

**UNIVERSITY OF GHANA
DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY**

**A HISTORY OF DEATH AND FUNERAL RITES:
A CASE STUDY OF THE GA IN JAMESTOWN (GHANA)**



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LEGON IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE
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DEDICATION

I dedicate my MPhil thesis to Africa that has always been my inspiration, and to my family who enabled me to pursue my studies far away from home.



DECLARATION

I hereby declare that, except for references to other people's work which have been duly acknowledged, this work is a result of my own research work, done under supervision, and has neither in part or in whole been presented elsewhere for another degree.

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ABSTRACT

Rites of passage which are found everywhere in the world are life-cycle ceremonies that usually include religious transformations with a passage to the next stage of life. Death and funeral rites represent the last rite of passage and the Ga ethnic group of Ghana has its own unique way of performing them; their traditional rites which existed for a long period of time in precolonial society have drastically changed under the influence of colonial intervention and modernization. The other factors of change include the influences of the environment, ethnic conflicts, intermigration, religious transformation due to the impact of monotheistic religions such as Christianity and Islam, development of trade, merging of cultures, etc. Early death rituals with their rich cultural heritage in the traditional Ga society and the environment are in imminent danger of being lost due to the impact of all these external factors, but some of them have been modified and kept within the new rites. Due to the multitude of variations of the rites among the Ga subgroups, the case study of Jamestown will be applied as a part of this research project.

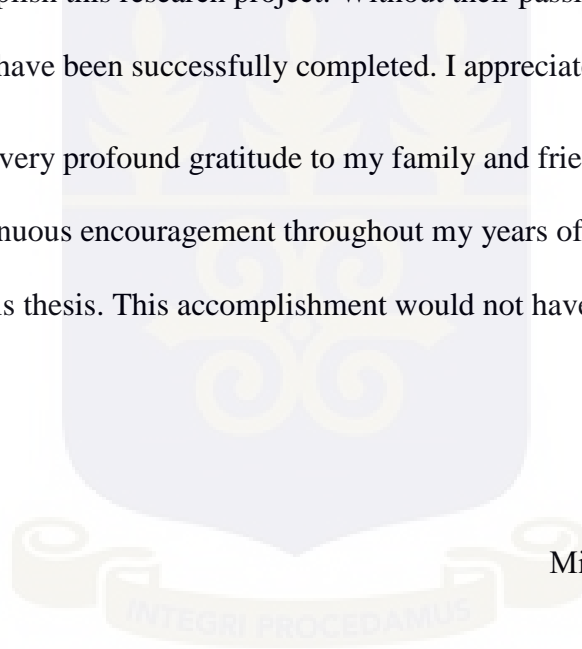
The relevance of the study is not only in its contributions to the existing knowledge, but also represents a new historical and ethnographic approach to changes of traditions, awareness of all these various changes for the particular ethnic group and an attempt to preserve some of them.

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I would also like to thank to all of my informants, my classmates, professors from the history and other departments, the friendly staff of the history department, and the experts who were involved in order to accomplish this research project. Without their passionate participation and input, this thesis could not have been successfully completed. I appreciate your help.

Finally, I must express my very profound gratitude to my family and friends for providing me with unfailing support and continuous encouragement throughout my years of studies and the process of researching and drafting this thesis. This accomplishment would not have been possible without them. Thank you.

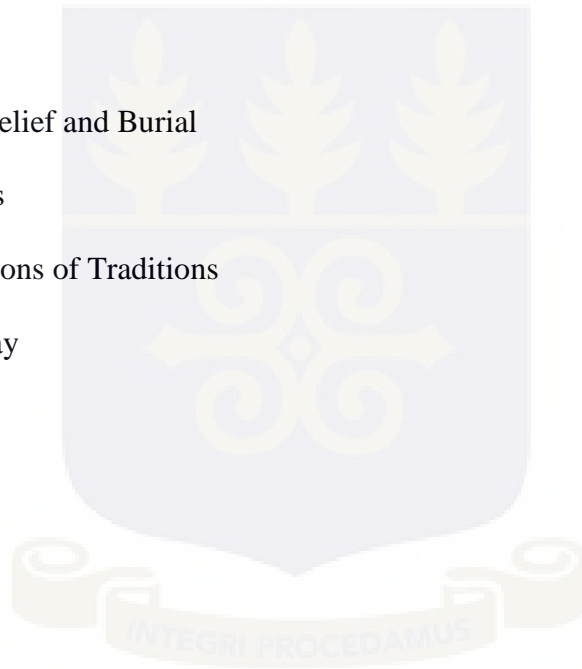


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Glossary

- Abofu* – type of funeral rites performed for the death of a possessing spirit of a medium (Ga)
Abusua too – sacrificed goat for the relatives that concludes the rites of a widower (Ga)
Abebuu adekai – fantasy coffins (Ga)
Ade Tsaani – the following morning (a rite performed the day after the burial among the Ga)
Adinkra – set of symbols / a dark coloured funeral cloth with symbols (Akan)
Afunsoa (Sasa) – a special rite to detect a culprit who caused death (Ga)
Akoŋ – religious cult of Akwapim origin (Ga)
Akotia wulɔmɔ – traditional priest of an Akotia chief deity (Ga)
Akpeteshie – locally distilled gin (Ga)
Akutso (Akutsei - plural) – town quarter (Ga)
Alokpli – fatal respiratory disease (Ewe)
Asafo company – town militia (quickly mobilized men among Fante or Ga), also a rhythm
Ashiko – traditional dance, once used at funerals (Ga)
Ayiagu – widowhood rite that marks the end of mourning period (Ga)
Ayilɔ – spiced white clay used for embalming the corpse (Ga)
Azizanya – arrival place for the dead souls (geographically the mouth of river Volta) (Ga)
Bragoro – menstrual ceremony (puberty rites for girls among the Akan)
Caboceer – African middleman (Portuguese)
Dipo – puberty rite for girls among the Adangme and Krobo
Gbatsu – sacred grove of a deity, foretelling house (Ga)
Gbeɓimo – way-asking (mercy kill – to speed up the death) (Ga)
Gbobalɔ – the one who have died and come back (a name for a baby whose older siblings died) – signifies the concept of reincarnation (Ga)
Gbɔmɔtso – body of physical, sensate being (Ga)
Gbonyo paaty – reception, often with merry-making, after a burial (Ga)
Hades – god of the underworld in Ancient Greek mythology
Hɔmɔwɔ – major annual Ga harvest festival (Ga)
Husunaa – town boundary (Ga)
Jamboree – very big and loud speaker/a boisterous, lavish party
Jemawɔŋ (pl. *Jemawɔjii*) – any major Ga deity identified with a place (Ga)
Kente – traditional cloth with colourful patterns with symbolical meanings (Akan, Ewe)
Kla (Kra) – soul aspect of a human being that is believed to join God after death (Ga)
Kpekpei (Kpokpoi) – ceremonial food associated with *Homowo*, made from steamed ground maize mixed with palm oil and okro and eaten with palm-nut soup (Ga)
Kple (Kpele) – Ga traditional religion/religious cult of Guan origin (Ga)
Kpledzo (Kplejoo) – maize planting and harvesting ceremony (Ga)
Kpojiemɔ – ceremony of outdooing proclaiming the status of a newborn child or a newly installed chief (Ga)
Klɔbɔ – spice used for embalming (Ga)/an ethnic group related to the Ga
Kura – widowhood rites (Ga)
Mamprobi – royal cemetery, mausoleum, a tomb for a chief (Ga)
Maŋtse (pl. *Maŋtsemei*) – chief, king (Ga)
Me – religious cult of Adangme origin, also type of music (Ga)
Naa – grandmother (Ga)
Naade/Naa Yomo – goddess of fertility (Ga)
Naiyoo We – house of the sea-god (Ga)
Nai – appellation for the sea, a major Accra deity (Ga)
Nii – grandfather, chief (Ga)
Nsatsi – river that separates the land of the dead from the land of the living (Ga)
Nyanyra – special herb given to the deceased father (Ga)

- Nyɔɣɛmɔ* – supreme god, creator (Ga)
Obiniona – you have asked and you have received (baby named after the survival of his mother's death) (Ga)
Obutu (Awutu) – Guan speaking people who occupied Accra Plains before the Ga invasion (Ga)
Odwira (Odzra) – ceremony dedicated to the fallen in war (Akan)
Ohe – incense believed to ward off evil spirits when it is burnt/spice used for embalming (Ga)
Okulafo too – goat sacrifice that marks the end of widowhood status (Ga)
Okyeame – linguist, a spokesperson for a chief (Akan)
Oshi – ritual dance as part of *Homowo* (Ga)
Otu – name of a deity, associated with a gun/religious cult of Fante origin (Ga)
Otɔfo – ghost of the one who dies unnaturally, hovering ghost (Ga)
Otɔfo gbele – investigation of unnatural death (Ga)
Otofo – puberty custom for girls (Ga)
Otutu (pl. *Otutui*) – a shrine consisting of cement or swish mound serving as a kind of altar (Ga)
Oyeadu – fetish that kills pregnant woman (Ga)
Shamansheo – will, testament, sharing the inheritance according to the last will of the deceased (Ga)
Sibi-saba – traditional dance once used at funerals (Ga)
Sisa – ghost, shade of one who died natural death (Ga)
Sliki Terkleh – silk loin cloth, traditional ceremonial funeral cloth for an elder (Ga)
Susuma – spirit of the deceased/ancestral shade/departed soul (Ga)
Tabɔn – a Ga (Jamestown) community founded by Africans returning from Brazil in mid-19th century (Ga)
Tsese – a kind of a box/a ritual wooden bowl (Ga)
Tsotsoobi – the morning star, Venus/rising sun (showing the baby to the rising sun/star among the Ga)
Twɛ – language of the Akan ethnic group (“lingua franca” in Southern Ghana)
Tukpei – new deities that appeared in Ghana in the 20th century (Ga)
Wɔyoo (pl. *Wɔyei*) – priestess, female medium of a deity (Ga)
Wɔŋ – god, deity (Ga)
Wulɔmɔ (pl. *Wulɔmei*) – traditional Ga priest, esp. priest of a major lagoon deity (Ga)
Yalayo (pl. *Yalaye*) – funeral woman (a woman who assists preparing the dead body) (Ga)

I am aware that some of these words might not be spelt correctly or might have many variations of spelling. They were taken from M.E. Kropp Dakubu Ga-English Dictionary. Those not present in the dictionary are from Margaret Field's book “Religion and Medicine of the Ga people” and from my Ga interviewees. The consonant letter *ŋ* is pronounced as *ng* in song, the vowel *ɛ* as *e* in essential, and vowel *ɔ* is pronounced in the same way as *o* in origin.

Chapter 1: Introduction

The Issue: Rites of Passage, Death and Funeral as a Rite of Passage

The rites of passage represent four important turning points in life among African traditional societies. Birth with naming ceremony; puberty rites; marriage ceremony; and, death with funeral rites; these mark the transitions of the individual passing from one stage of the life cycle to another.¹ Every ethnic group in Ghana has a different attitude towards these rites, which are determined by customs, values, morals, and originally based on traditional beliefs. Death and funeral rites, which are the last rite of passage in a person's life, should be processed with great care and attention that will enable the deceased to enter the world of ancestors. Therefore, the Ga people celebrate these complex ceremonies in a special way. They have successfully stood the test of time, even though they have been thoroughly influenced. From pre-colonial to colonial and post-colonial times many external factors have impacted the death rites of the Ga ethnic group that have been transformed through history. The majority of these changes occurred during the last quarter of the 19th and at the beginning of the 20th centuries when the Gold Coast became British colony, while some of them happened recently.

Historiography

There are many authors who wrote on the history of the Ga people, some of them wrote on social history, but few of them tackled their rites of passage. This thesis is an inter-disciplinary work that will use a variety of different sources to capture a wide historical and ethnographic perspective, before focusing on transformations in death and funeral rites among the Ga, which have not been thoroughly explored yet. Historical background will be examined from major works on Ga history written by John Parker, Irene Odotei and David K. Henderson-Quartey. The theoretical background of passage rites will be extrapolated from anthropologists such as Arnold

¹ Rites of passage will be more thoroughly described in Chapter Two.

Van Gennep, Emile Durkheim and Victor Turner. The Ga funerals that were partially examined by Margaret Field, Marion Kilson, Diana Gladys Azu and some other authors listed below will be described in detail.

John Parker wrote an extensive work on the transition of the Ga society from pre-colonial to colonial period, titled *Making the Town*, where he described the formation of a modern colonial capital with its institutions.² The book is a detailed study of urban history, but offers little information on the rites of passage of the Ga people. Far more important for this thesis is Parker's article *The Cultural Politics of Death & Burial in Early Colonial Accra*, published in 2006, which represents a major source regarding the transformations of funeral rites together with the introduction of sanitation, morgues, public cemeteries and policies which marked the urban Ga communities by the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries. He thoroughly described challenges and transition from the intramural burial and separated burial places towards the use of common cemeteries. Some instances of the burial of the chiefs show gradual abandonment of certain practices such as human sacrifice and adjustments of certain ceremonies such as *Hɔmɔwɔ*.³

Irene Odotei (Quaye) analysed the important events in the history of the Ga people during the 17th and the first half of the 18th centuries when the Ga established a kingdom but then lost their independence due to the subsequent invasions of Akwamu, Akyem and Asante peoples.⁴

David K. Henderson-Quartey self-published a monograph of the Ga history titled *The Ga of Ghana: History and Culture of a West African People*, where he narrated the history of the Ga, from the origin theories up to the recent events.⁵ He also described some Ga traditional customs including funerals and impact of Christianity on their performance.

Nathaniel Nana Amartefio prepared a lecture that was presented on the occasion of 40 years of rule of Nii Ngleshie (chief of Jamestown) at "3rd Annual Wetse Kojo / King James memorial

2 John Parker, *Making the Town*, (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2000).

3 John Parker, "The Cultural Politics of Death & Burial in Early Colonial Accra" in *Africa's Urban Past*. ed. by David M. Anderson & Richard Rathbone. (Oxford: James Currey Ltd, 2006).

4 Irene Odotei (Quaye), "The Ga and their Neighbours, 1600-1747," (PhD. Diss., University of Ghana, Legon, 1972).

5 David K. Henderson-Quartey, *The Ga of Ghana: History and Culture of a West African People*, (London: self-published, 2001).

lectures”, where he introduced the abstract history of Jamestown and the role of Wetse Kojo.⁶ He mistakenly mentioned that Slave Coast was annexed by the British in 1877, even though it never belong to British but was included in the Dahomey kingdom and later became colonized by the French. This source, however, represents an important contribution to the micro-history of Jamestown.

The book of social anthropologist Margaret J. Field, *Social Organization of the Ga People* explained the social life of the scattered Ga town communities and their specific features which also clarifies the social and historical background of Accra city quarters.⁷ Traditional beliefs and customs were thoroughly explored in her earlier work *Religion and Medicine of the Ga people*, which covers the majority of the rites from the colonial period. This ground-breaking source covers everything from public worship to rites of passage and practice of magic and medicine.⁸

The theory of rites of passage was developed by Arnold Van Gennep at the beginning of the 20th century, by defining these rites as the basis of social and religious life of the traditional societies. These life-crisis ceremonies and their background is explained in his original work titled *The Rites of Passage*.⁹ The fundamental writings of Van Gennep, Victor Turner and Emile Durkheim analysed the rites of passage and their stages of separation, liminality and incorporation featured by each of these rituals. Authors who wrote about rites of passage in Africa include T.N.O. Quarcoopome,¹⁰ Natasa Gostisa,¹¹ Marian Lily Adams,¹² Steven J. Salm, Toyin Falola,¹³ which deal with ethnographic and sociological perspective. Rites of passage and funeral rites in Ghana were

6 Nat. Nana Amarteifio, “Fourty Years of Rule of Nii Ngleshie, Jamestown,” Paper presented at the 3rd Annual Wetse Kojo / King James Memorial Lectures, Accra, 24th June 2015.

7 Margaret J.Field, *Social Organization of the Ga People*, (Accra, London: The Crown Agents for the Colonies, 1940).

8 Margaret Field, *Religion and Medicine of the Ga People*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1961).

9 Arnold Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1960).

10 T.N.O. Quarcoopome, *West African Traditional Religion*, (Ibadan: African Universities Press, 1987).

11 Nataša Gostiša, *Pojmovanje smrti, z njo povezane navade in obredi v afriškem tradicionalnem okolju*, (Diploma in Sociology, University of Ljubljana, 1998).

12 Marian Lily Adams, *Family, Life, Education*, (Accra: Yemens Press, 2008).

13 Steven J. Salm, Toyin Falola, “Gender Roles, Marriage, and Family,” in *Culture and Customs of Ghana* ed. By Toyin Falola. (London: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2002).

explored by contributions of authors such as Peter Sarpong,¹⁴ Osafo K. Osei,¹⁵ Hugo Huber,¹⁶ Emmanuel Kwaku Akyeampong,¹⁷ and Gocking.¹⁸ Osei and Sarpong mostly focused on rituals of the Akan ethnic group; Akyeampong explored their social history; and Gocking wrote about the influences of Christianity on traditional customs of the Gold Coast inhabitants. Other authors mentioned in this paragraph were of limited use, nevertheless pointing out to practices of the neighbouring ethnic groups.

Diana Gladys Azu published her work titled *The Ga Family and Social Change* where she described funeral ceremony as it was practised in the early 1970s in Laboni town quarter of Accra in details. She also examined widowhood rites, inheritance and succession issues, but without any comparison with colonial and pre-colonial practices.¹⁹

Sjaak Van Der Geest wrote his master's thesis at Legon University in 1972, where he described the Akan funeral rites at Ayere. Since he was able to learn the local language *Twi* well enough to follow the funeral procedure and rites, he conducted his field research with the local people individually. His arguments came from personal attendance and observation in a form of a narrative. When he returned to the place of his survey almost 30 years later, he wrote an article *Funerals for the Living: Conversations with Elderly People in Kwahu, Ghana*, about the major transformations that he tracked by comparing these two time periods. His findings of the changes in Akan funeral ceremony resemble those of the funeral rites among the Ga ethnic group and therefore represent a valuable piece of evidence for this study.

Marion Kilson wrote a collection of essays *Dancing with the Gods* in the late 1960s, which were not published until 2013. Even though she has followed Margaret Field regarding the Ga traditional religion and their world view, she forgot to include the concept of *kla* (the soul), which

14 Peter Sarpong, *Girls Nubility Rites in Ashanti*, (Tema: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1977).

15 Osafo K. Osei, *African Heritage of the Akan*, (Accra: Republic of Ghana, 1979).

16 Hugo Huber, *The Krobo: Traditional Social and Religious Life of a West African People*, (Fribourg: University Press Fribourg, 1993).

17 Emmanuel Kwaku Akyeampong, *Drink, Power and Cultural Change*, (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1996).

18 Roger S. Gocking, *Facing Two Ways: Ghana's Coastal Communities under Colonial Rule*, (Lanham / New York / Oxford: UP of America, 1999).

19 Diana Gladys Azu, *The Ga Family and Social Change*, *African Social Research Documents*, (Leiden: Afrika-Studiecentrum, 1974).

accompanies the physiological – *gbɔmɔtso* and spiritual – *susuma* part of a human being. She also argues that “the soul inhabits the body for another three days after death after which it leaves the body to wander until the final funeral rites are performed a year later.”²⁰ According to all of my informants, the soul (after a natural death) joins the ancestors when the funeral and burial are completed. Kilson also wrote *African Urban Kinsmen, The Ga of Central Accra* – an in depth quantitative research of Ga kinship and its socio-economic differences and transformations, along with “the cycle of life crisis ceremonies.”²¹ She described the modernization process that took place in the traditional Ga communities of central Accra. She came in contact with an old fetish priestess who sang religious songs with metaphorical meaning for her as did one of my informants. Fetish priests and priestesses were obviously the most important keepers of traditions that passed on to the next generations by oral means.

Joyce Engmann described the Ga traditional belief and passage into the afterlife in her article “*Immortality and the Nature of Man in Ga Thought*”. She argued that *gbɔmɔtso* refers to a body and *susuma* to spirit, while the *kla* does not correspond to the soul. She has discussed the nature and existence of *susuma* and *kla*, but avoided the issue of reincarnation. Further she also claimed that “sleep is a practice for death” since “sleep consists in the existence of *susuma* in independence both of the *kla* and of the *gbɔmɔtso*, and this is precisely the state it is in after death.

Madeline Manoukin mostly followed Margaret Field in her book *Akan and Ga-Adangme Peoples of the Gold Coast*, but was able to pinpoint the beliefs regarding causes of illness and death summarized in seven separate reasons.²² That was only possible with thorough understanding of the Ga traditional belief.

Sandra E. Greene wrote a book *Sacred Sites and the Colonial Encounter: A History of Meaning and Memory in Ghana*, where she also described the traditional beliefs and mortuary rites

20 Marion Kilson, *Dancing with the Gods, Essays in Ga Ritual*, (Lanham: University Press of America, Inc., 2013).

21 “Life crises ceremonies” is another term for rites of passage. See: Marion Kilson, *African Urban Kinsmen, The Ga of Central Accra*. (London: C. Hurst & Company, 1974).

22 Manoukian Madeline, *Akan and Ga-Adangme Peoples of the Gold Coast*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1950).

of the Ewe people, which, in many aspects, resemble those of the Ga. Belief in the ancestors, the intramural burial for “good” and outskirts of the town for “bad” deaths, reincarnation within the family, spiritual parents, the importance of nails and hair of the deceased, are some of these similarities. She was also able to trace many changes in rites that arrived with introduction of Christianity and public cemeteries.

Roberta Bonetti wrote an article *Coffins for Wear and Consumption: Abebuu adekai as "memory makers among the Ga of Ghana,"* where she emphasized the symbolic and proverbial role of fantasy coffins. She blended this Ga “neo-tradition” with funeral symbolism of *kente* and *adinkra* of the Akan, since some of the coffins made for Akan chiefs were painted with symbols. She also discussed chieftaincy and land issues.

Ako Adjei wrote an article in 1943 titled *Mortuary Usages of the Ga People of the Gold Coast*. He had classified three types of death among the Ga, namely natural, accidental and unnatural. According to my informants an accidental death was always unnatural and the cause could always be revealed. Adjei used the word *hades* for the ancestral world, which was not appropriate, since it originally bears a negative connotation and means underworld among the ancient Greeks. *Hades* cannot be described as a world of ancestors since this god never allowed and soul to return to the world of living. He had also introduced an interesting hypothesis that since the Ga funeral customs have a lot of similarities to other West African peoples, there might have been a time when one broad common culture pervaded in the area.

The work of Emmanuel Isaac Kpakpo Addo, *Worldview, Way of Life and Worship*, mainly tackles religious issues among the Ga. A detailed description of traditional belief is followed by the introduction of Christianity among the Ga. As many historians before him, he presented various hypothesis of the Ga origins, namely “Ancient civilization hypothesis”, “Benin hypothesis”, “Ancient / Benin combination hypothesis” and “Ghana hypothesis.” He added that neither of them should be rejected as historically insignificant. Since the Ga are “negroid,” the first and the second hypotheses should be discarded.

Hugo Huber wrote his book *The Krobo: Traditional Social and Religious Life of a West African People* in the 1960s, which was republished in 1993. He described all rites of passage including the funeral rites among the Krobo people in details. Some of their traditional ceremonies are the same or similar to those of the Ga, since they share the same origins.

The last but not least major secondary source used for my thesis is a book richly equipped with photographs titled *Going into Darkness*, written by Thierry Secretan. He explored the origins and skills of the makers of the so-called *fantasy coffins*, which are an original feature of the Ga people. Skilfully made caskets are carved in all possible forms in order to portray symbolic feature or profession of the deceased have become a special phenomenon known all around the world.²³

A History of the Ga People and their Neighbours

The Ga people are part of the Ga-Adangme ethnic group situated in the Greater Accra Region of southern Ghana. Their territory is bordered by Fante to the West, by Ewe to the East, by the Akuapem Hills inhabited by various Akan groups to the North, and by the Atlantic Ocean to the South. As already mentioned earlier in this thesis, according to the widely accepted hypothesis the origins of the Ga can be traced to Benin.²⁴ An important supportive argument is that the Jamestown city quarter of “Alata” was named by migrants from the ancient kingdom of Allada, located in the present day Benin. The early Ga were farmers who adopted fishing skills from the neighbouring Fante and developed salt-making after they occupied the Accra plains from the 15th century AD.²⁵ Later on, when Europeans built their forts on the coast the Ga became middlemen between them and the Akan peoples of the interior. The Adangme occupied the coast near to the River Volta, while the Ga pushed westward overwhelming the indigenous Guan and Akan peoples and absorbing their culture and some religious features. The Ga state could be described as an agricultural theocracy. High priests called *wulɔmɔ* were in charge of every Ga community. They took major

23 Fantasy coffins will be more thoroughly explored in Chapter Six.

24 Irene Quaye (Odotei), “The Ga and their Neighbours, 1600-1747,” 3.

25 John Parker, *Making the Town*, (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2000) 4.

decisions, judged legal matters and performed important rites. However *wulɔmɔ* was not allowed to travel or wage war, therefore the Ga decided to separate sacred and secular powers, thus appointing a chief or *Maɲtse* to perform governmental duties.

Since the mid-16th century the Ga people have developed a thriving trade system. In the first half of the 17th century they established their capital at Ayawaso, a hill near the coast. From there their king controlled a centralised state based on military power. Akwamu, an Akan state, jealous of the rich trade income of their neighbours, attacked and destroyed Ayawaso in 1677 and subdued the Ga people by 1680. Subsequently the Ga were forced to migrate and thus they founded fragmented coastal towns of Tema, Nungua, Teshie, La, Osu and Ga-Mashie²⁶ (Accra), where they remain until today.²⁷ They called their coastal territory *Naiyoo We*, meaning the house of the sea god, which became one of their principal deities.²⁸ The Ga people in Accra settled around European forts, where they felt safer and protected by the presence of canons mounted on the fort walls.²⁹ The Akwamu ruled the Ga territory for 40 years and were replaced by the Akyem who only stayed for 12 years and were removed by the Asante in 1742. The Asante were finally pushed out in 1826 when British forces joined by indigenous coastal peoples including the Ga inflicted a valiant defeat on them. The Ga regained their suzerainty in the Accra plains, but were dispersed and thoroughly influenced by foreign culture due to the long period of Akan vassalage. This period left traces in culture, language, government institutions and religion. Equally influential on the Ga people was the authority over them claimed by European companies. The Ga society therefore has distinct characteristics which are the result of an eventful history.³⁰

The Ga territory became the centre of the Gold Coast Colony after the capital was transferred from Cape Coast to Accra in 1877. Using a mixture of persuasion and the threat of

26 Ga-Mashie is a geographical entity that combines the early city quarters of Accra, called Kinka (Dutch) and Jamestown (English).

27 The defeated Ga fled to various places along the coast, trying to get some autonomy as middlemen between the Europeans and the Akan peoples of the interior.

28 Interview with Okyame Sikafo, 17/6/2016, 2.

29 David K. Henderson-Quartey, *The Ga of Ghana*, 136.

30 Irene Quaye (Odotei), "The Ga and their Neighbours, 1600-1747," iii.

force, European officials gradually replaced indigenous authorities with their own institutions, especially after the occupation of Kumasi when the Asante military threat was decisively diminished.³¹ After the departure of the Danes in 1850 and the Dutch in 1872 from the coast, the British annexed their territories and later, in 1901, also occupied the Northern territories, and imposed an indirect rule on the entire Gold Coast Colony. This system that originally developed in India and Nigeria employed traditional chiefs who reported to the government. They functioned as tax-collectors and judges for minor offences, while all important decisions and population control remained in the hands of the colonial government. After Ghana's declaration of independence in 1957, the Ga-populated area was included in one of the ten administrative regions, called The Greater Accra Region. The paramount chief, chiefs and sub-chiefs still possess some authority, but their role is mostly symbolical and ceremonial.

The Ga people are presently a mixture of different peoples and cultures that have been assimilated or fused into their own unique system with a distinctive language and celebrations.

A History of Jamestown

Ga Mashi was one of the small groups of the Ga families who settled in the Accra Plains near the site of Fort James around the 16th century. They lived with the indigenous population, mostly the Guans and Larteh who were gradually absorbed by the Ga society until the Ga Mashi ruled the coast and some of the inland.³² Even though some peoples of southern Ghana were already trading with Europeans during the 16th century, the Ga remained reluctant and even destroyed a Portuguese fort in Accra because it was built without a chief's permission. In the second half of the 17th century several agreements were signed between the Ga chief on one side and Dutch, Danish, Swedish and British merchant companies on the other.³³ The latter were allowed to build forts along the coast; thus began the trade in gold and later on slave trade. In the area of the Little Accra the

31 John Parker, *Making the Town*, 81.

32 David K. Henderson-Quartey, *The Ga of Ghana*, 67.

33 John Parker, *Making the Town*, 9.

Dutch erected Fort Crevecoeur (now Usher Fort), the Swedes built Fort Christiansborg (which became Danish) and the British constructed James Fort. Shortly after the construction of these forts the Ga established small settlements around these forts: “Kinka” became known as Dutch Accra, Osu became Danish Accra and Jamestown became British Accra.³⁴ Margaret Field described thoroughly how Accra city quarters, called *akutsei* of these Accra communities developed during the 16th and 17th centuries.³⁵ Asere, Abola, Gbese and Otublohum were part of Kinka, while Alata, Sempe and Akanmaji represented parts of Jamestown. Abola gained a dominant position within Kinka and Alata won its supremacy within Jamestown. Abola *Maɲtse* represented all town quarters in general affairs.

