainers, mentors, traditional birth attendants, exorcists and even as political heads in places where chieftaincy has not yet been instituted (Opoku, 1978).

Odotei and Awedoba (2006) believe that women's roles and responsibilities as leaders have transformed to meet contemporary challenges, intensifying advocacy for gender equity, and promoting community development. Okomfo Akosua Atuobua's situation resonates with this point as she is simultaneously functioning as a leader in the Koankre shrine and also as a spiritual head in the Ohene Akura village where she has initiated various developmental projects. Her capacity to perform these duties can be attributed to the priestess' ability to connect with the deities to whom she serves as an intermediary (Cornwall, 1994). The multiple roles she performs with ease demonstrate that priestesses are capable of leading just like their male counterparts (Ortner, 1978; Oduyoye, 2000; Page, 2011).

Additionally, women are often portrayed as powerful only after menopause because menstruation blood is believed to make her unclean, usually excluding them from some religious spaces (Kobayashi, 2013). For others, tradition does not allow women to completely take charge of running affairs in a community, but rather relegates them to subordinate roles intended to complement the work of male leaders (Achebe, 2003). Even

when women and men have been called and equipped by deities to perform roles independently, men still dominate in most religious spaces (Oduyoye, 2000).

Women's role is usually connected to the domestic sphere influencing their decision that they are incapable of handling the herculean tasks of traditional priesthood with its associated political, economic, and religious functions (Ortner, 1978; Bakare-Yusif, 2004).

While it seems advantageous for priestesses to be seen in male dominated spheres such as the priestly institution, this is accompanied by challenges that affect their ability to accomplish in their positions such as reconstructing their gender identities to perform their official roles (Agadjanian, 2002). Achebe's work on the female kings in Enugu-Ezike, Northern Igboland demonstrates the patriarchal construction of gender in traditional institutions. The portrayal of women as less capable of performing similar functions as their male counterparts obliges female kings to adopt male characteristics to fit in as a female king (Achebe, 2003).

Despite the social construction and power relations associated with women's roles in society and religious spaces, priestesses have taken religious leadership with community-wide authority. Among the Yoruba in Nigeria, priestesses of the Yemoja cult connect with the Orisa (deity) to revitalize kings and nourish the community as well (Apter, 1991). Omoyajowo (1991) for instance, noted that in the patriarchal Owe traditional society in Nigeria, the phenomenon of the "Ofosi" is associated with women who are predominantly possessed by deities to perform roles in society. In Ghana, women have similar opportunities to serve as leaders in some of the traditional institutions. At a shrine located in Obuasi Dadwen in the Ashanti region of Ghana, Okomfo Oforiwaa presides over a diverse group community, of which many seek spiritual and non-spiritual guidance (Nrenzah, 2013). Nana Yaa Anane, a priestess at the Taakwodwo shrine of Brosankro in the Ashanti region also operates as a spiritual leader and relates to her deities to divine and provide service to the

larger community (Atuahene, 2010). Okomfo Akosua Atuobua of Ohene Akura in the Eastern region manages a shrine which had always been operated by males, and also doubles as a community and spiritual head of Koankre. The scope of priestesses' influence sometimes extends beyond the local community. For example, Okomfo Akua Oparebea, a renowned priestess of Larteh Kubease in the Eastern part of Ghana, is training many priests and priestesses nationally and globally (Boakyewa, 2014).

Some scholars have highlighted the complexity of women's autonomy and power in spiritual cults (Kenyon's, 1999) and suggest that women's relationship with deities do not only challenge and appropriate male power, but also subverts gender categories (Behrend and Luig, 1999). For example, in the Bijagos Islands, the bodies of priestesses served as vessels to accomplish the initiation of young men into full ancestors (De Sousa, 1999). In Yoruba, priestesses are considered wives of divinities mostly in secret societies even when they are publicly involved in priestly roles with community wide participation. They act as messengers of the divinities to bring messages to the community while men act as interpreters (Omoyajowo, 1990).

Gender has not always been a determining factor for one's ability to take on leadership roles in traditional shrines. Miescher (2007) and Amadiume (2015) argue that colonial administrators introduced male-bias in religious leadership. They viewed women as they culturally viewed women in Europe which ultimately meant that regardless of their position, they were inferior to men. This led to the marginalization of women in both religious bodies and in the larger community. Amadiume's (2015) examination of Igbo women leaders describe gender flexibility where both men and women alternating roles when holding religious leadership positions. There are designations such as 'male daughters or female husbands' that reinforces the notion of gender fluidity. This power in varied spaces blurs the strict gender categorization (Odotei, 2006).

In the wider field of religious leadership and social relations, priestesses in leadership positions have not been thoroughly studied to interrogate their diverse contributions and roles in society especially when operating in a male dominated shrine. Little work has been done on the impact of priestesses and how they relate to deities in sacred spaces which are generally associated with males. Agadjanian (2002) terms this as de-gendering and re-gendering of one's gender to fit in or to perform duties and responsibilities assigned by the deities. This study seeks to interrogate the use of de-gendering and re-gendering as a form of resistance to the social construction of gender in male dominated shrines. It will focus on the traditional priesthood as a site of research specifically focusing on the contributions of Okomfo Akosua Atuobua in the Koankre Shrine.

1.2 Statement of Problem

The social construction of gender roles impact opportunities that men and women have access to in the traditional religious institutions (Odotei, 2006; Adomako Ampofo, 2013). Oduyoye (2000) and Achebe (2003) suggest that in patriarchal societies, masculinity is preferred and femininity is viewed as subordinate. This provides the opportunity for males to wield power, rule estates and nations, make familial decisions and lead religious institutions while women serve as support (Odotei, 2006; De Sousa, 1999). The phenomenon of priestesses is not new, however, their functioning in male dominated shrines such as Koankre as spiritual heads and community leaders is a rare occurrence. Since in most societies, people are socialized to maintain gender roles and uphold male leadership, there is often difficulty in accepting the idea of a priestess – who, by virtue of her gender is often expected to be subordinate to men (Achebe, 2003). The scanty research on priestesses as distinct leaders in the religious realm presupposes that the operation of the traditional priesthood institution remains the same regardless of the gender of the leader. Despite the

limited ability for women to participate in traditional shrines as the ultimate spiritual leader, they still face discrimination at the community and institution level. This has inadvertently led to a lack of study of this population as well as a reduction of women being willing or able to step into the role of priestesses.

1.3 Study Objectives

The main objective of this study is to interrogate the life of a priestess, Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, who operates in the male-dominated Koankre shrine, paying particular attention to her roles and contributions in this shrine and the community. The research seeks to:

- Explore the circumstances that guided Okomfo Akosua Atuobua journey to becoming a priestess in a historically ‘male’ shrine.
- Interrogate the use of de-gendering and re-gendering by Okomfo Akosua Atuobua to successfully perform her role in the Koankre shrine.
- Analyze the impact of gender norms on community members’ attitudes and expectations of the priestess of her duties as a religious and community leader.

1.4 Research Questions

- How did Okomfo Akosua Atuobua become a priestess in the traditionally “male” Koankre shrines?
- To what extent does de- gendering and re-gendering occur with female priests who work in predominantly male spaces?
- How does gender impact the administration of her duties as a priestess in the community and the shrine?

1.5 Significance of the Study

This work will contribute knowledge to the scanty research on priestesses. Additionally, the research underscores the contributions of women in leadership positions and draws particular attention to their impact and input to development in their communities and beyond.

1.6 Literature Review

This section reviews some relevant literature on women's leadership positions in traditional African religious institution. The literature reviewed will focus on Traditional African Religion as an institution, gender, and patriarchy.

1.6.1 Overview of African Traditional Religion

The priestly call comes in a variety of forms to potential devotees at distinct periods in their lives. Ben-Amos and others emphasized that in most African societies, the traditional priesthood call is inherited from one's lineage (Ben- Amos, 1994). Opoku (1978) and Mbiti (1991) argued that generally, the call comes to the candidate through possession of a family deity. It is within the family that priesthood customs, traditions and knowledge are preserved and handed over from one generation to the next (Opoku, 1978). There are rare cases where the prospective head of the shrine do not belong to the family lineage of the traditional priesthood institution yet becomes the spiritual leader of the shrine.

Mbiti (1991), Opoku (1978), and Omoyajowo (1991) suggest that the priestly role in most African societies is assigned to both men and women. The process of admission is dependent on a combination of factors such as call, ethnic identity, family ancestry and customary rules to succession. Among the Igbo, Uhammiri who is the goddess of Ugwuta Lake has priests and priestesses as renowned healers of various illnesses (Jell-Bahlsen, 2000). Among the Yoruba, Orisa-Oko cult is open to both males and females. They serve as intermediaries and

a higher percentage of them are priestesses (Omoyajowo, 1991). The works cited above however, failed to interrogate the nuanced relationships between male priests and female priestesses to the deities.

African Traditional religion is part and parcel of cultures in most African societies. Traditions and cultures in African communities and also in other parts of the world reinforce a value system that supports the social construction that subordinates women roles (Olupona, 2000). Amadiume (2015) suggests that centrality is given to women in discourses of goddesses/divinities even in patriarchal societies. According to Omoyajowo (1991), in African societies, the concept of God is not altogether masculine. In Nuba of the Sudan, God is regarded as the ‘Great Mother’ and addressed with feminine pronouns. The Ndebele and Shona ethnic groups of Zimbabwe address God in a triad as God the father, God the mother and God the Son (Omoyajowo, 1991: 74). Because of this, women are quickly “in touch”, hear, know, and speak on behalf of humans to the deities and are readily submissive to them (Opoku, 1978). Phelan (1983) argued that men are tasked with meeting the religious challenges in the priesthood institution while women are expected to create an atmosphere for possession because of maternal instincts. It is believed that women are largely able to express emotions through their softness to fierce and powerful male deities. In Igbo society, the Chi-Ukwu pantheon has both male and female deities, neutral spirits and ancestors (Jell-Bahlsen, 2000). This allows the mediums to ‘marry’ the spirit in a form of possession that helps them to perform their roles as priests and priestesses in their various shrines (Behrend & Luig, 1999). Behrend and Luig (1999) further claim that the spirits are always attracted to the opposite mediums. Thus, the male spirit ‘marries’ the female mediums and vice versa.

1.6.2 Gender and Patriarchy in African Traditional Religion

Most societies accord leadership positions to men resulting in inequalities in institutions such as religious spaces, families and even educational institutions (Sultana, 2010). The

social construction of gender and institutional patriarchal practices enable men to dominate, oppress and exploit women even when they are trained and capable for such positions. Women are often regulated to performing leadership positions that include caring, nurturing and mothering families, communities and institutions (Jell-Bahlsen, 2000; Page, 2011). Hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1995), emphasizes the dominance of men over women. Patriarchy remains part of most societies regardless of geographical location or cultural differences (Coles, 2009). Oduyoye (2000) argues that, patriarchy is not necessarily determined by the biological nature of women, rather they are dictated from society which prescribes males as superior to females.

The complexity and nuances of African culture and traditions influence the status and position of women in African traditional leadership. Adomako Ampofo (2013) suggests that although gender roles complement each other, discrimination and restrictions limit the leadership roles that women can hold in certain sectors.

Oduyoye (2000) agrees with Adomako Ampofo and argues that Akan myths, proverbs, and folktales demonstrate complementary gender roles. However, when analyzing women's roles in society, there is evidence of inequality and disadvantage. The intersection of patriarchy and culture influences women's leadership roles in African society. For instance, Nwando Achebe's (2003) work on the female king of the Enugu-Ezike, Northern Igboland, tells of a woman who challenged the "traditional" notions of masculinity and manhood in colonial Enugu Ezike and "became a man".

Amadiume (2015) asserts that in African societies, gender construction for men and women are flexible and fluid in some traditional institutions. She further argues that the socio-cultural effects of colonialism influenced the current strict gender roles for men and women. Traditional philosophies of leadership were modified to conform to the Western perspective of a rigid gender ideology (Amadiume, 2015). This imposition made men and women

always male and female regardless of their position and status in society (Amadiume, 2015; Bakare-Yusif, 2004).

Oyewumi (1997) argues that gender is not the most significant stratifying principle in African society. Oral traditions in legends, myths, stories, folk-tales, songs and dances, liturgies and rituals, proverbs and riddles birthed religion (Essien, 1994). These oral traditions established an ‘ideal’ society which included the roles and responsibilities of individuals based on gender (Bádéjò, 1998).

1.7 Theoretical Framework

This study will use intersectionality theory to interrogate Okomfo Akosua Atuobua’s role and contribution in the Koankre and Ohene Akura. The theory of intersectionality was developed by feminist scholars and originally coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989). The theory investigates nuanced experiences that impact women and addresses women’s subordination by examining the multiple and shifting identities of women in the society. Davis (2008) defines intersectionality as the interaction between categories of difference in individuals and the outcomes of these interactions in terms of power. The theory is concerned with how gender interacts in society and transforms relations of power. In the case of women in religious spaces such as the shrine, there is the notion of multiple identities that displace gender categories of femininity and masculinity. Priestesses subvert the ‘hegemonic’ hierarchies depending on the demand of the deities to execute their roles and duties to community and clients (Behrend & Luig, 1999). Feminists have argued that women’s relationship with deities dealt with resistance and empowered them as a marginalized group in religious space (Behrend & Luig, 1999). For this reason, using a gender lens and grounded in the intersectionality theory, this thesis interrogates Okomfo Akosua Atuobua’s roles, reactions, attitudes, and behaviors in Koankre shrine and the

community in which she operates. The researcher will consider culturally and socially specific implementation of intersectionality theory.

1.8 Methodology

This study required primarily qualitative methods of data collection including but not limited to one on one interviews, participatory observation and primary and secondary sources claim alone. The following sections outlined the research methods employed.

1.8.1 Research Design

This study employed qualitative research methods. Specifically, the phenomenological approach was identified as the most appropriate for the study. Phenomenology as a method uses a descriptive approach to understanding specific structures and institutions that characterize consciousness in the world as we experience it. The purpose of phenomenology is to connect individual experiences with a phenomenon which serves as the foundation for the experiences of individuals, the community or society (Creswell, 2006).

The phenomenological approach helped to reconstruct the history of the priestess in relation to the shrine, adherents, predecessors, clients, chief and elders and even community members who patronize the shrine. Such an approach was beneficial for giving context to the overall study. The researcher is an outsider/insider and as such this method supported a more complex understanding of the evolution of Koankre shrine and surrounding communities.

1.8.2 Data Collection

The researcher used both primary and secondary data collection methods. The main instruments used for the collection of primary data included interviews, focus group discussions and participant observation.

Subjects included the adherents of the shrine such as the Okomfo (priestess), Okyeame (linguist), Abosomfo (servants of the shrine) and Sumankwafo (servant in search of herbs), their shrines, clients, helpers and subscribers.

Prior to data collection, the researcher established contact with the priestess and community leadership to seek permission to conduct the study. Nrenzah (2013) states that the researcher must foster link between the people and the chosen setting. This entry was done through my father's friend who had taught in the village for more than twelve years. My father's friend served as what Roets et al (2015) termed "gatekeeper", that is, an individual whose role is to assist the researcher into the setting of the shrine and its people. This gave the researcher access to the shrine formally. Nrenzah states that "access itself does not come that easy, one must take time to develop the entry process from commencement of the research to the end" (2013: 269). This was certainly the case when researching on such a sensitive place like the shrine with the added challenge of being an outsider. However, the researcher was allowed into the shrine after the first and second visits to the shrine and adherents, the priestess, clients, and community opened up to participate in the research without fear.

The researcher's outsider position to the shrine also drew people to participate in the research since this was the first time someone apart from the expected clients, adherents and community members who come for help from the shrine, was inquiring about the inner workings of the shrine. However, the researcher's outside position obliged that each time she visited the shrine she had to explain the reason for the study. This was due to the suspicions felt by the priestess that perhaps the researcher had been sent by a media house, security persons or even a religious body to condemn their activities in the shrine.

1.8.2.1 Interviews

The interviews were conducted in the local language (Twi) using semi-structured or unstructured interview guide on working days (worship day) for the priestess, adherents,

clients, chief and elders in Ohene Akura. Semi-structured and unstructured forms of interviews offered the informants the liberty to express their views freely and even added valuable information not included in the original questions, an advantage that structured interviews lack (Greenhalg, Russell & Swinglehurst, 2005).

Before consent could be given to the researcher to conduct the interviews on the Koankre shrine, the adherents had to seek consent from the suman (spirits) and this came with payment in a form of schnapps and apketeshie (local gin). After consent was given, the researcher inserted herself into the practices and activities of the shrine to uncover the roles and contributions of the priestess in the shrine and the Ohene Akura community.

To start the interview, the researcher conducted a series of in-depth one-on-one interviews with Okomfo Akosua Atuobua to inquire about her personal life, call and priesthood experiences in the Koankre shrine, and how she relates to the deities or creates connections with the deities to get the needed result to solve people's problems. The interview also dwelt on the various roles she played in the community and when she served clients.

The researcher also interviewed the Okyeame, Sumankwafo and Abosomfo on a one-on-one basis. They are people close to Okomfo Akosua Atuobua and to an extent participate in the activities of the Koankre shrine depending on the duties assigned by the Okomfo Akosua Atuobua.

The researcher travelled from Accra on different occasions to interview respondents from whom historical and oral data was required for this study. The frequent visits to the shrine paved way for the researcher to establish an informal relationship for free interactions. The researcher transcribed and also analyzed the information from the interviews using common themes (Kumekpor, 2002).

Due to the sacred nature of the activities in the shrine, it was difficult for the researcher to explain some of the symbolic language, color expression and even some gestures used during worship. The researcher employed a research assistant from the shrine to provide critical information about the symbols, colors, and behaviors from the shrine attendants own perspective. This helped the researcher to engage meaningfully with respondents and attendants.

1.8.2.2 Focus Group Discussions

Focus group discussions were conducted to examine the communities understanding of the shrine, its leadership, and their relationship to the community. The groups consisted of adherents, clients, traditional authorities, trainee priestesses and some selected members of the Ohene Akura community who belong to the Koankre shrine. The study hosted two groups one for men and one for women with a total of 6 members per group. The male group included 4 close adherents to Okomfo Akosua Atuobua who assisted by outlining the historical background of the Koankre shrine. The group discussions helped in analyzing and evaluating the work of Okomfo Akosua Atuabua in comparison with the works of her husbands Okomfo Dafour and Okomfo Agyei both of blessed memory. These close adherents also provided facts and key historical moments associated with the village and Atibie town, Ohene Akura and the Koankre shrine.

The female group of the respondents had three priestesses who were trained by Okomfo Akosua Atuobua. They discussed their perceptions as priestesses with regards to cultural limitations and some taboos associated with their roles as women operating in the Koankre shrine.

There was also a mixed group of members selected from the 4 previous groups used for the focus group discussions. This fifth group was meant to give a fair representation of the intergenerational and modern influence of the priestesses' roles in the Koankre shrine.

A key informant was used in the selection process of people for the focus group discussions. Suad (2018) states that key informants are directly affected by or have eligible knowledge about a phenomenon. For all the groups, the key informant first identified among the people the most popular person, who without any restrictions, was ready to be part of the discussion, and who also helped in selecting other members who were also ready to discuss issues at liberty.

In each group, there was time allocation of 2 hours. Respondents were made aware that the discussion would be recorded with a recorder. It is worth noting that some respondents who were very expressive in the all-male and all-female groups became much calmer and gave straight answers when they were put in the mixed group.

1.8.2.3 Participant Observation

Participation and observation go together since a researcher cannot participate without observing the activities of the shrine. Lecompte (1999) defines participant observation as the process of learning through exposure to, or involvement in the day-to-day activities as participants in the researcher setting.

To observe the operations of the shrine, the researcher spent time in the shrine on most working days. The researcher paid attention to the shrine's activities including but not limited to the number of people who visited the Koankre shrine, their purpose for the visit and the items they brought for the performance of rituals. There was a specific focus on the age, gender and purpose of the visit. The researcher observed symbolic items such as the swords, cowries, kola nuts and eggs which were constantly used by the priestess in the Koankre shrine during possession. The researcher also observed costumes used by the priestess during possession and in her non possessed state. This provided the researcher with information that the priestess' changed costumes while performing her roles in the Koankre shrine. There was a behavior change with the priestess that accompanied the costume change

during the possession. These observations were important to the researcher because of how the priestess dealt with a wide range of problems brought to the Koankre shrine.

This observation also helped the researcher to understand the extent to which the relationship between close male adherents and the priestess is built in terms of power and authority in the Koankre shrine.

The researcher also observed the various restrictions for women and men who visited the shrine and their attitudes, reactions and behavior towards the priestess and vice versa. Through this observation, the researcher was able to obtain information outside what respondents said during interviews and focus group discussions.

Finally, the researcher waited late into the evening before leaving the shrine to observe some of the rituals performed at night by the priestess and close adherents after the working hours. As the researcher inserted herself into the setting and collected data, the researcher accompanied them on sacred days to ritual activities, healing and initiation of new adherents and trainees that are open to the public.