James Fort was constructed in 1673 by The Royal African Company just half a mile from the Dutch fort with chief Okaikoi's permission. It was built in a fishing village called Soko (modern Chorkor) and was the smallest of the three European forts. King James I of Great Britain granted a royal charter to the company to build the fort and name it after himself.³⁶ The Accra city quarters of Sempe, Alata and Akanmaji, which united for military purposes, came under the patronage and protection of the English. The inscription “Alata” on the modern palace of the “*Ga Maɲtse*” (paramount chief) testifies that labourers from the kingdom of Allada built James Fort in cooperation with local workers. One of these workers, Wetse Kojo, was a skilful negotiator who became a chief broker and contributed to the Nleshi (English) or Alata community by becoming an important force in town affairs.

Ga Maɲtse Okaikoi was killed during the invasion of Akwamu in 1677. Akwamu settlers, who occupied the Accra city quarter known as Otublohum, brought along their own (Akan) traditions including the *Odwira* ceremony, which is still celebrated by the Nleshi – Alata city quarter – *akutse* of Accra.³⁷ Nleshi Alata was joined by the Sempe and Akanmaji quarters, but

34 Ibid., 10.

35 Margaret J. Field, *Social Organization of the Ga People*, 142-151.

36 Nat. Nana Amarteifio, “Fourty Years of Rule of Nii Ngleshie, Jamestown,” 3.

37 According to M. Field, the *Odwira* or *Odzra* ceremony involves “the firing of old guns to tell the dead slain in battle that the living can still fight.” See Margaret J. Field, *Religion and Medicine of the Ga People*.

Nleshi retained its supremacy over the other two.³⁸ The years of Akwamu and Akyem rule diminished the authority of the Ga *Manɔtse* and resulted in an even greater division of the Accra indigenous population as the Akan immigrants were incorporated. The inhabitants of Jamestown decided to protect themselves by building a confusing and narrow system of streets in the shape of a labyrinth which partially remains in place until today. This was done despite the negative effects such as diseases caused by waste and filth accumulated in the streets and frequent fires, due to the use of grass roofs.³⁹ The Ga people, however, joined forces in times of crises and their warriors contributed a lot to the final defeat of Asantes in 1826. The end of Asante rule and the British abolition of slave trade in 1807 also impacted the life in Accra and Jamestown. Due to the gradual abandonment of slave trade by all European powers in the 19th century the Gold Coast received a party of ex-slaves from Brazil who formed the *Tabɔn* community, which produced some wealthy entrepreneurs through commercial links with their fellow returnees in the Slave Coast (present day Benin).⁴⁰ The *Tabɔn* buildings, their descendants and culture still form part of the contemporary Ga-Mashie district.

Accra remained a confederation of seven independent units, each except Akanmaji having a *Manɔtse*, but without a paramount leader of Accra.⁴¹ In 1840, all the *Manɔtsemei* met and performed a religious ceremony where they elected Abola *Manɔtse* to lead their united army on the battlefield when needed. Native Administration Ordinance made the *Manɔtse* of Accra a Ga *Manɔtse* or a leader of all the Ga people. This was needed for British administrative purposes and was an artificial creation of indirect rule, which has never been accepted by the other Ga communities and their traditional authorities.

At the same time the educated Euro-Africans from Ga-Mashie played an important role in the politics and economy of Accra, while Jamestown itself became an important commercial centre. Another change came with the arrival of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society to Ga-Mashie

38 Nat. Nana Amarteifio, "Fourty Years of Rule of Nii Ngleshie, Jamestown," 6.

39 Ibid., 8.

40 John Parker, *Making the Town*, 16.

41 Margaret J. Field, *Social Organization of the Ga People*, 156.

in 1838. Initially they were unsuccessful in converting indigenous Ga people, until the conversion of the Sakumo *wulɔmɔ* to Christianity in 1894.

The Danish were a minor force among the colonial powers in Accra, but the British and Dutch fought bitterly for their supremacy and this conflict contaminated the Accra city quarters of Jamestown and Kinka with quarrels that lasted well into the 20th century. Up to 1850 only Jamestown was firmly under British jurisdiction, but people from other parts of Accra also brought cases to be tried under British supervision.⁴² This shows that the British were successful in gaining trust among people compared to traditional tribunals. In October 1892 the paramount chief of Kinka wanted to place Jamestown in a subordinate position, but the newly enstooled Jamestown chief, Kojo Ababio, protested at a meeting with the British governor.⁴³ Instead, their *Manɔtse* of Alata gained paramount status within Jamestown which remains until today.

Jamestown became an important trading centre and the richest city quarter of Accra as a result of the exporting of palm oil, and later rubber and cocoa. When a light-house and a seawall were constructed, Jamestown harbour gained in its dominance until a new harbour was built at Takoradi in the 1920s. Jamestown's trading practically stopped when Tema harbour was built in the 1950s and the harbour in Jamestown closed its trading activities. Presently the area is used for the fishing industry which, however, cannot replace the former trading economy in terms of employment.

Two earthquakes devastated Accra, in 1862 and 1939, and a large fire spread from Kinka to Jamestown in 1894. There were some casualties, but these events conveniently created corridors for the construction of new roads. The same area was affected again in 1908 when a plague epidemic swept through it and prompted the colonial government to destroy the infected residences.⁴⁴ There were yellow fever outbreaks in 1911 in 1923 which made the government take some sanitation measures. The colonial government ordered for some people to be moved out of the area and settled

42 David K. Henderson-Quartey, *The Ga of Ghana*, 327.

43 John Parker, *Making the Town*, 14.

44 Nat. Nana Amarteifio, "Fourty Years of Rule of Nii Ngleshie, Jamestown," 14-15.

them in new suburbs outside Jamestown. Later the colonial government built some racially segregated city quarters outside the centre for the Europeans who moved to Ridge.

The impact of western education gradually increased during the 19th century through schools founded by various Christian churches. In the 20th century they were joined by Accra Royal School which was established in 1915. These schools also provided knowledge on construction, technology, law and other subjects, which were previously unavailable to the Ga.

In 2011 the Alata town quarter officially gained the paramount status over the Sempe and Akanmaji, the quarters of Jamestown. Thus the *Manɔtsɛ* of Alata became equal to the Ga *Manɔtsɛ* of the Abola city quarter of Kinka. At the same time the leaders of all the Ga towns obtained their paramount status in the National Assembly of Chiefs.

The Ga people were developing their independent society until the 1680 when they were defeated and their territory was occupied by the Akan for a century and a half. Influences from the Akan people marked Ga culture and customs, including their funerals. The British domination from the 19th century brought modern features into Ga tradition that came through education, administrative regulation, sanitation measures, technology and Christianity.

Objectives

- To show how the rites of passage and particularly funeral rites are intertwined with the cyclical perception of time among the Ga people.
- To recognize and analyse important transformations that have occurred from pre-colonial to colonial and post-colonial periods.
- To explore different factors and influences which caused these major changes in funeral rites through time.
- To describe and define modifications that have been incorporated into Ga society in the modern era through the merging of different cultures and religions which has brought a unique blend of various rites to present funerals.

- To include different aspects and features that accompany death and funeral ceremony including the questions of last will, inheritance, choice of cemetery, mortuary and funeral services, the application of music and dance, etc.

Research Questions

1. What was the original attitude of the Ga ethnic group towards death rites?
2. How did colonial administration, formal education, Christianity and Islam impact the rites?
3. How did the environment, trade and neighbouring ethnic groups influence the rites?
4. Which legislation changed the rites?
5. To what extent has the modern state of Ghana preserved these rites?
6. How do funerals function today in comparison to the traditional ones from the precolonial times?

Conceptual and Theoretical Framework: Cyclical Time Theory

As Vansina argues, the concepts of time are crucial for any understanding of tradition.⁴⁵

This research is dealing with the tradition of the Ga people, located in southern Ghana, whose traditional beliefs are closely linked to the cyclical perception of time.

The first conception of time was timeless eternity merged with the timelessness of creation. However, as people observed nature from the aspect of the seasons, movements of the sun, the moon and the planets, they realized that these natural phenomena repeat, which meant to them that time may also move in circles. With the emergence of great monotheistic religions, the perception of time became linear, with its beginning in the past and its end in the future. Some cultures such as the Mayan or the Balinese were using both cyclical and linear time. In others, ancient China, for example, there were three models of their sense of time, namely cyclical, linear and spiral.⁴⁶ Especially amongst the cultures where time was perceived as cyclical, the rites of passage played an important role.

45 Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History*, (Woodbridge, Suffolk: James Currey, 1997), 129.

46 Jorn Rusen, ed. *Time and History: The Variety of Cultures*, (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007), 46.

The circle of life and death in living organisms and cosmic time of night and day is a variation of cyclical motion.⁴⁷ The earliest civilisations of ancient Egypt, Babylon, Assyria, Persia and others, including the two Asian world religions of Hinduism and Buddhism, share the mythical views of time and space and see time as an eternal repetition of cycles caused by supernatural forces. Agricultural planning and related seasonal migrations brought about the development of the calendar of most civilised societies. Planning a future for physical needs was not the only aim of measuring time. Planning the evolution of an individual left traces on his social development, when he was obliged to go through the rites of passage in order to serve his own society well. For oral history, cyclic time conception may be useful in investigating not only ancient European societies, but also for the majority of pre-colonial African cultures and most indigenous cultures of America, Asia and Australia, who understood time as a great cycle.

Every society has a certain conception of time but its perception varies due to differences in understanding the nature and religion of a particular society. The conceptions of the past, present and future exist universally, but through history they have been understood in different ways in various parts of the world. In most ancient cultures and traditional societies, the predominant perception of time was cyclical, while Western societies adopted the perception of time in a linear progress.

Presently the predominant perception of time in developed societies is linear because it enables peoples to write and record history as measurable sequences of time with their own beginnings and endings. This linear time perception was established by Jewish monotheism and its eschatological belief in an apocalyptic end which was improved by Christian philosopher St. Augustine who fused Greek philosophy with Christian belief. This gradually resulted in the disintegration of the archaic cyclical cosmological world view.⁴⁸ Christian time was defined as

47 Milojevic Vesna, *Educational Futures: Dominant and Contesting Visions*, (London, New York: Routledge, 2005), 13.

48 M.C.Lemon, *Philosophy of History*, (London, New York: Routledge, 2006).

linear since Christian God created the world (*creatio ex nihilo*) in time that has its beginning – creation, progress and an end, in the form of the last judgement. This chronological perception of time also prompted the existence of history as a science that, with the advent of Enlightenment, resulted in the abandonment of the cyclic perception. The linear time perception in the Western world became hegemonic as a conceptual base of progress, even though some natural phenomena, such as the circling of the planets, seasons and the calendar remain cyclical. Hegel wrote that the basic separation between eastern and western thought might appear in the religious divisions and different perceptions of history between the pagan – cyclicalism, and the Christian – linearity. However, some prominent thinkers, such as Hume, turned away from Christian linear views of history that developed from “creation” to the “last judgement” and turned back to the pagan cyclical perception.

Traditional societies in Africa are trying to maintain the cyclical time perception that comes from their ancient world view, even though Christianity and modern science encourage linear time. African traditions employ the interconnected concepts of life, death and rebirth that are also well known in major Asian religions. African traditional cultures had their own stories of the creation of the world, of nature, of men, of agriculture and so forth, where the forces of good and evil are encountered and shape traditional values of these early societies. Natural events were perceived as animated by gods and as people being part of this mythical consciousness. If something was not right, it was because the gods wanted it that way. Consequently, offerings were made to please the gods. We need to remember that ancient peoples employed myths and practiced rituals which enabled them to survive for thousands of years, including the already mentioned great civilizations. Therefore, they cannot be treated as absurd or fictitious, but rather as meaningful and purposeful. This can be explained with an example from the ancient Egyptian mythology where the sun-god, with its daily death and rebirth on the next day represented a unit in time. The Egyptians measured the time “of the reigns of different kings and the movements of the heavenly bodies, but the notion

of a self-sustaining history of their own human past was not relevant.”⁴⁹ The ancient Egyptian religion has a lot in common with the traditional beliefs of West African peoples who also recorded time in terms of floods, famine, earthquakes, good harvests, battle victories, etc. Whilst offering no explanations of these events, as they were seen as acts of gods.

The most important issue in the ancient era was to obey the gods and rightfully understand their signals in order to reply to them in a proper way with offerings or sacrifices. Cooperation with gods was seen as crucial for peace and prosperity. Rituals were performed in temples or oracles where priests or augurs explained their will or predicted the future. Subsequent predictions together with traditional myths served as a guide for common people's conduct in relation to their rulers, royal officials, family and other aspects of life. In a completely animated environment storytelling explained the events which did not emerge from human beings but involved the gods, spirits and demons that were always present in their environment. Scientific progress was not part of their mindset because these cultures had no impulse to improve existing things and they rather preserved the well-known than taking control of circumstances. Their ideas were not the product of reason but rather of intuitive anthropomorphic imagination in the form of ghosts, deities and lesser gods. The Akan people, for instance, were able to create a calendar that determined planting and harvesting seasons and other cyclical events, even though they did not develop sciences and skills such as astrology, mathematics or stone-masonry that were known to the Ancient Egyptians, Early Greeks and Romans. The Akan were one of the few peoples of Sub-Saharan Africa who developed an independent civilization.

The Ga people shared similar beliefs to Stoics who determined a more extreme theory on the basis of circles, saying that planets follow the same route, that the same persons will live again with the same surroundings, friends, enemies and that every vanished city or village will be restored again and again. This extreme hypothesis brings doubts to the meaning of before and after, and poses questions about the existence of parallel universes: a cosmological cycle existing at different

49 M.C. Lemon, *Philosophy of History*, 20.

levels at the same time. The Ga traditional leaders are following the cyclical time perception, because one of their main tasks is the calculation of the incoming planting, harvesting and fishing seasons, as well as the period of the festivals such as *Kplejoo* and *Hɔmɔwɔ* that take place once a year.⁵⁰

The question is why the African people still believe in a mythical view of time. In Europe, the Greek emancipation from an earlier pre-classical mythical view of history to rational, philosophical consciousness that implies reason rather than an imaginative perspective of the world started more than 2500 years ago, but its final emancipation came with the Enlightenment and its scientific method from the mid-18th century. Rational, intellectual thinking presented a revolutionary shift in the form of a logical explanation of the surrounding world. Sub-Saharan Africa went through different development since they did not experience the Renaissance, the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution. Science and education brought by Europeans overlapped several stages of development, leaving the educated Africans with many misunderstandings when the imported modern technology blended with their mythical perception of the world. The gap was filled up with numerous Christian and a few Muslim sects trying to slow down a transition from the mythical to scientific perception of the world by gaining influence and prestige on account of the old traditions that are now fused with these predominant monotheistic religions.

Another feature of the Ga people that asserts their cyclical time perception is reincarnation, which is firmly established in their traditional beliefs. Through that they also believe in ever-existing links between the living and the dead, which will be described in later chapters. The transition between two lifetimes begins with death in the first life and ends with the birth in the new, second life.⁵¹ On the basis of a thorough study of the Ga mortuary rites we can recognize some elements of this transition, called “the last rite of passage” by anthropologists. The tradition of the

50 Interview with Cephass Adjei Pinto, 11/11/2016, 14.

51 There is no source which would determine the age of the beliefs of the ancient Ga people, but they probably existed in times when polytheism was a dominant religious practice before their arrival to Accra Plains in the 16th century.

Ga people clearly recognizes four important stages in the lifetime of an individual. Namely, birth with the naming ceremony, initiation into adulthood, marriage with wedding ceremony, and death with funeral rites. These four rites of passage may present four quarters in the “life cycle”. The passages on this circle are celebrated by most African cultures, with the funeral being celebrated most extensively because it presents an important transition into the next world. Death for the Ga people does not mean an ending of someone's life, but merely an invisible transition to the afterlife, from which a new human being is born. These arguments also support the recognition of the spiral time theory within the Ga cosmology from a different point of view.

Methodology

I will use a qualitative approach to the inter-disciplinary research combining historical and ethnographic methods in order to examine this issue from different perspectives. A historical study will show the continuity and discontinuity of various funeral and associated rites that will be extrapolated from archival documents dealing with the introduction of cemeteries, the ban on certain rites and on human sacrifice, regulations regarding over-expenditure and excessive drinking, etc. By examining the passing of the laws, local warfare and foreign occupation I will determine in which historical periods the major changes occurred, even though it is impossible to determine the exact time of changes introduced in funeral rites. Due to the scarcity of historical literature on this topic this presents the major limitation to the historical approach that will be substituted with ethnographic findings. The interviews will be of central importance for the research, but I will only be able to describe events and customs that remain in the minds of my informants with the awareness that some rites and their meanings have been forgotten and are therefore lost. I am also aware that the reliability of the information provided by interviewees will be limited, especially the data regarding historical accuracy, and that the interview process itself may have shaped their statements and thus resulted in subjective answers. A historical analysis will explore the impact of political and religious transformations on the rites as well as changes due to technology,

modernization, urbanisation and “Westernisation”. My position will enable the recognition of these external influences while some stories of my interviewees will testify about internal changes in their society. In order to trace and understand transformations of the rites of passage of the Ga people it will be important to encompass a large time-frame, from their early written history of the 17th century up to the present. The comparison between the past and the contemporary rites will cover the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial eras and will strive to explore the differences and similarities between them. The historical approach will not only be limited to the general history, but will also include some aspects of geographical, economical and religious history associated with the present issue. Geographical history will emphasize the impact of the environment on the rites; economic history will examine the influence of trade as well as the expenditure for funerals; and religious history will show the transformations of beliefs and different views on the afterlife.

With the ethnographic approach on the basis of anthropological inquiry I will be able to investigate first the terminology of the rites of passage and then gradually shift the focus towards the concept of funeral rites. The ethnographic point of view will describe these rites, attitude towards them, influences from other ethnic groups, the role of libation, the dramaturgy of celebrations, mourning and grief, and the issue of *death duties*, lineage and testaments. I will analyse the question of brief and prolonged rituals with extended mourning, and also compare royal and commoners’ funerals. Further on, I will explore cultural orientations expressed by drumming, dancing and singing. The critical roles of funeral women in mourning rituals will be compared with those of contemporary undertakers. The detailed analysis of different modes of death linked with consequent additional rites will show influences on the community and portray features of these special rites. Indigenous customs of the Ga funeral rites such as fantasy coffins, dancing with the casket, and the role of the *Hɔmɔwɔ* festival will be described, and their impact on the rites will be analysed. The convergence of social, religious and medical forces will be surveyed. I will also explore the appropriation of symbolic objects, actions and rites together with different views of the afterlife that depend on religious conviction. In continuation, I will research the background of the

present perception of funeral rites that, according to the popular adage, “became rites for the living, not for the dead.”

Before embarking on the description and analysis of the Ga funeral rites, I need to define two very important terms for this thesis, i.e., “traditional” and “modern”, and delineate them. By “traditional” I describe everything that originates from the pre-colonial period and all the customs, rituals that existed prior to colonial intervention. By “modern” I entail all the regulations, legislation and everything that was brought by the Europeans during the colonial and post-colonial periods. For instance, some laws introduced by the British in the middle of the 19th century are called “modern” in comparison with the “traditional” Ga law. “Traditional religion” represents a belief that belongs to the “animistic branch” of African religions, while “modern religion” refers to Christianity or Islam. A traditional ruler, however, is a chief, sub-chief or someone who is elected, even presently, by the community, in order to perform traditional customs and rites that still exist.

My main primary sources are comprised of the interviews that I conducted during my field work in the past year. I conducted ten extensive and five minor interviews on this topic by visiting all Ga towns and making at least one interview in each of them thus assuring that general information of the Ga funeral rites is well represented. I established contacts with these people through my professors and classmates, which created a snowball effect. Three of these interviews were done at the Jamestown city quarter and they represent a major source that enabled a case study of that particular area. The other major informants include a traditional priestess from Nungua, a Christian pastor from Labadi, a retired professor of history and anthropology from La, a professor of archaeology from Osu, a retired surgeon from Osu, and finally a teacher and chief’s councillor from Tema. The only major non-Ga informants were a retired government official, a chief-linguist, and a curator from Nyankumasi Ahenkro, who enabled some comparison with the Akan traditions. I personally conducted all of these extensive interviews from March to December 2016 with the help of oral history audio or video recording. The oral research process took a lot of time. After the questionnaire was drawn up I needed to find the informants, record their testimonies and in some

cases bring a translator, who translated my questions to them as well as informant's answers back to me. After the interview that usually took about two hours I had to make the transcription, which also took a lot of time to complete. All of the informants provided original findings that will supplement the existing material and contribute to the originality of my thesis, since many of the issues have not been researched so far. Not only the detailed description of the past and contemporary funeral rites I received in Jamestown, but also the information from other informants will enable the portrayal of some local perspectives and some specifications of their ritual development through time. The diversity of informants' locations, backgrounds, education and profession produced very different points of view, which demanded a lot of crosschecking and evaluating the reliability of the provided evidence. Certain informants told interesting stories which sometimes included supernatural events that they had taken for granted but present certain limitation for the historical science. The information from oral sources and their inaccuracies were crosschecked with the use of other primary and secondary sources, in particular with the archival material available in the Accra's National Archives and some secondary sources.

The other primary source will be the archival documents found in Public Records and Archives Administration Department (PRAAD), which concern the data from the pre-colonial and colonial periods dealing with funerals and affiliated rites. These include a number of administrative documents (ADM, SNA and CSO) and concern mainly the period of the second half of the 19th and the first half of the 20th centuries. Papers found in PRAAD were issued by colonial authorities, governors, district or provincial commissioners, secretaries for native affairs, local chiefs and sub-chiefs. They come in various forms, such as a collection of treaties with native chiefs, documents dealing with customary law, certain rites, cemeteries, etc. These sources will produce an overview of legislation and native customary law that introduced public cemeteries, sanitary inspections, forbade certain rites and gradually transformed traditional funeral rites. The dates and places of new pieces of legislation from these documents are clear and final, while their limitations lie in the implementation of these new laws, which in some cases did not take place for decades. It may be

recognized that usually the older the documents are, the higher was the level of bias.

Some material will be obtained from historic newspaper articles from the middle of the 20th century, found in the archives of the Institute of African Studies (IAS) of the University of Ghana. Another interesting source from the video archives of the IAS will be the application of a video footage depicting a funeral at Bortianor, a small fishing village from 1994. Unfortunately, there are no other videos from other decades of the 20th century that would help define the time of transformations of the Ga funeral rites with greater accuracy. In order to enrich the content of my work and to enable the reader to visualize some aspects of my thesis, I will include a picture of a funeral from the Basel Mission Archive, and one taken by myself that will be used as a supplementary source. In addition to these primary sources, this thesis will be supported by anthropological observations taken at funerals attended in 2016. However, in the urbanized areas of Accra, its suburbs and nearby towns, there will be little information showing which particular original rites from the pre-colonial period still exist.

Various secondary sources consist of books and published articles described in the historiography section. Among all these sources tackling death and funeral rites among the Ga people I need to highlight two of the major ones once again. Margaret Field's classic entitled *Religion and Medicine of the Ga people* covers the practice of funeral rites in the colonial period.⁵² This source will be consequently appropriate for a historical comparison between the present (informants) and not so distant past (Field), where the roles of traditions gradually diminished. I consider this source to be a very reliable account of the Ga traditional rites, since Field was able to learn their language and lived among them for an extended period. Another important source dealing with Ga funeral rites will be an article by professor John Parker entitled "*The Cultural Politics of Death & Burial in Early Colonial Accra*", which will form a platform for the historical approach in my thesis and enable access to some British sources that are not available in Ghana.⁵³ Parker, however, mentions several mausoleums, tombs and cemeteries established during the

52 Margaret Field, *Religion and Medicine of the Ga People*, 196-205.

53 Parker John, "The Cultural Politics of Death & Burial in Early Colonial Accra," 205-218.

colonial period, but lacks the information about their present functions and their exact locations.

There are few sources from the pre-colonial period dealing with death and funeral rites. The issue of intramural burial and the concept of reincarnation are briefly mentioned in Romer's report of his experience of serving as an officer at Osu castle in the 18th century. This source will enable some comparison with contemporary studies.⁵⁴ The issue with these older European sources is the misunderstanding of the Ga beliefs and the presence of bias. The absence of detailed report on pre-colonial death and funeral rites will represent another limitation in analysing the transformations.

Other secondary sources will be the unpublished diplomas, MPhil and PhD theses that I found at the Institute of African Studies (IAS), University of Legon, which deal with various aspects of funeral rites, and also some theses dealing with this topic that I found in different libraries in Slovenia. The majority of these theses tackle death rites of other neighbouring ethnic groups which resemble those of the Ga.

The fundamental secondary sources will help to analyse the death and funeral rites, supported by some examples from my field interviews and the archival documents which will provide the legislative aspect of the changes.

Significance of the Study

My thesis will contribute additional insights to the existing knowledge on death and funeral rites of the Ga ethnic group. It will apply a new historical approach by studying traditional customs of the Ga people and their development from the pre-colonial to colonial and post-colonial periods. It will analyse modifications of traditional practices of death and funeral rites and explore the changes that transformed the beliefs, world-view and funeral ceremony within the Ga ethnic group. It will introduce an awareness of differences between changes due to both local and foreign influences. The thesis also represents an attempt to preserve some of the original African traditions in the form of customs, rituals and ceremonies.

54 Ludewig Ferdinand Romer, *A Reliable Account of the Coast of Guinea (1760)*, Ed. by Selena Axelrod Winsnes. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

Organization of the Chapters

The next chapter starts with a theoretical explanation of rites of passage in general, followed by a gradually narrowed down description of funeral rites in Africa, Ghana, Ga ethnic group and Jamestown area. I explore and compare the ancient and contemporary processes of death and funeral rites among the Ga and particularly in Jamestown, which represents the core of this research. The description of funeral announcements and an analysis of how the expenses have been covered contribute to a more thorough presentation of the death rites. The information is mainly extrapolated from the field interviews. This chapter contributes to the body of knowledge of major changes that influenced funeral rites from the pre-colonial to post-colonial periods.

The third chapter explains the traditional religion of the Ga people which includes worshipping different gods, deities, and most of all, ancestors. The interconnectedness of shrines, various rites and processions that have their origins in the traditional belief are examined. The belief in ancestors who died but are still present and are influencing the society will be linked to the Ga concept of reincarnation. The role of ancestral worship during the *Hɔmɔwɔ* festival and its history will be discussed in one section. The gradual abandonment of intramural burial and the introduction of public cemeteries will be analysed on the basis of archival documents. The prohibition of human sacrifice through legislation will be described. This chapter introduces the religious background of the Ga people and some of the past features that left traces in the contemporary culture.

Chapter Four deals with special rites, such as widowhood rites or rites of separation that once existed and are now performed in a modified way among the Ga people according to the circumstances. These rites that used to be of the greatest importance have lost their former role or have been transformed. Due to the multitude of varieties between the Ga towns, a case study of Jamestown funeral rites will be applied at this point. The type of death was of great importance in the ancient Ga society and various rites were performed for each situation. Therefore, these features are presented in a shorter, but thorough way.

The fifth chapter will analyse different factors of change that had an impact on funeral rites.

As already mentioned, religion, colonization, technology and modernity in general influenced funeral rites among the Ga. These analyses substantially contribute to the uniqueness of the entire thesis by showing that fundamental changes transformed the basis of funeral rites.

Chapter Six presents some recently invented traditions and some features of the Ga funeral customs that were modified from pre-colonial to the present times. Abandoned elements of the rites are described and the background of contemporary practices researched. Uniqueness and ingenuity of the Ga funeral rites will be presented and examined.

The last chapter presents the conclusions of the research project. It also presents another theory of time, which might become a basis for future research.



Chapter 2: Funerals

Rites of Passage

A rite of passage is a form of a ritual ceremony found in all societies to mark and recognize a person's entry into a new stage of life.⁵⁵ According to van Gennep the rites of passage in traditional societies, as already mentioned in Chapter One, are the following: birth with naming ceremony, puberty rites, marriage, and death with funeral rites. In the contemporary society though such a rite would mark any kind of a major change in life of an individual including baptism, graduation, membership in fraternity, etc. People are required to go through these turning points in life individually or in a group, depending on the custom. Inexperienced neophytes must pass through elaborate processes of socialization which consist of magico-religious-social activities that conclude with the acknowledgement of a new status of a person. Unique experiences and newly acquired knowledge of traditional norms and values of his own society enable a person to advance in the social hierarchy of his community. After “graduating” to a higher social status an individual reinforces communal bonds and the structure of the society. In traditional cultures, however, the participation in these rites was considered an important responsibility which was compulsory for all; today, however, some of them (puberty rites for instance) have been mainly abandoned.

An anthropologist Arnold van Gennep saw regeneration as a law of life and the universe. He stated the following:

“The energy which is found in any system gradually becomes spent and must be renewed at intervals. This regeneration is accomplished in the social world by the rites of passage as a given expression in the rites of death and rebirth. These life-crises ceremonies differ from rites of intensification (ceremonies associated with seasons and other regular

⁵⁵ *The World Book Encyclopedia*, (Chicago: World Book Inc., 2012), 350.

occurrences, which bring changes in human activity).”⁵⁶

According to these definitions it can be easily classified that the death and funeral rites are a rite of passage, while the Ga traditional festival such as *Hɔmɔwɔ* would be characterized as a rite of intensification. Before proceeding with the description of the particular Ga rites we need to explore the theoretical background of rites of passage. Naming ceremonies, called baptism rites among Christians, still hold an important position in every African society, while puberty rites or initiations into adulthood have mostly lost their importance and have been widely abandoned in the last century. Marriage ceremonies maintain their importance on the African continent, even though they are losing importance in the Western world. Death and funeral rites which will be studied thoroughly in this thesis maintain their role and are considered very important among the peoples of Southern Ghana, namely the Ga, Ewe and Akan, who observe funerals in a prolonged way and with great care.