1.8.2.4 Secondary Sources

Relevant books, journal articles and unpublished theses on traditional priesthood institutions and religion were used. These sources support the primary materials as well as set the foundation for analyzing material for relevant themes. Most of the literature on the traditional priesthood institution emphasizes on the equality of the roles of priests and priestesses. It suggests that men and women are called to perform their roles, and as a result, priestesses have not been studied as distinct. However, much attention has not been given by way of academic research to the role priestesses play in the traditional priesthood.

1.8.3 Sampling Method

For this study, a purposive sampling technique was used. In choosing the case study for the research, the researcher used the critical case sampling method, a type of purposive sampling that is important in researching the phenomenon of interest in making logical generalization. Patton (2001: 236) defines a critical case sampling as a process of selecting a small number of important cases that are likely to yield the most information and have the greatest impact on the development of knowledge. This is because case study provides insight into issues, by understanding the context of the study not focusing on the individual itself but people's relationship with the individual being studied.

In selecting respondents for the study, homogenous sampling was used. This sampling technique is also a type of purposive sampling method which aims at members who share some common characteristics or traits (Malterud, 2001). Members of the focus groups therefore shared similar characteristics such as sex and age. These groups include women priestesses, some elders from the chief palace, male adherents of the shrine who have a close relationship with the priestess, and finally a group of trainees who are all females in the Koankre shrine. This purposive sampling helped influence the responses for retrieving data from the field in a way that it gave fair opportunity to members to express themselves freely. This ensured that group members were not intimidated by other group members since they all had similar traits, age and sex.

1.8.3.1 Sampling Size

The purposive sampling method was used in selecting the respondents. The study engaged with 34 respondents who were either interviewed or participated in a focus group discussion. This number included Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, Okyeame Donkor Kofi, Abosomfo Atta Bismarck and Atta Bernard and Sunmankwafo Kwame Asare, who were all interviewed one-on-one with specific focus on Okomfo Akosua Atuobua's life, roles, relationship with

deities and how that helps her solve clients' and the community's problems, cultural taboos, and the influence of modernity on these roles over the years.

Out of the total number of 34 respondents, 29 were put into smaller focus discussions groups. They comprised of 5 all-male and 5 all-female groups of clients whom the researcher met frequently at the shrine, allowing for an equal number of female and male respondents for clients. 6 males who formed the traditional council of the Ohene Akura village were also grouped for a focus group discussion on their relationship with the priestess. Also, 3 males and 3 females from the community were also grouped into focus groups in which they discussed the various developmental projects initiated by Okomfo Akosua Atuobua in Ohene Akura. Other groups included 3 female trainees understudying Okomfo Akosua Atuobua. They discussed the taboos and limitations associated with women operating in the traditional priesthood institution. Another group was made up of the 4 close male adherents who discussed the personality of Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, her roles in the Koankre shrine, how she became a priestess in the Koankre and how and when she relates with the deities to solve all problems brought to the shrine. Lastly, a mixed-sex group made up of 8 people was created from the already created groups to discuss their general views on gender construction of male roles and female roles pertaining to the operation of Okomfo Akosua Atuobua's roles in the Koankre shrine and the Ohene Akura village.

1.8.4 Methods of Data Collection

For the purpose of this study, the researcher used in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and participant observation to obtain the necessary information on Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, her roles in the Koankre shrine, her relationships with the deities and her contributions to the shrine and Ohene Akura.

Before conducting the in-depth interviews, the researcher arranged meetings with the key informants. The interactions at the meetings created the necessary rapport between the

respondents and the researcher. It helped respondents to feel comfortable with the researcher; it also enabled them to answer the questions that were posed to them by the researcher without any inhibitions. All the interviews for this study were recorded and later transcribed for better analysis.

The focus group discussions gave opportunity for the researcher to obtain some unexpected information and to get different perspectives on certain matters. A disadvantage of using the focus group discussion was that there was limited time for further probing of certain responses. This was due to the number of people who had been given the opportunity to express themselves at a time.

The researcher also used participant observation methods on the field. The researcher observed Okomfo Akosua Atuobua as she performed her roles and related to the deities in the shrine. The adherents who worked in her shrine were also observed.

1.8.4.1 Data Collection Instruments

The researcher used an interview guide as an instrument for sourcing information. This interview guide contained a set of questions based on the research topic which were ordered systematically in 5 sections, with each category discussing specific themes.

The researcher made use of voice recorders to record all interview sessions and focus group discussions to complement the written notes taken.

1.8.4.2 Pre-testing the Instruments

Before all the interviews were conducted, the interview guide was first tested using some selected adherents from Ohene Akura and Koankre for clarity and to determine how respondents understood the questions. This helped the researcher to revise some sections of the interview guide for better understanding and prevent sensitive questions which could be culturally and ethically inappropriate.

Focus group discussion questions had to be modified using simple adjectives in the Twi language to make it easier for respondents to answer the question. Some of the adjectives the researcher could not translate from the English language to Twi language such as gender made it difficult for respondents to give clear answers because of the communication barriers. Through the pre-testing period, the researcher had to find a way of explaining such words for clearer understanding during the time of the interviews.

The device used for recording all the interviews on the field was pre-used to verify its durability and speed before it was used each time in the shrine by the researcher.

1.8.5 Data Analysis

Because of the qualitative research method used for this study, the researcher used the Thematic Analysis format to analyze the data collected from the field. The data collected was grouped into themes and each theme also had sub sections that discussed various issues associated with the themes. These themes are significant to the discussion of priestesses' roles at the Koankre shrine and helped to answer the research questions of the study.

1.8.6 Limitations of the Study

Prior to beginning fieldwork, the researcher assumed that researching on traditional priestesses within an Akan community would be easy. However, the researcher's positionality as an outsider who was neither a subscriber nor an adherent of the shrine or a part of the Ohene Akura community raised several questions about identity and motives for conducting the research.

Besides this limitation of identity and motive, collecting data on the field brought a lot of challenges to the researcher. First, the traditional priesthood institution is traditionally shrouded in secrecy and as a result, details of certain information especially on rituals were not given to the researcher because the researcher is not an adherent of the shrine. This

challenge was overcome when the researcher participated in the activities on some days (working days) in the Koankre shrine and interacted with some adherents on a regular basis at the shrine. Doing this gave the researcher exposure to the rituals performed at the shrine. Another important setback was the difficulty in understanding some symbolic items and language used at the shrine, such as eggs, ways of dressing, demarcations and many others. However, this challenge was dealt with by consulting one of the obosomfo (servant of the shrine) on the shrine who assisted the researcher to translate such items and their use as and when it was being used in the shrine.

1.9 Outline of the Study

The research study is divided into five independent but interrelated chapters. They are as follows:

Chapter one is the introduction to the research including background to the study, statement of problem, research objectives and questions, significance of the study, a brief conceptual framework, literature review, research methods that guided the study and structure of the study.

Chapter two focuses on the origin of the Koankre traditional priesthood institution. It focuses on the evolution and establishment of the shrine and Ohene Akura village.

Chapter three discusses the background of Okomfo Akosua Atuobua and her calling to the Koankre shrine. It also interrogates how her background impacts her ability to perform her roles in Koankre shrine and Ohene Akura village.

Chapter four examines the relationship between the social construction of gender and patriarchy, specifically associated with Okomfo Akosua Atuobua.

Chapter five provides a summary of findings, recommendations and a conclusion.

CHAPTER TWO

OHENE AKURA AND KOANKRE SHRINE

A MAP OF KWAHU WEST DISTRICT SHOWING WHERE OHENE AKURA IS LOCATED



KEY: ■ Ohene Akura

Figure 1: Map of Ohene Akura

2.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the founding of Ohene Akura and the Koankre shrine. Establishing the historical background of the Koankre shrine is critical in this study as it provides insight into the leadership hierarchy, setting, beliefs and practices that have existed until contemporary times when Okomfo Akosua Atuobua became the spiritual head of the shrine. The chapter will also discuss how the shrine has shaped the worldview of the community. It will take into consideration the social, economic and religious nuances of the community surrounding the shrine.

2.2 Ohene Akura

Ohene Akura is located in the Kwahu West district of the Eastern region of Ghana. The village is a few kilometers off Nkawanda No.2 located on the Accra-Kumasi high way before Nkawkaw. The road network from Nkawanda No.2 to Ohene Akura is poor, and there is no signboard that gives direction to the village. However, because of the Koankre shrine the village is popular. Many people within and outside the Kwahu West district frequent the village.

Historically, the people of Ohene Akura claim they migrated from Kokronpe in the Kwahu West district after which they settled at Atibie Ohene Akura under the direction of the Asubone deity. According to Obosomfo Atta Bismarck, the new settlement of the shrine was formally called Ametemano (literally meaning ‘Don’t gossip about what I will say’).² This was as a result of the adherents’ previous experience at Kokronpe where the chief priest and the chief had a misunderstanding resulting from frequent deaths of the youth and low yield of their farm produce, problems which were ascribed to the chief’s daughter (see

² Obosomfo Atta Bismarck, interviewed at Koankre shrine, 23/08/2018.

Section 2.3 below). The name was changed to Atibie Ohene Akura (now popularly called Ohene Akura) when the population increased from just the adherents of the Koankre shrine to include settlers from the surrounding villages.

The influence of the Asubone deity has made the people of Ohene Akura to tie their political and socio-cultural life to the Koankre shrine. According to Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, the land where the village is located today was a virgin land when the deity directed that they should establish the shrine there.³ The virginity of the land enabled the priests of the Koankre shrine to get easy access to herbs for healing and divination. The change in settlement from Kokronpe to Ohene Akura also brought the shrine closer to Asubone river and that provided easy access for purification on sacred days.⁴

The village's closeness to the Asubone river also facilitated farming and trading, which were the major occupations in the district. It made the land suitable for the cultivation of crops such as cocoa, coffee, kola nut, oil palm, plantain, banana and cassava. Also, women in the area mould and sell earthenware bowls and pots and some farm produce along the Accra-Kumasi high way.

2.2.1 Religious Life of the People

The history of Ohene Akura is directly linked with Koankre shrine and this is because of Asubone (river deity) that directed Okomfo Akosua Atuobua and other adherents to resettle the shrine. Before Islam and Christianity were introduced in the area, the people in Ohene Akura together with other adherents worshipped Koankre and Asubone deities. Since that period, Koankre shrine has provided spiritual support especially during sacred days such as *Akwesidae*, *Awukudae*, *Dapaa* and *Fofie*. On such days, adherents of the shrine pour libation

³ Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, interviewed at Koankre shrine, 23/08/2018.

⁴ Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, interviewed at Koankre shrine, 23/08/2018.

asking for blessing for the Ohene Akura village. In certain times, the spiritual head of the Koankre shrine gets possessed and is directed by the deities to perform ritual purification in the village and the chief's palace.

The Asubone deity also protects the environment in which they live through various means such as the institution of taboos. This ensures a good relationship between the village and the shrine. One of the major ways the environment is protected is through the taboos which ban people from over-exploitation of the river and its surroundings, especially by small-scale miners (*galamsey*). Concerning the environment, on sacred days such as *Akwesidae*, the Asubone deity visits the shrine through possession of the spiritual head (priest/priestess) to ensure general cleanliness in the shrine and the village as a whole. This remains an important exercise that brings purification to the people living in the village.

2.2.2 Political System of Ohene Akura

As indicated above, the Koankre shrine has a direct relationship to the people in Ohene Akura and this makes the village a religious one. Many writers including Opoku (1978), Mbiti (1991) and Apter (1991) have written on the relation between the traditional priesthood institution and chieftaincy, and have suggested that priests and priestesses have always been part of the chieftaincy system in their various communities. Opoku (1978) further postulates that in places where the chieftaincy institution was not instituted, these priests and priestesses served as leaders and administrators of such communities.

The political system in Ohene Akura gained much support from the Koankre shrine. To understand this relationship, a brief history of how chieftaincy was instituted in Ohene Akura will be discussed. Ohene Akura is under the traditional paramountcy of Atibie Hene (the chief of Atibie). As the population of Ohene Akura increased, the leader of Koankre shrine informed the Atibie Hene and he decided to institute a sub-chief in the village. According to Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, it was through her initiative that the political system

in that village was established. Okomfo Akosua Atuobua explains further that it was the deity, Asubone, who directed the person to be chosen for the position even before the traditional council nominated the individual.⁵

The shrine has since been a backbone to the chieftaincy institution at Ohene Akura. It performs rituals needed for the sustenance of the institution during sacred days such as *Akwesidae*, *Awukudae*, *Dapaa* and *Fofie*. At certain times too, the spiritual head of Koankre shrine gets possessed by the Asubone deity to perform ritual purification in the village and the chief's palace. According to Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, these rituals are performed in the *nkonya dan mu* (stool room) where most women are not permitted entry; however, during possession the leader of Koankre shrine is taken to the stool room to perform these rituals.⁶

The chief also consults the Koankre shrine for direction on how to rule the village in difficult times. This has created and inspired a cordial relationship where the chief also supports the work of the priestess in the shrine. According to Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, the chief buys new costumes for the shrine, especially during times of feeding the deities and on festival days.⁷

2.2.3 Economic Aspect of Ohene Akura

Kwahu people are reputed to be business-oriented and hardworking (Opusuo, 2016). This makes the people sociable, accommodative, and industrious. They are receptive and this could be attributed to their background in trade which also probably encouraged their movements or migration from one place to the other to seek for greener pasture. According

⁵ Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, interviewed at Koankre shrine, 23/08/2018.

⁶ Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, interviewed at Koankre shrine, 23/08/2018.

⁷ Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, interviewed at Koankre shrine, 23/08/2018. Feeding the deities is a spiritual exercise that the adherents of Koankre shrine perform to pacify the deities.

to Maame Akua, a resident in the village, although Ohene Akura has been in existence for quite some time, it only had a population of about 500 people.⁸ The impression given was that most occupants of the village had travelled in search of greener pastures through trading in the nearby town of Nkawkaw, and in cities like Accra and Kumasi, and they only returned during festive periods such as Easter and other festivals associated with the deities in the Koankre shrine.

The above notwithstanding, geographically, the existence of the Asubone river makes the land suitable for human habitation and draws people interested in cultivating cash crops such as kola nut, cocoa and palm plantation to the Ohene Akura village. Fishing is also another important activity in Ohene Akura because of the Asubone river. However, it is mainly done by a small group of people. Farming and commerce are therefore the dominant occupations among the Ohene Akura people.

The Kwahu area is one of the places in Ghana which has large clay deposits; this has led to the production of pottery works. These pottery works are usually engaged in by women who mould the clay into pots, earthenware bowls and coolers. These potteries come in different shapes and sizes depending on the use and purpose. Such works are displayed for sale along the Accra-Kumasi high way. According to Akosua Nyina, this business is highly lucrative because the clay is acquired for free and does not require heavy resources to start.⁹

2.2.4 The Social Life of the People

Ohene Akura shares boundaries with other villages such as Kokronpe, Atewaso and Nkawanda. These villages pay homage to the Atibie paramount chief, making them part of the Twi-speaking communities in the area. The language spoken is Kwahu Twi, a slight

⁸ Maame Akua is an inhabitant of Ohene Akura, interviewed at Ohene Akura market, 23/08/2018

⁹ Akosua Nyina is a trader in pottery at Nkawanda No.1, interviewed at Ohene Akura village, 16/09/2018.

variant from Akyem and Asante Twi. The Akan society traces their descent and lineage through the matrilineal line and succession to office and inheritance are also based on maternal bonds.

Although Ohene Akura is made up of few occupants, the village can boast of social amenities such as a basic school, electricity, mechanized boreholes, and a bridge which also serves other surrounding villages. The bridge links Ohene Akura and its surrounding villages to the Accra-Kumasi high way.

Okomfo Akosua Atuobua disclosed that there are traditional festivals such as *Akwesidae* (celebrated every 40 days), *Dwoada dapaa*, *Fofie* and *Awukudae* and they are celebrated in relation to the Akan traditional calendar. In Koankre shrine, these days are most noted as *da bone* (sacred days). They are celebrated to honor the deities through drumming, singing and dancing. Also, adherents offer food to honor the deities. These aspects of socialization in Ohene Akura remain important in shaping relationships and strengthening the economic life of the people in Ohene Akura.

As indicated above, Asubone is also a deity who is directly linked with the Ohene Akura. The deity seeks to protect the environment in which they live through various means, one reason for the good relationship between the people of the village and the shrine. One of the major ways the environment is protected is through the taboos that ban people from over-exploitation of the river and its surroundings, especially by small-scale miners (galamsey). With reference to the environment, on sacred days such as *Akwesidae*, the deity visits the shrine through possession to ensure general cleanliness in the shrine and the village as a whole. The deities play a major role in the moral lifestyle of the people in Ohene Akura village. This brought total transformation to the Ohene Akura village where people live and interact freely with each other. Because of these taboos set by the Koankre shrine, the society always expects certain moral standards and social behaviors from the people living

in the Ohene Akura village. This shows that the traditional priesthood institution is not isolated from the community within which it operates but dependent on a society's customs and traditions to determine the well-being of society.

2.3 The Origin of Koankre Shrine

Koankre shrine, as it is popularly called today, originated within the Oyokuo¹⁰ clan of the Kwahu who settled at Atibie in the Eastern Region of Ghana.¹¹ The Kwahu Atibie people form part of the larger Kwahu ethnic group who migrated from the Sekyere-Efiduase and Mampong in the Ashanti Region of Ghana.¹² Oral history recounts that through the migration period, the Kwahu Atibie were led by a deity called Asubone. This deity directed their movement until they settled at the bank of the Asubone river, present day Kwahu Atibie. Because of the assistance the deity rendered to the people of Kwahu Atibie during the periods of wars with the Asante people and other ethnic groups, the leaders of the Oyokuo clan decided to keep the deity at Kokronpe where the place became their *abosomfie* (deities' house).¹³

Formerly, the shrine was called 'Oyokuo abosomfie' (Oyokuo deities' house). Because the shrine is affiliated to the kingship, it is closely bound up with the tradition of the Oyokuo clan from where leadership is selected, while at the same time community members' way of life is shaped by the religious settings of the Asubone deity, as discussed above. However, despite being advanced in years, the current priestess of the Koankre shrine, Okomfo

¹⁰ Oyokuo is one of the Akan clans. Oyokuo clan has a particular totem that features as their symbol which stretches vertically to include the totemic spirits, family spirit and the likes. The totem that is associated with the Oyokuo clan is the Hawk which is noted for its truthfulness and sincerity. It tries to exhibit its braveness by showing whatever it picks to the public by lifting it high.

¹¹ Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, interviewed at Ohene Akure, 12/07/2018.

¹² Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, interviewed at Ohene Akure, 12/07/2018.

¹³ Opayin Kwesi Boateng, interviewed at Kwahu Atibea palace, 17/07/2018.

Akosua Atuobua, could not give detailed chronological history of the first priest who operated the shrine. This is because at the time she became a priestess of the shrine, most of the people had died. She could only recount the names of Okomfo Dafuo and Okomfo Agyei who operated the Koankre shrine the time she joined. However, the kingship affiliation of the shrine and its deities remain important to uncover deep insights into the original settlers of the larger Kwahu Atibie people in relation to the Koankre shrine.

According to Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, the Koankre shrine has been in existence for many years and has been handed from one generation to another within the Oyokuo clan.¹⁴ Until recently, the spiritual heads of the shrine had always been male priest who operated the shrine with the deities and the ancestral spirits.

The shrine meets Harvey's (2000) definition of what an indigenous religion is. To Harvey (2000), indigenous religion is a tradition that merely exists at a particular place and stresses on the centrality of elders and ancestors. This becomes a good starting point for us to examine leadership structure and membership to know women's position and roles within the broader indigenous traditional religion.

After the Oyokuo clan settled at Kwahu Atibie in the Akyem land, Asubone deity was established at Kokronpe. Kokronpe and its surrounding villages form part of the land under the paramountcy of the Atibie Chief. These lands, which have now become villages, were formerly used for agricultural purposes when the people first settled at Atibie. Due to the serenity and its natural vegetation, the leaders decided to establish the shrine so that it can continue to offer protection and also grant them spiritual powers against their enemies. Oral history has it that during this time, it was only few farmers and Koankre adherents who lived

¹⁴ Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, interviewed at Koankre shrine, 4/08/2018.

at Kokronpe.¹⁵ Because the land was fertile and the Koankre shrine also provided numerous help to the many people, the population increased rapidly and it became a village with a chief to govern the affairs of the inhabitants.

According to Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, during the time that a chief was enthroned, the Koankre shrine was under the administration of Okomfo Dafuo and Okomfo Agyei, who were brothers from the Oyokuo family.¹⁶ They operated the shrine for the benefit of the people in Atibie, Kokronpe and other surrounding villages. Okyeame Kofi Donkor stated that there were misfortunes such as instant deaths of young people in Kokronpe village and as this continued for a while, the chief inquired of Okomfo Dafuo to divine for the source.¹⁷ When Okomfo Dafuo consulted with the deities, the Tigare¹⁸ deity exposed the chief's daughter as responsible for the misfortunes in the Kokronpe village. This act of exposing the chief's daughter as the cause for underdevelopment, death and misfortune in the village brought about misunderstanding between the priest and the chief at Kokronpe which led to the relocation of the Koankre shrine to Ohene Akura. This divination led to irreconcilable conflict between the Koankre shrine and the chieftaincy institution at Kokronpe village. This relocation was directed by the Asubone deity through possession of Okomfo Akosua Atuobua who served as a probational priestess at the shrine which was operated by Okomfo Dafuo and Okomfo Agyei.¹⁹

¹⁵ Okyeame Kwaku Barko is the linguist of the Atibea palace, interviewed at Atibea Chief Palace, 25/08/2018.

¹⁶ Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, interviewed at Koankre shrine, 23/07/2018

¹⁷ Okyeame Kofi Donkor, interviewed at Koankre shrine, 5/09/2018.

¹⁸ Tigare is one of the deities served at Koankre shrine. This deity is in charge of neutralizing witchcraft powers.

¹⁹ Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, interviewed at Koankre shrine, 23/07/2018.

Having looked briefly at the original people who established the Koankre shrine, it is important to discuss the deity, Asubone²⁰ who is directly linked to the establishment of the Koankre shrine. According to Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, all the other deities functioning in the Koankre shrine originated from the Northern region of Ghana.²¹ They include Koankre, Latafa, Tigare, Abrewa tia and Shiawu. Okomfo Akosua Atuobua noted that Asubone is the name of a deity and a river which has its source in the Obo mountains, north of the town, and runs northwest through many towns and villages in the Kwahu West municipality before it finally joins the Afram River (Volta Lake).²² The river is used for domestic and agricultural purposes. In communities such as Asubone No.1, the river provides fishing as an occupation which boosts the economic life of the people. The river, as noted above, is a deity with its shrine at Ohene Akura called Koankre. Asubone is believed to possess unique characteristics where it could empty immediately and rejuvenate itself the next moment.²³ This gave the river its name, Asubone (bad river). Okyeame Kofi Donkor explained that the flow of the river is a bit mystical hence it is identified as a female deity.²⁴ Asubone is more human-like in actions in her relationship with the Koankre shrine and the larger community of Ohene Akura. This establishes the foundations of the complex relationship this deity has with the human world especially the people of Ohene Akura and the larger Kwahu Atibea people. The Asubone deity became part of the belief system of the people and, as a result of its supernatural being, powers and forces, provides diverse help for all who seek solutions to problems such as barrenness brought to the Koankre shrine.

²⁰Asubone is a river and at the same time a deity. The river flows from Obo to other communities such as Ohene Akura, Kokronpe and Atevaso. The river is a source of life that sustain domestic activities such as drinking, bathing and washing, and agricultural activities for the well-being of the people.

²¹ Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, interviewed at Ohene Akura. 18/08/2018

²² Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, interviewed at Ohene Akura. 18/08/2018

²³ Okyeame Kofi Donkor is the linguist of the Koankre shrine. He is chosen from the linguist family of the Koankre shrine, 28/07/2018

²⁴ Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, interviewed at Ohene Akura, 14/07/2018

2.3.1 Reason for the Establishment of the Koankre Shrine

In most African societies, one of the reasons that account for the introduction of a shrine is in relation to the ancestral origin of the people (Phelan, 1983). Shrines are usually associated with families where customs and traditions are passed on to sons and daughters, thus making them a highly developed tradition or becoming a family business kept for future generations for its benefits. Considering this, Kaonkre shrine was established by the Oyokuo clan to purposely guide and protect during the period of their ancestral migration and war with the Asante until they settled at the present-day Kwahu Atobie. Because of the numerous benefits derived from the shrine, it was established to continually protect, preserve, and guide the people. As a result, the Koankre shrine uses the Oyokuo totem, a hawk, which is noted for its truthfulness. There is an adage which says that *asansa fa adea a ode kyere amansan* (if a hawk picks something it shows it to the public). It tries to exhibit its braveness, truthfulness and sincerity by showing whatever it picks to the public by lifting it high. This symbol of the Oyokuo clan is expressed in the Koankre shrine. Generally, the Koankre shrine is inevitable in the socio-cultural patterns of the life of the people in Ohene Akura.

The shrine takes charge in running the spiritual affairs of the whole community and, in communities where there are no chiefs such as the Ohene Akura, the shrine becomes the political administration of the village. This supports Mbiti's (1991) argument that religion is deeply entrenched in the daily life of the African and it is impossible to separate it from their cultural life. The affiliation of Koankre shrine to the Oyokuo family has led to the continuous existence of the shrine till date, with leaders also chosen from the Oyokuo clan. This makes it difficult to understand why currently the shrine is being headed and operated by Okomfo Akosua Atuobua who does not belong to the Oyokuo family.

2.3.2 Belief Systems and Practices

Opoku (1978) has highlighted the concept of the supernatural as an important feature of African indigenous religions. In the Koankre shrine, there is a strong belief in the existence of deities who manifest themselves strongly among practitioners who operate at the shrine. People acknowledge their existence even in these contemporary times when monotheistic faith is prevalent.

In the Koankre shrine, these deities are ranked according to the time they became part of the shrine. The ranking also shows the power the deities possess, which dictates their roles and use in the Koankre shrine. As a result, the deities have taboos and prohibitions as they relate to the people in Koankre shrine. It is through the observation of these taboos that these deities can continually have their dwelling with the people and can relate reciprocally. Aside from this, the deities in Koankre shrine are gendered, a feature portrayed during possession when their particular gender is exhibited.

Okomfo Akosua Atuobua states that the highest deity they always call on in the Koankre shrine is the Supreme Being (God). They call him *Nyame*, *Onyame kokroko* (Almighty God), Omniscient *Ahuntahunu Nyame* (The All-Knowing and the All-seeing God), Omnipresent (God is everywhere), *Onyankopon* (One God). As a result, these appellations are mentioned first, each time libation, rituals and other activities are performed. They believe that God is the sustainer of the universe; however, there are other deities believed to work directly or as messengers of the Supreme God in whom the people believe and worship. Practitioners sometimes see these deities in dreams and also communicate directly with them for their problems to be solved. It should be noted that all these deities to be discussed are males; however, they behave in duality depending on the roles to be performed in the Koankre shrine.

In Koankre shrine, Asubone is ranked after the Supreme God. Today, this deity performs numerous roles in the Koankre shrine, yet the deity's important role historically was the establishment of Ohene Akura after guiding the Oyokuo clan through wars and settling them at Kwahu Atibie. Because of this, many households in Ohene Akura and Kwahu Atibie, like Okomfo Akosua Atuobua's maternal family, adopted the deity. The entire Koankre shrine is dependent on the Asubone deity who usually appears on *da bone* (sacred days) such as *Akwesidae*, *Adae* and *Awukudae*. The deity is in charge of ensuring the general cleanliness and preservation of the environment, both spiritually and physically. According to Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, Asubone deity is a sign of cleanliness and purity in both the shrine and Ohene Akure village.²⁵ Because of this, people are careful about the way they live and are particular about observing the deity's taboos. One of the most important prohibitions of Asubone is *amankeni* (cocoyam). Okomfo Akosua Atuobua noted that this prohibition is strictly adhered to and that this food is not brought to the Koankre shrine at all or even near its surroundings. The close adherents of the shrine are prohibited from eating such food. This taboo will be discussed in the subsequent section on the training of 'Koankre abosomfo'²⁶

Another powerful deity in the Koankre shrine is Tigare. As the name suggests, the deity originated from the Yipala in Northern Ghana.²⁷ In Ghana, this deity is served in many shrines and has similar functions as it does at Koankre shrine. Tigare is known for neutralizing witchcraft powers. This has also featured strongly in Koankre shrine since its inception, and usually called upon to protect the inhabitants of the village and also to curb

²⁵ Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, interviewed at Ohene Akura, 18/09/2018.

²⁶ Koankre Abosomfo are people who are called to serve as servant of the deities in the Koankre shrine. these people are called to be devotees in several ways such as family ties to the Ayokuo clan, called by any of the deities in the Koankre shrine.

²⁷ Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, interviewed at Ohene Akura, 18/09/2018.

witchcraft activities. The image of the deity has numerous beads which signify the number of witches this deity has exposed in the Ohene Akura community.

Shiawu performs a similar function as the Tigare deity. As stated by Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, the deity when revealed in a dream is very huge and tall.²⁸ Shiawu literally means 'meet and die'. The deity performs roles related to discovery of lost items, murder, deals with people who commit crime and also identifies close members of the Koankre shrine who do not live in accordance with the taboos of the shrine, such as having sex on days before working day, stealing and telling lies against another member of the shrine. The deity controls the behavior and activities of close members on working days in the Koankre shrine.

Abrewa tia is a deity responsible for child birth in the Koankre shrine. Because of the abilities of the deity to give children, Koankre shrine is known beyond the borders of the Kwahu West district. Women specifically come to Abrewa tia to seek children. Usually, these people who are considered clients of Koankre shrine come and commit their womb to this deity who is believed to help these clients have children in the shortest time. At certain times, this deity functions in duality where he solves women's child birth problems and exhibits masculine warrior attitudes during possession of Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, the spiritual head of Koankre shrine.

The Koankre deity was introduced to the Koankre shrine at its early stage when the shrine was settled at Ohene Akura and most of the deities were dormant. The deity's natural powers supersede all the other deities, even Asubone who established the shrine. The deity originated from Brede, a town in the Northern part of Ghana. Because the Koankre deity

²⁸ Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, interviewed at Ohene Akura, 18/09/2018.

provided quick healing of ailments such as diabetes, blindness, barrenness, and leprosy, the shrine was named after it. Chapter 3 will discuss the Koankre deity in detail.

Beside these deities, other spirits such as *Atia mframa*, *Amoatia* (dwarfs) are also called upon to perform their roles on working days in Koankre shrine. The practitioners of Koankre shrine believe that ancestors such as the elders of the Oyokuo clan and priests of the Koankre shrine who have died have passed into the spirit world. According to Obosomfo Atta Bismark, priests and elders who are closely associated with the Koankre shrine are buried at the compound of the shrine.²⁹ These ancestors are believed to exist and, as a result, they are called upon on working days and on scared days to help in the operations of the Koankre shrine. Okyeame Kofi Donkor was quick to add that the gravesite is demarcated as sacred and that women are not allowed in this place.³⁰

2.3.3 Setting of the Koankre Shrine

The setting of a shrine is crucial, because it is alleged to be a “seat” of the magico-religious power and that its appearance must portray such imagery (Nrenzah, 2015). In most African societies, shrines appear in diverse forms such as ceramics, pots, shaped-stones, trees, constructed buildings, gravesites and assemblages of rocks. From the outside of Koankre shrine, on the unpaved road leading to the shrine, one is greeted by markers of the spiritual space in the form of curved stones, images of the deities and the gravesites of past ancestors of the shrine. Upon entering the shrine for the first time, the setting identifies Koankre shrine as an indigenous shrine which has been in existence for a while, the nature of artifacts used and manner in which they decorate the images of the deities with slaughtered animals’ jaws,

²⁹ Obosomfo Atta Bismack, interviewed at Koankre shrine, 13/07/2018.

³⁰ Okyeame Kofi Donkor, interviewed at Koankre shrine, 13/07/2018.

pot shaped stones, gravesites of the dead ancestors could all create fear in this shrine that is manned by a woman.

Each deity has its artifact which is displayed in front of the shrine. Every artifact representing a deity is molded in a particular form. They come in human-like form for Asubone and Abrewa tia deities while the artifact for the other deities are shaped in animal-like form such as a lion for Shiawu and Tigare deities. Latafa and Koankre are represented by a large rock housed in a room called *bosom dan mu* (deities' room). This room is where people who visit the shrine are taken for prayers after divination. For the purpose of this study, such people will be called clients of Koankre shrine.

All the deities are believed to reside in or are associated with rivers, forest groves, large rocks or even trees as spirits. These natural features of the Koankre shrine are closely linked with the Oyokuo clan symbols and the Asubone river. First, the buildings which house the shrine are decorated with the image of the hawk which is the totem of the Oyokuo clan who settled at Kwahu Atibie. Aside from the buildings, the hawk symbol is also drawn on some items used during possession such as the sword, gun, and even the images of the deities mounted at the compound of the shrine. Also, the Asubone river has its image erected at the center of the compound of the shrine. This image has schnapps bottles, eggshells, and the jaws of several animals used for rituals over the years hanged in front of the image. The image is painted white. This signifies that Asubone is a river deity.

Apart from these external features of the Koankre shrine, there are three buildings, each used for different purposes. The first room houses all the images of the deities. This room is called *abosom dan mu* (deities house) where the *suman* (spirits) of the deities are called during prayers in the form of libations, rituals and sacrifices. The middle room is called *bisa dan mu* (consulting room). This is where the spiritual head of the shrine sits for client consultation on working days. This room also contains objects such as cowries, knives,

beads, black powder, mirrors, sheep's skins and kola nuts which are used for divination and directions. Kola nut is also used to detect witchcraft.

The last room in the Koankre shrine houses items used during possession such as costumes which come in styles or designs based on the origin of the deity. These costumes also come in varieties of colors such as white, red and black; or mixed colors, usually red and black stripes or white and black stripes. During possession, the Okyeame and other close adherents are to determine the particular costume to be used, based on knowledge gained after several years of working with the priestess and the deities.

A part of the costume is a gun, cutlass or bow and arrow depending on assignment of the possessed spirit. However, this is not just easily determined by the adherents since different choices have to be made before the right tool is selected for the possessed spirit. At this stage, speech, gestures and mannerisms are all directed by the possessing *suman* (spirit). The cudgel and the spear are also used in spiritual warfare and to arrest a person possessing witchcraft.

Koankre shrine also serves as habitation for close adherents. Most of these adherents have their rooms at the compound of the shrine where they live with their families. As a result, there are limitations to the extent the shrine can be used, especially by the families of close adherents or those not called to serve as servants of Koankre shrine. These apply to both men and women. However, the major demarcation is for menstruating women and nursing mothers who live in the Koankre shrine. Because of this, they are excluded from certain parts of the shrine such as the *abosom dan mu*, *bisa dan mu* and even where the images of the deities are erected for ritual purposes. Koankre shrine has clear demarcation for places called sacred and guided by taboos.

2.3.4 Divination

Divination is an important step in determining the source of the problem and possible solutions (Mueller, 2013). In Koankre shrine, divination is used in dealing with any difficulties of life brought by clients, community members and even adherents. These difficulties can range from child delivery problems, farming difficulties, difficulties in acquiring visa to travel abroad, difficulties in finding a life partner to marry, and barrenness. Other clients seek help for spiritual protection in trading. Individuals' problems become widely solved during possession on working days.

In Koankre shrine, divination is performed by the spiritual head only. This is done through possession of the deities to determine the possible solution to the diverse problems. Items usually used for divination include alcohol, hens, sheep, and eggs, but these items can be used together or separately depending on the problem brought to the shrine and the demands of the deity who is leading the divination.

The first stage of divination is for the people to offer prayer to the deities in the room marked *bosom dan mu* (deity's room). As already discussed, this room contains all the images of the deities served in the Koankre shrine where the people will speak to the hearing of the deities directly. In this room, both men and women are to remove their slippers and walk bare-footed. Aside this, women are to take off their head gear. These are signs of respect to the deities in the shrine. These forms of prayers are attended by the Okyeame who carries a bell and alcohol. The bell is rung immediately the Okyeame enters the room to alert the deities that there are visitors in the shrine, after which individual requests are petitioned to the deities even before they queue to see the spiritual head in the consultation room.

In the consultation room, the spiritual head divines using alcohol, kola nut and cowries to inquire from the deities. This is usually in a form of conversation with the clients. This

conversation further diagnoses the problem brought to the shrine by the spiritual head, and ‘proper’ divination is recommended after.

With spiritual-related problems, a white chicken is slaughtered and let loose by the Obosomfo of the shrine. Should the chicken die face upwards, it is considered a good sign, but should it be otherwise, it is considered a bad sign. This is mostly done continually for a better result to be achieved. For clients having problems with birth or barrenness, the divination is always associated with eggs which signify life. Mostly, the eggs are boiled with the prescribed medicine by the deities or, in some other cases, put on top of the pot containing the medicine. In most cases, herbs are also recommended by the deities for the Sumankwafo to search, in addition to the spiritual divination. All these processes help the spiritual head to deal with a wide range of problems brought to the shrine. People admit the numerous solutions they have got through the consultation of the Koankre shrine. This makes Ohene Akura, although a small village, known by many in the Kwahu West District and other neighboring communities.

2.3.5 Recruitment and Membership of Koankre Shrine

In many shrines in African societies, recruitment and membership are not by one’s will but as a result of a “call” by the deities (Boakyewa, 2014; Atuahene, 2010; Opoku, 1978). This call comes to prospective devotees in different forms and at different times. In Koankre shrine, close servants of the shrine are recruited through their affiliation to Oyokuo clan. However, specific people are ‘called’ by the deities. These close servants are called *Koankre abosomfo* (worshippers). They include *Okomfo* (priest/priestess), *Okyeame* (linguist), *Abosomfo* (servants of the shrine) and *Sumankwafo* (servants of herbs), with each adherent having a specific role to play. The spiritual head of the Koankre shrine is called the *Okomfo hene/hemaa* (chief priest/priestess), who is selected from the close adherents. This makes

recruitment of these servants of Koankre very important since through these close adherents, the spiritual head is selected.

The *Okyeame* (linguist) of the Koankre shrine is Kofi Donkor. He is selected from the linguist family, called purposely to perform this role in the Koankre shrine. He pours libation on every working day in the shrine. Mostly, the Okyeame prays for strength from the deities to assist them as they perform their roles. He also serves as interpreter of whatever the priestess speaks during possession to the clients who seek help from Koankre shrine. The Sumankwafo of the Koankre shrine is Kwame Agyei. He is also trained to understand the *suman* in the prescription of herbs. He searches for the required herbs for clients as prescribed by the deities. These herbs are gathered from the forest or nearby farm lands. The Obosomfo (servant) performs all the necessary sacrifices required by the deities. They also sacrifice animals for ritual purposes. During *da bone* such as *Akwesidae*, *Adae* and the rest, they play drums, which is an integral part of the ceremony in welcoming the deities into the shrine. They also prepare the deities' food and also feed the deities.

The first requirement for recruitment into the Koankre shrine is to belong to the Oyokuo family. Members inherit such roles with their family lineage and, usually, this admission is through possession by the deity. Asubone's call is usually ascribed at birth. This is a call from the womb. Close adherents whose calls come through this means have special features such as *mpesepese* (curly hair), special marks such as the symbols, character and behavior of the deity after birth. Children born with these and other features are considered to be divinely called to serve at Koankre shrine. Such adherents have the deity's name attached to their name such as Kofi Latafa, Ama Koankre. These children grow up as servants of Koankre shrine. Obosomfo Atta Bismarck³¹ disclosed that this call is more spiritual, and

³¹ Obosomfo Atta Bismarck is a servant to the Kaonkre shrine.

adherents who reject such call suffer several consequences in life such as strange diseases, chronic illnesses, madness, blindness and even death. Obosomfo Atta Bismarck recounted his story as:

I was called by Asubone to serve as servant of Koankre shrine when I was in my mother's womb. After birth, I had a mark on my forehead; however, I did not consider it important to serve at the shrine even though I was informed by my grandmother, Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, that I was called to be a servant of the shrine. I travelled to Accra and did not find any work for about a year. I saw myself not belonging to the city because whatever I did failed completely. This made me come and serve as a servant of the Koankre shrine.³²

This confirms what Atuahene (2010) suggests, that the call into the traditional priesthood institution cannot be rejected but can only be delayed.

Apart from belonging to the family lineage which is directly linked to the shrine, the deities also choose adherents they want to work with. In this case, a person who is called into the Koankre shrine is equipped by the deities to perform all assigned roles and duties without any interference or limitations to their roles. These various forms of call to serve at the Koankre shrine are subjected to verification by the deities through an existing *Okomfohene* or *Okomfohema* (chief priest/priestess). Verification of an adherent's call is very important because the shrine is responsible for the well-being of the entire community. It also preserves the institution from recalcitrant people whose interests are not for the people they serve, but are more concerned about the possibility of monetary gains. This confirms Opoku's (1978) assertion that verification authenticates the candidate 'call' into the priesthood institution.

The verification of a prospective devotee comes in the form of possession at the Koankre shrine. In Koankre shrine, possession by deities is expressed in three ways by the adherent;

³² Obosomfo Atta Bismarck, interviewed at Ohene Akura, 19/09/2018.

however, the mode of expression varies from one candidate to another. The first is *akom asi ne so* (deities have descended on him/her); second, *akom aka no* (deities have mounted on him/her); and third, *akom aforo no* (deities have mounted on him/her). These forms of possession vary in the character traits exhibited by the devotee.

In Koankre shrine, adherents are recruited by belonging to Oyokuo family who are purposely called to serve at Koankre shrine. This confirms what Phelan (1983 p. 34) wrote about the Dusun people in Malaysia:

the babalian (chief priestess) is not a hereditary post; anyone from the priesthood family may be initiated however the person must be diligent and keen enough to learn.

This kind of calling is rare among the Akan, especially in Koankre shrine where the shrine is directly linked to the Oyokuo family and which considers the family a very important social institution. It is within the family that priesthood customs, traditions and knowledge are preserved and handed over to the next generation. However, Okomfo Akosua Atuobua does not belong to the Oyokuo clan and was initiated into Koankre shrine at an early stage of life. She is currently its spiritual head due to varied reasons which will be discussed in Chapter 3.