Van Gennep was well acquainted with major concerns of the scientific thinking of his era that encouraged the setting up of classificatory categories. His classifications were so well defined that they still stand today and they have left a great impact on most of other social sciences. Van Gennep insisted that “ceremonies needed to be examined in their entirety and in the social setting in which they were found.”⁵⁷ At this point it is necessary to clarify the terminology used by anthropologists such as ceremony and ritual defined by Victor Turner. A “ceremony” means a series of formal or traditional actions which has a closer bearing on the religious behaviour associated with social statuses, where politico-legal institutions also have greater importance. On the other hand a “ritual” means a part of religious ceremony which is applied to different forms of religious behaviour associated with social transitions.⁵⁸ The rites of passage usually include a series of rituals and even though they mostly do not involve politico-legal institutions, but rather imply social transitions, they are sometimes called ceremonies.

56 Arnold Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, VIII, XIII.

57 Arnold Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, VI.

58 Victor Turner, *The Forest of Symbols*. (Ithaca / London: Cornell University Press, 1967), 95.

There are also other “smaller” rites of passage which mark life stages such as birthdays, entering of a New Year; religious rites such as Bar Mitswas, Ramadan, etc; or that could take the form of special events such as the first sexual intercourse, the enthronement of a chief, market days, etc. It needs to be emphasized that in most of traditional African cultures the rites of passage play a more central role than in the Western society.

A naming ceremony is very important for West Africans. The Mandingo people show the newborn baby to the stars in order to introduce it to the ancestors, whom the stars represent. The Akan, Ewe and Ga celebrate an outdoor ceremony when a baby reaches one week in order to be accepted as a person coming from death to life. Otherwise the baby would be considered a ghost who only made a brief appearance but preferred to return to its “spiritual” parents in the spiritual world than to stay with the actual ones.⁵⁹ The Ga people share the same belief and they call this outdoor ceremony *Kpodziemo* which is performed early in the morning so that they can show the baby to the rising sun, called *Tsotsoobi*.⁶⁰ According to one of my informants the rising sun in the form of yellow glow brings healing, while the setting sun takes the sins away for cleansing. Due to this healing effect they show an eight-day old baby to the rising sun.⁶¹ Such outdoor is an introduction to the naming ceremony that follows. The family meets at the father's house where the extended family meets for this unique ceremony which is conducted by the head of the family on the 8th day after birth. Presently the ceremony may be postponed to the 15th day after birth in order to gather funds for the occasion.⁶² The officiant who is of the same sex as the infant brings the naked child out, faces eastward, lifts the child up toward the morning sun and introduces it to the Ga world.⁶³ A set of liturgical prayers in the Ga language with a rich philosophical component takes place for the child to become a responsible adult who would carry on the traditions of the family, bearing in mind that he has to make contributions to the upkeep of his parents and also the upkeep

59 Interview with Abusuapanin Akwasi Ampomah, 1/5/2016, 1.

60 Interview with Emmanuel Evans Anfom, 13/9/2016, 1.

61 Interview with Chris Hesse, 21/9/2016, 2.

62 Interview with Nii Akwei Bonsu III, 16/3/2016, 1.

63 Marion Kilson, *Dancing with the Gods*, 116.

of the family and upkeep of the society and so forth.⁶⁴ Traditional values that are inculcated into the child also serve as a reminder to all people present to stay on the right path.⁶⁵ There is also a special rite among the Ga and Akan when an elder gives the child a drop of water and tells it that this is water; then the baby is given a drop of alcohol and is told that this is alcohol.⁶⁶ They consider that rite very important for the child to distinguish between the truth and the lie for good. There is also some symbolism – water represents life, and alcohol serves as a means of communication with ancestors through libation.⁶⁷ The child inherits a family name after his father, he is given a personal name after the day of the week in which he was born. One of my informants claimed that among the Ga there is “sometimes also a third, rotatable name according to the generation”.⁶⁸ This is usually a name of a deceased relative or a certain friend who was reincarnated. Ga Christians and Muslims also give a child another name. With the conclusion of a naming or oudooring ceremony the child becomes humanized, socialized and accepted into the family.

The puberty or initiation rites were usually performed when biological manifestations of puberty took place and an individual needed to be accepted into adulthood. They were once compulsory since a woman or a man was not considered an adult without having performed them and they could not reach a status of an ancestor if they died without going through them. These ceremonies were also widely spread among African peoples, but today only few ethnic groups practice them. The most elaborate and sophisticated puberty rites which took about six months to complete were performed among the Mende.⁶⁹ The Asante today seldom perform their “*Bragoro* rites” for the girls, but the Krobo people of Southern Ghana are famous for their obligatory “*Dipo* rites” that have recently been transformed into a national festival. These initiation rites were once obligatory for all girls and without having performed them they would not be able to marry.⁷⁰ The

64 Interview with H.N.A. Wellington, 22/6/2016, 2.

65 T.N.O. Quarcoopome, *West African Traditional Religion*, 112.

66 Emmanuel Kwaku Akyeampong, *Drink, Power and Cultural Change*, 32.

67 Libation is a very common rite in Southern Ghana; a person pours a few drops of any liquid to the ground in order to communicate with his ancestors who are buried in the earth. Libation is more widely described in Chapter Six.

68 Interview with H.N.A. Wellington, 22/6/2016, 2.

69 T.N.O. Quarcoopome, *West African Traditional Religion*, (Ibadan: African Universities Press, 1987), 117.

70 Interview with Abusuapanin Akwasi Ampomah, 1/5/2016, 2.

process involved learning domestic skills, social values and cultural traditions, through rituals, games and practical experiences.⁷¹

The puberty rites or initiation to adulthood used to be a compulsory ceremony for boys who usually had to go through a period of isolation, several physical tests of endurance, had to take part in some competitive games, and were taught important occupational skills. Presently there are no more special rites for the initiation of boys in Southern Ghana; the Asante though had a custom of presentation of a cutlass, a gun or a tool by a father to his son in order for him to know that he is mature enough to marry.⁷² The Ewe and Ga boys' initiation, however, included an act of circumcision that has been practiced since their early history, and an initiation into the *Asafo* company.⁷³ A painful experience of circumcision allegedly made them physically and mentally stronger than their non-circumcised neighbouring peoples. The present practice of circumcision of boys on the 8th day after birth⁷⁴ raises the question whether this early circumcision remains a puberty rite or is a part of a naming ceremony. Female circumcision is not being practiced in Ghana in the same way as it is in some other West African countries.

Puberty or nubility rites used to play an important role in Ghana, but this role has diminished due to the influences from European culture, Christianity and obligatory education.⁷⁵ Europeans and their missionaries considered these rites unnecessary, immoral and in contradiction to the Christian doctrine, and have therefore discouraged local people from performing them. In Jamestown there are three houses with traditional background where they still perform puberty rites for girls and even for some adults who have returned to their tradition.⁷⁶ Puberty rites for boys were almost extinct by the 1950s but would still be performed for those who were likely to succeed important

71 Steven J. Salm, Toyin Falola, *Culture and Customs of Ghana*, 129.

72 Peter Sarpong, *Girls' Nubility Rites in Asanti*, 11.

73 Historically, the *Asafo* companies, originally introduced by the Fante ethnic group, were established as temporary military units, consisted of instantly mobilized young townspeople in larger towns. These soldiers served as a protection force against enemy invasions. In the 20th century, however, their traditional military role changed to watchers and peacekeepers who also perform some traditional rites.

74 Interview with H.N.A. Wellington, 22/6/2016, 3.

75 Interview with Emmanuel Evans Anom, 13/9/2016, 2.

76 Interview with Nii Akwei Bonsu III, 16/3/2016, 2.

offices such as *wulɔmɔ*, *Manɔtse*, etc.⁷⁷ Due to the fact that today the majority of young people are not initiated to adulthood, there have been several spiritual and moral transformations which ended up in disastrous consequences as a result of lacking traditional values in the lives of the juniors.

Marriage ceremony is considered the third rite of passage and unlike the former two rites, the act of marriage is not losing its role and remains an important institution in the Ghanaian society. Traditional marriages in Ghana have always been arranged in advance as an agreement between the two families that was upgraded into an alliance between them. The reasons for this link were not only social, but also economical, thus ensuring a comfortable future for the couple. In the past the parental authority has almost always been the decisive factor in choosing the marriage partner, even though there was no physical coercion, but merely moral pressure combined with authority.⁷⁸ Nowadays, one's personal choice is much more common than the betrothal by the parents. Traditional marriage practices in the Gold Coast colony were not influenced by Christianity until the Synods of 1871 and 1875 condemned polygyny, and sanctioned the grounds for divorce on terms of wife's responsibilities.⁷⁹ Another major influence on marriage rites was introduced by the colonial government which passed a bill of Marriage Ordinance in 1884 making it a contract and permitting only monogamous marriages with the exception of Islamic ones.⁸⁰ Since then the Christian marriage has gradually replaced the traditional one among the Akan, Ewe and Ga ethnic groups, but features of traditional rites still exist among the followers of traditional beliefs. One of these traditional elements among Akan and Ga, is the presentation of "brideswealth" that a groom needs to pay to the bride's family before taking her to his own custody. After the payment is concluded the marriage is considered legal and the couple is officially married.⁸¹ In modern times men and women in Ghana normally choose their own partners, but the consent of the family remains a rule for the implementation of marriage.

77 Madeline Manoukian, *Akan and Ga-Adangme peoples of the Gold Coast*, 91.

78 Hugo Huber, *The Krobo, Traditional Social and Religious Life of a West African People*, 98.

79 Roger S. Gocking, *Facing Two Ways: Ghana's Coastal Communities under Colonial Rule*, 87.

80 *Ibid.*, 88.

81 Osafo K. Osei, *African Heritage of the Akan*, 47.

In a traditional society of the Ga a marriage usually commences with the introduction of the families. A boy who likes a certain girl informs his parents about that and they send somebody to the girl's parents who acknowledge the request. Then a man introduces this woman to his parents and vice versa. A time for the meeting of both families is fixed and the boy's party has to come with a number of items to the girl's party, where a linguist conducts the ceremony. After this event they are engaged, and among the Ga it also counts as marriage. The traditional Ga society was polygynous, but the ritual described above needs to be repeated for every new engagement. Presently an official registration is necessary for the marriage to be publicly acknowledged, but even in a polygamous marriage only one wife is registered.⁸² The marriage is considered successful only when children are born and the couple is recognized as fruitful.

Death with funeral rites is the fourth and last rite of passage; according to West African and Ghanaian traditional beliefs, it is considered an act of God. These rites will be thoroughly explored in the next chapters, therefore the concept of rites of passage needs to be analysed first.

Victor Turner defined the rites of passage in another way:

“Rites of passage are found in all societies but tend to reach their maximal expression in small-scale, relatively stable and cyclical societies, where change is bound up with biological and meteorological rhythms and recurrences rather than with technological innovations. Such rites indicate transitions between states.”⁸³

The traditional Ga society is a perfect match with the description of characteristics stated above. The cyclical perception of time can be merged with the four rites of passage which represent four most important steps in a person's life cycle. Not only are these stages marked with biological transitions, but they also imply important social roles that form a kind of hierarchy within a community. Ghanaian ethnic groups in general pay large attention to the respect for older generations and also among the mates, even though one may be only a day older than the other. The advancement to the next rite of passage affirms the individual as a more respected member of the

82 Interview with Emmanuel Evans Anfom, 13/9/2016, 2.

83 Victor Turner, *The Forest of Symbols*, 93.

society.

According to both Van Gennep and Victor Turner a particular rite of passage may be divided into three phases: separation, liminality and aggregation. Separation marks the cessation of a role or category previously occupied when individuals are separated from the society. In liminality or transition period the individual finds himself between the two statuses where he is without social contacts and most vulnerable, because he does not belong to any of the social groups. Aggregation or reincorporation comes when an individual is reintegrated into the society with a new position. Every rite of passage may be split into these three stages, whereby each of these rites has an emphasis in another phase. The following analysis describes the understanding of rites of passage among the Ga ethnic group.

Birth with naming ceremony could be structured in the following order: Birth itself is a separation from the world of the ancestors. Liminality continues during the next 8 days, when a child is kept indoors and not yet considered a person. Aggregation starts when the outdooing and naming ceremony is performed and the baby becomes recognized as a living being incorporated into the physical and social environment.

Even though initiation or puberty rites called *otufɔ* are practically extinct among the Ga, they could be structured according to the existing *dipo* rites, performed by the Krobo people, who are kin to the Ga. These rites, performed from February to April, are the most important event for a Krobo female. Separation begins when the girls are summoned by the priest or priestess who is in charge of the initiation rites.⁸⁴ Liminality begins when the neophytes are physically removed from their natural environment and gathered for performing various ceremonies which include learning domestic skills and confinement that takes one week.⁸⁵ Aggregation comes when the closing celebrations conclude and girls return to their compounds where they are accepted by their families as women who are ready to marry.

Separation in marriage rites starts when a young man informs his parents about the girl and

84 Hugo Huber, *The Krobo, Traditional Social and Religious Life of a West African People*, 169.

85 *Ibid.*, 181.

they start to investigate her background. Liminality begins when the two families meet and the couple becomes engaged. This period continues until the marriage is confirmed. The aggregation commences when the couple is pronounced husband and wife who begin a new life as a new family.

Death means a separation literally when a soul leaves a body. Liminality starts when death is announced and funeral rites are being planned by the family. This transformation continues until the last funeral rites are observed. Then the soul is free and reincorporated to the world of ancestors. In order to connect the last rite of passage with the first, it needs to be stated that after completing funeral rites the soul is ready to enter the next body in a next life.⁸⁶ That makes the cycle complete.

Separation may be the most important phase of birth, aggregation of marriage, and liminality of initiation and death. Victor Turner considered liminality to be the most important part of rites of passage because liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention and ceremonial.⁸⁷ The process of liminal period is marked as an anti-structure where normal social rules are reversed. The order of culture and society are changed into untamed chaos of nature. Various initiation rites in undeveloped societies are frequently conducted by priests or shamans in the wild natural environment, far from their local dwellings in order to show the other aspects of reality to the neophytes. The purpose of exposing them to extremes is merely to reaffirm the social norms and values when they pass the initiation. During these initiations into adulthood some of the rites symbolically portray death. Initiations of shamans, Bedik people of Senegal⁸⁸, or Dagara people of Ghana and Burkina Faso bury their novices to the neck in the ground. They believe that exposure to difficult and dangerous tasks transforms them into adults.

Turner stated that in the liminal period the subject of passage ritual is structurally if not physically invisible.⁸⁹ This transitional being is a liminal person that cannot be classified and is

86 Reincarnation within the Ga traditional belief will be thoroughly explored in Chapter Three.

87 Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process; Structure and Antistructure*, (London /New Brunswick: Aldine Transactions, 2008), 95.

88 Nataša Gostiša, *Pojmovanje smrti, z njo povezane navade in obredi v afriskem tradicionalnem okolju*, (Diploma, University of Ljubljana, 1998), 27.

89 Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process; Structure and Antistructure*, 95.

often described by a set of symbols. For instance, the dead corpse accompanied by the non-departed soul could be such a transitional being. Every rite of passage somehow represents “a small death” and a new life in a new form. In this case death is an equivalent of separation, an element present in ceremonies of childbirth, initiation, marriage and funerals. According to the traditional cyclical perception of life, rites of passage represent progression from the spiritual world, passing the living world on the way back into the spiritual.⁹⁰ All rites of passage with an exception of funerals are joyous occasions, and even funerals are celebrated in a more or less joyous way if the deceased had lived a long and prosperous life. This kind of funeral in Ghana is considered a success for the deceased and his family because the circle of life was completed and the soul passed into the afterlife to wait for the next reincarnation.

The observance of rites of passage was more or less significantly affected by incursions of monotheistic religions such as Islam and Christianity, technology, blending of neighbouring cultures, Western civilization and modernity in general.⁹¹ Profound changes that occurred in the past rarely leave traces that would make a historical approach possible; this is due to scarce dating in the sources making it difficult to determine the exact time period of a change of a particular rite. In the distant past various ethnic groups maintained several taboos regarding passage rites that involved sacrifices if they were not observed. Most of these taboos have now been forgotten or lifted as a result of the above mentioned influences.

Death and Funeral as a Rite of Passage

Death is the final rite of passage and it represents the last phase of an individual's life cycle. It is celebrated in all societies and consists of several ceremonies attended by the living kin and people who were close to the deceased. In order to assure a safe passage to a person these rites need proper performance by providing everything for the departed for his smooth transition into the world of spirits. Another reason for it to be called a rite of passage is in that it marks a journey from

90 Emmanuel Kwaku Akyeampong, *Drink, Power, and Cultural Change*, (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1996), 30.

91 T.N.O. Quarcoopome, *West African Traditional Religion*, 110.

one life to another according to traditional beliefs, or to heaven or hell according to the Christians and Muslims.

Like the other rites of passage, a funeral is also divided into phases of separation, transition and incorporation. Once the body is destroyed, and funeral rites function in part to hasten this destruction, the separation is necessarily considered final.⁹² Thus the separation phase consists of dying that results in death. Richard Kisiara, for instance, understood the separation phase as “taking the corpse outside from the house or place of death, burning tools, houses, and other property of the deceased and also killing the deceased's wives, slaves and animals.”⁹³ Van Gennep pointed out that at funerals the phase of separation represents the most prominent component, while the rites of transition and incorporation are not that important.⁹⁴ That may be true for some cultures, but for ethnic groups in Southern Ghana⁹⁵ it can be argued that the rites of transition and aggregation, which incorporate the deceased into the world of the dead, are more emphasized. The fact is that death in these traditional societies is not seen as an end but as a transition of the soul from the physical into the spiritual world.

The liminal state of the death starts when the soul leaves the body and wanders around it until the burial with funeral rites is completed. The soul then departs for the journey to another world, but the entrance to it comprises a series of rites of passage whose details depend on the distance and topography of that world.⁹⁶ The liminal phase ends at this point whether the passage has been successful or not, and the separation that also ends the extended mourning period takes place.

In Southern Ghana the transition or the liminal period, when the dead soul is still in bond with the living, lasts for a longer time due to the delaying of a funeral for weeks, months or even years. Goody, who studied funeral rites among traditional societies of Northern Ghana, argues that

92 Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 50.

93 Richard Kisiara, “Some Sociopolitical Aspects of Luo Funerals,” 127.

94 Arnold Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, 146.

95 Ethnic groups in Southern Ghana are Ewe, Ga and various Akan sub-groups.

96 Arnold Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, 153.

the period of mourning after funeral still represents transition, which ends with the performance of the second funeral.⁹⁷ Among the Southern Ghanaian ethnic groups, however, there is no second funeral and the transitional part of the funeral rites normally starts with the physical exposure of the corpse at his home or funeral home where he usually lies in an open coffin. In Ghana lying in state, also called wake-keeping, is usually performed on Fridays. That is when the core family stays with the corpse through the night, before the day of the funeral. The next day all customary rites are performed and the corpse in a coffin is escorted to the cemetery, where it is buried.⁹⁸ The transition period does not necessarily end with a burial, because it might be extended by the post-liminal period in the form of commemorations when the relatives still mourn the deceased. Some cultures do not observe these commemorations, but Fante and Asante people usually meet on the 8th day and on the 40th day after the funeral.⁹⁹ The tie is broken by the last commemoration or the last visit that “completes the rites of separation in relation to the deceased and the reconsolidation of the society or restricted group of the living.”¹⁰⁰ After this phase the soul that was neither a living being nor a spirit, would stop wandering around and depart to afterlife or the land of the ancestors until it is reincarnated into another being or goes somewhere unknown. Akan people meet at the first anniversary in order to distribute the inheritance and in case of a widowed spouse, he or she is allowed to marry.

Reaggregation or incorporation places the subjects after social or cultural transformation to new status in the society. The funeral ceremony as a whole reintegrates community by actions of solidarity which help to re-establish its morale that was destabilized by death within the kinship. Another rite of incorporation, where the living overcome the disappearance of a missing member, is a shared meal after the funeral. This custom is common in different cultures of the world and has recently arrived to Ghana. It reunites the family and ends the mourning period, except for the widowhood time period which is normally longer. The soul is detached from its previous

97 Jack Goody, *Death, Property and the Ancestors*, (London: Tavistock Publications, 1962), 26.

98 Funeral rites are more thoroughly described later on in this chapter.

99 Interview with Nii Akwei Bonsu III, 16/3/2016, 5.

100 Arnold Van Gennep: *The Rites of Passage*, 160.

environment and living kin, and therefore free to go.

Most world beliefs testify that a deceased must take a voyage and his survivors are careful to equip him with all the necessary material objects which will assure him a safe journey or crossing and a favourable reception as they would a living traveller.¹⁰¹ The ancient Greeks and Romans assured this safe passage with a coin that a deceased used to pay Charon, a boatman who carried the soul to the afterlife. A similar belief and its practice persist in some parts of Europe and among the Ga people who add money, trinkets and also coins into the coffin of the dead.¹⁰² Ancient European cultures such as Celts used to put weapons next to the corpse so that he may keep the status of a soldier in the afterlife. Some African peoples add clothing, sponges and several other items because they believe that the hereafter is a carbon copy of this earthly life.¹⁰³ In any case a funeral ceremony and a proper burial must be performed, so that everybody, including the deceased, are satisfied – both the dead who are seeking a safe passage to the spiritual world and the living who want to reintegrate into the society without one their members.

In Ghana death is considered as a transition from the physical world to the world of spirits and ancestors.¹⁰⁴ The transformed dead remain a part of the family as guides, protectors and even punishers, if necessary. Therefore they are highly respected and feared among the living. In Ghana, a funeral is the most important rite of passage and it is celebrated in a splendid and elaborate way so that the soul of the deceased would smoothly pass to the world of ancestors. The nature of the ceremony largely depends on the age, status and occupation of the deceased.¹⁰⁵

The fundamental functionality with traditional and complex nature of these rites has been exposed to many changes, losing its role as a rite of passage and becoming an occasion for displaying status and wealth of the living. The trend toward lavish and ostentatious displays at contemporary funerals is clearly driven more out of concern of the statuses and social standings of

101 Ibid., 154.

102 Interview with Nii Akwei Bonsu III, 16/3/2016, 10.

103 T.N.O. Quarcoopome, *West African Traditional Religion*, 127.

104 Marian Lily Adams, *Family, Life, Education*, 139.

105 Steven J. Salm, Toyin Falola, *Culture and Customs of Ghana*, 135.

the living than for the posthumous fate of the deceased.¹⁰⁶ Even though parts of these ceremonies had stood the test of time, the modern funerals of Southern Ghana are an obvious indicator that the initial role of these rituals are going through profound transformation.

Another role of funeral ceremony, based on local beliefs, is the defensive procedure against the soul of the deceased, where the rites represent prophylaxis against the contagion of death present in the area.¹⁰⁷ This aspect is sometimes not seen on the surface, but is clearly evident in a detailed research of the funeral ceremonies of a particular ethnic group. Every funeral though is a reminder for participants that the death is inevitable and one must be prepared because it may come when least expected.

Death Rites in Africa

Until recently, however, little attention has been paid to the history of death practices in Africa in relation to demographic change, urbanization, the interventions of the colonial and post-colonial state and the availability of new technologies.¹⁰⁸ The reason behind this statement may lay in the sensitive nature of the issue among majority of African ethnic groups, who do not want to speak about death. Africans do not consider death a philosophical notion but merely a natural event, that needs to be accompanied with proper rites, not to disturb the gods, deities or death ancestors.

An external observer may often see the performing of different types of rites as a theatrical performance. This is not surprising since it is well known that drama developed in Ancient Greece from the festivals honouring god Dionysus. The place, movements, gestures, cult requisites, clothing, light, colours play their symbolic roles in the ritual.¹⁰⁹ The main difference between the artistic theatre and a ritual is that the former serves as entertainment, while the latter conveys an energetic transformation of the individual causing change in the state of consciousness by

106 Joseph K. Adjaye, "Rituals, Postmodernity and Development" in *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana, New Series*, No. 6 (2002): 3.

107 Arnold Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, 193.

108 Rebekah Lee and Megan Vaughan, "Death and Dying in the History of Africa since 1800," 341.

109 Natasa Gostiša, *Pojmovanje smrti, z njo povezane navade in obredi v afriškem tradicionalnem okolju*, 4.

concentrating on symbols.

Comparing Africa with the Western world, we can notice that Africa deals with funerals in a prolonged and sophisticated way because they still consider the dead as a part of the world of the living. African people use funeral rites to transcend death because in their traditional mentality death means a return to the ancestors.¹¹⁰ Even though these ancestors live in a different world they remain closely connected with the living. While the western funerals cement the separation of the dead from the living, African management of death maintains kinship ties long after the burial in a spiritual way, though. Veneration of the dead is also closely connected to the respect of the elders who maintain political and social power over the younger generations, by remembering those who have passed away.

From the outside perspective Africa has always been seen as a continent of darkness and death, and this attitude has not changed much in the recent years. Western media still portray Africa as a place of many dangers such as violence, abductions, civil wars and contagious diseases, even though these disturbances affect only few people in the continent as a whole. Africa has been in the process of profound change but only its inhabitants noticed that since the stereotypes on the outside remain. Mnemonic influences of the Rwanda genocide in 1994 and the outbreak of Ebola in 2014 remain in the western mentality even though the consequences of both have long been eradicated. The Ebola outbreak certainly somewhat influenced the attitude towards death, as the population of Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea risked infection through physical contacts with the deceased which was previously part of their tradition but this has changed after the outbreak. In the not so distant past most of the urbanized regions of Africa had some experiences with one or another epidemic that spread in some particular cities and accelerated the medical approach to the bodies of the deceased. The same can be said for HIV/AIDS.

Since violence and warfare have a long history on the African continent they also left some impact on funeral rites. Within African traditional beliefs there was no heaven promised to the

¹¹⁰ Traditional religion and the world of ancestors will be described in Chapter Three.

warriors who died in battle as it was for the Vikings, Crusaders, and Muslims fighting jihad.

Various civil wars fought in the past for control of the state or territory were transformed into the modern wars for natural resources sponsored by world superpowers. The present thesis cannot discuss how the dead soldiers across the African continent were dealt with for the lack of space, however, let it only be mentioned that in general a violent death was never encouraged by the traditional beliefs. Also, the role of slavery and slave trade cannot be underestimated since it had a profound impact on African societies. Slaves in Muslim and traditional societies were normally treated better than those who crossed the Atlantic, but slaves in Africa, who were usually treated as servants were sometimes sacrificed for ritual purposes.¹¹¹

Another common influence for the whole continent came in the form of various Christian missionaries and their biased description of African funeral rites. Many reports of their first contacts with the indigenous peoples were along the lines of, “Brown was horrified by the noise and apparent disorder of pagan Nyakyusa burial rites, with their reference to the role of ancestral spirits in the world of living, the role of animal sacrifice and, perhaps above all, their explicit expression of sexuality.”¹¹² If we compare this report from Tanganyika with the rites of Ghana or the Gold Coast colony, it can be recognized that all described features can be found there too, except for the role of sexuality, which is not present in the funeral rites in West Africa but is present in some East African cultures, such as the Lugbara of Uganda.¹¹³ Today animal sacrifice is rarely performed, while the role of ancestral spirits is still emphasized even within “Christian funerals” that will be described in the continuation of this thesis. Some missionaries in Africa were successful in persuading indigenous people to join Christian faith since they were fascinated by Christ’s resurrection and salvation for everybody, which prevented them from fearing ghosts, ancestral spirits and death itself. Christianity as known today in Africa has taken many forms; there are different denominations with varying efficacy in converting African ethnic groups. In every case it caused

111 Human sacrifice will be discussed in Chapter Three.

112 Rebekah Lee and Megan Vaughan, “Death and Dying in the History of Africa since 1800,” 351.

113 Richard Kisiara, “Some Sociopolitical Aspects of Luo Funerals,” 128.

dissension, which gradually diminished when some aspects of traditional religion became incorporated in Christian practice.

In a similar way Islam also influenced funeral rites, in particular in Western and Eastern Africa, where Muslim religion has a long history. Islam however did not cause such profound changes since their rites remain more akin to the African traditional beliefs.

The major changes, however, came with the colonial rule and the questions of sanitary methods, grave depth, intramural burials, corpse exposure, and mortuaries. Some peoples, such as Luos of Kenya and Dagara of Ghana, were once burying the dead wherever they died¹¹⁴, while others, such as Akans, were buried in the bush. A married Luo man was buried in front of his house, while an adult Ga was buried in his bedroom. The Lushae tribes of Assam had similar customs as ethnic groups from Southern Ghana. They dug a grave next to the house of the deceased in the night and also killed an animal – as a pig, a dog or a goat – in order to escort a dead person who would thus find a way to the world of the dead.¹¹⁵ Medicalized and rationalized approach to public health came to British and French Equatorial Africa by the 1930s.¹¹⁶ Some African communities expressed resentment to the new intrusive legislation, especially with the introduction of cemeteries and the practice of cremation which according to traditional beliefs did not make for a safe rite of passage.