2.3.6 Training of Adherents

Training into the traditional priesthood is quite demanding, rigorous and lengthy (Phelan, 1983; Mbiti, 1990; Opoku, 1978; Idowu, 1973; Boakyewa, 2014; Atuahene, 2010). This is as a result of the considerable knowledge one has to gain in knowing the deities and to totally ‘marry’ them as wives or husbands in order to perform all roles in the shrine. This assertion is similar to the training processes in Koankre shrine. In Koankre shrine, the training process lasts 4 years for adherents who are called by the deities. This training is important for close adherents because they work closely with the chief priest or priestess at the shrine and are also chosen to be future priests and priestesses. Because of the many

traditions the adherents have to know, including taboos and rituals associated with the deities, all adherents must be trained first as adherent and secondly as future priests and priestesses. However, only committed people who are ready to learn go through the training as it is quite lengthy and demanding.

In Koankre shrine, training begins at an early age for adherents called to be ‘servants of Koankre’. According to Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, people are trained at an early stage of life so they will not ignore the call when they grow up. Also, young people usually have the strength, time, and are ready to be submissive to the trainers.³³ This training comes to both young boys and girls below 20 years of age depending on their affiliation with the Koankre shrine and the deity who has called them; however, it should be noted that adherents who usually work in the Koankre shrine are males. The number of men who work closely with the priests/priestesses outnumber that of women who work in the Koankre shrine.

Candidates who are chosen are required to avoid, discard and bury personal values before training begins. These include personal character, values and philosophies which contradict the taboos of the Koankre shrine. This helps the novice to live within the requirements of the priesthood institution of the Koankre shrine after he/she becomes a priest or priestess.

Also, there is a complete break away from the family. According to Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, this helps protect the secret of the profession from outsiders of the Koankre priesthood institution before the novice is taken through the processes of the training.³⁴

Training of the novice into the Koankre shrine is the duty of the Okomfohene or Okomfohemaa, a spiritual head recognized by the community. The community role becomes important due to the shrine’s close association with the Oyokuo clan of Kwahu

³³ Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, interviewed at Ohene Akura, 28/09/2018.

³⁴ Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, interviewed at Koankre shrine, 14/11/2018.

Atibie. The chief priest or priestess is a close adherent who has kept the processes, customs, traditions and history of the Koankre shrine and transmits them to the next generation. This is because the language, instructions, prayers, ritual processes and taboos are not written down or documented and must be memorized. The spiritual head of the Koankre shrine and other elderly adherents keep such traditions and customs for future trainees.

For the purpose of the study, the 4 years training stages of the Koankre will be discussed to understand the *modus operandi* of the Koankre shrine. The study will also show how this training applies to men and women who aspire to be *Okomfohene* and *Okomfohemaa*. Usually, the time spent on training is dependent on the pace of the adherent or trainee's ability to learn fast and obey all the taboos. The process of training in Koankre shrine is the same for men and women adherents. In Koankre shrine, the spiritual aspects of the training are facilitated by Asubone deity. This deity remains important because of the close connection with the Oyokuo clan.

2.3.6.1 First Year

The first year of training in Koankre shrine tends more towards spiritual than physical aspects; however, most secrets are not revealed. This means most activities the trainee undergoes are more spiritual preparation into the traditional priesthood institution. The first process a neophyte undergoes is ceremonial cleansing or ritual birth. This helps revive the spirit of her deity within and makes the neophyte ritually clean. This bath also symbolizes the transition of the neophyte from the old life to a new life. This is done within a period of seven days. Aside the ritual bath within the first year the subsequent activities are physical interaction with the senior priest/priestess and other adherents of the Koankre shrine.

After the seven days, the neophyte's hair is cut and fixed to grow in a form of *mpesempese* (long strands). This is done for the candidate to remain ritually clean and to introduce them to the *akom* (possession). At this stage, certain secrets are not revealed to the neophyte.

Their basic assignments are to help the *Okomfohene/Okomfohema* (priest/priestess) in their work. The neophyte also accompanies the priest/priestess whenever he/she goes to perform a religious ceremony from one place to another.

2.3.6.2 Second Year

In the second year, the neophyte delves into the processes of the priesthood training; he/she is allowed to wear *suman* (spirit/charm) and is informed of the special taboos attached to each. The observance of these taboos sets the neophyte apart for the work of his/her deity. The neophyte should be able to identify different types of herbs and their uses with the help of *suman* (spirit). Therefore, instructions in herbal medicine become an integral part of the training program for all adherents since they will work closely with the chief priest/priestess during possession.

This stage of knowing the *suman* also introduces the neophyte to the art of divination and correct interpretation of herbs while working with the senior priest/priestess. This helps to explain causes of human difficulties which lie beyond common sense explanation. This is an important skill of the priestly office which distinguishes trainees from “ordinary” people. Before this aspect of the training starts, herbs are rubbed into the neophytes’ eyes and ears to allow them “see properly” “and “listen attentively” to their deities, important for the successful and accurate diagnosis of diseases and prescription of herbs for cures.

2.3.6.3 Third Year

As part of the training in the third year is the fitness and aptitude of neophytes for the job. This is usually scheduled for the third year where the neophyte has to be tattooed on the right shoulder. This tattooing ceremony marks the beginning of an important phase in the training in the Koankre shrine. The marks bring stability and resistance from normal secular life. The neophyte’s life then becomes sacred and the deity has an absolute claim on his/her life.

Expectedly, these processes are not learned in a day but gradually. The neophytes learn to perfect their skills under the Okomfohene/hemaa's close and regular supervision. This is mostly to test for the neophyte's retentive memory as well as physical endurance in knowing the various herbs and proper diagnosis of clients' problems.

During this period, the novice learns to identify spirits such as ancestral spirits and others apart from their own deity. Other skills are also learned by the would-be priestess, including how to diagnose diseases and call on other spirits for support.

The neophyte is also introduced to the use of divination symbols such as the ceremonial sword, and trained in the ability to read omens using the mirror and eggs. These symbols when read, gives the trainee the ability to foretell future events when he/she is possessed by his/her deity.

2.3.6.4 Fourth Year

After the novice has gone through all the required training satisfactorily, she is recommended by the chief priest/priestess for *akomyi* (graduation). This exciting moment Atuahene (2010) describes as a moment of "freedom". In order for the priest/priestess-in-training to become professionally perfect, they continue consulting with their mentor as 'servant of Koankre'. The *akomyi* (graduation) is meant to emphasize the emergence into the new life. The range of ceremonies also marks or symbolizes death and resurrection or casting away of old clothes and putting on new ones. The *akomyi* also breaks some prohibitions like not visiting with family members and abstinence from sexual relations. After the training, the neophyte is reunited with his/her spouse or can marry. The newly graduated priest/priestess can at this time also freely eat all foods, keep their hair well and wear more than the prescribed clothes. The person is now seen wearing white clothes signifying victory over all obstacles during the training. In most African societies, because priests or priestesses have a very important role to play, proper training is required else she

or he fails to gain recognition from people such as chiefs and community members who may patronize the services of these priests and priestesses.

2.3.6.5 Taboos and Punishments Associated with Training

Taboos are important to training in the Koankre shrine. These taboos guide the behavior of the trainee. Taboos come in two forms: (1) the general taboos that every trainee must follow, and (2) the individual deity's taboos. All these taboos must be followed and if the novice transgresses, he/she will have to undergo a purification exercise and make sacrifice to the offended deity. In some cases, the neophyte may be asked to start the training processes all over or may even be banned from the Koankre shrine.

The general taboos in Koankre shrine are similar to what Opoku (1978) outlined concerning the Akonedi shrine. This is because both shrines belong to the Akan tradition, and therefore there is no much difference between them.

Firstly, the neophyte is to abstain from sexual relations during the entire period of the training. The training period is a spiritual marriage to the deity and in case the trainee is married before the training, the novice is granted a "divorce" from their spouse until the end of training. This helps the novice to have physical, spiritual and mental ability to learn. This rule is strictly observed in Koankre shrine because adherents work closely with the deities and the spiritual head of the shrine.

Secondly, the trainee is strictly forbidden from consuming sugar, ripe plantain and honey because sweet things are alleged to arouse sexual desire.

Thirdly, the novice should voluntarily absent herself from the shrine for seven days each month during her menstrual period. This taboo is strict for female trainees who are called to serve as 'abosomfo of Koankre'.

Fourthly, the neophyte is not allowed to go back to the family members until the end of the training period.

Lastly, the neophyte is required to be obedient to the elders, family and community.

Besides these general taboos the novice is expected to obey, individual deities have specific taboos the trainee must follow. These include general food taboos such as not eating kenkey, riped plantain and palm nut soup on specific days. Also, having sex on a day preceding working day is prohibited. Disobeying these taboos of the shrine calls for the punishment of the transgressor and can even lead to death.³⁵

Each deity has its taboos that the adherents must observe while at the Koankre shrine. Some adherents stated that “there are so many foods they don’t eat as far as they work with the deities in the Koankre shrine.”³⁶

The major food taboo of the Koankre shrine is *amenkeni* (cocoyam). According to Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, because of Asubone (river deity) this food is not supposed to be brought to the premises or even the surroundings of the Koankre shrine.³⁷ Other deities such as Koankre who originated from the Northern part of Ghana and has been part of the Koankre shrine prohibits that dog meat and snails are brought to the shrine. It is also a taboo to bring goat meat to the Koankre shrine because of Latafa. All close adherents of Koankre shrine are prohibited from eating these specific foods due to their relationship with the deities. The priestess stated that any adherent of Koankre shrine who eats or brings such food items to the shrine renders the deities powerless.

³⁵ Okyeame Kofi Donkor, interviewed at Ohene Akura, 28/07/2018.

³⁶ Obosomfo Atta Bismarck and Obosomfo Atta Bernard, interviewed at Koankre shrine, 13/09/2018.

³⁷ Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, interviewed at Koankre shrine, 2/06/2018.

Other than the general food taboos, on certain days all close adherents are prohibited from eating particular foods. On Thursdays, all the adherents are not supposed to eat plantain and on Tuesdays they do not eat palm nut soup and kenkey. Ripe plantain is not to be eaten on days preceding working days because it is alleged to arouse sexual desires.

Also, prior to working days, close adherents to the Koankre abstain from sexual relationships with any man or woman, including those with husbands and wives. A trainee called Yaa Asantewaa added that even if one slept in the same room with the husband or wife, they were not supposed to have sex. The days preceding working days in Koankre shrine are Monday, Tuesday and Friday, she does not sleep with a man.³⁸

This is an essential taboo that all adherents must observe because of the marital relationship she has with the deities in the shrine. According to Colleyn (1999), relationship between the spirit and mediums is seen as a marital and sexual relationship, the spirit being the medium's spouse. All the adherents admit that they observe all the taboos otherwise the deities will kill them.³⁹ Although these men do not menstruate to be exempted from the shrine, they are not supposed to eat or sleep with a menstruating woman. Obosomfo Atta Bismarck stated that he is very careful when he travels outside the village and wants to eat from public chop bars/canteens.⁴⁰

Having looked briefly at the taboos associated with the Koankre shrine for adherents, it is important to look at how colonialism influenced the activities in the shrine.

³⁸ Yaa Asantewaa is a trainee priestess who is being trained by Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, interviewed at Koankre shrine, 12/04/2018.

³⁹ Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, Abosomfo Atta Bismarck and Bernard and Okyeame Kofi Donkor, interviewed in group at the Koankre shrine, 15/06/2018.

⁴⁰ Obosomfo Atta Bismarck, interviewed at Ohene Akura, 4/07/2018.

2.3.7 The Colonial Influence on Koankre Shrine

An examination of Koankre shrine cannot be complete without a discussion of Western religions such as Christianity and its threats to the shrine (Olupona, 2000). As discussed in the previous sections, Koankre shrine has been in existence for a long period of time. This is because of the help the shrine has offered to the people in Kwahu Atibie, Ohene Akura and beyond. The Koankre shrine has also helped in the preservation of the environment where the shrine set taboos for both adherents and people in Ohene Akura to follow. Despite these overtures, Koankre shrine has undergone changes due to contact with Western missionary churches which were established in Ohene Akura. The first Apostolic church which was established in the Ohene Akura village has had much influence on clients' and close adherents' participation, observance of taboos and on other activities in the Koankre shrine.

2.3.7.1 Christianity and Adherents in Koankre Shrine

According to Obosomfo Atta Bernard, a close adherent from the Ohene Akura community, the first church to be established in the Ohene Akura was the Apostolic Church. The church was established during the time the shrine had gained root in the Ohene Akura village. Before the church was established, the leaders of the church came to the village as evangelists where they moved from house to house to share the gospel of Christ. As they shared the gospel with the people, this came with clothings and food items which attracted many to their activities in the village. According to Rev. Kusi,⁴¹ the gospel should not only be preached but must satisfy the physical needs of the people. After intensive evangelization and crusade had taken place, there was revival among the people of Ohene Akura including adherents who worked closely with the shrine. As the church grew numerically, adherents

⁴¹ Revered Kusi is the head pastor of the Apostolic church at Ohene Akura.

who subscribed to Koankre shrine also reduced. This is how Okomfo Akosua Atuobua expressed the extent to which the Apostolic Church has caused a decline in the participation of close adherents and even her own children in the activities of the Koankre shrine:

In the early days when the shrine was first settled at Ohene Akura, there were many people I worked with. But with the inception of other religions such as Christianity, even my children left the shrine to follow the first Apostolic church that was established in Ohene Akura.⁴²

There was initial resistance posed by the people, due largely to the benefits they derived from the Koankre shrine such as healing and protection. With the advancement of the Apostolic church, the church introduced new teachings which directed people to resort to prayers to solve their problems rather than offering sacrifices to Koankre and other deities in the shrine. However, there were adherents who were not rooted in the teachings of the Apostolic church as such they simultaneously remained members of the church and clients of the Koankre shrine to which they would turn whenever they encountered difficult problems. However, as Okomfo Akosua Atuobua stated, “they prefer to come in the evening or contact me on mobile phone to diagnose their problems.”⁴³

2.3.7.2 Christianity and Clients in Koankre Shrine

Close adherents of Koankre shrine such as the Okyeame and Sumankwafo stated that they used to have a lot of clients who visited the shrine every day, even outside of the working days allocated for consultation. Usually, they could operate the shrine from morning until evening and sometimes some clients who needed help were scheduled for the next day. However, with the introduction of the Apostolic Church, members who visited the Koankre shrine dwindled in numbers. Although the church had gained followers through evangelization, the teaching was not well rooted in the people and therefore some people

⁴² Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, interviewed at Koankre shrine, 23/08/2018.

⁴³ Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, interviewed at Koankre shrine, 24/09/2018.

came to the shrine to seek help when difficulties arose. Okyeame Kofi Donkor⁴⁴ added that most Christian clients only came to the shrine when they were overwhelmed and could not take control of the situation. The most likely situation, however, is when sick clients have been declared dead by doctors and their families then run to the shrine for help. Maame Afua, the priestess's daughter, made it clear that clients affiliated to the Christian religion who are within the Ohene Akura village mostly visit the shrine in the night to avoid being seen by community members. Nana Akurang, one of Okomfo Akosua Atuobua's trainees, also commented that "these Christians always condemn our practices yet they are the first people to visit the shrine every working day including their leaders. They usually come hiding from the general public."⁴⁵

2.3.7.3 Christianity and Taboos in Koankre Shrine

Beginning from the time the first Apostolic Church was introduced to Ohene Akura, most adherents dissociated themselves from the worship of the deities in an attempt to enjoy the benefits the Christian religion brought. These churches brought changes to the activities of the Koankre especially on taboos which guided the people in the Ohene Akura village. For instance, days set aside for rest and not visiting Asubone river were disregarded because of the introduction of the Apostolic church. These taboos are no longer regarded by some people in the Ohene Akura village because the people who belong to the Apostolic Church consider it as outmoded and irrelevant.

Certain days such as the *Adae*, *Akwasidae*, and *Awukudae* are considered sacred and people are to rest and not do rigorous work such as farming, fishing and even trading. Apart from the sacred days, Fridays are considered as a sacred day for the adherents of the shrine and

⁴⁴ Okyeame Kofi Donkor, interviewed at Koankre shrine, 24/09/2018.

⁴⁵ Nana Akurang is a pass trainee of Okomfo Akosua Atuobua who came to visit her mentor at the Koankre shrine, 24/09/2018.

the people of Ohene Akura. In the course of the week, there is always a day to rest and through this day, the Koankre shrine performs rituals to sanctify the people spiritually.

Although the shrine exists, Christianity's influence has resulted in the decline of clients' visits, adherents' rejection of the shrine and even a decrease in the participation of family members who previously performed diverse roles in the shrine. These effects parallel those discussed by Olupona (2000) with regards to how Christianity and other religions have impacted the activities and practices of traditional religions. According to Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, even her own children neglected their roles in the shrine when the first Apostolic church was established in Ohene Akura.

2.3.7.4 Okomfo Akosua Atuobua's Contribution to the Missionary Church (Apostolic)

Omenyo (2011) states that the traditional priesthood institution also offered help in the establishment of missionary churches in Ghana. This assertion is confirmed in Koankre shrine with the introduction of the Apostolic church. Okomfo Akosua Atuobua contributed positively to the activities of the church that was established in Ohene Akura. According to Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, "I was the one who appealed to the Atibie Hene to release land to build the church. And so, even now my daughter Akosua Kyeraa fellowships with them."⁴⁶ Furthermore, "the church leaders come to invite me whenever they are having their annual harvest, and I contribute money to support their religious activities."⁴⁷

2.3.8 Koankre Shrine in Contemporary Times

Notwithstanding the introduction of the Apostolic church and its influence on the Koankre shrine, the shrine remains important and strong even in this contemporary time (cf. Nrenzah

⁴⁶ Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, interviewed at Koankre shrine, 3/09/2018.

⁴⁷ Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, interviewed at Koankre shrine, 23/08/2018.

2015; Olupona 2000; and Baum 2016). There are still very powerful priests and priestesses who perform diverse roles in their communities and beyond, especially in roles such as healing and divining for both the spiritual and physical aspects of the human life. According to Appiah-Kubi (1981) the well-being phenomenon in most African societies is not merely absence of disease, but full development or totality of a person.

These aspects remain a significant part of the operations of Koankre shrine and this has led to many people returning to indigenous priestesses like Okomfo Akosua Atuobua for their health and well-being, despite professing to be followers of Christianity or Islam.

Although it is indigenous, Koankre shrine has adopted new technologies to reach clients who cannot come to the shrine. Clients who live in distant places prefer to contact the priestess via mobile phone to get their problems solved in the convenience of their homes. This, according to Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, has helped to boost their client base in the shrine, otherwise there would have been a drastic decline in clients' patronage. Additionally, the priestess considers the use of technology as the easiest way to reach a lot of people who need assistance from the shrine. As Nrenzah (2015) states, indigenous priests and priestesses have adopted new strategies to compete with the Pentecostals and Charismatic churches for clients. On several visits to the Koankre shrine, many people called the priestess during possession to inquire about their problems. One of them was Maame Akosua Koramah.⁴⁸ According to Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, a client Maame Akosua Koramah called her to inquire about her daughter who stayed in another town, and was pregnant and had been admitted to the hospital. The call was to inquire if the daughter was fine and to

⁴⁸ Maame Akosua Koramah is a client of Koankre shrine.

know if she would have a safe delivery.⁴⁹ These modern shifts in the roles of priests and priestesses have added value to their contribution as spiritual leaders in their communities.

In Ghana, the use of traditional medicines is very strong because of inadequate government resources to extend modern health care to rural areas. It is through this that the first president Dr. Kwame Nkrumah assisted the great Okomfohemaa Nana Akua Oparebeah of Larteh to start an umbrella organization for the Traditional Healers in Ghana known as Ghana Psychic and Traditional Healing Association (GPTHA) (Isola, 2013). This association has brought a lot of priests and priestesses together to help solve the physical and spiritual needs of the people. In the case of Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, the GPTHA has helped her in performing her role as a trained traditional birth attendant in Ohene Akura. Ohene Akura lacks a modern health facility so the GPTHA's constant and regular training organized for her enhance her role as a traditional birth attendant.

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter has deliberated on the establishment of Ohene Akura and the origin of the Koankre shrine, in relation to African indigenous religion. The discussion showed that Koankre shrine and its deities have been in existence for ages where leaders and adherents are recruited from the Oyokuo clan. A critical look at the shrine revealed that it has influenced the political, religious, economic and socio-cultural activities of the people. This has given the spiritual head in Koankre shrine a privileged position in the Ohene Akura village.

⁴⁹ Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, interviewed at Koankre shrine, 14/09/2018.

CHAPTER THREE

THE MAKING OF A FEMALE PRIEST

3.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on Okomfo Akosua Atuobua. It examines her roles and responsibilities as a priestess of the Koankre shrine. It argues that regardless of the Koankre shrine being operated by male priests since its inception, Okomfo Akosua Atuobua who became the first priestess in the shrine has a significant role to play in ensuring the well-being of the people.