Other changes came with the urbanization and commoditization of funeral rites in the form of funeral homes and funeral services rendered by undertakers and by funeral insurance industry in some African states. Since funerals are now well planned and funeral attendance mandatory for close relatives, they also represent an opportunity to travel either from a city to a village or vice versa. Finally, globalization influenced Africa in general as was the case in other parts of the world, introducing features from other, formerly unknown cultures.

The main features of a successful funeral among Luo in Kenya would be large attendance, plenty of food available and a lot of crying and wailing.¹¹⁷ The success of a funeral in Ghana,

114 Ibid., 134.

115 Arnold Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, 162.

116 Rebekah Lee and Megan Vaughan, "Death and Dying in the History of Africa since 1800," 354.

117 Richard Kisiara, "Some Sociopolitical Aspects of Luo Funerals," 129.

however, is mostly assessed on the basis of excessive expenditure, and on how large was the attendance of neatly dressed and important people coming to honour the deceased. Meals for the mourners are a contemporary feature though. Families in both countries examined usually depend on the contributions of the members of the extended family and visitors. In both countries people sacrifice money and time needed for a proper performance of death rites. In any case funeral is an occasion which brings people from various age groups, from both sexes and from different background together and strengthens their ties due to unlimited cooperation during the rites.

Death Rites in Ghana

In Ghana death is not seen as the end but merely as a transition from the physical world to the world of spirits and ancestors. The society does not consider it the final stage, but rather as temporary exclusion of the individual from human society.¹¹⁸ Compared to other rites of passage, funerals in Ghana receive greater honour and are celebrated as a prolonged ceremony. The planning and preparation for the funeral might take some weeks or even months, before it is settled. Beside a proper farewell to the deceased and distribution of person's legacy, there are some invisible roles of funerals, such as recreating social relations in the community and reminding the mourners of the cultural values that should not be forgotten.

Even though the dead are transformed into the spiritual realm, they continue to be part of the family, where they protect, direct and guide the living family members.¹¹⁹ There is an old belief among the peoples of southern Ghana that the dead ancestors could severely punish anybody who violated the norms.¹²⁰ These supernatural sanctions used to serve as moral safeguards, feared by everyone, thus helping the traditional authorities to maintain their position without taking any physical action. These sanctions though do not affect the deceased anymore, because the ultimate transference of the soul into the land of the dead is affected only by the final rites of passage – the

118 Peter Sarpong, *Ghana in Retrospect*, (Accra: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1974), 28.

119 Marian Lily Adams, *Family, Life, Education*, 139.

120 Chris Abotchie, "The Control Mechanism of the Lineage." in *Social Control in Traditional Southern Eweland of Ghana*, (Accra: Ghana University Press, 1997), 17.

mortuary rites. A ghost or a soul lingers close to the mortal remains until the final rites have been performed, because it cannot or will not depart before these rites are performed.¹²¹ This belief more or less applies to all ethnic groups in Southern Ghana, even to some of those who have converted to Christianity or Islam.

Funeral and death rites not only vary from one ethnic group to another, but they also differ even within a particular group according to age, status, and gender of the individual. The type of death was of paramount importance in the pre-colonial and colonial times. Priests used diverse methods to find out the cause of each deceased member of the community so that they could perform appropriate rites which would guarantee a smooth passage of the deceased to the afterlife. Natural death which is most common in the 21st century was considered rare in these traditional societies as they believed that the works of supernatural beings or ancestors was a normal cause of death. If full and proper funeral rites were carried out, everybody received honour and propitiation and acceptance into another world.¹²² In order to enter the abode of ancestors a person must have died a natural death; for unnatural deaths like those caused by accidents, drowning or diseases it was believed to have been caused by the person's hidden crimes.¹²³ If the rites were not performed, the person's soul remained in transitional state confronted with his terrors and was unable to reach the world of ancestors.

Funeral rites in Southern Ghana used to involve formalized mourning of the deceased, wailing, bathing and dressing of the corpse, performing different types of separation and special rites, drumming, dancing, singing of songs and dirges, pouring of libation and firing of muskets at the larger funerals. Another important act that marks the transition process is the carrying of a coffin while dancing, before taking it to the grave, which expresses the final moment of joy for the deceased. Burial rites were performed in various ways. While Akan usually buried their people in the bush, the Ga, Ewe and some peoples from the Northern region such as Nankanni, practised

121 Ibid., 39.

122 R.S. Rattray, *Religion and Art in Ashanti*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 103.

123 T.N.O. Quarcoopome, *West African Traditional Religion*, 128.

intramural burial for honoured deceased.¹²⁴ Some ethnic groups such as Akan then performed anniversary rituals either 40 days and one year after death at so-called parting ceremonies which also served as an opportunity to distribute the inheritance and put a stop to widowhood status.¹²⁵ While the peoples of Northern Ghana are extremely brisk in their manner of sending off the dead to their new home, the Akans among others devote major effort and time to this procedure.¹²⁶ The funeral among some Northern ethnic groups lasts one day only, while the Asantes traditionally observe one week celebration.

The organization of death and funeral rites has always been a domain of the family who took responsibility for proper performance and for covering the expenses of the event. These expenditure has always presented a distinct contrast between daily struggles in life and high costs for the elaborate funeral ceremony. Among the Akan the core family was responsible for the expenses, while extended family, friends and others contributed what they could.¹²⁷ The Akan ethnic group which is predominant in Southern Ghana had a custom of dramatic and prolonged one week funeral celebration ; this was gradually shortened to a weekend celebration which is a common feature of the neighbouring Ga and the Ewe. Extended celebration that lasts longer than a weekend is meant for chiefs, sub-chiefs and other dignitaries, while funerals for a commoner are performed in a swift and quiet manner.¹²⁸ In other parts of Ghana contemporary funeral rites for a commoner are still organized differently than those of the chief or traditional priest. While funeral celebrations for dignitaries were usually extended, they were performed in a shortened version in a case of untimely or unnatural death. In the 21st century funerals are mainly differentiated by the amount of money the families spend on the rites. It often happens that the deceased lived in poverty and neglect, but after his death some prosperous children or members of the extended family would organize a grand funeral and spend a large amount of money. Sometimes the family would rather face a huge debt

124 A.W. Cardinall, *The Natives of the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast*, (London: Routledge, 1920), 104.

125 Steven J. Salm, Toyin Falola, *Culture and Customs of Ghana*, 135.

126 Kwasi Wiredu, "Death and the Afterlife in African Culture." published in *Person and Community: Ghanaian Philosophical Studies I*, (Accra: Council for Research in Values, 1992) 146.

127 Madeline Manoukian, *Akan and Ga-Adangme Peoples of the Gold Coast*, 53.

128 Interview with Abusuapanin Akwasi Ampomah, 1/5/2016, 3.

than risk a social disgrace due to the poorly performed funeral.

In general what the living sought to gain through a proper funeral was the successful transition of the deceased from the world of the living into that of the dead.¹²⁹ This fundamental role of funerals in Ghana has recently changed into a display of wealth and status of the surviving members as Sjaak van der Geest pointed out, “funerals are for the living, not for the dead.”¹³⁰ This statement implies that the original functionality of the funerals as passage rites has turned into a profane celebration of the living.

Another recent feature of Ghanaian funerals mentioned by some of my informants is that they sometimes turn into a mini party which, with a lot of drinking and food, becomes enjoyment for some visitors.¹³¹ However this enjoyment should not be confused with merry-making at a funeral of a person who has lived a long and glorious life and is happily celebrated as a successful passage into the afterlife. In any case, the funerals in Ghana, especially among Akan, Ewe and Ga-Adangme peoples, are still expanding in terms of importance and scale. It may be said that they are one of the most important observances in their social life.

Funerals among the Ga

As already mentioned in the introduction the Ga people lost their independence and capital of their kingdom in the 1677 when they were forced to flee to the coast, where they settled in scattered communities that later became known as Ga towns. Thus they had moved closer to the sea which had not only affected their society but also their world view. Three major deities were associated with water, with the sea and the lagoons. During foreign occupation (1680 – 1826) by Akwamu, Akyem and Asante they had to rely on their supernatural allies and European cannons in the vicinity of the forts. Spiritual forces in these towns were different from those in the rural neighbourhood, and they mostly followed four major cults which still form the basis of the Ga

129 Emmanuel Kwaku Akyeampong, *Drink, Power and Cultural Change*, 38.

130 Sjaak Van Der Geest, “Funerals for the Living: Conversations with Elderly People in Kwahu, Ghana.” in *African Studies Review*, Vol. 43, No.3 (Dec. 2000): 103.

131 Interview with Nii Akwei Bonsu III, 16/3/2016, 4.

traditional beliefs.¹³² Even though the physical death was certain, the dead individuals did not disappear from the community. They took a form of ancestors who always watch over the lives of their living kin, and as already mentioned earlier in this thesis, punishing or rewarding them according to their behaviour. These ancestors were worshipped together with their gods and deities in various rituals at their traditional shrines. A glimpse of these rites may be found at the “Hɔmɔwɔ” festival observed by all Ga communities.

A very important feature of the Ga traditional funeral rites was the intramural sepulture inside the ancestral house. A source from the 17th century narrates that “every single Black is buried in the room in the house where he died.”¹³³ This statement is not completely true since small children and slaves were disposed of on the outskirts of town. Another pre-colonial report testifies that until the mid-19th century these people were not properly buried but were exposed on elevated platforms on the edge of a town.¹³⁴ Only those who were respected and honourable enough had a privilege to be buried in the house. Some of them were buried in the courtyard of the compound, while others under the floor of their bedroom.¹³⁵ Inequality of death rites within a particular ethnic group may be seen as a social differentiation which is presently measured by wealth, but it may well be that the pre-colonial Ga people separated those who were welcome to reincarnate within their own family from those who were not much wanted.

John Parker argued that the liminal period of the funeral rites lasts for about forty days, during which the dead are in limbo between their biological existence and the afterlife.¹³⁶ However, many of my informants testified that the Ga people have not observed the fortieth day after funeral, for that is an Akan tradition as it is a one week celebration.¹³⁷ Therefore the liminal period of a Ga

132 Ga traditional religion will be more thoroughly examined in Chapter Three.

133 P.E. Isert, *Letters on West Africa and the Slave Trade. Paul Erdmann Isert's Journey to Guinea and the Carribean Islands in Columbia' (1788)*, ed. By Selena Axelrod Winsnes, Oxford, 1992, p.132. Cited in John Parker, “The Cultural Politics of Death & Burial in Early Colonial Accra,” 209.

134 William F. Daniell, “On the Ethnography of Akkrah and Adampe, Gold Coast, Western Africa”, *Journal of the Ethnological Society*, 4 (1856), 18. Cited in John Parker, “The Cultural Politics of Death & Burial in Early Colonial Accra,” 209.

135 Intramural burial and burial on the outskirts of a town will be examined in Chapter Three.

136 John Parker, “The Cultural Politics of Death & Burial in Early Colonial Accra,” 209.

137 Interviews with Cefas Adjei Pinto, 11/11/2016, 5; H.N.A. Wellington, 22/6/2016, 6; Emmanuel Evans Anfom, 13/9/2016, 5; Chris Hesse, 21/9/2016, 4; Naa Ohemea Bortsoo, 26/9/2016, 5.

funeral does not last longer than until the final funeral rites that are performed just after the burial. Sometimes the family meets after one year but that is a modern feature meant to finalize the expenses. After all the rites have been completed the soul reaches the aggregation phase where it returns to the world of spirits and its previous life is no longer attached to the bereaved who also stop mourning at this point. A soul that has achieved the status of an ancestor is always ready to reincarnate within its previous family bearing some signs such as body marks and gestures, resembling its previous incarnation.

The role of funerals among the Ga people in pre-colonial and colonial times was to ensure a safe and easy passage of the deceased into the afterlife. That is why funerals were performed with great precision and in accordance with traditional beliefs. An improper funeral would evoke anger or vengeance of the spirit, and in order to avoid offending the ancestors the dead were buried with pomp and dignity. While Parker and Field claim that the principal object of funerary rituals was to sever the ties between the living and the dead, they may also be perceived as an instrument for transforming these ties between the living and the dead.¹³⁸ The dead among the Ga always remain there and cannot be eradicated. They are present not only as memories but as ever-attending spirits protecting their living kin.

Among the Ga death was always an important event in the sense of a passage rite. In order to pay respect to a dead friend or relative whose mouth was sealed so that he could not eat, the mourners also decided to fast.¹³⁹ Asante however still observe the tradition of fasting at funerals.¹⁴⁰ Okyame Sikafo, royal linguist of Jamestown, considers meals and the changing of fancy dresses at the funerals to be disrespectful to the deceased and the ceremony itself. He remembers traditional funerals as simple with a clear and exact purpose without ornamentation.¹⁴¹

When somebody died he was kept at home since there were no mortuaries. Since the body

138 John Parker, "The Cultural Politics of Death & Burial in Early Colonial Accra," 209; and Margaret Field, *Religion and Medicine among the Ga People*, 199.

139 Interview with Okyame Sikafo, 17/6/2016, 1.

140 Marleen De Witte, "Money and Death: Funeral Business in Asante, Ghana," in *Africa: Journal of International African Institute*, Vol.73, No.4 (2003): 547.

141 Interview with Okyame Sikafo, 17/6/2016, 1.

was embalmed, some additional time was gained that enabled family to gather for the funeral and for the carpenter to make the coffin.¹⁴² Then the person was simply put into the coffin and taken to the cemetery or forest where he was buried after a short burial ceremony. There was no big celebration or party after the burial, there were only a few differences in performance of rituals depending on the status of the person and type of death. A child, for example, was not buried at the same place as a fetish priest or a chief. In some remote villages where there are no morgues they still bury people within three days after their death. The traditional Ga calendar divided the days of the week into male and female days. Due to their ritual significance, the funerary rites could only be performed on female days which were Monday, Thursday and Saturday.¹⁴³

Pre-colonial Accra witnessed several transformations in the performance of funeral rites. The end of pre-colonial era was marked by the expansion of British authority and political power that consolidated after the departure of the Danes and the Dutch in 1850 and 1872, respectively.

The new colonial period started in 1874 with the destruction of the Asante capital Kumasi and the creation of Crown colony that united all territories in Southern Ghana. The Ga people of Accra were additionally influenced by the British imperial system when the capital was relocated from Cape Coast to Accra. Accra as the urban centre and Ga-Mashie as its heart were under impact of profound changes sparked by migrants, colonial officials, merchants, missionaries and their converts, which eventually penetrated the traditional Ga society and its customs. Even though the British imposed an indirect rule which enabled partial autonomy of the local chiefs and sub-chiefs, the fast-growing city of Accra was not suitable for traditional African affairs in the eyes of colonial rulers. Fetish rituals had to withdraw from the public view, Hɔmɔwɔ celebration was modified and reformed into a festival, Christianity was on the way, but the conversion of the majority of the population into Christianity was a long process.

The late 19th and early 20th centuries signified a period of tremendous change in the Ga funeral customs, mostly initiated by the British colonial authorities and the new Christian religion.

142 Coffins came in common use among the Ga in the middle of the 18th century. See Chapter Six.

143 Marion Kilson, *Dancing with the Gods*, 112-113.

Especially Accra, becoming a metropolis, saw multiple interventions that brought about unstoppable changes in cultural politics and traditional practices. The past world view had to give way to a new blended form.

Funerals in Jamestown

The old pre-colonial “Little Accra” consisted of Kinka and Jamestown, small settlements that emerged around the Dutch and British Forts. Kinka was further divided into four town quarters and Jamestown into three namely Sempe, Alata and Akanmaji. When Kinka and Jamestown expanded, their territory which was geographically unified but politically divided formed an entity called Ga-Mashie. Even though the Kinka and the Jamestown were close neighbours their traditional customs developed in a different way.¹⁴⁴

Traditional rivalry between Kinka and Jamestown persisted long after the departure of the Dutch. In 1925, the Gold Coast Independent newspaper reported of clashes between Abola and Asere from Kinka on the one side, and Ngleshi (Alata) on the other, when the latter blocked a regular yearly funeral memorial procession for the departed Asere Maɲtse. Police had to intervene and scatter the protesters and the blame for this happening was on the Native Affairs Department and their inappropriate policy.¹⁴⁵ These struggles between town quarters as well as chieftaincy disputes marked the Ga political sphere of the 20th century and sometimes affected funerals of important people.

After WWII large governmental buildings were constructed around Jamestown which made the expansion of traditional houses impossible; they became overcrowded with youth making many people to relocate to suburbs. Every kin group in Jamestown had some women working at the famous Makola market who could be relied on for financial support in the times of need, such as funeral performance or treating the ill.¹⁴⁶ Jamestown survived into the 21st century as a traditional

144 Since three of my informants come from Jamestown I decided to use this topographic term for describing funeral rites, while I applied the term “Ga-Mashie” for common issues that refer to both areas.

145 PRAAD ADM 11/923, Case No. 26/1925. Subject: Accra Yearly Custom.

146 Deborah Atobrah, *Caring for the Chronically Sick within Ga Families; A Study of Modern Innovations and*

community that blends with its modern commercial buildings.

Announcing the Death

Within Jamestown a death of a commoner was immediately announced to the people; first to the paternal family of the deceased and its clan, then to the maternal family and its clan and then to all the others. The ways of announcing the death differed according to the status of the deceased person, however, the announcement was never made in a direct manner. Usually they expressed it in a very polite, indirect manner such as, “A person went to sleep and did not wake up.”¹⁴⁷ or “A person has gone to enter his eternal rest.”¹⁴⁸ Different and carefully selected words were used to soften the impact and the Ga had all sorts of phrases to describe it. In order to present the sad news to a friend of the deceased some people used metaphors, e.g., “This person went home.” or “The person has gone to his ancestors’ home or garden”, or “He could not make it.” or indirect hints, such as, “My wife was sent to the hospital and we are looking after her making sure that she gets well. Ok, at long last the doctor did all that he could do but...”¹⁴⁹ Another option of announcing death was by saying, “The person is sick.” or “It has been a long time since we have seen this person.”¹⁵⁰ There were also creative ways of responding to the news of the death. Sometimes a sick and dying person might be locked in a room so that nobody knew the time of his departure. In another case shouting and cries from a particular house conveyed what happened there, but in that instance the people would consider the death impromptu.¹⁵¹

There was also a compulsory announcement. When a man died a woman had to inform all the wives in the family and then the delegation came to officially inform the widow that her husband died (even though she already knew that). Certain other announcements were made in this

Traditional Practices, (PhD Dissertation, Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana Legon, 2009), 110.

147 Interview with H.N.A. Wellington, 22/6/2016, 5.

148 Interview with H.N.A. Wellington, 22/6/2016, 3.

149 Interview with Nii Akwei Bonsu III, 16/3/2016, 12.

150 Interview with Cefas Adjei Pinto, 11/11/2016, 3.

151 Interview with Nii Aryee Quarshie I., 27/10/2016, 11.

manner, especially towards the head of the family.¹⁵²

Today, if the person dies in a hospital the relatives carry the message home and inform the head of the family who organizes a meeting where a public announcement is made and decisions about the funeral are taken.¹⁵³ Death of an individual has never been a big secret compared to the death of a chief, even though the privilege of the announcement always belonged to the head of the family. Sometimes they wait until the corpse safely arrives to the morgue.¹⁵⁴ After that the nucleus family is informed and then all other relatives and people.

The modern way of announcing the death in a form of a very elaborate obituary is to print a brochure with tributes of close relatives and sometimes friends and colleagues. A good photograph of the deceased with obituary notice may be printed in large quantities and dispatched around the town quarter or home village of the deceased. However, since the 1970s the publication of photographs of the deceased (as a dead person) in the obituary notices of local newspapers was prohibited.¹⁵⁵

The announcement of a chief's death has always remained secret for some time, sometimes for up to a month. According to the traditional belief the immediate announcement of royal death would represent an offence to traditional gods and deities with catastrophic consequences. Delayed announcement also enables the performance of some secret rites and allows some time for the preparation of the body.¹⁵⁶ Before the public learns about the tragic event, the secret remains with two or three elders who wait for the right moment to reveal the truth. One of my informants stated that usually the paternal and maternal clan know about the death and there were some instances when somebody indirectly conveyed the death by wailing or crying.¹⁵⁷ In Jamestown by tradition the "Asafo group" was called¹⁵⁸ who started playing music before dawn. The Asafo provided a

152 Interview with Emmanuel Evans Anfom, 13/9/2016, 12-13.

153 Interview with H.N.A. Wellington, 22/6/2016, 14.

154 Interview with Nii Aryee Quarshie I., 27/10/2016, 12.

155 Joseph K. Adjaye, *Boundaries of Self and Other in Ghanaian Popular Culture*, (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2004), 157.

156 Interviews with Emmanuel Evans Anfom, 13/9/2016, 4; Nii Aryee Quarshie I., 27/10/2016, 12.

157 Interview with Nii Aryee Quarshie I., 27/10/2016, 12.

158 See footnote 71.

bottle of wine for the elders and then they continued playing music, singing a particular song and moving from house to house pretending that they are looking for the missing chief who is dead. The inhabitants give drinks and small money to the Asafo boys thanking them for delivering the message about king's death to the different houses. After the public announcement the messages were conveyed to all other chiefs with the affinity to the deceased one. Together with these messages they sent drinks, some cash and a red cloth called "Koojan" which symbolizes the death of the chief and also features as an invitation to his funeral. The funeral was then announced from chief's paternal family home and everybody was informed about when the deceased chief would be laid in state.¹⁵⁹ This elaborate official announcement was made to some prominent individuals in order to obtain some financial contributions for the royal funeral. Even to the people who were not yet informed about the chief's death, the announcement was made in a polite, indirect manner, such as, *"The chief went to his fathers and when he got there maybe he is going to take some help to come and cure himself. When he got there he was given a seat to sit there, so he is no more coming. That is where we will say he is dead."*¹⁶⁰ The official announcement of the chief's death was always made by using poetic language without actually using the word "death". People did also not talk about the tragic event which is merely considered to be a transition to the ancestors. Sometimes they used euphemisms, e.g., *"Chief went to the bush or forest to pick a leaf but he did not come back."* or *"He went to sleep and he did not wake up."*¹⁶¹ The metaphorical announcement of chief's or king's death existed also among other African ethnic groups such as the Bol people from Ivory Coast or Fon people from Benin.¹⁶²

In the past it was quite easy to keep the information concerning chief's death from the general public and really sit on it, but nowadays the information of the chief's death is difficult to hide due to the congested population of the modern city of Accra. Usually the information leaks and the contemporary communication technology allows the news to spread very quickly among the

159 Interviews with Okyame Sikafo 17/6/2016, 14; Naa Ohemea Bortsoo, 26/9/2016, 11.

160 Interview with Nii Akwei Bonsu III, 16/3/2016, 12.

161 Interview with H.N.A. Wellington, 22/6/2016, 3, 14.

162 Natasa Gostiša, *Pojmovanje smrti, z njo povezano navade in obredi v afriškem tradicionalnem okolju*, 34.

people, but the official announcement is still delayed until the chieftaincy council decides to reveal it to the public. Important people such as other chiefs, sub-chiefs and dignitaries pretend that they were not informed until the arrival of the delegation which officially presents the sad news with elaborate customs and practices. The organizers are aware that after the official announcement people will start coming so they have to be well prepared. They quietly inform people who are responsible for the organization of the funeral so that they can meet and decide when to make a public announcement on the radio, in the newspapers and other media.

The most important feature of the announcement of the death was the politeness and appliance of symbolism in informing other people. Before coming to the facts, a Ga person would “prepare the mind” of his kin before telling the tragic news.

Traditional Funeral Process

When somebody died in pre-colonial Ga society it became the issue and responsibility of the family to prepare everything for the funeral rites and burial which should be done in accordance with standards of the society. A person was born into the family and he was supposed to leave this world with a proper farewell of his own kin.¹⁶³ For a commoner a funeral and burial was done almost immediately. They kept the body for a maximum of a day or two, before it started to rot, while the corpse of a dignitary or a chief was embalmed and therefore preserved for some time, usually up to a week.¹⁶⁴ One of these preservatives was camphor dissolved in rum, which was poured into all apertures and to all over the skin except the face.¹⁶⁵ As it was necessary to have a quick internment, the burial itself used to be done before the funeral celebration took place. Usually the family set the date and determined the details of a funeral ritual after the burial was concluded.

The first thing to do after a person died was to pour libation in order to propitiate the

163 Interview with Nii Akwei Bonsu III, 16/3/2016, 3.

164 Interview with Emmanuel Evans Anfom, 13/9/2016, 4.

165 Margaret Field, *Religion and Medicine among the Ga People*, 199.

divinities, titulary household deities, and to placate the departed spirit.¹⁶⁶

The head of the family was the first person to be informed about the death within the family. The news then quickly spread around the town and to the villages causing people to break out in wailing and crying and also to prepare and hurry up to the place of the ceremony. The funeral itself needed to be performed quickly since the body would disintegrate in a couple of days. One of my informants stated that immediately after death the core family held their first meeting to organize the funeral. Usually they performed a funeral with burial on Saturday and then they met on Sunday to gather contributions and on Tuesday they reimbursed everybody if there was extra money left.¹⁶⁷

According to one of my informants the duty of conducting ceremony such as a funeral, belonged to the head of the clan or major lineage.¹⁶⁸ If there was no leader, they appointed an overseer, who saw to the smooth functioning of the ceremony.¹⁶⁹ After the official announcement of the death was made and all the family members were informed, the *yalayei* – the funeral women from the paternal family came to wash and shave the corpse.¹⁷⁰ Each of them brought a piece of wood fibre that was used as a washing sponge which was not used only to bath the deceased's body, but also for a traditional ritual of "splitting the sponge". It meant that a piece of a sponge was to be buried with the corpse, while the other part was to be kept by the living, thus separating two close relatives or friends. Since almost everybody brought sponges, only a small portion of it was used, but the rest was shared among funeral women who were not paid for their job but they took some items, such as sponges, soaps, pomades, or other things that were brought in large quantities.¹⁷¹ A sponge, however, also had a symbolical meaning since it was used for bathing a newborn baby as well as a corpse which signified both a welcome and a farewell of the family to the soul. Beside a

166 Ako Adjei, "Mortuary Usages of the Ga People of the Gold Coast," *American Anthropologist*, New Series, Vol. 45, No.1 (Jan. - Mar. 1943), 87.

167 Interview with Naa Ohemea Bortsoo, 26/9/2016, 2.

168 Interview with Cefas Adjei Pinto, 11/11/2016, 12.

169 Diana Gladys Azu, *The Ga Family and Social Change, African Social Research Documents*, 48.

170 Funeral women called *Yalayei*, are two to four females who had passed menopause and are authorized by the family to perform traditional preparation of the dead body for the funeral. They are chosen due to the sound experience in the customary procedures. (Interview with Irene Odotei 17/10/2016, 9, 18.) Another expression is *Kotsa Yei* (women of sponge) or the mortuary women. (Interview with Cefas Adjei Pinto, 11/11/2016, 13.)

171 Interview with Nii Aryee Quarshie I., 27/10/2016, 4.; Irene Odotei 17/10/2016, 2.

soap and a sponge, funeral women traditionally used lime, myrrh and powder to smear the body and also a towel and some other things to prepare the body for wake-keeping. Some communities and some homes had a special place or room where they used to wash the corpse. Funeral women cleansed the body and washed the head three times in a ritual way so that the deceased could carry the story of his relatives to the other world. Male relatives abstained from this process except for holding the corpse by the head, while the widow if the deceased was a man held his feet. If a spouse is also not alive any more, the oldest son or daughter held the feet. Wailing and weeping was forbidden during the washing of the body as that would hasten the decay of the corpse.¹⁷² Fingernails and toe-nails were cut very short and were sometimes used for other rites.¹⁷³

In the pre-colonial times there were no morgues to preserve the body without decaying, so the funeral women applied a concoction made out of herbs to keep the body from disintegrating. After death the body was put on a bucket in the corner of the room where they squeezed all the water from the dead body before they started with the embalming.¹⁷⁴ Certain preservatives were inserted into the mouth and anus in order to keep the body in proper form during the wake-keeping.¹⁷⁵ If the person was sick and bedridden for a long time, the funeral women cleaned the body in a special way. Proper cleansing, sensitive embalmment and preparation of the body prevented the corpse from further decay for another three days enabling the family to organize a befitting funeral. Temporary preservation of the body and especially of the face was crucial so that family members who arrived in the next days could see the deceased for the last time.

When the body was fully shaved, washed and dressed, it was ready for wake-keeping that usually lasted for one day and one night before the burial, and during lying-in-state the deceased was never left alone. The period of wake-keeping was also important to prove that the person was confirmed clinically dead since there were some occasions when the dead simply woke up from a

172 Margaret Field, *Religion and Medicine among the Ga People*, 198.

173 See Chapter Four, Rites for a Distant Death.

174 Interviews with Cefas Adjei Pinto, 11/11/2016, 1.; Naa Ohemea Bortsoo, 26/9/2016, 1; Ago E. Kwei, Adzei E. Anang, Adjei T. Bekoe, *Teshi: Administrative and Cultural Practices*. (Accra: Rhona Publishers, 2004), 94.

175 Interview with H.N.A. Wellington, 22/6/2016, 14.

state of temporary coma. After 48 hours, however, the chance of a person being alive was very small. During the wake-keeping the elders sat in front of the room in order to greet new visitors and to collect donations. Sometimes the body was laid in state for a very short time and then taken to the burial. Funeral and burial rites were always conducted by the head of the family escorted by other members of the kin.¹⁷⁶ Sometimes a family decided that they would not display body for wake-keeping and the deceased was buried instantly.¹⁷⁷

Luxurious equipment, items and dresses at funerals were used by the Ga people at least from the early colonial period when the finest bedstead was borrowed and decorated with European finery, embroidery, lace curtains and bows of mid-Victorian affinities. Elaborated clothes, gold ornaments and jewellery as well as other symbols of rank and importance were worn. Everything was supposed to be close to perfection because of the perception that stinginess was an insult to the dead.¹⁷⁸ The male elder who had passed away was dressed in a ceremonial funeral cloth called *Sliki Terkleh* and a woman elder was dressed in a loin cloth. A kind of spiced clay with sweet scent, called *ayilɔ* was be applied to the corpse. Some families in Jamestown used to observe a rite when a special herb called *nyanyra* was put around the deceased father's neck before he was buried.¹⁷⁹

All these preparations were necessary to preserve the body until the time of the burial. And then the person was adorned with lots of ritual clothing. If *Sliki Terkleh* was not available, a male person was dressed in a suit, a woman in a normal frock. If those were not available then they used the person's best clothing such as a wedding gown.¹⁸⁰

The funeral ceremony was full of wailing, mourning and also merry-making especially to cheer up the bereaved core family members.¹⁸¹ Women expressed their sorrow in tears and cries of regret while honouring the deceased and his generosity and other good personal traits, while men

176 Interview with Nii Akwei Bonsu III, 16/3/2016, 4.

177 Interview with Okyame Sikafo, 17/6/2016, 1.

178 Margaret Field, *Religion and Medicine among the Ga People*, 200.

179 Interview with Nii Aryee Quarshie I., 27/10/2016, 9.

180 Interview with H.N.A. Wellington, 22/6/2016, 3.

181 As already mentioned, this sincere merry-making should not be confused with “after-parties” at modern funerals, which include loud music and excessive consummation of alcohol.

did not weep; they rather shouted out the person's important achievements and sang war songs.¹⁸² This public weeping, shouting and general lamentation represented the climax of the whole ritual. Ceremonial drumming, dancing and singing also played a special role and only certain rhythms were allowed to be played at funerals.¹⁸³ The immediate family members were the first to approach the corpse, followed by the extended family, sympathizers, friends and neighbours. The weeping continued for as long as the deceased was lying in state.¹⁸⁴ There used to be a customary presentation of the gifts for the dead by all close relatives in the form of money, gold, or pieces of cloth, which the deceased would use in the afterlife, not in a physical state but merely in a spiritual manner.

When a woman died it was traditionally the widower who had to provide a coffin, a dress, a shroud and other things that were specified by the organizers of the funeral. If he failed in doing so, he lost the claim over their children who in this case became members of the woman's patrilineage.¹⁸⁵ The extended family was obliged to provide the grave-space and the children of the deceased had certain obligations to perform.¹⁸⁶

If it was a man who died, then the children had to provide a coffin and the widow had to provide the bathing material and other necessities, contributing at least one third of the total expenses or more, while the maternal and paternal side provided one third each.¹⁸⁷

If the person who died was without offspring or his children were financially weak, then his siblings provided the essentials. If there were no close relatives, the entire extended family contributed for the funeral and covered all of the expenses.¹⁸⁸

In pre-colonial times all other kin and friends were bound to contribute as much as they could. If the contribution was not in money, then they could give a sheep, a goat, a fowl, and some

182 Thierry Secretan, *Going into Darkness*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1995), 16.

183 More on traditional funeral dances, songs and dirges in Chapter Six.

184 Ako Adjei, "Mortuary Usages of the Ga People of the Gold Coast," 90.

185 Diana Gladys Azu, *The Ga Family and social Change, African Social Research Documents*, 50.

186 Interview with Irene Odotei 17/10/2016, 2.

187 *Ibid.*, 2.

188 Interview with Nii Akwei Bonsu III, 16/3/2016, 4.

vegetables or help the bereaved family in any other way.¹⁸⁹ If they were very poor, they could contribute by helping at work that needed to be done, including cooking for the attendants. Even those small contributions were important in a symbolical way, as they affirmed an individual as a family unit.

Traditionally a funeral was also an issue of the community that, even though people in the community were not related to the deceased, helped and supported the family. Since the mourning members were not supposed to cook or prepare food, the neighbours did that and were at disposal with their time and resources.¹⁹⁰ All these favours were done in a reciprocal manner, as their neighbours would expect the same from them. In the pre-colonial period the core family members were obliged to fast until completion of the burial in order to pay respect to the deceased.

The coffin and the shroud were always publicly presented to the family, and the funeral women had to make an open display of bathing appliances.

Usually the body was buried on the second day, since the carpenter took one day to make a casket. Normally the corpse could be buried as soon as he has done his work. Sometimes the family added few personal items into the coffin which the deceased could use in his afterlife. Therefore rum, money, gold and soap were buried with the deceased. Some visitors added presents of money by saying “take it to cross the river”.¹⁹¹ The ancient Greeks and Romans had a similar custom of giving a coin under the tongue of the deceased so that he could pay a ferryman to cross the river. However, according to the Ga traditional belief, the money was not only a fare to the land of the dead, but also a payment for him to be cured of the sickness of which he died. Food, however, was never given to the dead. Food without salt or pepper was sprinkled above the ground after the burial and on special occasions such as “Hɔmɔwɔ”.¹⁹² If a woman died in Ga-Mashie, seven pieces of cloth were put around her waist before she was covered with a shroud.¹⁹³ These clothes were

189 Interview with Naa Ohemea Bortsoo, 26/9/2016, 11.

190 Interview with H.N.A. Wellington, 22/6/2016, 14.

191 Margaret Field, *Religion and Medicine among the Ga People*, 200; Interview with Chris Hesse, 21/9/2016, 9.

192 Margaret Field, *Religion and Medicine among the Ga People*, 200.

193 Interview with Nii Aryee Quarshie I., 27/10/2016, 6.

needed in order for her to appear decent before she met her ancestors in the afterlife.

Before the Europeans introduced coffins the Ga used woven baskets or fibre mats for burials. In the last decades of the 19th century the wealthy Ga individuals were buried in a coffin. Traditionally, there were four carriers of the casket and one person of the *Asafo group* beat the drum and all of them sang a farewell song. Before taking the coffin to the cemetery for burial, they lifted it three times, as they would lift a newborn baby at a naming ceremony.¹⁹⁴ Then it was carried around the town for around an hour, stopping at places linked to the deceased life, which represented a sequence of the personal connection. Sometimes the carriers prepared themselves with drinking and dancing until they got possessed by evoking the dead person in order to avenge his death.¹⁹⁵ The coffin used to dance and move here and there in an unpredictable manner so that the attendants would perceive it as if the dead communicated with them through gestures. If it crashed into a person or his house, that person was deemed responsible for the unnatural death of the particular deceased. A person was arrested by the traditional authorities and taken to a very powerful medicine man who condemned the person of an assassination by spiritual attack. The guilt of the condemned person was testified by a rite of boiling oil, whereby the accused person had to take the finger ring out of the pot with boiling palm-oil. An innocent person would take the ring out without any effect, while the guilty person would be burned.¹⁹⁶

As I wrote earlier on, a burial was traditionally performed in the house, either in the bedroom or in the courtyard of the deceased. The next day, when the relatives made sure that the person was truly dead, they performed certain rites so that the ancestors would accept him into their world. The rites on the following day after the burial used to be called “visiting the graveside” or “tombstone”, even though there was no tombstone erected on that burial ground. In Accra they call it *Ade Tsaani* – the following morning.¹⁹⁷ Seven to nine old men from the clan visited the graveside to inquire how the deceased was accepted into the new abode. After pouring libation, they

194 Marion Kilson, *Dancing with the Gods*, 124.

195 IAS Video Archive, Peter Bischoff, *African Cross Rhythms*, Loki Films Denmark, 52 minutes, 1994.

196 Interview with Okyame Sikafo 17/6/2016, 12-13.

197 Interview with Irene Odotei 17/10/2016, 6.

conversed with the spirit of the dead for a while. They walked home in complete silence but on their arrival they reported about their mission to the home of the dead.¹⁹⁸ Another post-burial custom called the “morning thanksgiving” was performed by women from the clan who visited and thanked the prominent members of the community who attended funeral rites on the previous day.¹⁹⁹

Margaret Field described an ancient custom when every morning for a week after the death, a woman would sprinkle kenkey with palm-nut soup to the burial place or to the box with the remains of the deceased in order to feed the ghost.²⁰⁰ Almost all of my informants stated that this kind of rite does not exist anymore and it obviously died out by the end of colonial period.²⁰¹ One of my informants, however, mentioned that this rite was performed in remembrance of the dead since the dead person was accustomed to eat with his family members from the same bowl and in order to ease his departure he was still given some food. A custom to throw a few pieces of food on the floor while eating is still common among some of the Ga people.²⁰²

Another rite performed one week after the funeral is the pouring of rum by the oldest man of the family who thereby told the deceased that the living had mourned him every day since his departure.²⁰³ This might had been a special ritual but it alludes to casual libation that is poured by the elders from time to time to honour their ancestors.

After three weeks after the burial there used to be a night of drumming, dancing and drinking, representing the real farewell to the deceased.²⁰⁴ The close relatives expressed gratitude to the drummers, while some women sprinkled a handful of maize among them.²⁰⁵ Three weeks is supposed to be a period after someone's *susuma* lost contact with the people in the physical world.²⁰⁶ Another source claims that the “third week memorial celebrations” were performed to

198 Ako Adjei, “Mortuary Usages of the Ga People of the Gold Coast,” 93.

199 Ibid., 93-94.

200 Margaret Field, *Religion and Medicine among the Ga People*, 201.

201 Interviews with H.N.A. Wellington, 22/6/2016, 6; Emmanuel Evans Anfom, 13/9/2016, 5; Naa Ohemea Bortsoo, 26/9/2016, 6; Okyame Sikafo, 17/6/2016, 5; Nii Aryee Quarshie I., 27/10/2016, 7; Chris Hesse, 21/9/2016, 5; Irene Odotei, 17/10/2016, 9.

202 Interview with Cefas Adjei Pinto, 11/11/2016, 6.

203 Margaret Field, *Religion and Medicine among the Ga People*, 201.

204 Madeline Manoukian, *Akan and Ga-Adangme Peoples of the Gold Coast*, 92.

205 Margaret Field, *Religion and Medicine among the Ga People*, 201; Interview with Irene Odotei 17/10/2016, 6-7.

206 Joyce Engmann, “Immortality and the Nature of Man in Ga Thought,” in *Person and Community: Ghanaian*

honour the memory of the dead relative where dancing and feasting took place. “The great lamentation” used to be performed at least two years after the burial, especially for the chiefs and members of high nobility.²⁰⁷

According to some of my informants, the Ga people had never observed special days of mourning such as the eighth or the fortieth day, or one year on as is customary among the Akan and some other ethnic groups. After the performance of the final funeral rites that used to be performed on Tuesdays or weekends the people did not meet again.²⁰⁸

Contemporary Funeral Process

A traditional funeral process underwent only slight modifications in the last decades but Christian and Muslim funeral rites introduced new ways of performing funeral ceremonies. Some of the features described by my informants depict these changes of the Ga funeral process.

If a person is dying at home, he depends on the surrounding family. Just before dying the family gives the person some water to drink to ease the passage of his soul. Usually the family calls the doctor to prove that the person has really died.²⁰⁹ Another informant stated that when a Christian is about to die they call a church minister to give the dying last rites, the communion.²¹⁰ A Christian priest prays for the person, while a traditional priest pours libation. Since many people today die in a hospital as a result of a certain disease, no rites are performed before the death otherwise somebody might accuse the person performing the rites of killing the sick.²¹¹

When the information of the death comes out there is a lot of wailing and crying by the women from the family. They usually say that the person has gone to the ancestors.

After the head of the family is informed about the death of a relative he organizes the first

Philosophical Studies I, (Accra: Council for Research of Values, 1992) 165.

207 Ako Adjei, “Mortuary Usages of the Ga People of the Gold Coast,” 95.

208 Interviews with H.N.A. Wellington, 22/6/2016, 6; Emmanuel Evans Anfom, 13/9/2016, 5; Naa Ohemea Bortsoo, 26/9/2016, 5; Okyame Sikafo, 17/6/2016, 5; Nii Aryee Quarshie I., 27/10/2016, 7; Chris Hesse, 21/9/2016, 5; Irene Odotei, 17/10/2016, 9.

209 Interview with Irene Odotei 17/10/2016, 18.

210 Interview with H.N.A. Wellington, 22/6/2016, 15.

211 Interview with Chris Hesse, 21/9/2016, 12.

meeting within three days' time to announce the death of a family member to everyone. At this meeting they discuss responsibilities and contributions of each family member, the type, date and details of the funeral ceremony.²¹² They also discuss the choice of area for the funeral rites which usually takes place in the courtyard of the paternal family house. If that house is in a slum area, then the younger, wealthier members would try to persuade the older family members to perform rites at a more decent place.²¹³ Family members also put some seed money on the table for the arrangements, yet in a case when an individual in the family is rich enough, he could fund the whole funeral. If the core family is poor, then the extended family comes to sponsor the celebrations.²¹⁴ After that the bereaved children usually have two more meetings to plan the funeral details.²¹⁵ These subsequent meetings usually take place in the most modern residence of the maternal side.²¹⁶ The second meeting follows the previously given assignments and customary acquaintance of the funeral organizers. One family member is responsible for the place of the grave with the epitaph, another supervises the coffin making, the third provides the shroud, the fourth writes a biography and takes care of other necessities and so forth. The third meeting only serves as a confirmation of the date for the funeral, burial ceremonies and to distribute the property of the deceased.²¹⁷

If the deceased is a wife, her husband provides a coffin and a dress, while the paternal and maternal families provide the grave site, the canopy, the church service and the undertaker if they do not wish to handle the corpse. If there are no children or close relatives, distant relatives have to provide everything and the burial is a simple one without a funeral ceremony.²¹⁸

If the family can afford to store the corpse in a morgue for some time, they will send it there immediately after death. While the body is kept in the morgue, the family meet about three times, usually on a Monday, Wednesday and Saturday, to inform distant relatives, raise the funds and

212 Interview with Nii Aryee Quarshie I., 27/10/2016, 2.

213 Interview with Emmanuel Evans Anfom, 13/9/2016, 10.

214 Interview with Emmanuel Evans Anfom, 13/9/2016, 13.

215 Interview with Nii Akwei Bonsu III, 16/3/2016, 5.

216 Interview with Emmanuel Evans Anfom, 13/9/2016, 10.

217 Interview with H.N.A. Wellington, 22/6/2016, 5.

218 Interview with Nii Aryee Quarshie I., 27/10/2016, 2.

determine the role of certain family members for performing proper rites, other funeral arrangements and to make contributions.²¹⁹ Presently the undertakers in the service of a mortuary have replaced the traditional role of funeral women to some extent. Some families decide to hand over the entire care of the corpse to this institution, while others store the corpse in the morgue but still prepare the body for the funeral by themselves or they hire a dresser-cum-cosmetic artist.

The traditional role of wake-keeping has also changed, since it is not obligatory any more to present the body for ordinary viewing before the burial. If a person died of a dangerous or a communicable disease, medical authorities will not give the body out and consequently all the services are attended to by the mortuary. If the body is given medical free certificate, the corpse is almost always delivered back home for the wake-keeping.

When the body is laid in state in the courtyard of the family house, the lid of the casket is opened for viewing, which might take only a few minutes, but in the case of a disease mentioned above there is no viewing. The coffin is usually placed in front of the family house, in the courtyard of a compound or in the middle of a stadium in the case of a grand funeral. If the person was a Christian, his church usually allows the family to choose whether they will perform Christian rites in the house or in the church. Some Christian churches do not approve of the carrying of the casket by bearers to the cemetery and allow for the use of an ambulance instead.²²⁰ If the deceased was a Muslim, they do not wait long for the burial, but bury the body in a short time.²²¹

According to some of my informants the custom of giving rum, gold and soap (in addition to the money) into the coffin is still in practice,²²² while others claim that it is only money and sometimes cloth that is given to the casket.²²³ The female corpse is not equipped with seven cloths any more, since they are taken by the children of the deceased. Instead they use paper to make the body comfortable and some ornaments to decorate the coffin. However, not all of these items are

219 Interviews with Nii Akwei Bonsu III, 16/3/2016, 3; Okyame Sikafo, 17/6/2016, 5; Irene Odotei 17/10/2016, 2.

220 Interview with Nii Aryee Quarshie I., 27/10/2016, 2.

221 Interview with Nii Aryee Quarshie I., 27/10/2016, 3.

222 Interviews with H.N.A. Wellington, 22/6/2016, 6; Emmanuel Evans Anfom, 13/9/2016, 5; Naa Ohemea Bortsoo, 26/9/2016, 5; Okyame Sikafo, 17/6/2016, 5; Nii Aryee Quarshie I., 27/10/2016, 6.

223 Interviews with Cefas Adjei Pinto, 11/11/2016, 5; Chris Hesse, 21/9/2016, 5.

buried with the casket to the grave.²²⁴ One of my informants remembers that in addition to money and gold, a handkerchief and a ring was given to her grandparent.²²⁵ Cotton or silk handkerchiefs represented traditional donations of the grandchildren of the Laboni.²²⁶

When the final procession for the deceased is ready, four or six bearers lift the coffin with the remains of the deceased and carry it towards the cemetery. There is no more danger that somebody would be accused of causing death if the coffin would plunge into the person. However, the carriers usually dance on a music provided by brass band that is escorting them to the cemetery.²²⁷ The corpse is saying the last good-bye to everybody and the sweating, suffering faces of the bearers give the impression that they are driven by a spirit.²²⁸ That is one of the few traditional features that can still be seen at the traditional as well as at Christian funerals, even though the latter sometimes use a vehicle for the transportation of the corpse.

Nowadays, the majority of the common Ga people are buried at cemeteries; except for some individuals who expressed in their last will that they want to be buried in their homes. Few relatives who are informed about this exceptional funeral dig a hole, bury the body in great secrecy at midnight and cement the floor afterwards.²²⁹

The traditional roles of financing and organizing funerals have changed with modernization and other factors that contributed to the extravagance of funerals. From the perspective of undertakers, carpenters and pastors we may agree that funerals today are more lucrative than in the past.²³⁰

Instead of fasting, the Ga people now slaughter a sheep to prepare meals for the visitors. For a grand funeral the organizers provided take-away boxes with rice and chicken.²³¹ Sometimes they organize a so-called *Gbonyo paaty* after the church services have been completed with all kinds of

224 Interview with Nii Aryee Quarshie I., 27/10/2016, 4.

225 Interview with Irene Odotei 17/10/2016, 8-9.

226 Diana Gladys Azu, *The Ga Family and social Change, African Social Research Documents*, 50.

227 From funeral attendance at Kokrobite, 27/2/2016; Kpone 1/10/2016.

228 Margaret Field, *Religion and Medicine among the Ga People*, 200.

229 Interview with Okyame Sikafo, 17/6/2016, 3.

230 Excessive expenditure and emergence of funeral economy is explained at the end of this chapter.

231 From funeral attendance at Kokrobite, 27/2/2016.

drinks and food. Such a fun-making in a superfluous way is considered very dishonourable in the memory of the dead by the elders of the community.²³² The organization of the whole funeral depends on the family that is providing everything for the visitors. Usually they are reasonable and spend less time and money but sometimes funerals become excess.

The final funeral rites may be performed on any day except on Wednesdays or Fridays but weekends are most convenient for most since people do not work on Sundays. As I already mentioned, the Ga do not observe the 8th or the 40th day for mourning as their Akan neighbours. Recently some of them practice meeting at anniversary. Another custom that probably came from Europe is to bring flowers on the tomb for the person on the third Sunday after the funeral and on every anniversary.²³³

The type and extent of the funeral celebration primarily depend on the family's decision, secondly on the status of the deceased, thirdly on the faith of the deceased, followed by all other factors. Sometimes different members of the family quarrel when they do not agree about how the funeral should be organized. In order not to bring confusion to the burial grounds, the decision must be taken before the funeral begins. A successfully and responsibly performed funeral brings satisfaction to the bereaved family and organizers who express a farewell to the deceased the best way they can.

The pre-colonial and colonial way of performing funeral rites differed from the contemporary customs, implying the limitation phase of the funeral rite was somehow different, since the inversion of funeral and burial process. It commenced with the death of a person, continued with the burial rites and concluded when the funeral celebration was completed.

Covering of Expenses

The Ga people traditionally had very precise rules who contributed what for the funeral rites. Some of the elders came in, made decisions, but did not have any means of fulfilling their

232 Interview with H.N.A. Wellington, 22/6/2016, 9-10.

233 Interview with Nii Aryee Quarshie I., 27/10/2016, 6.

obligations. Close relatives, however, knew exactly which items to provide according to categories of payment and which services were needed. The expenses of a traditional funeral did not exceed GHS 100 (new currency).

In the 1950s and 1960s the Ga women of Accra organized themselves in a voluntary association called “Friends Society” which helped the poor with the requirements of funerary ceremonies. This network with around 3,000 members provided seats, refreshments, choral music, etc.²³⁴ It was a predecessor of modern undertakers even though their services were free.

The extravagance of contemporary funeral rites has taken many forms among the Ga ethnic group and the costs have increased significantly. The commercialization of the modern society has replaced cultural values that were so important within indigenous tradition. According to one of my informants, these extravagances, such as providing full meals to all participants of the funeral, went beyond normal cultural practice by mixing them with the real rites and this inflated the existing “funeral system”. The costs of a mortuary, a cemetery, a music band, a coffin, of hosting sympathizers, hiring a hearse, funeral advertisements, buying funeral cloths and refreshments and other things increased the cost of the whole ceremony to GHS 5,000 instead of GHS 2,000. Another feature of showing such prestige is an announcement published in a newspaper, advertisement on the radio, or recently, the introduction of neatly printed funeral booklet with tributes to the deceased and farewell messages from the core family. Sometimes they also use posters, stickers, T-shirts with photographs of the deceased, which are not only a clear sign of advertising death as a public celebration, as it appears to the casual visitor, but also a kind of immortalisation of the dead.²³⁵ All this may be called a “funeral industry”. Mini-parties represent another feature; they are organized after the burial with a lot of drinking and making enjoyment instead of mourning, thus becoming a means of disrespect towards the elders.²³⁶ All this lavishness makes people run into debts and other negative areas, leaving disastrous consequences behind. Sometimes they organize a party on

234 Marion Kilson, *African Urban Kinsmen: The Ga of Central Accra*, 65.

235 Sjaak Van der Geest, “Funerals for the Living: Conversations with Elderly People in Kwahu, Ghana,” 112.

236 Interview with Nii Akwei Bonsu III, 16/3/2016, 4.

Sunday, called *Ade Tsaani*, by inviting many friends, involving plenty of food and a celebration. According to another informant, the costs of such a funeral may rise up to GHS 20,000 (new currency) by becoming the “grandeur” and the spending is much higher than necessary. According to this informant, the influence of spending exorbitant amounts came from the Ga youths who wanted to invite all friends to the ceremony.²³⁷ The total expense of the funeral is equivalent to six years' income for a Ghanaian town dweller.²³⁸ In Teshi there used to be a big competition between the clans and families who wanted to appear richer and greater than their neighbours, cost what it may. If somebody spent a large amount of money for his dead mother, the neighbours spent much more, even though it led to a big debt.²³⁹ At these expensive events the majority of the money was not spent on the rituals for the dead, but on entertaining large crowds of visitors.

However, there are some families who restrict the mourners and family members to an accepted rite which does not go beyond a certain point and is confined only to family circle. As observed at some traditional Ga funerals, the organizers only serve water and soft drinks, no alcohol that was traditionally offered in the past in limited quantities, and the canopies and chairs are distributed only for a limited number of visitors. Thus excesses and after-party are kept out of the official ceremony.²⁴⁰ When the seller of cloths or some other items dies, the family offers the remaining stock for sale to the funeral visitors at the funeral grounds, thus gathering some extra contributions to cover the expenses.

In the present day Ga-Mashie, the Ga have a fund-raising event called “Lifting up the funeral”. Family members and friends are invited to raise a loan if the family cannot fund the whole funeral with their own resources, so that other people can also relieve the family of carrying the full burden.²⁴¹ Since everybody in the Ga society considers a funeral as a collective event they are willing to contribute and play their role in order to ease the great responsibility of the bereaved

237 Interview with Okyame Sikafo, 17/6/2016, 15-16.

238 Minimum salary for a town dweller in May 2017 was GHS 272.

239 Roberta Bonetti, “Coffins for wear and consumption: Abebuu adekai as memory makers among the Ga of Ghana,” in *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, No. 61/62, Sarcophagi (spring/autumn 2012), 273.

240 From funeral attendances at Kokrobite, 27/2/2016, Kpone 1/10/2016 and Ofankor 10/12/2016.

241 Interview with Irene Odotei 17/10/2016, 3.

family, knowing that they would receive a similar farewell when the time comes. Even though an individual in a family is rich enough to cover the entire funeral expenses he rarely pays for everything, since that can be easily misinterpreted as showing off. Some well-organized families enter the names of the visitors including the amounts donated by them in a specially printed receipt book. When another family member dies, anyone can check the particular amount previously donated in order to return with an equivalent amount on a reciprocity principle.

Some families use funerals as an opportunity for renovating the house before the ceremony begins, so that the guests would arrive to a neat and luxurious place. Since the event is important for public relations, they do their best to impress the visitors and reaffirm themselves. The already mentioned assumption from Van Der Geest that “the funerals are also for the living,” stands firm also for the Ga people. He conducted some interviews among the Akan and described several cases where very poor or neglected people enjoyed the most expensive and elaborate funeral rites organized by their distant relatives.²⁴² These relatives argued that they made the funeral lavish in recognition of the greatness of a dead kin and for his contributions to the community. The expensive funeral costs of the Akan do not differ much from those of the Ga. One of my informants conveyed a very similar description of a funeral of a poor woman for whom nobody paid much respect when she was still alive. The funeral was attended by members of Legon University who came by bus and several important people who arrived by their splendid four-by-four drives.²⁴³ Such a grand event was organized to raise not only the status of the dead but of the living relatives who became important in the views of the attendants and their neighbours. Rites performed at an extravagant event have lost their religious importance.

Extensive expenditure allows people to organize very elaborate funerals that involve the participation of the whole community, even though they carry a heavy financial burden. In 1998 the Asante Regional House of Chiefs issued a very detailed regulation concerning all stages of a funeral from the mode of announcement and the length of time the body may be kept in the mortuary and

242 Sjaak Van der Geest, “Funerals for the Living: Conversations with Elderly People in Kwahu, Ghana,” 108 – 110.

243 Interview with Irene Odotei 17/10/2016, 4.

displayed in the house, to the type of cloth to be worn and the prices of particular items and services.²⁴⁴ During the author's attendance at some Ga and Akan funerals, however, the above strict standards were not observed. It may be due to the very mild sanctions for not respecting these regulations, which were, “to be called before the council of elders”, “to bring a bottle of schnapps, a sheep”,...²⁴⁵ It is impossible to restrict the current funeral practices in Ghana.

Even though rich old people do not want their children to organize an expensive funeral and to spend a lot of money, they do so because of the pressure of the society. Not much has been written about the reciprocity from the opposite perspective of undertakers and small enterprises providing all the necessities for grand funerals earning a lot of money for their services. Transformations of the funeral rites also created opportunities for many other professions to profit from these ceremonies and form a kind of “funeral economy”.

Many people see funeral business as commercial exploitation of the bereaved families because if there are not enough donations some of them incur debts, sometimes so ruinous that they are carried on to the next generation. Some banks or friends offer loans to these families but the burden of repaying usually persists for some time. Donations, however, do not always come in money, but also in the form of soft drinks, spirits, foods and other goods or borrowed accessories such as canopies. In pre-colonial times, the customary drink was palm wine which was also used for pouring libation for which spirits are used today. Money donations in Ghana are an essential element of funerals, because they create social ties and make the celebrations hardly accessible to outsiders.²⁴⁶ It is an inside affair making links to group identities and social relations. Money donation may also present an essence, a subtle feature of modernity having profound effect on funeral rites in general, transforming a pre-monetary economic system into a western type monetary system. This particular impact may not be seen on the surface yet it represents a major, gradual transition of the funeral rites from tradition to modernity, two concepts that cannot be ultimately

244 Marleen De Witte, “Money and Death: Funeral Business in Asante, Ghana,” 553.

245 Ibid., 553.

246 Ibid., 540.

separated. Western-inspired consumption practices conquered funerals as well as most of the other aspects of life by forming customs that became “neo-traditional”.

Today, old and new, modest and expensive, Christian and traditional types of funerals exist among the Ga people who organize funerals in line with family agreements.



Chapter 3: Religion, Belief and Burial

Traditional Belief and Reincarnation

“It is difficult to discuss African traditional religions historically. They have not been totally static. One group may have influenced and changed the beliefs of other groups but without internal written document, and with few shrines and temples built in long-lasting materials, it is difficult to record change over a long period.”²⁴⁷

In European reports describing African indigenous beliefs there was a lot of bias due to the misunderstandings of their faith. In the 19th century European scholars started using a uniform attribute “animist” or “ancestors’ worship” for all African traditional religions.