3.2 Description of Okomfo Akosua Atuobua

Okomfo Akosua Atuobua popularly known as Nana Ogyamframa (flaming fire) in Koankre shrine and Ohene Akura village is about 119 years old. According to Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, she was born during the time Ghana was “living with the whites” (that is during the colonial era). Okomfo Akosua Atuobua attributes the length of her life to her hard work, dedication, honesty, and also obeying all the taboos prescribed by the deities she serves. Her good health is reflected in her personality, behavior and how she performs her roles in the Koankre shrine.

Okomfo Akosua Atuobua is well-built, of medium height with dark skin and short hair. The priestess is very pretty and active even in her old age. An interaction with her for the first time portrayed her as firm and confident. It is obvious that her many years as a priestess in an indigenous shrine such as Koankre has transformed her immensely as a spiritual head. Subsequent interactions with Okomfo Akosua Atuobua also revealed her as caring, motherly and accommodating. Although Okomfo Akosua Atuobua is still in touch with her feminine side, she is also very masculine in terms of her speech and in commanding of authority and respect in the Koankre shrine. Okyeame Kofi Donkor mentioned in a

discussion that, “Okomfo Akosua Atuobua has actually become a ‘man’. She does her things as a male in leadership position.”⁵⁰

Okomfo Akosua Atuobua is a spiritual head of Koankre shrine which is dominated by male adherents with whom she works very closely in performing her roles. Apart from her roles in the Koankre shrine, Okomfo Akosua Atuobua has contributed immensely towards the development of Ohene Akura village,⁵¹ as discussed in the subsequent section.

For about 90 years, Okomfo Akosua Atuobua has been a priestess at Koankre shrine serving deities and the people of Ohene Akura. Her admission into the Koankre shrine did not limit her roles as a woman; rather, she became the center of the Koankre shrine in relating to the deities which brought fame and transformation into the Koankre shrine when the shrine was relocated to Ohene Akura.

Okomfo Akosua Atuobua’s age also draws many people to the Koankre shrine. She is seen as a mother, friend, doctor, social worker, psychologist, psychiatrist and philanthropist, farmer, trader, community leader and priestess to a large segment of the Ghanaian population. From a statement made by Obosomfo Atta Bismarck, one deduces that Okomfo Akosua Atuobua’s roles in the Koankre shrine are numerous, yet she performs all these roles with respect, authority and power even with the help of male adherents.⁵² However, to understand Okomfo Akosua Atuobua as a woman who occupies such an enviable position and performs diverse roles in the community, it is important to discuss her biography of how she became a priestess as well as her journey to the Koankre shrine.

⁵⁰ Okyeame Kofi Donkor, interviewed in a group discussion with other adherents at Koankre shrine, 23/10/2018.

⁵¹ Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, interviewed at Koankre shrine, 28/09/2018.

⁵² Obosomfo Atta Bismarck, interviewed at Koankre shrine, 4/10/2018.

3.2.1 Early Life of Okomfo Akosua Atuobua

Okomfo Akosua Atuobua was born in Kwahu Tafo on the 31st of August 1900 to Abena Oforiwaa from Kwahu Atibie and Kofi Agyapong from Kwahu Tafo. She was named Akosua Atuobua Agyapong at birth. Both parents were farmers though her mother traded as well. Her parents' occupation meant they did not stay at Kwahu Tafo but moved from one village to another in search of fertile land to farm. After a while, they settled at Kokronpe where her great grandparents adopted the Asubone deity who helped them to cure a chronic eye problem. To Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, the deity persistently called her to serve at the shrine and, fortunately, Okomfo Akosua Atuobua's parents also chose Kokronpe because it's known for the cultivation of cash crops such as kola, cocoa and oil palm which they farmed in addition to the food crops.⁵³ This decision to farm at Kokronpe coincided with Okomfo Akosua Atuobua's call to serve her ancestral deities.

During this time, Akosua Atuobua was the only child of her parents and at around 10 years of age, she joined her mother in trading. They traded in earthenware bowls and in food stuffs such as cassava, palm oil, and plantain. According to Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, the earthenware bowls were made by her mother while the other food crops were farmed by her father.⁵⁴

Okomfo Akosua Atuobua and her mother traded in many communities in the Kwahu West district such as Kokronpe, Atewaso, Nkawanda, Jejeti and even Nkawkaw during market days.⁵⁵ During non-market days, they traded at Nkawanda along the Accra-Kumasi highway which she recounts was profitable in those days.⁵⁶ She was introduced to trading at an early

⁵³ Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, interviewed at Koankre shrine, 23/09/2018.

⁵⁴ Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, interviewed at Koankre shrine, 23/09/2018.

⁵⁵ Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, interviewed at Ohene Akura palace, 24/10/2018.

⁵⁶ Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, interviewed at Ohene Akura palace, 24/10/2018.

stage of her life and therefore did not get an opportunity to attend school. However, her mother's informal trading training became her occupation until she was called, trained and became a priestess at Koankre shrine.

3.2.2 The Family History of the Priesthood Institution

Phalan (1985) and Atuahene (2010) assert that people get called into the priestly institution as a result of family ties and this is confirmed in the case of Okomfo Akosua Atuobua's experience. According to her, oral history has it that her maternal grandmother, called Okomfo Oforiwaa, was a priestess who served the Asubone as a family deity at Kwahu Atibie.⁵⁷ However, Okomfo Akosua Atuobua claims her grandmother died years before she was born. Recounting the family history, the priestess noted the reason Asubone was adopted as the family deity that is her great grandparents suffered from a chronic eye problem (kokram) which caused blindness to the family members at early stages of their lives. Her great grandparents had to consult a variety of deities to cure this family sickness but it was only Asubone (river deity) who was able to heal the family. As a result, they adopted the Asubone deity as a family deity whom they served until their demise.

After they had died, Okomfo Akosua Atuobua's direct grandmother took over the family shrine and served Asubone and other deities. However, Okomfo Oforiwaa developed a chronic eye problem while serving the deities. At this time, the deities could not cure her eye problem and she died. According to Opayin Kojo Opoku,⁵⁸ a close relative, Okomfo Oforiwaa offended the deities by eating foods such as *amenkeni* (cocoyam) which is a taboo for close adherents, and her constant disobedience to this taboo resulted in her death as a punishment.

⁵⁷ Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, interviewed at Ohene Akura palace, 24/10/2018.

⁵⁸ Opayin Kojo Opoku is an uncle to Okomfo Akosua Atuobua and also a member of Koankre shrine.

When Okomfo Oforiwaa died, the shrine was vacant and no one was willing to serve the deities. Okomfo Akosua Atuobua's uncle who was called to serve the deities refused. He travelled to Accra to start petty trading but he had an accident and died. Opoku (1978) argues that those who resist the priestly calling are struck with a chronic sickness or death.

At this point in the family history, after the death of her uncle, it was Okomfo Akosua Atuobua's turn, as a direct grandchild of Okomfo Oforiwaa, to pick up the family's spiritual mantle. Her call to serve in the family shrine came at an earlier age than for previous family members.

3.2.3 Okomfo Akosua Atuobua's Call

Okomfo Akosua Atuobua's call into the priesthood institution was not coincidental as the calling is associated with her maternal family lineage. The call came at an early stage of her life at age 13. This drew her nuclear family from Kwahu Tafo to Kokronpe where the family deity was adopted. The family shrine was vacant after the demise of her maternal grandmother.

Okomfo Akosua Atuobua explained, that at the age of 10, friends with whom she played thought she possessed witchcraft since she could predict the outcome of the games they played. At other times she could predict people's death in the community. According to Opayin Kyekyeku,⁵⁹ Akosua Atuobua's uncle, her behavior growing up was abnormal. He remembers she could predict misfortunes that eventually transpired in people's lives. This behavior turned the attention of some maternal family members to the family shrine and deities which had been abandoned.

On one of Akosua Atuobua's trading trips at Kokronpe with her mother, they came to a place where Okomfo Dafuo, a priest at Kokronpe, was feeding his deities and because the

⁵⁹ Opayin Kyekyeku is an uncle to Okomfo Akosua Atuobua and a member of the Kaonkre shrine.

ceremony was accompanied by drumming and dancing, Akosua Atuobua got possessed and started to dance to the rhythm of the drums. Akosua Atuobua's gestures and mannerisms were like that of the family deity, Asubone. When this happened, Okomfo Dafuo noticed that she was possessed and he sprinkled white powder on her as she danced to the rhythm of the drums, the white powder signifying that the possessing spirit is a river deity.

After this incident, Akosua Atuobua's parents took her to Okomfo Kwesi Dafuo's shrine to verify which particular deity had possessed her. After the verification of the deity, her parents realized that it was a deity call Asubone, from the maternal family, calling her to serve the family shrine. The call of Akosua Atuobua to serve the family deity brought a lot of controversies which needed to be interrogated in the light of the traditional priesthood institution.

3.2.3.1 Resistance to Okomfo Akosua Atuobua's Training

Nrenzah (2015) argues that a call into the traditional priesthood institution cannot be resisted but can only be delayed because of the belief in deities, ancestors, spirits and even dwarfs who are associated with the traditional priesthood institution. Also, because the traditional priesthood institution is sustained by such spirits, it remains difficult to resist the call especially if it is family-related. In the case of Akosua Atuobua, immediately her call was verified for training, there was some resistance from her mother to her being trained due to Okomfo Oforiwaa suffering blindness as a result of serving the family deity, Asubone.

Akosua Atuobua was sent to Ho, the capital of Volta Region to stay with her maternal uncle, Opayin Kwame Kyei.⁶⁰ Okomfo Akosua Atuobua stated that while she was in Ho, she suffered a lot of misfortunes while trading in foodstuffs and earthenware bowls with her

⁶⁰ Opayin Kwame Kyei is Okomfo Akosua Atuobua's close relative who, because of trade, resides in the Volta region of Ghana. He trades in earthenware bowls and foodstuffs.

uncle.⁶¹ Each time she went to the market, either her earthenware bowls would get damaged through falls or people did not buy from her. The priestess added that this made her become miserable in all her trading endeavors.

With these occurrences coupled by other behaviors Akosua Atuobua exhibited, her uncle Opayin Kwame Kyei decided to consult a traditional priest at Tigare shrine in Ho to inquire about the misfortunes, some of which nearly resulted in her death. The priest advised that Akosua Atuobua should be trained as a priestess to fulfill her calling to the deity (Asubone). This confirms what Mueller (2013) has argued that in traditional religion the spirit world is a tangible reality and no matter how long a person's call is delayed, it cannot be denied.

Immediately, the uncle planned for her to be sent to Kwahu Tafo, her father's hometown, to start her training and become a priestess.

3.2.4 Okomfo Akosua Atuobua's Training

Akosua Atuobua's training into the traditional priesthood institution is important for discussion because she was not trained in Koankre shrine, yet she is now the spiritual head of the shrine. Discussing the circumstances associated with her training makes us understand the dynamics of her training from that of Koankre shrine. Her training started at age 16 under the tutelage of renowned priestesses and a priest at different communities and lasted for 5 years. The first priestess to train Akosua Atuobua was Okomfo Minansah.⁶² Okomfo Minansah worked with Tigare and other deities at Kwahu Tafo in the Eastern Region of Ghana. Akosua Atuobua spent a year with Okomfo Minansah and learned the basic instructions and taboos of her deity (Asubone).

⁶¹ Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, interviewed at Koankre shrine, 24/05/2018.

⁶² Okomfo Minansa is a priestess at Kwahu Tafo, the hometown of Okomfo Akosua Atuobua's father. The priestess is known by many priests and priestesses in the district because of the Tigare deity who have a lot of power. This has resulted in the many roles she plays as a priestess to many in the Ghanaian community at large.

According to Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, she learned as she followed the senior priestess, Okomfo Minansah, as she performed her roles to clients, community and adherents for the first year, illustrating Phalan's (1985) assertion that the training process is not written down but, in the heart and mind of the priestly family, and trainees learn by participating in the activities of senior priests and priestesses. Okomfo Minansah also taught her the basic instructions in knowing the *suman* (spirit).

After a year, Okomfo Minansa took Akosua Atuobua to Akonedi shrine where she spent almost 2 years under Okomfo Akua Oparebea at Akonedi shrine in Larteh-Kubease in the Eastern Region of Ghana. The Akonedi shrine is known for training priests and priestesses in Ghana and has been acclaimed, even at the global level, especially when it comes to herbal medicine. Under the teaching of Okomfo Oparebea at Akonedi shrine, Akosua Atuobua was taught how to divine and also use herbs to heal. She also learnt the general taboos associated with the priestly role and these equipped her when she became a priestess. Okomfo Akosua Atuobua stated, that the training process, especially at Akonedi shrine, is rigorous and only determined priestesses can undertake it.⁶³ After learning these important skills at Akonedi shrine, Akosua Atuobua returned to Okomfo Minansah for her *akomyi* (graduation).

After graduation, training does not end; the priest/priestess has to work with a senior priest or priestess to sharpen the knowledge acquired during the training (Atuahene, 2010). Okomfo Akosua Atuobua added that after the *akomyi* she returned to Kokronpe and worked with Okomfo Dafua and his brother Okomfo Agyei at the 'Oyoku abosomfie', yet it was not unexpected because of her family priestly bonds with the shrine.

⁶³ Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, interviewed at Koankre shrine, 23/08/2018.

3.2.5 Okomfo Akosua Atuobua at Koankre Shrine

As indicated above, family ties contribute to a person's affiliation to the traditional priesthood institution. In Koankre shrine, people are also admitted because they are called by a deity who is closely associated with the shrine. This made it possible for Okomfo Akosua Atuobua to become a priestess at Koankre shrine. After Okomfo Akosua Atuobua's training, she returned immediately to Kokronpe and worked with Okomfo Dafuo and his brother Okomfo Agyei. The Koankre shrine was relocated from Kokronpe to Ohene Akura, with Asubone giving direction to where this shrine must be established.

During this period Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, being the only priestess, got possessed and led the other priests and adherents to Ohene Akura. According to Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, whichever place Asubone directed, they settled without complain.⁶⁴ This spiritual process took a whole year before the shrine finally relocated to Ohene Akura with Okomfo Akosua Atuobua being the leader of the team at the age of 21. This came with various rituals, sacrifices and purifications that needed to be performed before the shrine finally relocated to Ohene Akura. In addition to Asubone deity who gave the direction for the relocation of the shrine, Atibie Hene also played an important role in the release of land for such purpose. They also made sure the environment was serene for the operation of the deities and adherents because of the numerous help given by the deities.

After a while, the shrine was settled at Ohene Akura; however, the relocation caused a lot of harm to the leaders, clients and adherents. Activities of the shrine became very slow as clients found it difficult to find the new location of the shrine. This contributed to the decline of the shrine's activities for some time. Around that same time, there was a deity who had visited the shrine at Kokronpe in a human form. This deity continued to cause trouble in the

⁶⁴ Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, interviewed at Koankre shrine, 23/08/2018.

shrine by drinking all the alcohol brought by clients and even adherents of the shrine. This continued for about a year until one day this person they usually called ‘visitor’ revealed himself as a deity called Koankre and stated that he had come to ‘marry’ Okomfo Akosua Atuobua. We have to note that the relation between spirits and their mediums are seen as marital, the spirit being the medium’s spouse (Colleyn, 1999). In this case, the deity ordered that Okomfo Akosua Atuobua accompanied him to his home town at Brede in the Northern part of Ghana. Before any agreement could be made with the deity, the priestess Okomfo Akosua Atuobua got possessed by Koankre and, immediately, Okomfo Dafuo and other adherents accompanied her to Brede for the necessary rituals to be performed and also get trained so she could work with the *suman* (spirit).

Okomfo Akosua Atuobua spent almost 2 years at Brede learning about the taboos and important rituals in relation to Koankre. In the learning process, the caretaker of the shrine demanded that they slaughter a cow, hens and goats to authenticate the rituals performed; however, the caretaker of Koankre did not allow Okomfo Dafuo and Okomfo Akosua Atuobua to pay for any of the items used for the ritual.

Koankre’s caretaker demanded that Okomfo Akosua Atuobua should account to him at the end of every year for 7 years and afterward, she can work with the *suman* (spirit). Okomfo Akosua Atuobua stated that at the end of every year “even if I am dying, I have to travel to Brede to give account and also perform certain rituals to Koankre’s caretaker.”⁶⁵

On the return from Brede, Okomfo Akosua Atuobua became famous. People came from far and near to consult her for solutions to various kinds of illnesses, to ward-off evil spirits and to prevent-attacks by witchcraft and other evil powers. Okomfo Akosua Atuobua was able to recover lost items, punish criminals and to cause justice to prevail in the community

⁶⁵ Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, interviewed at Kaonkre shrine, 23/07/2018.

and beyond. The priestess also possessed healing powers which drew people with diverse problems to her, and this influenced her decision to name the shrine after this deity who is popularly known as ‘Koankre’.

3.2.6 Why the Shrine was Named ‘Koankre’

Considering why the shrine was named ‘Koankre’ is important in understanding the deity in relation to Okomfo Akosua Atuobua’s position amidst operating with Okomfo Dafuo and Okomfo Agyei. Using Koankre and other deities gave the priestess a role to play in the shrine as she got possessed by the deities to perform diverse roles in the shrine. Due to the transition of the shrine from Kokronpe to Ohene Akura, the shrine became dormant for a while until the coming of Koankre deity who energised the adherents and other deities in the shrine, hence the adoption of the deity’s name after the shrine.

There is the belief that African indigenous religion dwells on numerous deities for effective operation and the coming of Koankre deity with his spiritual dimension transformed the operation of the shrine. This deity, together with Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, provided the people of Ohene Akura with quick solutions to their health needs. Koankre healed people with spiritual and physical health problems such as swollen legs, barrenness, madness, bruises, laceration, headaches, acute pile, malaria, abdominal pains, small pox, measles, hypertension and diabetes.

As more people came from different towns and villages to consult Okomfo Akosua Atuobua in the shrine, the usual direction given was ‘Koankre’. Okyeame Kofi Donkor stated, that as Okomfo Akosua Atuobua became famous by using the deity, people who usually visited the shrine attached the deity’s name which is ‘Koankre’ to the shrine. Currently, the shrine is known as Koankre to many people even beyond the Ohene Akura vicinity.

3.3 Roles of Okomfo Akosua Atuobua in Koankre Shrine

Having discussed broadly Okomfo Akosua Atuobua's relationship to the traditional priesthood institution in Koankre shrine, it is important to turn our focus on some roles the priestess performs in the Ohene Akura village and its neighboring settlements, despite gender and cultural expectations which determine the roles for men and women (Fallon, 2003), especially that which involves community-wide participation such as rituals in religious and community spaces. However, Okomfo Akosua Atuobua's position as a priestess in Koankre shrine was not subordinated as she relates directly to Asubone and other deities who equipped her to perform her roles without limitations.

3.3.1 Political Roles

Many writers have written on the relation between the traditional priesthood institution and chieftaincy. Among these writers are Opoku (1978), Mbiti (1991) and Apter (1991) who state that priests and priestesses have always been part of the chieftaincy system and, as a result, the two interact with each other especially in the institution of chieftaincy and spiritual welfare. Opoku (1978) added that in places where chieftaincy was not instituted, these priests and priestesses served as leaders and administrators of such societies. These assertions remain true for Okomfo Akosua Atuobua who served as a leader in Ohene Akura before chieftaincy was instituted. The political system in Ohene Akura gained much support from Okomfo Akosua Atuobua. To understand this relationship, a brief history of how chieftaincy was instituted in Ohene Akura is discussed. According to Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, Ohene Akura is under the traditional paramountcy of Atibie Hene (chief).⁶⁶ As the population of Ohene Akura increased, she informed the Atibie Hene and he decided to enstool a chief at the village. It was Okomfo Akosua Atuobua's initiative which facilitated

⁶⁶ Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, interviewed at Koankre shrine, 23/08/2018.

the establishment of the political system in Ohene Akura.⁶⁷ She explains further that it was the deity Asubone who directed which person to be chosen for the position even before the traditional council nominated the individual.⁶⁸

Since that period, Okomfo Akosua Atuobua has provided spiritual support especially during sacred days. She pours libation asking for blessing for the Ohene Akura village. In certain times, the priestess is possessed by the deities to perform ritual purification in the village and the chief's palace. According to Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, some of these rituals she performs are in the *nkonya dan mu* (stool room) where most women are not permitted entry.⁶⁹

The chief also consults the priestess in difficult times for directions on how to rule the village. This has created and inspired a cordial relationship where the chief also supports the work of the priestess in the shrine. Okomfo Akosua Atuobua indicated that the chief buys new costumes for the shrine especially during times of feeding the deities and festivals.⁷⁰

Apart from the purification, Okomfo Akosua Atuobua is an important figure in the traditional council which consists of the chief and his elders in Ohene Akura. This is where the development and progress of Ohene Akura is discussed.

Before the chieftaincy institution, Okomfo Akosua Atuobua undertook several projects such as lobbying for a basic school, mechanized boreholes and a bridge on the Asubone river to facilitate movement to the Accra-Kumasi highway and other villages. These roles will be elaborated further in the chapter 4 of this study.

⁶⁷ Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, interviewed at Koankre shrine, 6/07/2018.

⁶⁸ Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, interviewed at Koankre shrine, 23/08/2018.

⁶⁹ Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, interviewed at Koankre shrine, 6/07/2018.