In the pre-colonial era the Ga people believed in many supernatural beings, all connected to the lives of the living. This indigenous belief is still present. Even though there are not many followers, the features remain present in everyday life. They are attached to their traditional deities and especially ancestors who are called for help through libation. Every time the libation is poured to the ground the ancestors are there to assist their living descendants. The *nyɔnmɔ* (god – creator) is the supreme deity, but the Ga believe that it is too distant to assist them in their daily endeavours, that is why they pray and link with *Jemawɔjii* – minor gods, deities and ancestors, for whom it is believed that they are ever-present. Minor gods and sub-deities are present in the form of the sea, the sun, the moon, the air, the lakes, the rivers, the mountains, the trees, the lagoons, but all under the principal deity. There are also man-made gods called *wɔŋ* that are usually sculptured and have lesser powers than *jemawɔŋ*. All these sub-principal deities have various names, different days of worshipping and then different functions.²⁴⁸ This hierarchy continues with human beings, animals and plants. Each of these phenomena demands certain rites to be performed for the maintenance of peace and harmony within the Ga community. Reindorf wrote that “there is no African nation or

²⁴⁷ Jocelyn Murray ed., *Cultural Atlas of Africa*, (Oxford: Phaidon Press Ltd., 1981), 31.

²⁴⁸ Interview with Irene Odotei, 17/10/2016, 16.

tribe, which has advanced so far in their religious views as Akras.”²⁴⁹ This Ga historian and pastor from the colonial period alluded to the indirect connection with elaborate Jewish liturgy and the theocracy which ruled the Ga state in the 17th century.

According to one of my informants these Ga deities meet in their spiritual realm in an unsettled matter, when they discuss and decide the destiny of a troubled individual who is summoned to a particular deity and judged. My informants also mentioned new deities called *Tukpei* who might end a life of a guilty person in an unnatural way in a period of seven days. A person who refused traditional medicine and is sent to hospital for a treatment that involves needles would be killed even faster.²⁵⁰

According to traditional Ga religion, each Ga town included dozens of different gods and deities, which were divided into four major cults, categorized on the basis of origin. The *Kple* gods and related rites were considered the most important and the oldest, since some of the songs are performed in the forgotten *Obutu* dialect that sounded more or less like gibberish.²⁵¹ The *Me* type of gods and deities originated from the Adangme mythology; worshipping them was accompanied by dances and music in their language. The *Kpa* gods (initially war gods) came from Labadi which is the new name for Laboni. The *Otu* and *akoŋ* types were yam-eating war gods, of Fanti and Akwapim origins respectively.²⁵²

The Ga believe that their family houses are inhabited by family gods and ancestors, thus forming an ancestral home. Since a human being cannot come in direct contact with gods, he needs to consult *wɔyei* (mediums) and *wulɔmei* (traditional priests) who would channel the will of gods or deities. The roles of priests and priestesses, however, vary considerably. While the kinship-ascribed male status of priests was primarily concerned with representing human aims and desires to immortal beings, the female status of priestesses was concerned with communicating the messages

249 Rev. Carl Christian Reindorf, *History of the Gold Coast and Asante*, (Cape Coast: Self Publisher, 1889), 21. *Akras* was an Akan name for the Ga since they were as numerous as ants - *Nkran*

250 Interview with Okyame Sikafo, 17/6/2016, 12.

251 *Obutu* relates to the Guan people who occupied Accra Plains before the arrival of the Ga.

252 Margaret Field, *Religion and Medicine among the Ga People*, 5-6.

of both gods and humans to one another as mediums in a state of trance.²⁵³ In the Ga traditional social groups both roles were associated with important responsibilities and both represented the highest authorities in the pre-colonial Ga society. The importance and the role of these traditional religious authorities and cults themselves was largely diminished due to the various factors.²⁵⁴ The authority of *wulɔmɔ* gradually declined, while the role of *Maɲtse* rose to the paramount status.

The Ga concept of a human being is comprised of three elements, namely *susuma* – spirit, *kla* – soul and *gbɔmɔtso* – body. There are no direct translations of these notions so these are merely attempts at nearest equivalents. *Susuma* leaves the body in dreams, in mind-wandering and witchcraft activities, but when *kla* leaves the body the person dies.²⁵⁵ According to the Ga traditional belief, *susuma* of the witch leaves her body in the night to meet with other witches and eat *kla* of their victims causing them to become weak, sick or to die.²⁵⁶ *Gbɔmɔtso* is the carrier of *susuma* and *kla* and the wellness of the body is a reflection of the wellbeing of *susuma* and *kla*.²⁵⁷ After the death of the body, *kla* goes to the God creator with unknown destiny, while *susuma* travels to the world of the ancestors.²⁵⁸ We may perceive *kla* as impersonal energy of life that is not owned by a particular person, since it belongs to God, while *susuma* remains personal, it carries an identity and characteristics and travels from one body to the afterlife and then to the next, reincarnated body. However some sources, such as Margaret Field, argue that it is *kla* and not *susuma* that reincarnates, but majority of my informants stated that it is *susuma* that reincarnates.

The Greek cyclical view of time when nothing happens due to constant repeats is not in accordance with Hindu and Buddhist concepts where the end of one's life brings progress or regress on an everlasting spiral of subsequent lives, called “samsara”. Though Hinduism offers a possibility of liberating the soul from “samsara” through its reunion with “atman” – the universal soul, and

253 Marion Kilson, *Dancing with the Gods*, 82-83.

254 Religious transformations are explained in Chapters Five and Six.

255 Margaret Field, *Religion and Medicine among the Ga People*, 92-93.

256 Ibid., 93.

257 Deborah Atobrah, “Caring for the Chronically Sick within Ga Families; A Study of Modern Innovations and Traditional Practices,” 122.

258 In this case *susuma* does not represent only a spirit but also a soul that reincarnates.

Buddhism introduces the condition of “nirvana”, the African traditional religions consider rebirth as a privilege and not as a burden in the process of continuous reincarnations.²⁵⁹

The traditional beliefs of the Akan, Ewe and Ga people of Ghana involve the concept of reincarnation. Death is considered a moment when the human soul departs this world of pain and suffering to the spirit world for a transitional rest.

The concept of reincarnation among the Ga is deeply rooted in their traditional belief. The special feature is that the dead can be born again only in their own families, a grandfather as a grandson, or a dead first child as a second child. Thus childlessness remains a curse because it blocks the whole line of reincarnation.²⁶⁰ Ga notion of reincarnation can be easily linked to cyclical perception of time since the Ga word for reincarnation signifies a recurring cycle.

Another important aspect of the reincarnation among the Ga is the concept that birth in this world means death in the other and vice versa. Ancient Egyptians had the same idea as they believed that a person who died in this world was born again in the world of the dead. The Egyptian sun god Ra died every evening and was reborn again every morning and the ancient Egyptians consequently performed a series of resurrection rites.²⁶¹

The Ga believe that personal immortality takes two main forms: survival of death in a disembodied state, and renewed life in a different material body.²⁶² The concept of reincarnation is perceived as a cyclical motion among the Ga, when a death in one world is considered a birth in another. After death the soul finds itself in an ambiguous state since it has reached an incorporative period as an ancestor on one side, which is the preliminal period before birth on the other. There is a life after death and this life needs a place to go, to pass into a new phase of life through reincarnation. That world is accessible for the *susuma* (spirit-soul) through a journey that involves passing a river. A person departs to the world of the dead or ancestors and then returns in a new form, a new body with some marks, behaviour and gestures that resemble his ancestors so that the

259 Osafo K. Osei, *African Heritage of the Akan*, 53.

260 Margaret Field, *Religion and Medicine of the Ga People*, 197.

261 Arnold Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, 157.

262 Joyce Engmann, “Immortality and the Nature of Man in Ga Thought”, 154.

family would soon recognize his return to the world of living.²⁶³ The Ga people consider reincarnation possible only within the family of the deceased.²⁶⁴ As soon as they confirm his reincarnation they name the child after its departed predecessor. If he was recognized as a traditional priest from his previous life, he is supposed to take the same vocation in this or he might face difficulties in a form of sickness. If proper rites were performed the infant was brought up and educated in a fitting manner to replace the old fetish priest.²⁶⁵ In general they believe that this new infant is not the other person, but the same individual who has come back in another physical appearance.

A common name given to the child who reappeared as his grandfather is *Nii* (*Naa* for a grandmother), which does not mean only a grandfather but also a chief. It also represents a feature of the Ga naming system that applies alternate names every two generations. The Ga believe that their ancestors return to the Earth from time to time and when they want it, they reincarnate in the first-born grandchild. Sometimes it may happen that a grandson and a grandfather, as his previous incarnation, may be alive at the same time.²⁶⁶ Even though the Ga people see no inconsistency for such an untimely reincarnation by saying that they have the same *kla*, it may represent a problem from eschatological point of view, since two persons cannot share the same soul.

One of my informants explained several instances when some persons who are long gone were seen somewhere outside Accra and some in another country as community members of their new environment.²⁶⁷ This informant was not talking about ghosts but about people who have returned to Earth to finish their unaccomplished missions.

Another important conception of the Ga reincarnation system is the phenomenon of the “sky family”. Before coming to this world, every person belonged to the family in the sky, which is

263 According to the Ga traditional belief, the land of the dead is very similar to the earthly one.

264 As among the Ga, Akan and some other African ethnic groups the reincarnation within the same family is also known among some American and Australian natives. Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, 191.

265 Interview with Okyame Sikafo, 17/6/2016, 10.

266 Madeline Manoukian, *Akan and Ga-Adangme peoples of the Gold Coast*, 103.

267 Interview with Okyame Sikafo, 17/6/2016, 10.

supposed to remain nearer and dearer than any earthly relatives. The family on Earth are merely a guardian of a reincarnated *kla (susuma)*.²⁶⁸ The amount of *kla (susuma)* seems to be unalterable, though it may be withdrawn at times from circulation.²⁶⁹ The perception that the soul does not reincarnate reminds us of the concept of reaching Atman (universal soul) in Hinduism.

When Romer asked a Ga servant about reincarnation he received an interesting answer, “I have heard an old Negro sigh and wish that after his death he might become a rich European”, and when he asked why the servant, “I would rather be a poor Black than a poor White because a poor White must have the same superfluous things – shoes, stockings and clothing – as the rich and, therefore, must starve at times.” It must be noted that this Negro, like others, believed in reincarnation, and was convinced that his soul [would] travel to Europe and he would be born [again] as an European. There are those who believe that their souls travel in animals, birds or fish.”²⁷⁰

Other early writers also addressed the concept of life after death but did not refer to reincarnation. The modern Ga believe in reincarnation, but not in animal form.

When Romer asked a slave why he does not become a wealthy man or Frempong (a great Akim king) in his next life but rather a slave, he replied, “No, that is not possible, for I know that as often as I have been in the world I have been a slave, and as often as I come back, I must be a slave.”²⁷¹ From this answer one can get the impression that reincarnation among the 18th century Ga people did not enable people to be born in a higher caste in the next life (like Hindu in Asia).

The perception of reincarnation is so strongly rooted in the Ga society that even some Christian denominations accepted it as part of their liturgy. One of the African Indigenous Churches was named “Born Again Church”.²⁷² The name obviously implied the relation with traditional religion. From a more dubious point of view the belief of reincarnation among the Ga might stem

268 Margaret Field, *Religion and Medicine among the Ga People*, 97.

269 Ibid., 94.

270 Romer Ludewig Ferdinand, *A Reliable Account of the Coast of Guinea (1760)*, 107-108.

271 Ibid., 108.

272 Interview with Nii Aryee Quarshie I., 27/10/2016, 10.

from a particular wish to revive a certain person that might be fulfilled or it may lead to disappointment if the person develops a different character from his predecessor.

Some Ga people who are happy with their present life send messages to their forefathers inviting them or other souls to come back to Earth and live again with a good and prosperous livelihood which they were not familiar with during their own life.²⁷³

The traditional belief system of the Ga also included a lot of taboos, which if broken, were punishable by death. If a person accidentally broke a taboo, he might be saved by certain particular rites; but if a taboo was broken by his own fault or folly, the person died shortly thereafter.

Today the traditional belief is losing ground due to various interventions of Christianity, Islam, state administration, general education and other factors. Some shrines and groves still exist and traditional religious authorities such as *wulmei* or *wɔyei* still perform the majority of their rites, but their influence on the Ga society is insignificant compared to that from the pre-colonial era. Some of the Ga, even though they have turned to Christian faith, continue to believe in reincarnation. The Christian dogma, however, says that an individual only lives once and then he is faced with the judgement of God. Even though the Christian concept of heaven and hell is becoming dominant for those who were raised in a modern environment, the traditional conception of the afterword remains present to some extent.

The World of Ancestors

Worshipping of the ancestors, which is widely spread in Africa and Ghana, constitutes only a part of the religious complex and ritual institutions of a particular ethnic group. This religious system was rooted among the Ga in kinship and hereditary ties with extensions to rituals and supernatural sphere through symbolic expressions that maintained a permanent living – dead relation.

After death the whole point of the last journey is to become one of the ancestors.²⁷⁴ This

273 Interview with Chris Hesse, 21/9/2016, 10.

274 Kwasi Wiredu, "Death and the Afterlife in African Culture," 137.

status, however, cannot be achieved by death only, but requires a befitting burial with proper rites, provided by the descendants. According to Margaret Field, the soul of the dead wanders around its old haunts for about forty days. That is the period when the flesh from the skull decays and falls off. Then it crosses the river *Nsatsi*, but on the river bank its nose is broken. That is why the spirit of the dead speaks in nasal tones.²⁷⁵ The arrival place of the newly dead is known as a geographical area called *Azizanya*, a landscape where River Volta flows into the sea, representing a return to eternity.²⁷⁶ This reminds of a custom of an American Indian tribe who sent the corpse off in the canoe to be carried by the river to the sea. The river represents life, while entering the sea symbolizes the return to eternity.

This land of the dead had no attributes of heaven or hell, even though there was a general belief that *susuma* – a departed soul faces some reward or punishment for its positive and negative activities during life. These deeds, however, do not affect the next reincarnation as it is acknowledged in the Hindu concept of karma. After three days the dead soul may return to its home in the form of an invisible ancestor who is sometimes recognized in the form of a bat. An ever-present ancestor is respected, thanked, looked upon and occasionally fed with pieces of food.²⁷⁷ The ancestors requested the living to perform certain customary rites; otherwise they would become offended and might cause some trouble. It was possible to pacify their anger by observing certain ceremonies. In general, the dead ancestors were demanding only few services for the relationship with the living in a form of few drops of a ceremonial drink and few pieces of food that were dropped on the floor from time to time. In the past the water pot in the house should never be empty in case the dead family members came to drink.²⁷⁸ An ancestral soul can also be invoked when there is a problem, it can be consulted or asked for spiritual defence against evil emanations in order to appease the situation. These dead who are always around show themselves in different forms.²⁷⁹

275 Margaret Field, *Religion and Medicine among the Ga People*, 202.

276 Joyce Engmann, "Immortality and the Nature of Man in Ga Thought," 165.

277 Margaret Field, *Religion and Medicine among the Ga People*, 203.

278 Diana Gladys Azu: *The Ga Family and Social Change, African Social Research Documents*, 48.

279 Interview with H.N.A. Wellington, 22/6/2016, 11-12.

In order to become an ancestor the deceased must have lived a virtuous life, worthy of emulation, i.e., must have been honest, kind, hard-working, respectful and respectable, had gone through all passage rites, had married and had children and had died a natural death at an old age. People who died an unnatural death through accident, suicide, drowning or “unclean diseases” such as epilepsy, small pox, leprosy or madness do not qualify as ancestors.²⁸⁰ This classification and the general perception of the ancestors are common among all peoples of Southern Ghana.

In the traditional Ga society, people never drank or ate without dropping a small portion on the floor for their ancestors because of the belief that the dead are always present watching over, and to some extent, control the living, their morals and their behaviour. These ever-present watchful dead had the power to strike or bless the living.²⁸¹ The Ga believe that their family houses are inhabited by family gods and ancestors, thus forming an ancestral home, a place where rites of passage and other rituals are performed and also providing basis of identity and legacy for future generations.²⁸² Such a traditional belief, closely connected to their world view, is not only a feature of the Ga, but also their kin Adangme and neighbouring Akan and Ewe ethnic groups. The cult of the ancestors appears in various forms and remains an institution traditionally linked to the family-kinship relations, even though it does not dominate the society as it used to in the pre-colonial times.

There was a particular rite dedicated to the veneration of ancestors in Jamestown, which was described by one of my informants:

“In a manner of celebrating people's birthday, they decided to celebrate the departed members of the family and chiefs of that time. They carved up to ten statues of these people from wood, dressed them in proper cloths and invited the children and the rest of the family to come around. The statues of the commoners and the chiefs were dressed in original uniforms and

280 Kofi Semanu Atsu Adzei, *The Rituals Associated with the Sacred Paramount Stool of Anfoega Traditional Area*, (MPhil thesis in African Studies, University of Ghana, Legon, 2011), 63.

281 Margaret Field, *Religion and Medicine among the Ga People*, 196-197.

282 Deborah Atobrah, *Caring for the Chronically Sick within Ga Families; A Study of Modern Innovations and Traditional Practices*, 108.

cloths with the same texture and design and adorned with bracelets and anklets. Under the statues they wrote the names and equip them with their pictures, so that everybody knew who is who. When they were remembering the kings in this manner, they bought a cow, put it on a car and roam the entire town with it. When they returned, they slaughtered the cow and celebrate with it.”²⁸³

This particular rite that is not a very old one according to the description (as they used a car) and that was performed every year or every two years, testifies of the depth and extent of the belief in the ancestors. Detailed portraying of the deceased was only possible with thorough memory that brought the images back from the oblivion. Since the children were also presented their ancestors together with local history, one can recognize an educational element within this rite. The conclusion of the rite was the sacrifice of a cow, thereby the largest possible sacrifice since the abolition of human sacrifice, which meant that it was the Ga royalty that was also represented by some of the statues invented this special ritual. The carved statues for this rite were later offered for lease to other Ga towns.

Even though today the extreme traditional belief is mostly outmoded, it persists in some remote villages. In the pre-colonial times it was an important tool for social control, used by the priests and the elders of the society. A belief that ancestors can read people's minds and would punish anybody who would plan an evil thing was very much present among commoners. On the other hand the ancestors protected the living and the land of the dead.²⁸⁴ They would appear in a dream or as ghosts by sending messages or demanding their wishes from the living. The ancestral shades may, however, also act as intermediaries between their descendants and divine beings. Every chief was also obliged to apply guidance of the ancestors if he was to rule wisely through the divine intervention.

In the 1930s the belief in ancestors was still there even though it lost some influence due to Christianity and Islam that were on their way. Margaret Field's informant answered the question as

283 Interview with Okyame Sikafo, 17/6/2016, 15-16.

284 Interview with Chris Abotchie, 19/5/2016, 1.

to what was the difference between a law and a custom, “Anyone will break a law if he can do so without being found out, but nobody wants to break a custom. If you break one wilfully, you die.”²⁸⁵ This statement, however, does not reflect the actual situation from that time, when there was a sublime war between the supporters of traditions on one side and the new Western-educated, mainly Christian elite on the other. The Christians, once baptised and under protection of their God, were not afraid of any spiritual punishments of their ancestors any more. I received ambiguous answers from my informants as to whether the Ga feared the ancestors. Some said that they had absolutely feared them in the pre-colonial era, but not presently due to the conversion to Christianity, while others said that they rather respect them as they had respected their grandparents.²⁸⁶ Reverence towards ancestors also came from the belief that they are closely linked to the gods.

The Ga, however, are very much afraid of ghosts and their mysterious appearance which is not only a part of their mythology, but also because numerous stories about them were also incorporated into the popular film industry of modern Ghana.

The traditionalists are trying to keep their rites unaffected and they continue with worshipping their ancestors. If they are financially stable, they continue to perform rituals for the departed for many years. The paramount chief of the Ga-Mashie, the Alata *Maɣtse* is presently 97 years old. His relatives and subjects celebrate his birthday in a traditional manner every year and will continue to do so even when he is dead.²⁸⁷ Presently there is much less worshipping of ancestors, but the Ga people still venerate them by believing that they will come and help them.

Hɔmɔwɔ Festival

Hɔmɔwɔ, a harvest ritual, in Ga literally means hooting at hunger and its origin dates back to the 16th century, when the Ga people occupied the Accra plains. Famine was frequent in that period

285 Margaret Field, *Religion and Medicine among the Ga People*, 197.

286 Interview with Okyame Sikafo, 17/6/2016, 10.

287 Interview with Okyame Sikafo, 17/6/2016, 8-9.

until they started planting maize which provided a rich harvest. At harvesting time they were able to spend all the stored grains from the previous year since the new harvest brought rich crops. They organized a celebration by using the entire stock of grains from the preceding year thus ridiculing famine which could not trouble them anymore.

In the pre-colonial times the period of *Hɔmɔwɔ* rites varied from town to town, each of them having some specific features and a different extent of celebration. At places where the *kpele* gods dominated, they performed the main annual religious feast called *Kpledzo*, for maize planting and harvesting, with greater pomp than *Hɔmɔwɔ*.²⁸⁸ The fundamental common features, however, remained the same. In addition to liberal or almost anarchical atmosphere and open attitude renouncing hierarchical positions of the elders, the emphasis was on honouring ancestors and on communication with them. It represented a rare site of Ga cultural unity that was otherwise uncommon. The most important ritual that reflected this unity was the invoking of the spirit and blessings of the famous Ga king Okai Koi who died in a battle in the 17th century. This king is still a symbol of unity, centralized power and the Ga greatness which has not been fully recuperated among the Ga. Nevertheless, the Ga showed no signs of unification since two of the Ga-Mashie quarters claimed supremacy over his graveside in 1920.²⁸⁹ At that time a new elaborate and defiant feature of *Hɔmɔwɔ* was introduced as a response of inter-quarter conflicts. The Asere people of Ga-Mashie started annual processions to the tomb of their *Maɲtse* (Okai Koi) who died in traumatic circumstances. His mausoleum became an object of veneration for the Asere people who were in a constant conflict with the neighbouring Abola, due to the supremacy of their chieftaincy status.²⁹⁰

Every year, before the start of *Hɔmɔwɔ*, local chiefs proclaim a 30 days' ban on drumming and any noise making which, according to the traditional belief, protects the new crops in the planting season. During that time funeral celebrations are also suspended.²⁹¹ This ban, however,

288 Madeline Manoukian, *Akan and Ga-Adangme peoples of the Gold Coast*, 98.

289 John Kwadwo Osei-Tutu, "Space" and the Marking of "Space" in Ga History, Culture and Politics, *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana*, New Series, No. 4/5 (2000-2001), 58, 67.

290 John Parker, "The Cultural Politics of Death & Burial in Early Colonial Accra", 217.

291 Victor Mensah Clottey, "Music and Dance of Oshie Ceremony in the *Hɔmɔwɔ* Festival among the Gas," (Diploma, Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, Legon, 1968), 1.

initiated protests especially among Christians who use music in their churches, and brought conflicts on a political and national level.²⁹² This conflict remains unresolved in present.

On *Hɔmɔwɔ* Friday the private rituals were performed at ancestral homes, the ancestral burial sites were decorated with red camwood paste to keep the evil spirits away; while on Saturday the ancestors were fed by the sprinkling of *kpekpei* (ancestor's food prepared from new season's maize and palm oil) on their graves and throughout the ancestral house.²⁹³ The spirits always eat first and the mortals later.²⁹⁴ An important element was the *Oshi* ritual performed on *Hɔmɔwɔ* Saturday, which was forbidden due to obscene dancing involved.²⁹⁵ Sunday was the day of great lamentation, when revered ancestors and those who had passed away in the previous year were remembered with the mournful sounds of wailing, horn calls and drumming.²⁹⁶ In Accra it is known as the “Day of Remembrance“, which serves to reaffirm the ties among the dead and the living Ga kinspeople.²⁹⁷

An important part of *Hɔmɔwɔ* is the worshipping of ancestors in a form of ancestral rites, which come in a form of drumming, dancing, and pouring of libation of a particularly dressed people in their festive mood. The whole festival is not only about happy celebrating, but also of mourning the departed, especially those who passed away in the previous year. These were especially mourned with suitable dirges by their relatives who were absent from home, but have returned for the festivity. One of my informants stated that some decades ago you could see everybody crying as a part of intensive mourning on Thursday and Friday before *Hɔmɔwɔ*.²⁹⁸ During *Hɔmɔwɔ*, however, death is a taboo and if somebody dies during this sacred period, he is buried without rites. Even though the *wulɔmɔ* (fetish priest) was forbidden to come in touch with the dead, there was one exception where an *Akotia wulɔmɔ*²⁹⁹ conducted the funeral and the

292 John Kwadwo Osei-Tutu, “Space” and the Marking of “Space”, 75-77.

293 John Parker, “The Cultural Politics of Death & Burial in Early Colonial Accra”, 216; John Kwadwo Osei-Tutu, “Space” and the Marking of “Space,” 58.

294 Interview with Naa Ohemea Bortsoo, 26/9/2016, 8.

295 PRAAD, ADM 11/1437. Case No. 25/1930. Subject: Effect of Statute Law on Native Customary Law.

296 John Parker, “The Cultural Politics of Death & Burial in Early Colonial Accra,” 216.

297 Marion Kilson, *Dancing with the Gods*, 91-92.

298 Interview with Cefas Adjei Pinto, 11/11/2016, 9.

299 *Akotia Wulomo* is a traditional priest of a chief deity from Berekuso.

cleansing rites for an individual who died during the holy period of *Hɔmɔwɔ*. In this case the body was buried within less than six hours after the announcement of death.³⁰⁰

Although ancestral shades are invoked in all traditional Ga prayers, *Hɔmɔwɔ* is the only ritual addressed solely to ancestors.³⁰¹ According to the traditional belief system the ancestors work together with gods and deities for the good of the community in a complementary way which is expressed during the festival times.³⁰² During *Hɔmɔwɔ* people not only sing songs portraying the cruelty of death, but also those of invocation and exultation in order to induce the gods to descend upon the incarnates and urge them to fulfill their missions.³⁰³ Even though the traditional religion is in decline and its priests do not possess any significant authority, the festivals such as *Hɔmɔwɔ* maintain the old culture that blends with contemporary one. According to Marion Kilson in 1973, 95% of the Ga people still observed *Hɔmɔwɔ* and it maintains its popularity up to the present times.³⁰⁴ Initially set as a religious festival, *Hɔmɔwɔ* has become a social and political event in present era.

Belief about Stools

The ancestral stools were not only a symbol of chief's authority, but were also venerated regularly through certain rituals, which promoted social and political unity of the people.

In the Jamestown palace of Alata-Ngleshi *Maɲtse* there is a custom of purifying the building when somebody dies. Since the funerals are usually concluded on Sundays, they use the Monday, which is associated with the traditional stool, for this cleansing rite. They bought a sheep or a ram, slaughtered it and mixed its blood with sea water and herbs. This mixture was used to cleanse the stool by sprinkling it to the stool room and around the entire house to remove impurity.³⁰⁵

300 Akuffo-Badoo W.S., "The Music of Kpa," (Diploma in African Music, University of Ghana, Legon, 1967), 8, 62-63.

301 Marion Kilson, *Dancing with the Gods*, 93.

302 Irene Odotei, "Festivals in Ghana: Continuity, Transformation and Politicisation of Tradition," in *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana*, New Series, No.6 (2002), Historical Society of Ghana, 18.

303 Akuffo-Badoo W.S., "The Music of Kpa," 70.

304 Marion Kilson, *African Urban Kinsmen, The Ga of Central Accra*, 76.

305 Interview with Okyame Sikafo, 17/6/2016, 4.

In a case of a royal death the stool previously occupied by a noble person had to be properly cleansed in a way described above and kept somewhere safe, before it was going to be used by the successor. Cleansing is necessary due to the belief that a dead person might have left something on a stool.³⁰⁶

At the Alata palace there is also a custom of feeding ancestral stools on Mondays and Fridays, except in a case of death. If the royal funeral is planned on Saturday, the stools are not fed on Friday. Instead they are being told that impurity in the form of death has befallen the house. If all the funeral rites are completed by Sunday, the stools are fed again on Monday.³⁰⁷

In traditional Ga religion there was a belief that a ghost might sit on the stool at night, thus harming the people in the house. That is why they always put all stools horizontally during the night to prevent an unwelcome ghost to sit on it.³⁰⁸ Stools formerly used by *wulɔmɔ* or *wɔyoo* were not used again. They were stored at a particular place because no one was allowed to sit on them anymore, since it was believed that not only the spirit or the soul of the dead would definitely come around someday, but also the *jemawɔŋ* - a god to which a priest or priestess had served during their lifetime. Thus the stool was kept far away from the living who did not have the capacity as the deceased priest to deal with supernatural forces. The commoners believed that the presence of a spirit or god might cause havoc in the house or harm them in another way.³⁰⁹

Among the Krobo, if the deceased was possessed during his lifetime, a small native stool was carried by elderly women to the cemetery, where it was smashed to pieces and buried within the coffin or upon it.³¹⁰

Stools still play their traditional symbolical role in chieftaincy affairs but former taboos related to them have mostly disappeared.