⁷⁰ Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, interviewed at Koankre shrine, 6/07/2018.

3.3.2 Social Roles

The social function of Okomfo Akosua Atuobua in the Koankre shrine has had great impact on the people of Ohene Akura. Ohene Akura is a religious community. It was built together with Koankre shrine and for that reason people in the community are bound by all activities of the shrine. Okomfo Akosua Atuobua and the adherents of the shrine also participate in all aspects of social life of the Ohene Akura community.⁷¹

The people in Ohene Akura observe some taboos instituted by Okomfo Akosua Atuobua in the Koankre shrine. For example, Friday is purposely dedicated to Asubone in the Koankre shrine and, as such, people living in the village also observe the taboos associated with the day. Mbiti (1991) argues that in most African societies, taboos are set towards attaining the good of society. The taboos of the Koankre shrine have promoted good morals in the social interactions of the people in Ohene Akura. This has brought about unity among members in the village. Most people in Ohene Akura are afraid to steal and also cause harm to other members in the village. This is as a result of the potency of the deities to easily identify witches, thieves and people who harbor bad intentions. This provides opportunity for people with recalcitrant behavior and character in the community to reform.

Okomfo Akosua Atuobua's advanced age and her position as a priestess draw people to her for all forms of advice on religious and social issues. Amele (2000) argues that old women provide the stable framework in social life as repository of traditional wisdom and the secrets of society. There is a general belief that complex issues are referred to old women in Akan society for wise counselling, hence the concept *yenkobisa aberewa* (let's seek counselling from the old lady). Some clients, members of the Ohene Akura community and adherents bring their marital issues, usually arising from infertility to Okomfo Akosua

⁷¹ Obaa Yaa, daughter of Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, interviewed at Koankre shrine, 23/09/2018.

Atuobua. After counselling is given, the priestess divines for the spiritual cause. Informants, including men, acknowledged the diverse help they received from the shrine from their ordeals such as healing from impotency, physical wellbeing and prospering in their cocoa farming.

Okomfo Akosua Atuobua's depth of wisdom is also sought in council meetings in the Ohene Akura society. Council meetings in Ohene Akura are held for deliberation on developmental projects and progress in the community. This meeting cannot take place without an invitation being extended to Okomfo Akosua Atuobua who is seen as the spiritual head of the community.

Okomfo Akosua Atuobua is a part of the traditional chieftaincy system in Ohene Akura and her position as a spiritual head of the village brings the elders, the chief and other royals of the traditional council to Koankre shrine on sacred days. They usually offer thanks to deities for protection, guidance and well-being of the people in the village. They also provide schnapps, chicken and other required animals to the priestess as a form of appreciation and thanksgiving during these sacred days.

Besides this, Okomfo Akosua Atuobua is a member of the traditional priests and priestesses' association in the Mpreaso Municipality⁷² and currently the chairperson of the association. It is through this association that the priestess was certified as a traditional birth attendant. This is under the bigger umbrella of the Ghana Psychic and Traditional Healing Association (GPTHA). The association brings all priests and priestesses together to discuss issues that affect their roles in the traditional priesthood institution.

⁷² This association is under the bigger umbrella of the Ghana Psychic and Traditional Healing Association (GPTHA). This association bring all priests and priestesses together and also deliberate on the welfare of the traditional priesthood institution.

Okomfo Akosua Atuobua's leadership is also seen during occasions such as festivals. These are large public celebrations for the entire community to remember, honor and think about the progress of the community. This is also the period of thanksgiving to God, ancestors, gods and other spirits of the land for their help and protection throughout the year. There are diverse activities such as drumming, singing, clapping and dancing by adherents of the shrine to celebrate this occasion, especially during *Akwesidae*. Hens and cows are slaughtered to honor the deities. In most cases, mashed yam with or without palm oil is sprinkled on the images of the deities. Libation is poured and it is considered as *musuyi* (ritual cleansing). This ritual is performed by Okomfo Akosua Atuobua but accompanied by the chief and other adherents of the shrine. During this period, the priestess gets possessed by Asubone deity who usually ensures that the village is free of bad deeds and cleansed for the safety of the people. The deity directs where and when the libation is poured. The libation is first poured on the Koankre shrine before being taken to the chief's palace, market square, crossroads, and the entrance of the village. The occasion is accompanied by drumming and singing for days. People may come to the shrine to receive advice from the deities about their sufferings and ailments.

Since Okomfo Akosua Atuobua is in charge of the entire Ohene Akura communities, she cannot exempt herself from social activities such as marriage ceremonies, child birth, puberty rites and funeral rites. In most African societies, these ceremonies cannot be performed without priests and priestesses (Nrenzah, 2015). Okomfo Akosua Atuobua is invited to pour libation during such occasions especially when there are difficulties.

During the death of a member from the royal family, Okomfo Akosua Atuobua remains an active member who performs sacred funeral rites in case the person died through an accident (*atofowuo*). Through the performance of the rites, the priestess communicates with the spirit of the dead to determine the cause of such misfortune in the royal family. This performance

creates grounds for members to reaffirm their solidarity with the dead so that burial and final funeral rites can take place peacefully.

3.3.3 Religious Roles

For traditional priesthood institutions to remain empowered to continually sustain society, it requires rites and rituals to be performed to keep the deities and the institutions alive (Agorsah, 2010), this applies to Koankre shrine as well. Feeding the deities remains an important ritual in the Koankre shrine. According to Maame Akosua, an adherent of the shrine, feeding energizes the deities so that when they call on them, they will answer quickly; otherwise, the work will collapse.⁷³ She further states, “When the deities are fed, the inactive deities become active when we call on them.”⁷⁴ This enables the priestess to communicate regularly with the deities, thus normalizing the relationship between the deities and the priestess.

These rituals and rites require varying degrees of competence on the part of the performer such as Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, the spiritual head of the shrine. Mostly, Okomfo Akosua Atuobua performs all rituals and rites in the Koankre shrine in order to keep the shrine alive, which in turn helps her to perform diverse roles such as healing, training and providing spiritual support to the people. The most important aspects of rites and rituals are performed during sacred days known as *da bone* (pl. *nna bone*). The following *nna bone* are observed in the Koankre shrine: *Akwesidae*, *Benada Dapaa*, *Awukudae*, *Fofie* and *Mmemeneda Dapaa*. According to Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, these sacred days are very special because the deities are energized to perform diverse roles.

⁷³ Maame Akosua is an adherent of Koankre shrine, interviewed at Ohene Akura, 3/10/2018.

⁷⁴ Maame Akosua is an adherent of Koankre shrine, interviewed at Ohene Akura, 3/10/2018.

Being a leader in Koankre shrine also renders Okomfo Akosua Atuobua the spiritual head of Ohene Akura and surrounding villages. Appiah-Kubi (1981) indicates that religion permeates all aspects of life of the people and this makes it difficult to separate the daily activities of the people. Appiah-Kubi's observation is true for the Ohene Akura society and can be seen in even the little details of their lives that come through from the interviews. By relating to the deities, Okomfo Akosua Atuobua serves as a link between the people and the deities to heal, bring quick judgment in loss of items, train priestesses, help people to travel abroad and help deliver babies as a traditional birth attendant. She ensures delegation of powers to close male adherents and monitors their activities.

3.3.3.1 Healing

Okomfo Akosua Atuobua's religious role as a priestess is inseparably tied to the practice and use of herbs for healing. As discussed above, the priestess was trained to use herbs in healing. This aspect of Okomfo Akosua Atuobua's role remains important to the people of Ohene Akura. Clients come from various towns and villages to seek physical and spiritual healing from the priestess.

The deities possess great healing powers which meet the needs of people who come to consult the priestess in the Koankre shrine. Due to this, people contact the priestess for all kinds of medical issues such as barrenness, chickenpox, fever, swollen legs and any such related diseases. According to Okyeame Donkor Kofi, clients usually come to seek the spiritual dimension to the root cause of their health problems.

Usually, the priestess, through possession by the deities, gives solutions to these problems brought to the shrine. These come in different forms and methods as directed by the deities. Details of how she solves these problems are discussed in Chapter 4.

3.3.3.2 Health Care Delivery

Over the years, in Ghana, governments' financial constraints have meant that people's health needs have been inadequately met, especially in remote villages. Inhabitants of such villages have to walk or travel long distances to access medical facilities. Ohene Akura is one of such villages which do not have a hospital or a clinic to cater to the populace's health needs. Thus, most people resort to Okomfo Akosua Atuobua.

For pregnant women within Ohene Akura and the neighboring settlements in particular, she is a vital resource. Okomfo Akosua Atuobua offers prenatal care, prescribes medicine, conducts spiritual examination and provides protection. Generally, through the help of the deities, the priestess guides these women throughout their nine months of pregnancy up to delivery.

Some clients attest to the varied help they have received from Okomfo Akosua Atuobua and the Koankre shrine. For example, Akosua Kraa, a client of the Koankre shrine could not keep calm when asked why she has been coming to the shrine. She stated:

I got married to my handsome husband in 2012 but after several years of marriage, I could not conceive. I had visited many churches and hospitals but each time, all they told me was that I was fine and that I will get pregnant. After several years of going up and down, a friend introduced me to Okomfo Akosua Atuobua. I came to see her on May 10, 2018 and she consulted her deities on my behalf. After that, she gave me some herbs that I boiled and drank every morning. After I drank the medicine for about 2 months, I got pregnant. Throughout the period of my pregnancy, the priestess offered diverse help until I delivered a baby girl and named her after the priestess.

This and several other supports are provided by Okomfo Akosua Atuobua to the people of Ohene Akura. Using the deities has caused the people of Ohene Akura to rely solely on the Koankre shrine for all their health needs. In attending to the various physical health problems people bring to the shrine, the spiritual aspects of the problems are not left out. Appiah-Kubi (1981) and Owoahene-Acheampong (1998) argue that the absence of diseases does not guarantee the total well-being of a person. The Okyeame of the shrine states that

in this village, every minute aspect of life is brought to the shrine: “Even when a person wakes and sees a cockroach, they will come to inquire about it in the shrine.”⁷⁵

Aside from spiritual healing, Okomfo Akosua Atuobua believes in environmental cleanliness. To the priestess, this is the first and most important remedy to healing. With the help of Asubone (river deity), the village is always kept neat. Okomfo Akosua Atuobua is always prompted by Asubone to inform the people, especially on *da bone* (sacred day), to clean the village before traditional festivals are celebrated. This is done every 40 days.

3.3.3.3 Training of Priests and Priestesses

Another important role Okomfo Akosua Atuobua plays in the community is training entrants called by river deities into the priesthood institution. Okomfo Akosua Atuobua started the training of other priests and priestesses when she was 60 years old. During this time, she was the spiritual head in Koankre shrine and had a lot of experiences in connecting to the deities, and this helped her to train others. Phelan (1983) writes that priests who are recognized by the community train new aspirants. The community role becomes important in even choosing the trainer (chief priests). These are mostly senior priests or priestesses who have kept the processes, customs, traditions and history of the society and can transmit to the next generation. However, the priestess seeks assistance from other shrines such as Akonedi operated by Okomfo Akua Oparebea and Tigare operated by Okomfo Minansah.

The first apprentice Okomfo Akosua Atuobua trained was a woman called Akua Frema who came from Kwahu Pepease. Kwahu Pepease is in the Eastern region and, according to Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, for some time now she has trained more priestesses than priests within the Kwahu West municipality and beyond. According to the priestess, this training is facilitated by the Asubone deity. This deity is responsible for verifying the deity

⁷⁵ Okyeame Kofi Donkor, interviewed at Ohene Akure, 29/09/2018.

possessing the candidate. After the novice has been verified of the particular river deity, immediately, the training begins.

In the Koankre shrine, under the spiritual leadership of Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, training takes four years and the trainee should be prepared physically, spiritually, economically, and mentally to undertake the training. This is because training is quite challenging, rigorous and lengthy as stated by scholars such as Phelan (1983); Mbiti (1990); Opoku (1978); Idowu (1973); Boakyewa (2014); and Atuahene (2010).

Okomfo Akosua Atuobua was of the view that most apprentices are not able to complete the training processes because of financial constraints and inability to obey all set rules with regards to sexual abstinence. Before training, the apprentice automatically 'divorces' his/her spouse until the end of the training to enable them to spiritually marry and bond with the deity who has called them. The temporal suspension of their physical marriages with their spouses helps them in concentrating on the profession without distraction and finally, it gives them the ability to obey rules such as sex abstinence until they complete their training and operate in their shrine as priests and priestesses.

According to Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, most of the trainees whom she has schooled range in ages from 25 to 35 years. Because they are young, usually they are strong, have the time, and are ready to be submissive. However, because they are young, most of their families resist their call and consequently refuse to commit to the financial charges and items required for the training. Okomfo Akosua Atuobua claims that sometimes she trains these priests and priestesses for free and after they have been trained, they pay back when they establish their individual shrines. The priestess was quick to add that some of the priests and priestesses refuse to fulfil their side of the contract.⁷⁶

⁷⁶ Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, interviewed at Koankre shrine, 23/09/2018.

In most African societies, because priests or priestesses have very important roles to play, intensive training is required else she or he fails to get the recognition of people such as chiefs and community members who may patronize the services of these priests and priestesses. Because of this, Okomfo Akosua Atuobua trains these novices so that they can get the necessary recognition in their various communities.

According to Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, most of the novices trained in Koankre shrine have been able to meet the requirements of the priesthood institution. The priestess stated that many of these priests and priestesses invite her to their shrine during sacred days or festivals.

Apart from training novices, Okomfo Akosua Atuobua continues to collaborate with her graduate priests and priestesses to ensure the well-being of society. There are times the trained priestesses and priests visit the Koankre shrine when they encounter difficulties in their roles to consult Okomfo Akosua Atuobua and deliberate on how to solve their clients' difficult issues.

3.4 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed Okomfo Akosua Atuobua in Koankre shrine. It was shown that, although Okomfo Akosua Atuobuo was not affiliated to the Oyokuo family, her priestly call was linked to a deity in Koankre shrine and this gave her admission into the Koankre shrine. Okomfo Akosua Atuobua being the first and the only priestess in the Koankre shrine brought a powerful deity called Koankre, through this deity, Okomfo Akosua Atuobua performed diverse roles in the political, social and religious settings for the betterment of Ohene Akura village and other communities.

CHAPTER FOUR

GENDER, PATRIARCHY AND OKOMFO AKOSUA ATUOBUA IN KOANKRE SHRINE

4.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the relationship between the social construction of gender and patriarchy specifically associated with Okomfo Akosua Atuobua in Koankre shrine and Ohene Akura village. This chapter highlights the priestess' relationship with the deities, precisely how she transforms into a different gender and take up a "masculine nature", which helps her to perform roles the Koankre shrine. In the case of the priestess is also the issue of her sex as against the gender expectations of their societies, this is where the priestess' relationship with past priests, close male adherents, and the chief and elders will also be interrogated.

4.2 Okomfo Akosua Atuobua with Male Priests in Koankre Shrine

The Koankre shrine has been in existence for years since its establishment in Kokronpe. Historically, the shrine belongs to the Akan people of Kwahu Atibie and is directly linked to the chieftaincy institution. Over the years, the Koankre shrine was operated by the late Okomfo Dafuo and his brother, Okomfo Agyei, who worked with Okomfo Akosua Atuobua. Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, who became a priestess at age 21, was not a member of the Oyokuo clan, yet her ability to relate to the deities brought transformation into the shrine through the deity Koankre.

As a result, Okomfo Akosua Atuobua became the center of affairs in Koankre shrine while the male priests worked as her assistants. According to Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, Okomfo Dafuo remained dormant in his relation to the deities because of Koankre's quick healing

power in solving problems brought to the shrine.⁷⁷ These roles are discussed in Chapter 3 of this study. Okomfo Akosua Atuobua connected with Koankre and other deities while Okomfo Dafuo performed other roles such as linguist, servant of the shrine, and also gave directions to clients who visited the shrine on working days. In Okomfo Akosua Atuobua's view, Okomfo Dafuo served as a linguist while Okomfo Agyei served as *sumankwafo* each time clients visited the shrine.⁷⁸

Okomfo Akosua Atuobua consults the deities to perform her roles in the Koankre shrine, which comes in different forms. The first is the use of cowries. The priestess spreads the cowries and recites incantations which are only understood by close adherents of the shrine. It is believed that Okomfo Akosua Atuobua listens to the deities after the cowries are spread on the sheep skin. The priestess also uses kola nuts as a sign of inviting the deities to the shrine. Through these various forms of invitation, the deities come one after the other to respond to the call of the priestess, Okomfo Akosua Atuobua. Okomfo Akosua Atuobua was of the view that Asubone and Koankre deities respond quickly when she calls. Okomfo Akosua Atuobua's relationship with the deities confirms Odotei's (2006) assertion that women hold religious leadership, not as complementary to men but with great autonomy. Although Okomfo Akosua Atuobua worked with these priests in the shrine, she had a distinctive role to play, which remained important in the operation of the Koankre shrine.

4.2.1 Okomfo Akosua Atuobua as a Wife in the Koankre Shrine

Okomfo Akosua Atuobua's relationship with the priests in the Koankre shrine was not just as co-workers, but also resulted in marriage. Marriage, as an important social phenomenon in every society, cuts across individual status and position in society. According to Akyeampong and Obeng (1995), marriage facilitates the continuation of lineage within

⁷⁷ Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, interviewed at Koankre shrine, 20/11/2018.

⁷⁸ Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, interviewed at Koankre shrine, 20/11/2018.

societies. Okomfo Dafuo married Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, this was possible because Okomfo Akosua Atuobua did not belong to the Oyokuo clan; it was rather her great grandparents who adopted and served Asubone deity because of the diverse help they gained from the deity.

The priests and the priestess operated in the Koankre shrine, inducing her to perform her roles, first as a priestess and then as a married woman. Okomfo Akosua Atuobua's marriage to Okomfo Dafuo produced two children. However, just after the shrine was relocated to Ohene Akura, Okomfo Dafuo passed on, leaving the shrine in the hands of Okomfo Agyei his younger brother. He got married to Okomfo Akosua Atuobua and also had two children with her. Okomfo Akosua Atuobua's marriage did not prevent her from performing her roles as a priestess, a wife and a mother, yet performed a distinctive role by connecting to the deities.

4.2.2 Okomfo Akosua Atuobua as the Head of Koankre Shrine

Okomfo Akosua Atuobua became a spiritual head of the Koankre shrine at the age of 40. She took over the Koankre shrine not because there were no men from the Oyokuo clan to occupy this leadership position, but because of her ability to relate to the deities, which brought transformation and fame to the Koankre shrine. Also, people who came to the Koankre shrine continued to have their problems resolved.

Okomfo Akosua Atuobua involved all the deities in operating the shrine. Meanwhile, most of these deities remained dormant, except Koankre and Asubone, who usually came quickly to help each time she called on them. She is the only and longest serving priestess of the Koankre shrine, even at the age of 119 years.

Currently, Okomfo Akosua Atuobua works with other all-male adherents, who usually function as linguists and servants of the deities. These adherents assist the priestess in the

performance of her roles, especially on working days, when many people come to the shrine. According to Obosomfo Atta Bismarck, each of the close adherents has a role to play during working days, yet they take instruction and direction from the priestess.⁷⁹ He added that they also report what transpired during the day to the priestess, after all the clients have left the shrine. This is because when she is in a trance during possession by the deities all her actions and behavior are directed by the deities. It is obvious that the male adherents take instructions and directions from Okomfo Akosua Atuobua who remains the leader and final authority in the Koankre shrine. Okomfo Akosua Atuobua holds the leadership position with great autonomy without interference by the male adherents. This demonstrates that priestesses are capable of performing leadership roles independently of their male counterparts in religious spaces such as the shrine (Odotei, 2006).

4.3 De-Gendering and Re-Gendering of Roles by Okomfo Akosua Atuobua

4.3.1 Relating to the Deities

At the Koankre shrine, Okomfo Akosua Atuobua has achieved fame, success and respect due to her capabilities to relate with the deities to solve the spiritual needs of the people. This is because the deities possess variety of healing powers that particularly meet the health and spiritual needs of the people in Ohene Akura and other surrounding communities. According to Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, relating with the deities through possession seems to be the best and only course of action to meet the demands of clients, adherents and community members.⁸⁰ Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, when possessed by the deities, is enabled to deal with a range of health and social issues in a highly structured and elaborate way. This confirms Appiah-Kubi's (1981) assertion that priest-healers in Akan society get

⁷⁹ Obosomfo Atta Bismarck, interviewed at Koankre shrine, 4/08/2018.

⁸⁰ Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, interviewed at Koankre shrine, 24/12/2018.

possessed to deliver messages to the community and also bring divine healing to clients.

Okomfo Akosua Atuobua added that;

“These deities have their own eyes and can see all things when you call on them, for me, I cannot help people; I am only a medium used by the deities to help people who come to the shrine.”⁸¹

Okomfo Akosua Atuobua stated that her being possessed by the deities brings quick solution to problems brought to the Koankre shrine.⁸² In relating to the deities, Okomfo Akosua Atuobua alternates between gender in the performance of her roles, and this comes with appropriate behavior, attitudes and ways of dressing, which help her to deal with problems brought to the shrine.