306 Interview with Chris Hesse, 21/9/2016, 4.

307 Interview with Okyame Sikafo, 17/6/2016, 5.

308 Interview with H.N.A. Wellington, 22/6/2016, 5.

309 Interviews with Naa Ohemea Bortsoo., 26/9/2016, 5; Cefas Adjei Pinto, 11/11/2016, 4.

310 Hugo Huber, *The Krobo, Traditional Social and Religious Life of a West African People*, 203.

Cemeteries and Mausoleums

In the traditional African culture the cemeteries were rare and played only a minor role in funeral rites. The graves were visited only when the burial took place and were later abandoned for good, since the living did not tend them. The people of Ivory Coast as well as the Ga people buried the deceased on different spots regarding the type of death.³¹¹ In the pre-colonial Ga society it was strictly determined where the particular dead should be buried – the ones who had qualified as ancestors were buried in the house, while others were buried out of the town's boundaries. The introduction of cemeteries brought major changes that applied also to spiritual significance of the burial place that suddenly lost its connection with the living. The Christians claimed that no separation should occur in such graveyards between those who died “good” and “bad” deaths.³¹²

As I said in Chapter Two, in the traditional Ga society the elderly people who have reached a status of an ancestor were buried in their houses where they lived; in the courtyard, behind the house, at the entrance of the house or, most frequently, under the floor in the corner of their bedroom. They were also conscious of the economy of space. When a number of elderly people died they were buried vertically – standing, instead of horizontally thus saving some space.³¹³ The bedroom with the grave under the floor was put back to use three weeks after the burial.

During the Akwamu invasion (1677-1680), enemy soldiers dug up every house, where they knew a Ga *caboceer* had once lived. This was because the Ga *caboceers* were usually buried in their own houses with some of their wealth.³¹⁴

In 1842 a Danish merchant, Joseph Wulff, following his last will and testament, was buried in his own house at Osu and his grave can still be seen in the basement, together with that of his daughter.³¹⁵ Since he was a Jew he preferred to be buried in a traditional custom of indigenous people than to be interred at a Christian cemetery.

311 Silvijia Sovič, “Smrt starca ne pokvari smrti: Šege ob smrti pri plemenu Agni,” (Essay, Mislinja, 1988), 50.

312 Sandra E. Greene, *Sacred Sites and the Colonial Encounte*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 78.

313 Interview with H.N.A. Wellington, 22/6/2016, 4.

314 Irene Odotei (Quaye), “The Ga and their Neighbours, 1600-1747,” 126.

315 Romer Ludewig Ferdinand, *A Reliable Account of the Coast of Guinea. (1760)*, 184.

Intramural sepulture was still in practice in 1859, not only for pagans, but also for the educated elite who wanted to be buried beneath their houses. Joseph Wullf was not the only important person who wished to be buried under his property. Accra's leading Euro-African merchant, James Bannerman wanted to be buried under his residence. His wish was fulfilled but his family demanded his remains be exhumed and were then reburied at the Wesleyan cemetery in 1912. The Gold Coast colonial government passed its first ordinance requiring the establishment of public cemeteries in 1878, while local chiefs were authorized to develop local cemeteries also in all villages and hamlets in 1911. The site of such cemetery was supposed to be at least 100 yards away from any house or water supply.³¹⁶ Intramural sepulture was officially proscribed in Accra in 1888 after the outbreak of bubonic plague, but it took a lot of time and effort of the colonial authorities before the majority of the Ga people started to use public cemeteries. Several attempts of the colonial administration were refused also leading to a physical resistance of the Asere town quarter of Ga-Mashie.³¹⁷ Protests persisted because of the Ga belief that a burial at a cemetery would disable a smooth passage of the deceased and it would also disable their communication with the living through libation. To them burial at a cemetery was equal to burial in the bush which was regarded as a kind of damnation for the soul of the dead individual who was suddenly not allowed to stay with his family in the compound. This problem spread through all Ga towns. In La, for example, the chief, following the orders of colonial government, decided to use the place where the fishermen dried their nets as a cemetery. The people were dissatisfied and it led to the destoolment of the chief.³¹⁸ Reindorf reported that some older Christians, who felt that death is drawing near, abandoned the church in fear of being interred in a common burial ground and returned to their own houses.³¹⁹ With a growing number of converts into Christianity in the 1890s this fear gradually diminished, when these new Christians accepted the burial at the Basel Mission cemetery at Osu.

316 Sandra E. Greene, *Sacred Sites and the Colonial Encounter*, XVI., 71-72.

317 John Parker, "The Cultural Politics of Death & Burial in Early Colonial Accra," 212- 214.

318 Interview with Irene Odotei 17/10/2016, 7.

319 BMA D-1, 48/62, Reindorf to Committee, Christiansborg, 16.1.1889. cited in John Parker, "The Cultural Politics of Death & Burial in Early Colonial Accra", 214.

This cemetery was almost full by 1934 and it was later extended. It had sections for Europeans and the Presbyterian mission, while the old part was turned into a high-standard garden by the Ladies League.³²⁰ Beside the Christiansborg castle, the Osu's impressive burial ground is the only visible legacy of the Danish colonialists.

Cemeteries were needed not only for the natives but also for the Europeans in the forts who were previously buried within the precincts of the castles. Soon there was no room left and European cemeteries were built outside the castles of Cape Coast, Elmina and Accra during the 19th century.³²¹

According to some of my informants, the Ga people of Jamestown sometimes still bury important people under their houses. If the last wish of a dying chief is to be buried in his room, his subjects would fulfil it. The Ministry of Health will allow such a burial if the grave is at least seven feet deep, so that rainwater or water from a broken pipe that might reach the grave would not pollute the compound.³²² Such intramural burial is performed in great secrecy around midnight, so that most of people do not know about it.³²³ The coffin prepared for the cemetery is emptied and filled with clothes, some heavy object and sometimes a fowl in order to perform the official funeral the next day where they bury a coffin without a body. After the undercover burial in the room the floor is cemented so that nobody could find out the secret.

The intramural burial is also still present in some remote villages where they bury their dead in the obscure places of their houses.³²⁴ Both in the village and in the city, however, such a burial is rather an exception than a rule. Common people now bury their deceased at public cemeteries and if they can afford it they place a tombstone on the grave in order to commemorate the person and express symbolic immortality.

Law-breakers, slaves, other marginalized citizens and those who died an unnatural death

320 PRAAD CSO 11/17/05. Case No. 427/33, Subject: Government Cemetery at Christiansborg – extension of.

321 Albert Van Dantzig, *Forts and Castles of Ghana*, (Accra: Sedco Publishing Limited, 1980), 86.

322 Interview with Chris Hesse, 21/9/2016, 3.

323 Interview with Okyame Sikafo, 17/6/2016, 3.

324 Interview with Cefas Adjei Pinto, 11/11/2016, 7.

were not allowed to be buried in their ancestral houses and their courtyards. Instead, as already mentioned earlier on, they were deposited outside the town's boundaries, usually in the forest or bush. In colonial Accra they were buried in the area called "Ridge". These shallow graves were sometimes dug by wild animals such as pigs or hyenas which devoured the remains of the dead body.³²⁵ There were even some cases of posthumous maleficence that demanded exhumation of the offender from its "hallowed repository", burning the body and scattering his ashes on the *husunaa* (town boundary) amid execrations of the populace.³²⁶ The town's boundary was spiritually hazardous due to the accumulation of all this "unclean" deceased people buried there but it may have also served as a place to discard unwanted evil from a living being. For example, a woman who had repeated miscarriages would go there with *wulɔmɔ* or medicine man to perform certain rituals at this northern Accra boundary of the town in order to get rid of her misfortune.³²⁷ The burial in this "evil forest" was quite different than the casual ritual. The body was wrapped in a dark cloth and carried to the place by traditional priests or priestesses who poured libation, put the corpse on the bare ground and returned home.³²⁸ These old town boundaries have been urbanized after World War II without any consideration of traditional authorities consequently losing its spiritual significance.

In the pre-colonial times there used to be an old European cemetery at Ga-Mashie called *Abrofu Esie*, meaning "Englishmen cemetery", which was later replaced by a Catholic church with Catholic school, and the first commoners' cemetery was at the location of today's "timber market". In the colonial times the Methodists, the Wesleyans and the Anglicans also built their own cemeteries. And so did the Muslims whose cemetery was called *Awusa goo* or *Hausa goo*.³²⁹

In the middle of the 20th century when the above mentioned cemeteries filled up the government built new cemeteries for Ga-Mashie people, located at Awudome, Odorkor and Mile

325 Interview with Cefas Adjei Pinto, 11/11/2016, 4.

326 John Parker, "The Cultural Politics of Death & Burial in Early Colonial Accra," 209-210.

327 Margaret Field, *Religion and Medicine of the Ga People*, 161.

328 Ako Adjei, "Mortuary Usages of the Ga People of the Gold Coast," 97.

329 Interview with Nii Aryee Quarshie I., 27/10/2016, 5.

Eleven. When the Odorkor cemetery became full, they abandoned it and started building residential houses there, while the area of Mile Eleven cemetery was recently replaced by a huge shopping mall. The old Awudome cemetery was later fenced and because it was overloaded they introduced three-foot burial instead of six feet, causing some coffins springing up from the ground. Since there is no other free space around Ga-Mashie area they still use it today even though they were supposed to relocate it long ago. Other Ga towns, such as Teshie and Nungua, have their own private cemeteries.³³⁰ During the *Hɔmɔwɔ* some people visit smaller and bigger mausoleums and sprinkle the cult food *kpekpei* to feed the dead spirits.³³¹ In Nungua there is also a sacred grove that contains some statues of chief-priests, the living ones and those who had passed away.³³² The Ga people of La, Teshie and Tema also have their traditional burial grounds called chief's cemeteries.³³³

With the introduction of mortuary practice mid-1890s, some Ga leaders chose to be buried in specially constructed *Mamprobi* (mausoleums) on the outskirts of Accra, rather than in the common cemeteries. However, there are no certain historical records as to when the change of Accra ritual topography shifted towards Western manners.³³⁴ The earliest recorded mausoleum burial in Jamestown was that of Sempe *Maɲtse* Allotei in 1895, followed by more famous Ga-*Maɲtse* Tackie Tawia from neighbouring Abola quarter in 1902 who was the paramount chief for forty years. His funeral was attended by a crowd of 10,000 people and became a catalyst for change in mortuary practices in the following decades. Mausoleum burial remained reserved only for “Maɲtsemei” (highest chiefs) and some high-ranking dignitaries, but in general it increased the politicization of death and burial in the colonial city.³³⁵ Another issue arose when a chief was destooled and there was no legislation stipulating whether he could be interred in a mausoleum or not. Usually the destooled chiefs were buried as commoners outside mausoleums.³³⁶

330 Interviews with Nii Akwei Bonsu III, 16/3/2016, 6; Nii Aryee Quarshie I., 27/10/2016, 5.

331 Interview with H.N.A. Wellington, 22/6/2016, 4-5.

332 Interview with Naa Ohemea Bortsoo, 26/9/2016, 4.

333 Interview with Irene Odotei 17/10/2016, 7-8.

334 John Parker, “The Cultural Politics of Death & Burial in Early Colonial Accra,” 214.

335 Ibid., 215.

336 Interview with Emmanuel Evans Anfom, 13/9/2016, 5.



The people of the deceased chief Tackie in Accra³³⁷

Another royal mausoleum for the departed *Maɲtsemei* was located on the mound bordering on Agboglobshie near the railway station.³³⁸ While some mausoleums were built for paramount chiefs around Accra, the royal cemeteries were scattered around, far removed from town and were reserved only for Asere, Osu and Otublohum city quarters by 1933. The British administration attempted to persuade the chiefs to discontinue burying anywhere.³³⁹ In 1934, the Ga *Maɲtse*, Jamestown *Maɲtse*, Abola *Maɲtse*, Gbese *Maɲtse* and Sempe *Maɲtse* agreed to bury their dead at the new cemeteries made outside city boundaries, west of the Korle Gonno.³⁴⁰ Even though the administration planned to bury the deceased Ga nobles at plots within public cemeteries, the chiefs insisted on having separate cemeteries for them. Due to the vicinity of residential houses, the Sempe cemetery and Chorkor (Jamestown stool cemetery) were closed down in 1944, except for the

337 Picture taken in 1903 at the funeral of *Maɲtse* Tackie Tawia. Source: Basel Mission Archives.

338 PRAAD ADM 11/923.

339 PRAAD CSO 467/33. Subject: Cemeteries for Chiefs and Private Families – Declaration of as Public Cemeteries.

340 Ibid.

holders of *Manɔsɛ* office.³⁴¹ Royal cemeteries were then built for Ga-Mashie chiefs and the one in Jamestown is called “Ojoegor”.³⁴² Another informant stated that in Jamestown they have built a walled royal cemetery called “Odzoogɔɔŋ” or Odzoo’s cemetery reserved only for their chiefs and traditional priests.³⁴³ The area is also known as “White Mamprobi”.³⁴⁴ While the commoner cemeteries filled up quickly, the royal ones still remain in use since the chiefs are only few. Mausoleums are of different types, some are very small containing only boxes with nails and hair, while others are larger with exposed tombstones.³⁴⁵ These tombstones with epitaphs for the chiefs were erected long after the chiefs were buried.³⁴⁶ The coastal area of Ga-Mashie had a special way of constructing a chief’s tomb. While the grave for a commoner was simply dug out and then covered with sand, the chief’s grave was dug and some stairs leading inside were cemented. The first chief was buried at the bottom, the following at his side and so on until the tomb was full. With the introduction of hygienic legislation this was later abandoned.³⁴⁷

The question whether their bodies were actually deposited there remains open. Since the coffin was nailed before it was taken to the cemetery nobody could check what was inside. The same issue was described by Margaret Field 80 years ago when she stated that “even if the zealous sanitary authorities were to challenge the coffin and find that it duly contained the corpse, it is doubtful where the remains would finally come to rest.”³⁴⁸ The government learned of this and suspected coffins were opened by sanitary and other authorized officials, regardless of unpleasant consequences.³⁴⁹

Another issue that evolved not so long ago was the double ownership of the Ga land, which brought about conflicts and involves many authorities who claim its possession. Unclear status prompted reintroduction of intramural burial, where an individual always rests within the family

341 PRAAD CSO 11/17/25. Case No. 3686, Subject: Cemeteries in Accra and District – discontinuance of burials in.

342 Interviews with Nii Akwei Bonsu III, 16/3/2016, 6; Nii Aryee Quarshie I., 27/10/2016, 5.

343 Interview with Okyame Sikafo, 17/6/2016, 4.

344 Interview with Nii Aryee Quarshie I., 27/10/2016, 5.

345 Interview with Emmanuel Evans Anfo, 13/9/2016, 4.

346 Interview with Cefas Adjei Pinto, 11/11/2016, 15.

347 Interview with Nii Aryee Quarshie I., 27/10/2016, 5.

348 Margaret Field, *Religion and Medicine among the Ga People*, 199.

349 K.B. Asante, *Voice from Afar*. (Accra: Publications Unit, 2003), 188.

territory.³⁵⁰

The ritual of intramural burial was modified in the 1930s by burying a miniature coffin of relics which included toe- and finger-nails, a piece of hair and a sacred sponge used to wash the corpse so that the spirit would remain at its original home.³⁵¹ In a case of unnatural death, a goat was killed in order to purify the house and its fat was mixed with the coils of sponge, hair and nails and added to the box. The remains of the goat were distributed among the relatives, and the person who accepted the head and legs was responsible for funeral costs.³⁵² According to some of my informants the hair and the nails are still buried³⁵³ in the dead person's house, but another said that the practice no longer exists.³⁵⁴

The Ga people gradually accepted British legislation which offered three burial options: church cemetery, public cemetery or mausoleum. Even though sanitary inspections checked the coffins, it was still impossible to control the actual burial of the remains within cemeteries.³⁵⁵ The innovations were mainly accepted, but the real performances of the burial remained hidden under the sublime veil of the Ga traditions. The old, filled-up cemeteries have been abandoned and the land is now frequently used for new commercial buildings as in the case of the already mentioned Mile Eleven cemetery. Some cemeteries are divided into the Muslim, the traditionalist and the Christian section, while the latter could be further subdivided into Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian, Pentecostal, Apostolic and other areas. Every corpse, however, had to be registered at “the Registrar of Births and Deaths” before being buried at any cemetery, due to the threat of potential epidemics which could jeopardize public health. The former separation of those who died “bad” deaths was completely abandoned, since the public cemeteries disapprove such detachment.

One of my informants opened a question of contradiction between the Ga reverence for the

350 Roberta Bonetti, “Coffins for wear and consumption: Abebuu adekai as “memory makers among the Ga of Ghana,” 271.

351 John Parker, “The Cultural Politics of Death & Burial in Early Colonial Accra,” 215.

352 Margaret Field, *Religion and Medicine among the Ga People*, 198-199.

353 Interviews with Nii Aryee Quarshie I., 27/10/2016, 6.; Naa Ohemea Bortsoo, 26/9/2016, 5.; Emmanuel Evans Anfom, 13/9/2016, 5; Chris Hesse, 21/9/2016, 5.

354 Interviews with Okyame Sikafo, 17/6/2016, 5; Cefas Adjei Pinto, 11/11/2016, 5; H.N.A. Wellington, 22/6/2016, 6.

355 Margaret Field, *Religion and Medicine among the Ga People*, 199.

ancestors and the management of their resting place. On the one hand they pay such a great respect to the dead, but on the other they misuse the graves at the cemeteries. Why do the Ga value their ancestors so much but they do not show any respect to the place where they are resting?³⁵⁶ This issue came from the informant's own experience when he travelled to Germany and was impressed by excellent care of their cemeteries compared to the very poor treatment of the Ghanaian ones. Because the Ga venerate their ancestors only in a spiritual way, they disregard the physical appearance of the place where their bones are buried. They maltreat their burial grounds since they do not represent the ancestors with whom they communicate through libation or other rites which are present everywhere in the invisible sphere.

Animal and Human Sacrifice

In the period of an independent Ga state, before the Akwamu invasion in 1677, a cruel and tyrannical regent queen Dode Akabi ruled the Ga kingdom at Ayawaso before her son Okai Koi succeeded her.³⁵⁷ She ordered their subjects to dig a deep well but angry people decided to lure her into an unfinished shaft and bury her alive. After that incident the ritual burial of live animals, or according to some sources even human beings was used to make powerful medicines or protection against epidemics, war, death, etc.³⁵⁸ After a burial they built white conical mounds made of clay, stone or cement called *otutu* (pl. *otutui*)³⁵⁹ to mark a burial place of these allegedly strong protective medicines.³⁶⁰ Another *otutu* was raised at Mandzrano by the Ga from Teshi who sacrificed a young girl, dressed as for an initiation, in order to seal the oath with settlers at Gbugbla (Prampram).³⁶¹ There was also a rite of burying a pregnant woman alive under the house called *gbatsu* (foretelling house) which later served as an oracle.³⁶² Among many African cultures the

356 Interview with H.N.A. Wellington, 22/6/2016, 16.

357 Carl Christian Reindorf, *History of the Gold Coast and Asante*, 29-30 (Parker mistakenly quotes p.18-19).

358 Ibid., 29-30.

359 *Otutu* was originally a fetish with its own priest that served as a war fetish among the Ga and had the power to kill enemies and heal wounded Ga soldiers. It was officially forbidden in 1907. PRAAD, ADM 11/1437.

360 Margaret Field, *Religion and Medicine of the Ga People*, 121.

361 Age E. Kwei, Adzei E. Anang, T. Adjei Bekoe, *Teshi, Administrative and Cultural Practices*, 73.

362 Madeline Manoukian, *Akan and Ga-Adangme Peoples of the Gold Coast*, 95.

extent of sacrifice represents a strong symbolical meaning of the religious ritual which is strictly categorized. Therefore an egg is the smallest sacrifice when asking to receive a little favour from the traditional gods or deities. A level higher is a chicken or a fowl that is most often killed in minor rituals. This classification continues with a goat or a sheep, followed by a cow as an expensive and precious sacrifice. At the top of this hierarchy is a human being. According to Margaret Field a sacrifice of a human being was the most precious thing someone can find, therefore a medicine made out of it must have been stronger than any other medicine.³⁶³ Some *otutui* may still be found at courtyards of some family houses.³⁶⁴

The custom of human sacrifice as a part of chief's funeral was an established practice in the neighbouring Akan kingdoms and those of the Slave Coast (present Benin) to the east.³⁶⁵ Asante used to sacrifice small children to their war fetish in order to prevail on the battlefield.³⁶⁶ In the case of royal death the Asante declared a curfew and the Asantehene's (Asante king) guards patrolled the streets in search of human beings for funeral sacrifice. Any person caught on the street or during the procession on a way to the burial grounds was immediately slain in order to be buried with the king as his retinue to the other world.³⁶⁷ All wives, servants and some high court officials of the deceased king or chief were also sacrificed in order to escort and continue to serve their master.³⁶⁸

In the case of the Ga mortuary ritual of a chief or sub-chief the practice of human sacrifice was somehow different. The victims were neither casual people from the street nor *Manɔse's* wives; usually they were his personal servants or slaves who were killed in order to guide their chief to the afterlife. Their heads were turned towards the direction of imagined afterlife and used as his retinue to lead him to the world of the ancestors. They might have been the same servants who were

363 Margaret Field, *Religion and Medicine of the Ga People*, 121.

364 From funeral attendance at Kpone 1/10/2016.

365 John Parker, "The Cultural Politics of Death & Burial in Early Colonial Accra," 210-211.

366 Madeline Manoukian, *Akan and Ga-Adangme Peoples of the Gold Coast*, 57.

367 Interview with Okyame Sikafo, 17/6/2016, 3.

368 The kings of the ancient kingdom of Ghana had a custom of burying servants with their sovereign, the sacrifices and libation offered to him. El Fasi M. ed., *General History of Africa III, Africa from the Seventh to Eleventh Century*, (Paris: Heinemann California Unesco, 1988), 134; During the period of Chinese dynasty Shang 2000BC, war captives and slaves were killed with big bronze axes in order to accompany the deceased king. Janez J. Švajncer, *Vojna zgodovina*. (Ljubljana: DZS, 1998), 67-68.

carrying him on a palanquin during his lifetime and were expected to escort him because “the chief does not walk alone”.³⁶⁹ Only close relatives and dignitaries attended such a funeral and burial ceremony which took place in the night in the secrecy of a dark forest. One of my informants mentioned that this practice that did not exist before among the Ga people came from the Fante people of Winneba.³⁷⁰ Margaret Field reports that the Ga method was to bury the victim alive, which alludes to similarities with the *otutu* ritual described above.³⁷¹

Fante chiefs of Cape Coast and neighbouring areas signed a declaration in 1844 with which they submitted to British law and their judicial authorities who thus became responsible to try any offender:

“Human sacrifices and other barbarous customs such as panyaring (kidnapping) are abominations and contrary to the law.”³⁷² Similar treaties were signed in 1852 by chiefs of Afflowhoo (Aflao in Volta Region), Adaffie (Greater Accra Region) and Elmina (Central Region), all renouncing the practice of human sacrifice.³⁷³ During the 1850s the immolation of slaves in British and Dutch parts of Accra was in decline, even though there were some cases reported.³⁷⁴ However, this horrific practice continued in secrecy and British authorities struggled with traditional chiefs to eliminate these sacrifices once and for all. Several other treaties for the abolition of human sacrifice were signed by the chiefs of Amanten (Brong Ahafo Region) in 1873, by Asantehene when the British captured Kumasi in 1874, by the chief of Agbozume (Volta Region) in 1879, by the chief of Gyaman (Brong Ahafo Region) in 1889, and by the Chief of Atebubu (Brong Ahafo Region) in 1890. A document dealing with child murder and ritual human sacrifices in the Western district of the Gold Coast colony lists several proofs that this practice persisted up to 1903.³⁷⁵ All these documents kept in Ghanaian national archives testify that the

369 Interview with Chris Hesse, 21/9/2016, 4.

370 Interview with Cefas Adjei Pinto, 11/11/2016, 9-10.

371 Margaret Field, *Religion and Medicine of the Ga People*, 204.

372 PRAAD, ADM 11/1727. Case No.4, 7, 8, 18, 19, 25, 46, 47. Subject: Collection of Treaties with Native Chiefs & C. on the West Coast of Africa.

373 Ibid.

374 John Parker, “The Cultural Politics of Death & Burial in Early Colonial Accra,” 211.

375 PRAAD, ADM 11/1727.

practice of human sacrifice was not only a local funerary feature, but a widely-spread custom among Akan, Ga and Ewe that was only gradually abandoned around the turn of the 20th century. Some informants claimed that human sacrifice among the Ga was completely abandoned during the colonial period.³⁷⁶ An Akan informant stated that human sacrifice among the Akan was not abolished until Kwame Nkrumah came to power.³⁷⁷

In 1930s, Margaret Field reported that in the Ga town of Nungua people practised a transformed version of sacrifice where an executioner played a comic role similar to that of a clown and the supposed victims – a boy and a girl – whitened with white clay cut their nails and hair that was to be buried with a dead chief.³⁷⁸ Such mock execution was a particular feature of Nungua as it is not known among the Ga-Mashie people of Accra.

The Akan and the Ga presently use sheep, goats or, rarely, cows instead of human sacrifice,³⁷⁹ because some of them believe that a chief must be bathed in blood before leaving this world.³⁸⁰ Other informants said that they only killed animals to feed the funeral attendants with a proper meal and not as a sacrifice.³⁸¹ Such killing of an animal is not compulsory and is even done sometimes at Christian funerals.³⁸² Sometimes chief's servants captured livestock to use it for a burial of their chief.³⁸³ Presently the Ga people sacrifice a sheep, a goat or a fowl, depending on the “taste” of a particular deity that prefers one or the other animal, but for a superior deity they slaughtered a cow or a bull. Similar sacrifices are made at religious festivals such as *Hɔmɔwɔ*.³⁸⁴

376 Interview with Okyame Sikafo, 17/6/2016, 3.

377 Interview with Kofi Anny, 2/5/2016, 1.

378 Margaret Field, *Religion and Medicine of the Ga People*, 204-205.

379 Interview with Abusuapanin Akwasi Ampomah, 1/5/2016, 7.

380 Interview with Nii Akwei Bonsu III, 16/3/2016, 10.

381 Interview with Chris Hesse, 21/9/2016, 9.

382 Interview with Emmanuel Evans Anfom, 13/9/2016, 9.

383 Interview with H.N.A. Wellington, 22/6/2016, 9.

384 Interview with Okyame Sikafo, 17/6/2016, 9.

Chapter 4: Special Rites

Special Rites

The intention of this chapter is to present various rites that are unique to the Ga ethnic group and pertain to the various types of death which demand their performance. There were also many taboos in the traditional Ga society and the person who broke such a customary taboo was usually banned from the town or he may have been saved by the performance of some special rites. Some people were barred from the burial grounds, which was one of the harshest punishments, since it was believed that a death without a funeral would bring damnation for the soul of the culprit.³⁸⁵

Rites and Burial for the Chiefs

The death and funeral of a chief differed, and to a large extent still does, from the funeral of a commoner. While the funeral of a commoner is a family matter, the death rites of a chief remain the responsibility of the community or even the whole region in the case of the departure of a paramount leader. In such a case the mourning is public, the social life is suspended and a holiday is proclaimed. The community is taxed for the purpose of organizing such a costly and elaborate event that also takes a long time, but eventually it is performed in a befitting way. Before the introduction of mortuaries the organizers could not wait long for the burial to take place. The embalment allowed them to preserve the body and prepare a grand funeral celebration in three days' time.

In Jamestown there was a rule that nobody should die in a chief's house or palace. If they had suspected that their leader was very sick and approaching his end, they took him outside the compound walls in order to die there and not to pollute the palace. If the death happened unexpectedly, the traditional priest cleansed the place with the sacrifice of a goat, ram or sheep and by pouring libation.³⁸⁶

385 Interview with Nii Aryee Quarshie I., 27/10/2016, 6.

386 Interview Okyame Sikafo, 17/6/2016, 13.

Even before the official announcement³⁸⁷ of the death was made, members of the royal family started with the preparation of the chief's body. A prominent feature of chief's death was the embalming of his corpse with special concoctions to preserve it for a few more days. They used expensive spices or cosmetics called *klɔbɔ* and *ohe* made from aromatic plants that were rubbed on the body, especially on the face.³⁸⁸ Such embalment is still in use, even though technology and refrigeration are applied to preserve the body for an indefinite period.

In the colonial period a ceremony called “the great lamentation” celebrated as a nation-wide affair used to be performed at least two years after the burial of a dignitary. It was performed specially for the chiefs and members of high nobility, for whom they performed religious rites and dances. During this one week celebration public looting became legal in the eyes of the native customary law.³⁸⁹ Here one may notice some similarities with the *Hɔmɔwɔ* festival.