4.3.2 Attitude during Possession

Okomfo Akosua Atuobua exhibits different attitudes during the possession by the deities while she performs her roles in Koankre shrine on working days. Because the deities are numerous, each one comes with a particular attitude in an aggressive or calm manner. From the onset of the *suman* (spirit), the Okyeame and other close adherents—through years of experience in the Koankre—can determine the nature of the possessing spirit.

When the *suman* (spirit) begins to show itself in the priestess, a dramatic physical transformation takes place, no matter the deity that has possessed her, causing her to be imbalanced and stagger suddenly. She also gains unusual strength during possession, reaching levels of activity that belie her 119 years. Additionally, reflecting the male gender of the deities that possess her, the priestess embraces masculine mannerisms in the way she talks, walks, gestures and postures. All these help the close adherents to determine the particular deity who has possessed Okomfo Akosua Atuobua. Unlike the other deities,

⁸¹ Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, interviewed at Koankre shrine, 13/12/2018.

⁸² Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, interviewed at Koankre shrine, 10/12/2018.

Koankre and Abrewa tia's possessions are very calm, and the priestess is required to sit at the *bisa dan mu* (consulting room) and engage in conversation with clients who have come to the shrine to seek help. For Asubone, Shiawu, Tigare and Latafa, their possession come with strong forces where the priestess displays physicality and dances on the compound of the shrine for a while before being taken to the consultation room.

The way the priestess speaks also changes. When possessed by Koankre, the priestess speaks in a language that resembles that of the people of Brede, and when possessed by Asubone, the priestess stammers while speaking in an unknown language. These unknown languages can only be understood and interpreted by the close adherents such as the Okyeame, Sumankwafo and Abosomfo who work closely with the priestess.

4.3.3 Behavior during Possession

The change in attitude from the onset of possession brings about behaviours that are dependent on the *suman* in operation. It must be noted that Okomfo Akosua Atuobua's comportment in her daily non-possessed state is sharply different.

Koankre is a deity known for healing, for this reason, the deity is called by the priestess to deal with clients who come with health problems. According to the Okyeame of Koankre shrine, when Koankre *suman* begins to show himself, the priestess starts to drink alcohol.⁸³ If care is not taken the priestess can drink all the alcohol brought by clients to perform rituals. However, after the *suman* (spirit) has left, the priestess does not look intoxicated, she walks normally and continues her usual duties in the shrine as if she had not drunk any alcohol.

⁸³ Okyeame Kofi Donkor, interviewed at Koankre shrine, 14/12/2018.

According to Obosomfo Bismarck, Shiawu and Tigare are deities known for destruction in the Koankre shrine.⁸⁴ These deities are called to solve problems associated with witchcraft powers. The priestess testifies to numerous witches and wizards Shiawu and Tigare deities have exposed. This is usually showcased based on the number of beads hung on the image of the deity in the shrine. This means the deities have high supernatural abilities which expose witches and wizards.

When Shiawu *suman* possesses the priestess, she begins to smoke cigarettes even while she is still performing her roles in the shrine. According to the Sumankwafo, “the priestess can smoke about 5 boxes of cigarettes within a short period of time, giving her the masculine attitude and behavior while performing her roles.”⁸⁵ This makes the priestess very active and fearful. This behavior tends to create fear among clients who are visiting the Koankre shrine for the first time. Deities such as *Asubone* make the priestess very restless during possession. This possession is usually accompanied by drumming and singing by *agorfoma* (drummers). The priestess moves up and down on the compound of the shrine and usually carries an egg, which signifies life, depending on the assignment the deities want to perform. This kind of possession needs much assistance from the Okyeame of the shrine who directs and interprets whatever behavior the priestess is portraying. Usually, the priestess prescribes medicine for clients who visit the Koankre shrine.

4.3.4 Costume During Possession

The costume of the priestess remains important during possession since it enhances the role of the priestess at the Koankre shrine. Each of the deities has a particular costume the priestess puts on during possession. Because most of the deities are portrayed as males, the costumes are designed as male attires which come in different styles based on the origin of

⁸⁴ Obosomfo Atta Bismarck, interviewed at Koankre shrine, 14/12/2018.

⁸⁵ Sumankwafo Agyei, interviewed at Koankre shrine, 23/09/2018.

the deity. The only exception is that of Asubone, whose attire is designed as that of a woman because during possession, the priestess exhibits female characteristics. The costumes also come in varieties of colors—such as white, red, and black—or mixed colors, usually red and black stripes or white and black stripes. The Okyeame stated that the color the priestess wears depends on the duties assigned by the deity. The selection of the costume is done by the Okyeame and other close adherents.

The costume of Koankre *suman* comes in black batakari (smock) with shorts and a black hat. The priestess wears black and red striped batakari (smock) with a pair of trousers during her possession by Shiawu and Tigare. These costumes resemble men's attires from the northern part of Ghana. Compared to the deities from the northern part of Ghana whose attires are designed in men's style, Asubone's costume is a white straight dress mirroring Akan women's attires.

The priestess' costume is also accompanied by a gun, cutlass or bow and arrow depending on the assignment of the possessed spirit. However, this is not easily determined by the adherents and the different choices can often be made before the right tool is selected for the possessed spirit. At this stage, the priestess' speech, gestures and mannerisms are all directed by the possessing *suman* (spirit).

After Okomfo Akosua Atuobua has displayed for a while on the compound, she is taken to a room called *bisa dan mu* (consultation room) where clients, adherents and community members can consult her for any kind of problem. Usually, the priestess will be gentle and speak with the adherents in a more relaxed manner. At this point, the priestess divines and prophesizes or prescribes solutions depending on the problem of those who have come to seek help from the Koankre shrine. The level of possession and the length of the priestess' loss of consciousness are not consistent; it rather depends on the degree of the problem and the individual involved. In the case of loss of articles and witchcraft (which causes

barrenness, blindness, acute madness, leprosy and loss of money from enterprise), the priestess violently loses consciousness for a long time to determine the cause of the misfortune. This is accompanied by a particular behavior and divination to solve the problem.

Several insights emerge from the detailed description of the priestess' encounter with a deity. This is fundamental in understanding the many dimension of women's power, autonomy and authority in relation to the deities (Kenyon, 1999). The reality of gender transformations in the traditional priesthood institution allows for cross dressing, which helps the priestess to take up masculine or feminine attitudes depending on the assignments given by the deities. This helps the priestess to be able to determine the causes and effects of the various problems brought to the shrine. This also provides alternative approaches to understanding the displaced 'hegemonic' association of masculinity and femininity which comes in the form of gestures, behaviors, attitudes and costumes and blurs the gender roles assigned to men and women. This allows Okomfo Akosua Atuobua to perform her roles to clients, visitors, village folks and community elders. The priestess' role is opened to the general public and not confined to a particular gender.

4.4 Cultural Limitations

Writing on women's restriction from traditional leadership position in most African societies, Ortner (1978) states that menstruation is perceived as a threat to spiritual welfare, and this excludes women from religious roles and participation, even in matrilineal societies where women have power. Generally, menstruation is a form of limitation to women; even when they have the power to perform leadership roles, they are restricted at certain points in time. This excludes them from performing certain roles and responsibilities, especially in rituals which are believed to sustain societies (Agorsah, 2010). Dauglas (1996) states that,

women and menstrual blood represent ‘danger’ and, as such, they possess the power to pollute some sacred spaces and ritual practices in societies. Due to this, some religious cults and shrines admit only men and post-menopausal women, that is, a stage in life where they can even become more powerful than men (Zahan, 2000). This is seen mostly among the Gurer, the Oubi and the Wobe people of the Ivory Coast, and the Dogon of Mali. Among the Owe people of Kwara State in Nigeria, traditional religion is controlled by adult males (Omoyajowo, 1991) as menstruation restricts women there from operating in religious spaces; their spiritual activities thus require the services of a male assistant as they operate in leadership positions.

Menstruation is considered a taboo in Koankre shrine, however since the spiritual leader of the shrine, Okomfo Akosua Atuobua has reached menopause she is exempted from this taboo. This makes her a ‘ritual man’ as described by Miescher (2007), where she performs all roles without restrictions. Yet, the power of menstrual taboo in the shrine has not disappeared since some trainee priestesses who have not reached menopause expressed that menstruation is a major taboo which has been a hindrance to their roles. According to these trainees, since they are still menstruating, at that time of the month they exempt themselves from the shrine for seven days.

Okomfo Akosua Atuobua stated that during menstruation, “these trainees are not allowed into the compound or even near the shrine until after the seven days. After the seventh day, they are purified (*yedwuri me ho*) before they come to the shrine, otherwise whatever they touch will be rendered impotent.”⁸⁶ This menstrual taboo at the Koankre shrine also applies to female clients who visit the shrine. In situations where a client does not know this rule about menstruation and comes to the shrine, the deities are pacified with the blood of an

⁸⁶ Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, interviewed at Koankre shrine, 3/09/2018.

animal bought by the client. This confirms Page's (2011) assertion that menstruation is a universal phenomenon which operates in all sacred spaces, which include Koankre shrine, a traditional priesthood institution.

At Koankre shrine, spaces are demarcated as sacred and profane, and at some particular points, some women are relegated to remain in the profane part of the shrine. Such sacred spaces include *abosom dan mu* (deities' room), *bisa dan mu* (consultation room) and ancestral graveyard, which are demarcated for ritual purposes.

Women who give birth at the premises of the Koankre shrine are restricted for 6 months before they are allowed to enter some areas such as the *abosom dan mu* (deities' room), *bisa dan mu* (consultation room) and ancestral graveyard demarcated for ritual purposes. Such women are also purified before they are allowed again into these spaces in the Koankre shrine.

4.5 Priestly Expectations

In modern times, traditional priesthood as an institution has been known to provide diverse help to people. This is not only spiritual but physical as well, and Okomfo Akosua Atuobua is not left out of this. She is known for the various developmental projects initiated in Ohene Akura village. These developmental projects are made possible because the priestess and her deities are directly linked to the establishment of the Ohene Akura village.

4.5.1 Farming

Okomfo Akosua Atuobua engages in agriculture as well apart from being a priestess. She is well known for the production of cocoa, a cash crop which is the backbone of Ghana's economy. She even won an award in 1992 as the best cocoa farmer in Ohene Akura village. Because of the priestess' interest in farming, she serves as the Chairperson for the Cocoa Abrabopa group in the Ohene Akure village. She also has a large plantain farm as well as

kola and oil palm plantations. Okomfo Akosua Atuobua owns these farms, and managed them with her husbands until their demise. She now manages them with her children. In one of our interviews, she stated that;

“it is good to be hard working, although I am a priestess, I own a lot of properties, so I don’t depend solely on my priestly profession, otherwise I will deceive people to get money.”⁸⁷

One of her grandchildren, Obosomfo Atta Bismarck added that;

“being a priestess/priest does not make one lazy at all. You have to make sure your community, household and family are secured and this comes with hard work.”⁸⁸

These statements make it clear that being a priestess gave Okomfo Akosua Atuobua more responsibilities as she has to be ready to offer her services to the deities, husband, children, clients and community.

4.5.2 Trading

Okomfo Akosua Atuobua is a trader as well. She trades in foodstuffs produced on her farm at Nkawkaw. She also operates a canteen which provides food for clients who visit the shrine as well as community members. Varieties of food served at Okomfo Akosua Atuobua’s Chop Better Canteen include banku, konkonte, yam, rice balls and fufu, each with an appropriate accompaniment. Okomfo Akosua Atuobua operates this food joint with her children. On working days, the food joint is managed by her elderly daughter called Afua Akyaa.

4.5.3 Education

Education is one of Okomfo Atuobua’s topmost priorities, so she has put a lot of effort into promoting education in Ohene Akura. Her initiative brought the only basic school to the

⁸⁷ Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, interviewed at Koankre shrine, 29/12/2018.

⁸⁸ Obosomfo Atta Bismarck, interviewed at Koankre shrine, 29/12/2018.

Ohene Akura village under the auspices of President John Agyekum Kuffour's Highly Indebted Poor Country (HIPIC) programme. According to the priestess, she always encourages her grandsons to attend school because education is the only property no one can take away from them.⁸⁹

After the school was established, teachers posted to the village refused their posting because there was no light and proper accommodation in the Ohene Akura village. Okomfo Akosua Atuobua assisted the teachers by providing them with decent housing for free. This initiative encouraged few teachers to stay in Ohene Akura. Apart from this, she also provided these teachers with foodstuffs every week from her farm.

Okomfo Akosua Atuobua is currently the chairperson for the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) in the basic school. She makes sure the basic school does not lack teaching and learning materials.

According to the adherents and elders in Ohene Akura, Okomfo Akosua Atuobua has made efforts to petition the Ghana Education Service to extend the basic school by adding extra 3-classroom block for JHS 1, 2 and 3, to start a Junior High School, which will further encourage and admit those who cannot travel to neighboring towns for their Junior High School education

4.5.4 Infrastructural Development

Since the establishment of Ohene Akura, Okomfo Akosua Atuobua has helped bring infrastructural development to the community. The most important of these developments is the building of a bridge on the Asubone River to link Ohene Akura to the Accra-Kumasi highway. This project helped the community by making transportation of goods and services easy. Prior to the construction of the bridge, the river could overflow its bounds during the

⁸⁹ Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, interviewed at Koankre shrine, 23/07/2018.

rainy season and prevent people from travelling for days. With the construction of the bridge, movement has become very easy, even during rainy seasons.

Okomfo Akosua Atuobua appealed to the foreigners who built the bridge to drill a bore hole for the community as well. This project helped the community to have access to portable water.

Ohene Akura can also boast of a 20-seater water-closet public toilet, which was also built in 2008 by the Epic Center under the President Kufuor's initiative for less endowed communities.

Okomfo Akosua Atuobua's initiative brought electricity extension from Kokronpe to Ohene Akura. This project helped ease the burden of hiring generators each time there was a social gathering such as funerals, festivals and weddings in the village.

4.6 Okomfo Akosua Atuobua's Relationship with Some Selected People

Okomfo Akosua Atuobua's leadership position in a shrine allows her to have a close relationship with people such as the chief, trainees, clients, adherents and community members in Ohene Akura and beyond. Because Okomfo Akosua Atuobua's position is vested by the deities and the community, she enjoys some form of authority which makes it easy for Okomfo Akosua Atuobua to command all the respect and authority at the shrine and Ohene Akura village. These people relate to the priestess at all times since they form an important part of the priestess' roles to the community and Koankre shrine.

4.6.1 Okomfo Akosua Atuobua and the Chief

Okomfo Akosua Atuobua works closely with the chief and his elders in Ohene Akura, despite being the head of Koankre shrine. According to her;

“I have been called by deities to serve the people of Ohene Akura and because the chiefs and elders are aware of this, they come to me for direction at all times.”⁹⁰

The chief and his elders hold Okomfo Akosua Atuobua in a high esteem because of the powers vested in her by the deities. The Okyeame of the Koankre shrine added that because Okomfo Akosua Atuobua and her deities established the Ohene Akura village, it places her in high position in the community.⁹¹ According to the chief of Ohene Akura, Okomfo Akosua Atuobua and her deities have been of great help to the whole village. The chief added;

“We see Okomfo Akosua Atuobua to be very brave and confident in ensuring the peace, development and well-being of the entire village.”⁹²

The chief and elders come to the shrine for consultation, and also invite the priestess and her close adherents to participate in council meetings at all times.

According to the priestess;

the chief and elders acknowledge my position as a spiritual head at Ohene Akura. Although I am a woman, the chief and his elders pay homage during sacred days and provide all the needed support by buying some of the clothing used in the shrine during possession. They also buy schnapps, chicken and other items to ensure the deities are well fed so they can continue protecting the village.⁹³

During traditional council meetings on developmental projects, the priestess is invited.

According to Okomfo Akosua Atuobua;

⁹⁰ Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, interviewed in Koankre shrine, 23/08/2018.

⁹¹ Okyeame Kofi Donkor, interviewed at Koankre shrine, 23/12/2018.

⁹² Nana Akoto, interviewed at Ohene Akura chief palace, 23/12/2018.

⁹³ Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, interviewed at Koankre shrine, 4/06/2018.

I am invited to these meeting and also contribute to the discussions. My duties are not only limited to praying and inviting the deities to help make the meeting a success, but also contributing opinions to various issues given the diverse developmental projects I have initiated in the Ohene Akura village.⁹⁴

Okomfo Akosua Atuobua added that, before the institution of chieftaincy in Ohene Akura by Atibie Chief;

I was the sole leader who initiated developmental projects and even used my position as a priestess to lobby government officials such as ministers and district chief executives to carry out developmental projects in Ohene Akura before the introduction of a chief in the community. I am mostly not informed by the chief and his elders about new projects before the projects are carried out.⁹⁵

The priestess gave an example of such governmental projects like the free feeding program introduced by the government to Ohene Akura Basic School. Despite her role as priestess, Okomfo Akosua Atuobua noted that her position as the PTA chairperson of the school brought the program to her doorstep. This demonstrates that in her non-possessed state, Okomfo Akosua Atuobua still carries power and authority which are not defined by societal dictates and the people's attitude. This reaction confirms the authoritative nature of the priestess among the chief and his elders (Oduyoye, 2000).

4.6.2 Clients

The Koankre shrine does not have any directional sign board, not even on the Accra-Kumasi highway, yet the shrine receives a lot of clients from within the village as well as from outside the Kwahu West municipality. This is due to Okomfo Akosua Atuobua's fame as a renowned priestess who has the ability to give quick healing to clients who visit the shrine. This makes Koankre shrine not just a physical healing center, but a spiritual one as well, for clients with diverse problems.

⁹⁴ Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, interviewed at Koankre shrine, 4/06/2018.

⁹⁵ Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, interviewed at Koankre shrine, 4/06/2018.

Clients are important in the operation of shrines. According to the priestess, “It is because of these clients that I have work to do every day, otherwise my deities would have been dead by now. Clients contribute a lot in sustaining the priestly profession.”⁹⁶

Despite the proliferation of churches and mosques in Ohene Akura and Ghana as a whole, many of the clients who visit the Koankre shrine still believe in Okomfo Akosua Atuobua’s deities’ spiritual prowess that help solve their problems. Some clients also acknowledge the priestess as their spiritual and adopted mother. Maame Afua, a regular client of the shrine, stated that she has taken the priestess as her mother and any time she needed help, whether physical or spiritual, she came to the shrine.⁹⁷

4.6.3 Community

The priestess does not only command respect in the Koankre shrine, but she is respected within the entire community. Adherents in the community call the Koankre shrine *Efiekessimu* (big house), which means it brings life and can also take life. Due to this, there is great reverence for the priestess in the community, with regard to her roles and contributions.

Besides being respected as a spiritual head in the Koankre shrine, the community sees the priestess as a mother who gives advice and counsel to people in the village. The priestess’ motherly role is due to Okomfo Akosua Atuobua’s age and years of experience.

Both female and male adherents of the shrine within the community see Okomfo Akosua Atuobua as a mother who provides both physical and spiritual help in various ways. The motherly nature of Okomfo Akosua Atuobua cuts across, even to non-adherents of the shrine. This makes it possible for people such as pastors to come to the shrine. The priestess

⁹⁶ Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, interviewed at Koankre shrine, 15/09/2018.

⁹⁷ Maame Afua is a client of Koankre shrine from Akyem Sekyere, interviewed at Koankre shrine, 24/08/2018.

is usually invited to weddings, funerals and church services, especially during annual thanksgiving and harvest.

Opayin Kwadwo Appiah from the community indicated that “the priestess has been very accommodating because when her husband Okomfo Dafuo was a priest at the shrine, his relationship with the churches and even the chief and his elders were not cordial, especially when the shrine was at Kokronpe.” He further added that, “Okomfo Akosua Atuobua is indeed a caring mother to all, and her position as the priestess does not prevent people from relating to her in the village.”⁹⁸

4.6.4 Trainees

Apart from the numerous roles Okomfo Akosua Atuobua performs in Koankre shrine, she is a mentor to many apprentices who have been called by river deities and aspire to be trained as priests and priestesses. According to Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, she only trains apprentice who are possessed by a river deity since she herself is associated with Asubone (river deity). Asubone usually verifies other river deities that possess potential apprentice before commencing training. Okomfo Akosua Atuobua trains both male and female apprentices; however, most of these apprentices trained by the priestess are females. Some reside in the Ohene Akura village, while others hail from nearby communities.

According to Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, she has trained many priests and priestesses. Reflecting on Okomfo Akosua Atuobua’s relationship with her trainees, one of these women, Maame Yaa said;

The priestess has taken us as her daughters. Even if you are called into the priestly profession and your family members do not have money to support your training, she will still train you and when you start

⁹⁸ Opayin Kwadwo Appiah is an elder at the Ohene Akura palace, interviewed at Ohene Akura chief palace, 23/09/2018.

working later, you pay her back, except for few rituals which she may require that you pay for yourself.⁹⁹

According to Okomfo Akosua Atuobua;

“most of the apprentices I have trained still call on me anytime to update me on the progress of their work.”¹⁰⁰

The priestess added that some of her other trainees in other shrines usually direct some of their clients to the Koankre shrine for healing, recovery of lost items, and even help to travel abroad.¹⁰¹

Indeed, the priestess collaborates with her many trainees for the benefit of society. Most of the priestess’ trainees come back to her if they encounter difficulty in their priestly roles as well. They also come to learn about new herbs which have been introduced by the deities.

4.6.5 Adherents

Most of the close adherents of the shrine are related to the priestess, either through her lineage or her late husbands’. These are mostly the priestess’ children, grandchildren, cousins, nieces and nephews. The only close adherent who does not relate directly to the priestess is the Okyeame of the Koankre shrine. Meanwhile, the Okyeame also comes from a lineage appointed by the deities to perform such role, where they in turn hand over the role to their children and grandchildren. The current Okyeame of Koankre shrine inherited it from his father, Okyeame Kwame Adu.

All the adherents acknowledge Okomfo Akosua Atuobua as the spiritual head notwithstanding their close relation to her.

⁹⁹ Maame Yaa, interviewed at Koankre shrine, 12/09/2018.

¹⁰⁰ Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, interviewed at Ohene Akura, 23/09/2018.

¹⁰¹ Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, interviewed at Ohene Akura, 23/09/2018.

According to the priestess;

“when you come to the shrine, we are a family working together as a team; there is no discrimination.”¹⁰²

Obosomfo Atta Bismarck added that;

“although Okomfo Akosua Atuobua is a woman, she has an important position with respect to the operation of the shrine. Actually, she is the spiritual head over all of us.”¹⁰³

Her “important position” besides being a priestess is that Okomfo Akosua Atuobua nurtures her family and adherents, cooking for them before working hours begin at the shrine. Most times, close male adherents are served by the priestess after she is done cooking.

Okomfo Akosua Atuobua was of the view that;

“now that all my husbands are dead, I consider all the male adherents as my husbands in this shrine. Usually, the priestess refers to these male adherents as “m’agya” (my father) when she needs them to perform a particular role in the shrine”¹⁰⁴

It must be noted, that women’s leadership roles are not easily divorced from the gender expectation or gender construction which portrays them as mothers, helpers and general caregivers in the society. Thus, although Okomfo Akosua Atuobua is a powerful priestess, in her “normal” state the chief and his elders, clients, adherents, community and trainees in the Koankre shrine tend not to distinguish her role from her gender. Finally, Okomfo Akosua Atuobua’s gender identity as a woman also draws a lot of people into the shrine, including non-adherents. This has sustained the Koankre shrine for all these years.

¹⁰² Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, interviewed at Ohene Akura, 23/09/2018.

¹⁰³ Obosomfo Atta Bismarck, interviewed at Ohene Akura, 25/09/2018.

¹⁰⁴ Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, interviewed at Koankre shrine, 4/07/2018.

4.7 Modernity and its Influences

Koankre shrine being an indigenous shrine has been passed on from generation to generation, yet has safeguarded its traditions over the years. However, the shrine has undergone some changes to meet the changing demands of society.

One major factor that has affected the operation of Koankre shrine is the decline in patronage due to contact with other religions as discussed in Chapter 2. It was realized that many adherents of the shrine have neglected their roles to the shrine because of the Apostolic church that was established in the Ohene Akura village. During working days, few clients and adherents visit the Koankre shrine because of the African ideology of knowing the spiritual aspects of their problems. This has led some men and women to come to the Koankre shrine on specific days dedicated for work, that is Sunday, Tuesday, Friday and Saturday, although some visit on days other than those specified for work. It is only during working days that the shrine becomes quite busy with clients who are overwhelmed by their problems which are beyond physical diagnosis. People also come from different places outside Ohene Akura village. It is obvious that the many people who come to Koankre shrine on working days are mostly visitors outside the Ohene Akura village.

Although both men and women come to Koankre shrine on working days, women usually outnumber men. These women mostly come to seek help in diverse aspects such as child birth, prosperity in trading, security on their farmlands, well-being of their families and marriages. In some cases, women come to seek help on behalf of their daughters and sons' marriages, and general well-being of their families. This confirms that it is women who bear the full burden of societal issues such as health and well-being.

Most women come to seek for childbearing from the Koankre shrine. Okomfo Akosua Atuobua shared that;

“Koankre has given a lot of children to many women and, as a result, a lot of children are named after me.”¹⁰⁵

A client called Sister Ama also confirmed this by saying;

“All my five children were given by Koankre. Right from conception to my giving birth, the priestess has contributed immensely.”¹⁰⁶

The table below shows the number of men and women who visited the Koankre shrine on some selected working days.

Table 1: Sex distribution of clients who visit Koankre shrine on selected working days

DAYS OF VISIT	MALE CLIENTS	FEMALE CLIENTS
Saturday 6th October, 2018	6	18
Tuesday 30th October, 2018	5	15
Saturday 3rd November, 2018	7	20
Tuesday 27th November, 2018	4	13
Saturday 1st December, 2018	9	25
Tuesday 25 th , December, 2018	3	13
Saturday 5th January, 2019	9	23
Tuesday 29th January, 2019	4	15
Total	47	142

¹⁰⁵ Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, interviewed at Koankre shrine, 12/09/2018.

¹⁰⁶ Sister Ama is a regular client of Koankre shrine, interviewed at Koankre shrine, 12/09/2018.

As indicated in the table, more women than men visit the Koankre shrine. Most females come to the shrine as a result of health, marital problems, failure in their businesses and land security for agricultural purposes. The few men who come to the shrine usually seek assistance with visa approvals in their quest to travel abroad, *duabo* (reversal of curses) and insecurity regarding land tenure system.

4.7.1 Economic Aspects of Koankre Shrine

Over the years, Koankre shrine was established to purposely meet the spiritual needs of first, the Oyokuo clan, and second, the people of Ohene Akura. According to Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, the priests who started the shrine were not motivated by money but the well-being of the people.¹⁰⁷ As a result, people who came to the shrine provided the necessary items needed to help solve their problems such as hen, sheep, kola nuts, alcohols, schnapps and eggs.

Currently, because of Okomfo Akosua Atuobua's fame which has spread widely, consultation in Koankre shrine comes with a required amount of money which ranges from GHC100.00 and above. Apart from the money, items such as schnapps, hens, *akpeteshie* (local gin), palm wine and eggs are also given, depending on the problem, and what the deities require. For some clients, the expenses associated with visiting the shrine is high and those who are not able to fulfill these requirements within days of their consultation seek permission from the adherents, who direct them on times they should bring the items to perform the rituals. Consequently, in this modern time, Koankre shrine has become a full-time business for adherents.

¹⁰⁷ Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, interviewed at Koankre shrine, 5/10/2018.

4.8 Challenges Facing Okomfo Akosua Atuobua at Koankre Shrine

Notwithstanding the loss of clients to Christian churches, Okomfo Akosua Atuobua's biggest challenge is the introduction of other traditional priesthood systems by other ethnic groups such as the Ewes in the Ohene Akura community. Most of these traditional priests have turned the priesthood institution into quick money (*sika duro*) ventures. The operations of these priests have deceived people, especially the youth, to engage in such practices without working with their hands. This has contributed to many clients losing interest and confidence in the traditional priesthood institution.

The priestess further commented on these competitors, indicating that, although they operate as priests and priestesses whose roles are to relieve society, they rather inflict pain on innocent people. To a large extent, they create tension and give right judgment to recalcitrant people instead of bringing moral and upright behavior to the Ohene Akura community. In other words, priests and priestesses rather connive with wicked people, especially thieves, ritual killers and murderers to make life uncomfortable for people in the society. Currently, it is difficult to walk at night in the village due to these ritual killers who masquerade as priests and priestesses.

Another challenge to the Koankre shrine is the extinction of herbs due to the introduction of chemicals for farming in the Ohene Akura village and its environs. Thus, adherents of Koankre shrine find it difficult to get access to some herbs recommended by the deities. These bad farm practices have caused a lot of harm to the operation of Kaonkre shrine in these contemporary times, in contrast to when the shrine was initially relocated to Ohene Akura. The land, during that time, was uncultivated and was guarded by taboos that preserved the environment. This secured the herbs used for healing and performing rituals. Some herbs for healing have become extinct, and the Sumankwafo has to search for several

days or even weeks for herbs. In some instances, they do not get them at all to meet the demands of the deities.

4.9 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed gender and patriarchy as portrayed in Koankre shrine. It considered Koankre shrine as an indigenous shrine that has been operated by male priests for several years, and argued that Okomfo Akosua Atuobua's presence in the shrine was not subordinated by the male priests with whom she worked. This was because of the priestess' ability to relate to the male deities worshipped at the Koankre shrine, bringing fame and transformation to the shrine. Finally, the chapter showed that the priestess possessed gender fluidity which subverts the societal construction of gender such as masculinity and patriarchy which usually associate leadership positions with males.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

5.0 Introduction

This concluding chapter summarizes the main findings of the study of Okomfo Akosua Atuobua's roles and contributions in the Koankre shrine. The major pre-occupation of the study was to examine the priestess' role and contribution with regard to patriarchy in Koankre shrine.

5.1 Summary of Findings

Findings from the data indicate that in traditional priesthood institution, leadership succession was hereditary through close family ties. This is especially so in most Akan societies where the family is derived from the maternal lineage through the blood. All traditions and customs are handed down from one generation to the next through family ties. It is also a known fact that in most African societies, women are mostly allowed to take up leadership opportunities only when there is a lack of a male for that leadership role. This study has established that Okomfo Akosua Atuobua became a spiritual head in Koankre shrine despite not belonging to the Oyokuo family. Akosua Atuobua position as the spiritual head is breakthrough that cuts through tradition but more importantly her ability to relate to the deities, which brought transformation into the Koankre shrine; that was why she was admitted into the shrine, and subsequently became the spiritual head.

This study also discovered that the priestess' ability to perform her roles is dependent on the deities in the Koankre shrine. As and when she is possessed, she exhibits traits and behaviors categorized as masculine, in addition to the biological and feminine characteristics she is socialized to uphold. The complexity here is that the priestess is expected to act in accordance with the possessing deity but the fluidity of the priestess, as she alternates

between “genders” depending on the deity, helps her to occupy the leadership position in her own right. Evidently, women who operate in predominantly male spaces have to de-gender or re-gender in order to perform their acceptable roles. This often portrays women in leadership roles as incapable of performing certain roles. In the case of Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, the expected traits such as firmness, bravery and courage exhibited during possession by the deities enhance her ability to perform her roles independently in the Koankre shrine.

The research indicates that although the priestess operates with males in the shrine, she is equipped by deities who enable her to perform her roles and duties to variety of groups such as clients, community and adherents without being confined or subordinated. After Okomfo Akosua Atuobua’s ascension to the spiritual headship of Koankre shrine, she has worked closely with males to date and still commands respect, authority and power among these male adherents, the chief and his elders in the Koankre shrine and Ohene Akura village respectively. Also, Okomfo Akosua Atuobua is able to perform her roles adequately to meet the needs of clients, adherents, the chief and his elders, trainee priestesses and to the larger Ghanaian communities due to the grace given by the deities.

Considering the foundation of the Koankre shrine and its setting as an indigenous site, coupled with all the deities and religious artifacts displayed in the shrine, one could think that it was impossible for Okomfo Akosua Atuobua to become a spiritual head of the shrine. At best, one would assume that she would probably take a subordinate position. Nonetheless, the priestess is the spiritual head of the Koankre shrine where she involves all the deities and ancestral spirits to perform her distinctive roles without male interference in the Koankre shrine and Ohene Akura. This confirms Behrend and Luig (1999) assertion that the spirits are always attracted to the opposite mediums. Thus, the male spirit ‘marries’ the

female mediums and vice versa. This has made Okomfo Akosua Atuobua take charge as a famous priestess who performs distinctive roles.

We also note that the demarcation of spaces as sacred and profane for the performance of rituals is believed to be an important phenomenon that sustains society. The sacred and profane dichotomy is strictly adhered to by members who live on the premise of the shrine and visitors as well. Certain places such as the *bisa dan mu* (consultation room), *obosom dan mu* (deities' room), *nananom asie* (grave yards) and even *nkunya dan mu* (stool house) for ritual purposes are prohibited to women because of menstruation and mothering roles. Having stated this, Okomfo Akosua Atuobua's ability to perform her role in these demarcated spaces is due to her menopause stage, where she has become a 'ritual man' in the Koankre shrine and Ohene Akura village. The menstrual restriction which subordinates women's roles in such religious spaces and leadership has been lifted by nature to perform her multiple roles.

The intersectionality theory touches on the most pressing issues facing contemporary women, and addresses women's subordination by looking at the intersecting, multiple and shifting identities of women in the society. We infer from this study that although Okomfo Akosua Atuobua is a priestess, her age also enables her to perform other roles such as advisor, mentor and counselor to many people in the Ohene Akura village and to clients outside the village. Also, it is obvious that Okomfo Akosua Atuobua's motherly nature draws many people into the shrine.

5.2 Conclusion and Recommendation

It is significant in this research to draw some important conclusions from the findings on women's leadership roles in the African traditional religion using Okomfo Akosua Atuobua as a case. In the first place, Okomfo Akosua Atuobua's position challenges the notion of

male superiority, and shows how traditional notions of patriarchy and masculinity can be negotiated as well. It also shows how gender flexibilities of the priestess enable her to perform roles to varied groups of people and in diverse spaces as well. The priestess' leadership position is firm and popular, yet generous through which the Koankre shrine has experienced a noticeable number of clientele.

Okomfo Akosua Atuobua's leadership position challenges the usual notion that women occupy leadership positions because of the absence of a male leader. This shows women's power, autonomy and authority in a traditional priesthood institution.

Again, Okomfo Akosua Atuobua's distinctive role as one who operated with male priests and male adherents in Koankre shrine debunks the idea that women's leadership is dependent on male superiority, which has been constructed in society as 'hegemonic' or male reserved.

Okomfo Akosua Atuobua's priestly leadership in Koankre shrine for over 90 years was not only limited to the Koankre shrine. Like the changes women's traditional leadership elsewhere has undergone to meet the demands of the new world, Okomfo Akosua Atuobua has had to undertake developmental projects for the progress of her community. She has contributed to developmental projects in the community where she operates and meets the health needs of the people, especially pregnant women, in the municipality.

Okomfo Akosua Atuobua, the longest serving priestess at the Koankre shrine is a role model to many people. She inspires women, especially trainee priestesses, and challenges them to excel in their various endeavors, regardless of whose domain it might be, whether male or female in their various shrines and communities.

From the study, I therefore recommend that the government should integrate and sustain the traditional priesthood into management policies, to create some funds which will serve as encouragement to priestesses working for the benefit of society.

Okomfo Akosua Atuobua has made quite an impact in the traditional priesthood institution in Ghana through her roles as healer, traditional birth attendant and mentor. She has also contributed to the development of her community even in these contemporary times. Despite the challenges of old and modern traditions, she has been able to make a difference in traditional priesthood. I intend to do a further study on gender and development in traditional priesthood institution to document further Okomfo Akosua Atuobua's life and activities.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR OKOMFO AKOSUA ATUOBUA

PRELIMINARY MEETING

1. When were you born?
2. Where were you born?
3. Who are your parents?
4. What were your parents' occupation?
5. Is any of your family member a priest/priestess?
6. Where did you grow up and with who?
7. Tell me about your occupation before you became a priestess?
8. At what age did you become a priestess?
9. Did your family members agree for you becoming a priestess?
10. What was the circumstance surrounding you becoming a priestess?
11. Which deity called you?
12. How many deities do you serve now?
13. Are they males or females?
14. What are their names?
15. Where do they come from?
16. How do you relate to these deities?
17. What is the link between the shrine and the deities?
18. What is the name of your shrine?
19. Who established the shrine?
20. Were you the first priestess of this shrine?
21. Who was your predecessor?
22. And how long have you operated in this shrine?
23. What specific roles do you play as a priestess and to whom?
24. Which specific people come to the shrine, women and men?
25. Which specific gender mostly come to the shrine?
26. What exactly do they come to do?
27. Have these roles changed over the years and which aspects?
28. What has influenced such changes?
29. How many people do you work?
30. Do you have family relation with them?
31. How many are men and how many are women?
32. Why the name Ohene Akura?
33. How did the settlement come about?

PRIESTHOOD IN KOANKRE SHRINE

CALL

34. When did you become a priestess at Koankre shrine?
35. At what age did you start operating in Koankre shrine?
36. How do you relate to the deities in the Koankre shrine?
37. What sacred days do you observe on the Koankre shrine?
38. What activities do you perform on those days?
39. How have you helped this village using the shrine?
40. Have you worked with another priest/priestess in the shrine? If yes who are they
41. How long did you work with your predecessor?
42. What roles do you solely perform in the shrine?
43. Are you the final authority in this shrine?
44. Who should come to Koankre shrine?
45. What do they often inquire about?
46. Are you able to help them?
47. What ways do you help them?
48. Do you have demarcation for people who come to the shrine?

PRIESTESSES ROLES

49. What/who influence your roles?
50. What particular days do you get possessed?
51. How does the priestess behave during possession?
52. Do you have particular costume during possession?
53. How does it influence your roles?
54. What do you do at the time of possession?
55. What are some of the things the priestess does during possession?
56. What are the tools used during possession?
57. Do you have special attire during this time?
58. Who influences such attire?
59. What type of colors do you wear and why?
60. What particular behavior comes during possession?
61. What necessities that?
62. Do you need to be adorned with priestly regalia when performing your roles?
63. Do you have a specific place for performing your roles?
64. What is the restriction associated with the place to men and women?
65. Who are the closest people who help in your roles?
66. What do they do?
67. How are they called?
68. Do they also have taboos they must observe?

TO COMMUNITY

69. What specific roles do you perform for your community?
70. Is it a voluntary role to the community or do you have to be asked to perform such role?
71. If you are asked, who instruct you?
72. What particular days do you perform these roles to the community?
73. Are the community members satisfied with these roles?

74. What specific roles do you perform for clients?
75. What specific days should they come to the shrine?
76. Which particular people come to the shrine very often (gender)?
77. What are their reactions towards you?
78. Are you able to meet their request at all times?
79. What specific role is expected of you from the chief and his elders?
80. How do you relate to them?

TABOOS

81. What is your thought about gender roles and statuses?
82. How do these taboos affect your roles?
83. How do you think people perceive you?
84. What is the common reaction of people as a priestess in the shrine?
85. How do male clients treat you as a female spiritual head?
86. What rituals are solely performed by you?
87. Do you have any major restriction associated with your roles?
88. What are they?
89. Does it limit your roles?
90. What happen to your roles when you are menstruating?
91. Has modernity affected these taboos?

ROLES TO CLIENTS AND COMMUNITY

92. What problems do people bring to you?
93. How do you solve their problems?
94. Does your gender influence the people who come to you?
95. What restriction is given clients who come to the shrine?
96. What happens if a client disobeys such restriction?

MODERN INFLUENCE OF ROLES

97. How do people get to know about your shrine?
98. What influence has other religions had on your roles?
What is your relationship with these other religions?
Have these religions influence your client base who patronize your shrine?
What about other adherents you work with in the Koankre shrine?
Have you adopted new ways of reaching your clients especially those who can't come to the shrine?
What are the challenges you face in this modern time concerning your roles?
What other leadership position do you hold aside being a priestess?
Do you have any association you join as priestess?

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

99. What is your view on a woman being a priestess?
100. What roles does Okomfo Akosua Atuobua performs?
101. How has modernity affected her role?
102. What are the expectations of clients who come to Okomfo Akosua Atuobua?
103. How has being a priestess completely changed her gender (behavior and attitude)?
104. Does this change in behavior and attitude affect her roles?
105. How does her behavior as a priestess different from her normal life?
106. How does she relate to people who come to the shrine?
107. Describe Oromo Akosua Autobus's nature. Is she
108. Friendly
109. Care-giving
110. Brave
111. Motherly
112. Firm
113. Confident
114. Does she treat women differently and men differently?
115. How do people relate to Okomfo Akosua Atuobua?
116. Describe the predecessor of Okomfo Akosua Atuobua
117. Does she command great respect as her predecessor?
118. Do you think Okomfo Akosua Atuobua's position challenges male superiority?

APPENDIX: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR OKOMFO AKOSUA ATUOBUA

PRELIMINARY MEETING

120. When were you born?
121. Where were you born?
122. Who are your parents?
123. What were your parents' occupation?
124. Is any of your family member a priest/priestess?
125. Where did you grow up and with who?
126. Tell me about your occupation before you became a priestess?
127. At what age did you become a priestess?
128. Did your family members agree for you becoming a priestess?
129. What was the circumstance surrounding you becoming a priestess?
130. Which deity called you?
131. How many deities do you serve now?
132. Are they males or females?
133. What are their names?
134. Where do they come from?
135. How do you relate to these deities?
136. What is the link between the shrine and the deities?
137. What is the name of your shrine?
138. Who established the shrine?
139. Were you the first priestess of this shrine?
140. Who was your predecessor?
141. And how long have you operated in this shrine?
142. What specific roles do you play as a priestess and to whom?
143. Which specific people come to the shrine, women and men?
144. Which specific gender mostly come to the shrine?
145. What exactly do they come to do?
146. Have these roles changed over the years and which aspects?
147. What has influenced such changes?
148. How many people do you work?
149. Do you have family relation with them?
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