A number of funeral rites have changed in the last decades, but the funerals of the chiefs remain more or less within the domain of the royal family and traditional customs. Chief's body may be stored in a mortuary for up to one year or sometimes even longer, but all the preparations including washing, shaving and dressing are done within traditional homes. If his corpse is temporarily stored at the morgue, it is reclaimed, brought home and buried within two days. In Jamestown they proceed in the following way: When the corpse is washed and shaved, they put it at a very solemn, quiet place, where it waits until the next morning when it is dressed and prepared for the funeral ceremony. Sometimes they even invite specialists from far away who dress the chief properly. Then sometimes they set the body in a standing or a sitting position, before it is finally laid in a coffin.³⁹⁰

In Jamestown the chief's corpse is laid in state in a big room decorated like a forest. There is a person standing in front of the room holding a wooden bowl and collecting contributions from the visitors. The entrance, however, is different from the exit point and everybody should exit through

387 Announcement of the chief's death is described in details in Chapter Two.

388 Ako Adjei, “Mortuary Usages of the Ga People of the Gold Coast.,” 89.

389 Ibid., 95-96.

390 Interviews Okyame Sikafa, 17/6/2016, 14.; Irene Odotei 17/10/2016, 7.

the second door. If a person breaks the rule and challenges funeral authorities by exiting at the entrance door, he thus enters an unknown place and gets lost, even though it is basically a normal room.³⁹¹

Before the chief's body is put in the coffin the members of *Asafo company* and other chiefs gather around the coffin in order to take back the oath sworn by the deceased chief, so that it can be given to his successor. After that the corpse is finally put into the coffin, a sheep or a cow is slaughtered and the blood sprinkled around, while the carriers with the casket pass through the blood.³⁹² In pre-colonial times the blood of chief's servants instead of the animals was sprinkled. When Ga-Mantse Nii Tackie Yaoboi was buried in February 1954, a thousand people witnessed his funeral rites where the bullock was slaughtered by the head of his family.³⁹³ A bull was also slaughtered for Ga-Mantse Boni Nii Amugi II in January 2007 at the Ga-Mantse palace where the bull's blood was sprinkled on his sea-blue casket amidst musketry.³⁹⁴

In the neighbouring Kinka, now called Ushertown the Ga-Mantse (paramount chief) is installed at a particular place called Amugi Naa, where he swears his oath. When Ga-Mantse dies, the same Amugi Naa people come and take back the oath before he is buried. The Jamestown paramount chief, however, does not swear his oath at the same place. His inferior chiefs and sub-chiefs swear an oath directly to him.³⁹⁵

The funeral of a chief was always performed with a great pomp, gun-firing and elaborate ceremony that included performances of some traditional drumming and dancing groups. The chief's coffin was loaded with money, gold, trinkets, kente cloth and other items that were buried with the deceased. In Osu they have an old custom to lay a chief in state by displaying state swords

391 Interview Okyame Sikafo, 17/6/2016, 14.

392 Ibid., 15.

393 "Final Rites for Late *Mantse*," Daily Graphic, No.1032, Accra 11.1.1954, 1, 12. (Accessed from Institute of African Studies Library).

394 "Final Funeral Rites of Ga-*Mantse* Successfully Completed," GNA, Accra, Monday 29th January, 2007. Accessed 25.5.2017 <http://ghananewsagency.org/social/final-funeral-rites-of-ga-Mantse-successfully-completed-2352>.

395 Interview with Nii Aryee Quarshie I., 27/10/2016, 14.

that are placed to both sides of the corpse, which becomes part of decoration. These swords, however, are not added to the coffin.³⁹⁶

One of my informants described how the traditional authorities tricked the colonial administration to avoid the burial of their chief at a public cemetery:

“And that is where they take the chief around town. They roam with the casket in town and then, when they are tired or at a point when it is getting late, they come and they put a coffin somewhere. Even before they carry the coffin outside through the blood of the sheep or a cow, what they do is that they do not put the body into the coffin. They take the body out and leave it in the room and then they carry the empty coffin with the chief's cloths. They carry it and take it to roam around the town, but they have the main coffin they will use to bury the chief in the room. So they will carry the empty coffin together with the cloths of the chief and then use it to roam. When they come back later, the body is still laying here, which nobody knows. It is only some elders and then the other chiefs in a small group. They are the ones who know about this and that is where at dawn they bury, or at midnight they bury the chief in his room.”³⁹⁷

Funerals and burials of a chief or sub-chief used to follow these special procedures with unique rites known only to the ruling class. Some of its features remained the same as in the past with the exception of human sacrifice which was gradually abandoned during the colonial period.³⁹⁸ Presently in Jamestown, if the chief belongs to traditional religion, the procession with the coffin halts if an animal crosses the path. A fowl, a goat or any other animal is instantly slaughtered, its blood sprinkled on the road and its body thrown away. The dead animal may not be picked up by a member of the funeral procession, but an ordinary citizen could use its meat for a meal.³⁹⁹

Since the legislation for cemetery burial was already introduced in colonial times, the intramural burial became an offence. British authorities demanded a burial permit be obtained and

396 Interview with H.N.A. Wellington, 22/6/2016, 5.

397 Interview with Okyame Sikafo, 17/6/2016, 15.

398 For detailed information on human sacrifice see Chapter Three.

399 Interview with Nii Aryee Quarshie I., 27/10/2016, 7.

sanitary inspections were checking the coffins in order to prove that they contained a corpse. As I said in Chapter Three, only in very special cases the authorities allowed for certain prominent people to be buried in a room.⁴⁰⁰

According to some of my informants, the Ga-Mashie chiefs are officially buried in mausoleums but their bodies are secretly intercepted and buried at an unknown place in the bush at midnight so that nobody knows where and what rites were performed in loco. After the procession with the coffin around the town is concluded, the coffin is brought to the house where the body is either taken out or buried at his home, or the coffin is carried to a secret location in the forest, where it is buried.⁴⁰¹ In the present Ga-Mashie territory the second option is almost impossible since the area is completely urbanized. The empty coffin would be filled with a slaughtered fowl and some ballast, taken to the cemetery and buried. In the neighbouring town of Osu there was a sacred grove, an exclusive place where the chiefs, queen-mothers and fetish priests are still being buried. Everybody knows the place but nobody dares go there, except a leader or a traditional priest, who is on duty.⁴⁰² An official report from 2007 stated that the Ga-Mantse casket was placed in a nicely-decorated black hearse, driven to seven paramount stool houses of the Ga State and then to Pobiman, near Pokuase where he was finally laid to rest at midnight.⁴⁰³ During the 1970s, however, the chiefs and sub-chiefs were rather carried to the cemetery by pall-bearers than driven in a hearse, even though they were Christians.⁴⁰⁴ Comparing these two cases in the particular detail of the corpse transfer, one can notice how traditional funeral customs have been gradually replaced by Christian practices.⁴⁰⁵

Strict methods of such a burial imposed by traditional authorities do not allow participation of anybody else, except for the few members of royal families. Even though there are cemeteries

400 Interview with Emmanuel Evans Anfom, 13/9/2016, 4.

401 Interview Okyame Sikafo, 17/6/2016, 3.

402 Interview with H.N.A. Wellington, 22/6/2016, 4-5.

403 "Final Funeral Rites of GaMantse- Successfully Completed" Accra, GNA, Monday 29th January, 2007. Accessed 25.5.2017 <http://ghananewsagency.org/social/final-funeral-rites-of-ga-Mantse-successfully-completed-2352>.

404 Marion Kilson, *African Urban Kinsmen, The Ga of Central Accra*, 64.

405 Replacement of traditional features with the Christian are thoroughly described in Chapter Five.

and royal mausoleums today, it is difficult to determine the exact location of the chief's burial ground. The elaborate procedure and the performance of special rites remain in the domain of chiefs.⁴⁰⁶ Even though the majority of chiefs had converted to Christianity, they remain buried in a traditional way since their status is above their religion.

According to one of my informants, the last “Ga-Maɲtɛ” Nii Tackie Tawiyah III died about four years ago.⁴⁰⁷

Rites and Burial for the Priests and the Priestesses

Traditional priests were not only religious and secular authorities in charge of the pre-colonial Ga communities, they were also seen as soothsayers. They were in charge of the Ga communities, they controlled everything and the subjects were in absolute obedience to them. In exchange, however, they had to swear to protect their families against evil forces. Thus they were kept away from all impure things, including dead corpses since they would pollute the sacred nature of these spiritual leaders. They were not even allowed to see their close relatives when they die; instead they bought some necessities for the funeral which they could not attend.⁴⁰⁸ Since they were not allowed to wear red or black, or to mourn with the others, they dressed in white and painted their faces with white clay. Then they engaged in singing songs of their cult and playing bells until the next morning while the attending priestess got possessed. There was no sorrow in this performance, there were only comic gestures that aroused laughter.⁴⁰⁹ Traditional high-priest *wulɔmɔ* was forbidden to come in any contact with death throughout his life. He was forbidden to see a corpse, to attend funerals and was sometimes not informed of the deaths of others. In this way these fetish priests were kept away from all negative events so he could preserve his divine and pure nature.

When the *wulɔmɔ* was about to die he had to be removed from the shrine of the god he

406 Interview with Nii Akwei Bonsu III, 16/3/2016, 6.

407 Interview with Nii Aryee Quarshie I., 27/10/2016, 12.

408 Interview with Okyame Sikafo, 17/6/2016, 4.

409 G.O. Sackeyfio, “Music and Dance of the Otu Gods of Ga Mashie,” (Diploma, University of Ghana, 1968), 33.

ministered to.⁴¹⁰ Among the Ga of Ga-Mashie the death of a fetish priest was always seen as a dangerous situation if purification was neglected. The priest's stool was carried to the sea for washing and a sheep was sacrificed on the stool for its cleansing. Other rites were performed at the shrine where he held his office so that the spirit of the deceased spirit would not disturb the newly installed priest.⁴¹¹ For a death of a traditional priest or priestesses there were always extra rites, since the Ga considered this occasion a double death – the spirit of the dead human being and the spirit which from time to time possessed this person. The rites for the death of the possessing spirit of a *wɔyoo* (priestess / medium) were called *Abofu* and used to last from three to six weeks. All the *wɔyei* from the neighbouring towns and villages were invited to participate, dressed in their traditional white calico. Field also described these special rites for a spirit of a dead *wɔyoo*.⁴¹²

When a *wulɔmɔ* died, the other *wulɔmei* informed his god about his death.⁴¹³ A funeral for a *wulɔmɔ* was not that grand, elaborated and secret as a funeral of a chief, but still with some special rites and with more respect than for a commoner.⁴¹⁴

When a chief priest died, they started preparing his body on Thursday. On Friday he was bathed, dressed in white fetish cloth and until the evening he was ready and laid in state. One of my informants mentioned that a corpse of a fetish priest was put in a standing position, while another described a sitting position for a *wɔyoo* at wake-keeping.⁴¹⁵ At first all his wives came around and sat beside the corpse and then the others followed. On Saturday afternoon the carriers took the dead priest and paraded him through town visiting all traditional houses amidst pouring of libation at the doorsteps or the main gates of these ancestral homes in order to bid farewell to all the people and all the deities of the town. After he was taken to all main town quarters and the town square they performed a few rituals and then he was taken to the cemetery of traditional priests for a burial which was concluded before the sunset. Before the burial they performed some traditional musical

410 Ibid., 4.

411 Ibid., 33.

412 Margaret Field, *Religion and Medicine among the Ga People*, 203.

413 Ibid.

414 Interview with Nii Akwei Bonsu III, 16/3/2016, 6.

415 Interviews with Nii Aryee Quarshie I., 27/10/2016, 12.; H.N.A. Wellington, 22/6/2016, 11.

styles such as *Obonu*, *Bintim* and played some other traditional music to accompany him on his journey. Other traditional priests attending the burial might get possessed during this ritual. One of my informants mentioned that the traditional priest was usually buried with full regalia in a sitting position with a parrot or a parrot feather which would instil fear into attendants since they experienced something extraordinary.⁴¹⁶ On Sunday they performed certain rites at the graveyard, and then they took the stool with a ritual wooden bowl (*tsese*) to the seashore to perform some rituals, while on Monday all traditional houses came together for the real funeral. They sat together, sprinkled maize and sugar cubes while giving a thanksgiving speech to all these houses and whoever was concerned. The people then left but they returned on Tuesday to share some drinks and biscuits among themselves thus concluding the final funeral rites.⁴¹⁷

If a traditional priest or priestess died and the people refused to perform these rites, his or her soul could not reach the ancestors or – even if it managed to enter their world – it was not able to participate in their meetings. Such a soul would then hover around its death place until people recognized this. They had to visit the place, make enquiries as to what needed to be done in order to pacify that soul and enable its passage to the ancestral line and their meetings. When proper rites were performed, the soul of a traditional priest or priestess could join the ancestors.⁴¹⁸

One of my informants stated that a traditional priest may be buried after the funeral has already been performed, on the early morning of the day after his death. Few traditional priests go to the burial grounds with the coffin where they perform some rites with the help of *wɔyei*, singing some special songs. The next morning before dawn the priest is buried and the date of the funeral ceremony is fixed to a time within two weeks. The news of the death of the traditional priest came with delay, only after his burial. This type of inverted succession of funeral and burial for a traditional priest together with special rites is still in practice.⁴¹⁹

416 Interview with Irene Odotei 17/10/2016, 9.

417 Interview with Naa Ohemea Bortsoo, 26/9/2016, 3-4.

418 Interview with Naa Ohemea Bortsoo, 26/9/2016, 9.

419 Interview with Cefas Adjei Pinto, 11/11/2016, 3.

Special rites for dead priests and priestesses are still performed in all Ga towns.⁴²⁰ One of my informants claimed that since some of the traditional priests have turned to Christianity, they first perform all these traditional rites at home and later bring the corpse to church for the mass before the burial.⁴²¹

Rites for a Distant Death

Originally the dead were buried where they had died, but it was the religious system that demanded ceremony along the burial rites which developed in almost every culture.

An old Ga practice of burying warriors who died on distant battlefields was to take toe- and finger-nails and a piece of hair from the corpse that was buried on the spot. His family received these remains in order to enable the return of his spirit to his original home.⁴²² According to some informants, the Ga people of Jamestown observed this type of ritual for every distant death, when the transport of the dead body of a person who died far away from home was impossible in a due time so the person was buried where he died, while a small box with above mentioned remains was sent home. In this way the family could also acknowledge the death of their member.⁴²³ This rite is still performed when the transport of the corpse is not possible. From the 1930s onward, motor vehicles called Mummy Trucks began to commute between Accra and the hinterland, enabling the corpses to be buried at home.⁴²⁴

Another source from the colonial period documented that also eye-lashes, the hair under the armpits and the hair at the private parts of the body were all taken off by means of a razor or a sharp knife.⁴²⁵ In such a case the hair and nails represent the whole body and the funeral service was

420 Interviews with H.N.A. Wellington, 22/6/2016, 6; Emmanuel Evans Ankomang, 13/9/2016, 5; Naa Ohemea Bortsoo, 26/9/2016, 5; Okyame Sikafo, 17/6/2016, 5; Nii Aryee Quarshie I., 27/10/2016, 6.

421 Interview with Chris Hesse, 21/9/2016, 5.

422 John Parker, "The Cultural Politics of Death & Burial in Early Colonial Accra," 215.

423 Interview with Nii Akwei Bonsu III, 16/3/2016, 6.

424 Ben Nana Edusei Donko, "A Socio-Economic History of Okwawu Migrants in Accra: A Case Study of Okwawu Traders in Okashie and Katamanto (c 1873-1990)," (MPhil Thesis, Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, Legon, 2003), 25.

425 Ako Adjei, "Mortuary Usages of the Ga People of the Gold Coast," 87.

performed in the usual way by burying the casket with these remains.⁴²⁶ Among the Krobo nails and hair also served as documentary evidence for the relatives who were unable to attend the burial.⁴²⁷ Presently if a Ga person dies far away or on another continent, somebody sends an envelope with his nails and hair.⁴²⁸ The rites for distant death still exist but they are quite rare today since the dead corpse may be transported quickly even over long distances.

Separation Rites

Separation of the dead from the living played an important role in the Ga traditional beliefs. Since the deceased and the survivors did not share the same world any longer, certain rites had to be performed in order to separate them for good.

In a case of close friendship which was believed to last forever, the surviving friend who paid a visit to his deceased friend at wake-keeping brought a cola nut or lime cut into two halves. A cola nut is bitter and a lime is sour, thus symbolizing the unpleasant farewell of the two. It may also have represented an issue which was unresolved at the time of death.⁴²⁹ The living friend threw two halves of a cola nut or lime in the air and they were supposed to land on different sides. The one which landed on the face belonged to the deceased and the one which landed on the back was taken by the surviving friend who threw his half away. If both of the halves landed on the same side, the person had to keep throwing both halves into the air until they landed on different sides, showing that the deceased was reconciled with the living and ready to part.⁴³⁰ The main reason of this rite was to pacify the soul or ghost of the dead so that it would not return and harm the living. In Jamestown this rite was not a norm for every funeral but in Nungua, for example, traditional priests and priestesses still observe this rite among themselves if one of them dies.⁴³¹ Everywhere in the Ga territory this rite used to be performed publicly. In some areas where they serve food and drinks at

426 Interview with Emmanuel Evans Anfom, 13/9/2016, 4.

427 Hugo Huber, *The Krobo, Traditional Social and Religious Life of a West African People*, 197.

428 Interview with Chris Hesse, 21/9/2016, 4.

429 Interview with Nii Akwei Bonsu III, 16/3/2016, 7.

430 Margaret Field, *Religion and Medicine among the Ga People*, 199.

431 Interview with Naa Ohemea Bortsoo., 26/9/2016, 4.

the funerals a person carries home a cup as a souvenir which is supposed to replace the former rite with lime or cola nut.⁴³² Among the Krobo people there was a custom of cutting a cloth into two or more small strips which were distributed among close relatives.⁴³³ Separation rites which may take different forms are still observed among the Ga people.

Widowhood Rites

Widows and widowers were traditionally obliged to several restrictions and to pass through a series of rites that had to be performed before they could reintegrate back to normal life. These somewhat notorious rites were performed in order to prove that the surviving partner is not responsible for the death of the other.

By the end of the 19th century when Christianity was gaining ground in colonial Accra, widows held on to practise *ayiagu* which marked the end of mourning for their departed husbands, enabling them to remarry.⁴³⁴ They were supposed to preserve six months of chastity after death of the departed partner.⁴³⁵ The fear that the deceased partner's spirit would return and get revenge in a case of hurried remarriage was still present at that time.

During the colonial period the surviving partner was still expected to perform widowhood rites called *kura* in order to convince the dead of his or her grief. The rites included intense mourning and expressing sorrow while being locked in a dark room for a week, explaining the desolation the dead had left behind. On the eighth day the old woman who took care of the widow or widower during this separation phase told the dead to go away and not to trouble the living since their path was divided. If the rite was not properly performed the ghost might come back and disturb the living and even cause his or her death.⁴³⁶ These widowhood rites were very similar among the Ga and their kin Adangme ethnic group.⁴³⁷

432 Interview with Irene Odotei 17/10/2016, 2.

433 Hugo Huber, *The Krobo, Traditional Social and Religious Life of a West African People*, 199 – 200.

434 John Parker, "The Cultural Politics of Death & Burial in Early Colonial Accra," 212.

435 Margaret Field, *Religion and Medicine among the Ga People*, 202.

436 Ibid., 201-202.

437 Interview with Nii Akwei Bonsu III, 16/3/2016, 5.

According to another source the seclusion in Laboni lasted for three months during which the widow would be given one cloth, a mat and a stone for a pillow. After three weeks she was washed in the sea, shaved every hair on her body and wore special beads around her neck, wrists and ankles. She came to cook for the husband's ghost and then ate the imaginary food with the dead husband's spirit, which has already been invoked. Then she had to wash, dry and fold the man's clothes. She was kept in the room with old women until after three months when she was dressed in black cloth with a white band in the middle signifying successful completion of the widowhood rites. The dead man's ghost was finally pacified by slaughtering a sheep, provided by the husband's successor.⁴³⁸

In some cases if a husband died, the widow had to shave all her hair instantly and was kept indoors and was fasting for a number of days.⁴³⁹ By cutting her hair the widow separated herself from the marital bond and previous life. In other cases she was supposed to go and only wash her hair in the sea early in the morning in order to wash away the influence of the departed. After the burial of her husband she was supposed to touch his legs, which meant the end of mourning period enabling her to remarry.⁴⁴⁰ If the deceased had a younger brother there was an option that he could inherit his widow after the completion of the widowhood rites by giving the elders three bottles of gin and providing and slaughtering a goat for *okulafo too* ceremony.⁴⁴¹

One of my informants mentioned another disturbing widowhood rite that used to be performed by one of the clans in Otublohum, an Ushertown quarter, where a noose would be placed around the neck of the widow while somebody tightened it and endangered her life.⁴⁴² If a widow refused to perform widowhood rites and all traditional customs, she was subjected to severe corporal punishment. She was supposed to wear a black dress throughout the mourning period.⁴⁴³

438 Diana Gladys Azu, *The Ga Family and social Change, African Social Research Documents*, 54-55.

439 Fasting of widows was also practised by the Haida people of the North Pacific. Arnold Van Gennep: *The Rites of Passage*, 156.

440 Interview with Emmanuel Evans Anfom, 13/9/2016, 5.

441 Diana Gladys Azu, *The Ga Family and Social Change, African Social Research Documents*, 60-61.

442 Interview with Emmanuel Evans Anfom, 13/9/2016, 9.

443 Ako Adjei, "Mortuary Usages of the Ga People of the Gold Coast," 88.

In the case of a widower the rites were much less rigorous since a widower was not confined to seclusion. In addition to providing the funeral items, he was bathed at *abusua too* (goat for the relatives) rites when he spent a night in the room where his wife was laid in state. After the goat was killed his mourning period was concluded.⁴⁴⁴

The above described widowhood rites were meant to break the domestic and sexual bond of the deceased partner and to publicly announce the new status of the woman or the man.⁴⁴⁵

It is quite possible that the rigid, severe performance and some inhumane treatment of the widows made the British administration modify some and forbid more rigid widowhood rites in order to protect human rights. Christian church also influenced the practice of widowhood rites that became modernized and simplified, while the compulsory widowhood period was abolished. Now instead of complex rituals that were compulsory especially for widows, a minister of the church which the person attends conducts a brief ending of widowhood rites.⁴⁴⁶ It is also customary that a delegation of a Christian church visits the widow and expresses its support for widowhood. The period of widowhood lasts approximately three to six months, while the period of mourning depends on the widow herself. After that period the thanksgiving ceremony is held and after the service the black clothing is removed and replaced with white.⁴⁴⁷

Contemporary widowhood rites are lessened and there are fewer strict and rigid rites due to the influence of Christian churches that deem them unnecessary and prefer to perform a similar but simplified cleansing.⁴⁴⁸ Some Christian churches approve of the performance of certain widowhood rituals but usually they prefer for them to be done through prayer. The final decision for their performance is still in the hands of the family.

444 Diana Gladys Azu, *The Ga Family and Social Change*, African Social Research Documents, 56.

445 Ibid., 57.

446 Interview with H. N. A. Wellington, 22/6/2016, 6, 8.

447 Emmanuel Isaac Kpakpo Addo, *Worldview, Way of Life and Worship*, (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum Academic, 2009), 209.

448 Interview with Nii Akwei Bonsu III, 16/3/2016, 9.

Death of Twins

Even though some African societies consider twins as an anomaly, they are perceived sacred within the traditional Ga society due to the belief that they possess a strong relationship with the spiritual world. At their birth they used to build a shrine at their home that held the bush cow horns in which spirits reside. If they decided to beat these horns together they could cause sickness or death in enemies.⁴⁴⁹

In the colonial period they used to perform very special ceremonies when one of the twins died. A woman who is a twin herself performed a rite to separate the survivor from the closely adhering influence of the departed. The soul of the deceased twin had to be separated from the living one, since it would try to get his fellow to join him in the other world.⁴⁵⁰ Field reported that when a twin died a wild cow spirit took possession of all twins in the district who were butting people savagely with their heads but never hurt themselves.⁴⁵¹ When one twin died the other one became very powerful and his displeasure was much more dreaded since he obtained an ally among the dead.⁴⁵²

Throughout the lifetime of the twins there was a ritual performed every year on a Friday, sometimes even after the death of those being honoured.⁴⁵³ The rite was performed to commemorate the twins' birthday and to remind people of their sacred nature. Even today there are certain rituals performed when a twin dies.⁴⁵⁴

Rites for Unnatural Death

In the pre-colonial Ga-Mashie society the fetish priest always enquired whether the death was natural or caused by evil spirits. That was because the Ga people believed that death could be caused by supernatural powers by witches, wizards, sorcerers, ancestors, deities or by a curse of a

449 Marion Kilson, *Dancing with the Gods*, 95.

450 Margaret Field, *Religion and Medicine among the Ga People*, 202.

451 Ibid., 180.

452 Ibid., 182; Madeline Manoukian, *Akan and Ga-Adangme Peoples of the Gold Coast*, 90.

453 Marion Kilson, *Dancing with the Gods*, 95.

454 Interview with H.N.A. Wellington, 22/6/2016, 11.

wronged person. The Ga believed that these supernatural forces contributed greatly to the higher death rate in their traditional society. If someone offended somebody, the offended person could use some ritual means to kill the offender. The priest poured libation and prayed to the gods who subsequently revealed the cause of death. Sometimes it was enough if a person went to the shrine (which also functioned as an oracle) of their deity to consult with it which subsequently revealed the cause.⁴⁵⁵ Sometimes the spirit of the deceased possessed one of the women (a medium) in the house and the fetish priest interpreted her gestures and facial expressions. The interpretation conveyed the dead person's message and the relatives of the deceased immediately performed certain rites to ensure a safe passage for the dead. If he was robbed of his life by a family member, the spirit would reveal it.⁴⁵⁶ Possession of some person was also frequent during the funeral rites when the ancestral spirit or spirit of the deceased entered somebody. Fetish priest then interpreted the message and certain rites had to be performed.⁴⁵⁷ Another informant mentioned that the spirit of the dead came and spoke with the voice of the dead individual and exactly revealed the cause of the death.⁴⁵⁸ Such events were common before the majority of people gradually converted to Christianity during the colonial period. But even then and until today some Christians still perform these old rites and consult fetish priests when they are curious about the grounds of a particular death.

According to a testimony of a Ga fetish priestess, the Ga people lived longer in the pre-colonial times. The average age at the time of death was around 90 years (today the life expectancy in Ghana is around 60).

“If a person died having only 50 or 60 years, it was considered unnatural death. The first reaction of a traditional priest was an attempt to bring the deceased back. A fetish priest would go to the cemetery, town square or to the nearest crossroads to pour libation asking deities what actually happened. Then the priest called the name of the deceased three times, to persuade him to come back to life. When the wailers and the traditional priest returned

455 Interview with Nii Akwei Bonsu III, 16/3/2016, 12.

456 G.O. Sackeyfio, “Music and Dance of the Otu Gods of Ga Mashi,” 6.

457 Interview with Nii Aryee Quarshie I., 27/10/2016, 15.

458 Interview with Irene Odotei 17/10/2016, 18.

home, the dead person, who had died prematurely was alive.”⁴⁵⁹

The traditional priestess did not consider her story as an example but more as a regular practice of treating premature death within traditional society. Everybody who survived through the sensitive period of early childhood and behaved well was supposed to live a long life. The old woman suggested that the main reason behind early deaths in contemporary society is unhealthy food as it contains chemicals and fertilizers. The different and unexpected ways people die today seemed unnatural to her. The story of this Ga fetish priestess indicates that the traditional religion used to have some kind of control over the time of death of an individual.

A similar story was told by a royal linguist from Jamestown who stated that if somebody is about to die they held the person, while somebody ran through town shouting the person's name. Sometimes they ground pepper and then squeezed it into the person's eyes in order to keep the dying alive for a bit longer.⁴⁶⁰ Pepper was also smeared over the body, burnt in the room or put under the dying person's nose so that the individual sneezed and was brought back to life.⁴⁶¹ Thus the already departed *susuma* (the spirit / the departed soul) returned to the body.

The definition of unnatural death was very clear and encompassed a wide range of various types of deaths within the traditional Ga society. Every premature death, by accident, disease, violence, suicide, during pregnancy or during the *Hɔmɔwɔ* period, was considered unnatural and demanded immediate burial and performance of special or “defensive” rites that would appease the soul. In some Ga areas there was a custom of burying criminals in the middle of the day when the ground was the hottest.⁴⁶² Since the traditional authorities did not want to “pollute” the town areas with restless spirits of the deceased, they ordered their burial outside town's boundaries so that the evil entities would not enter their settlement and molested the living.

The corpses of women who died during childbirth were cast unburied into the bush, their property confiscated by the *wulɔmɔ* of the goddess of birth and death since they were believed to be

459 Interview with Naa Ohemea Bortsoo, 26/9/2016, 1.

460 Interview with Okyame Sikafo 17/6/2016, 17.

461 Joyce Engmann, “Immortality and the Nature of Man in Ga Thought,” 165.

462 Ago E. Kwei, Adzei E. Anang, Adjei T. Bekoe, *Teshi, Administrative and Cultural Practices*, 96.

cursed.⁴⁶³ This practice continued into the early colonial period, before it was gradually abandoned.

If someone stole from another person or from a deity, it would not be the thief himself that would be killed by the deity, but people around him for as long as the truth about the theft has been made plain. When necessary rites were performed for a particular deity, the killings stopped. If a person drowned in the river or the sea, certain rites needed to be performed to get the soul out of the sea.⁴⁶⁴

Death during the *Hɔmɔwɔ*⁴⁶⁵ period was considered a curse, due to the sacred nature and the intense period of communication between the living and the dead. The powerful gods were present in town and the death could have disturbed their blessings which they delivered to the people who were celebrating. Therefore, this deceased was denied lying in state in an open coffin and instead lied on a mat.

People who lived a violent life or died a violent death experienced obstacles not encountered by ordinary people before having been admitted to the world of the dead. It was believed that all souls who died an unnatural death faced these difficulties entering the world of ancestors and acquiring their supernatural powers. Their soul became restless and they might have entered other, unknown territories. According to Christian faith, the sinner who does not repent before death goes to hell; similarly in the traditional Ga society such a person might have faced obstacles before entering the other world.⁴⁶⁶ Sometime people saw an *otɔfo*, a ghost, who scares, threatens, revenges, conveys messages to the living or just hovers around unable to reach the land of the dead. The difficulties to enter the world of the dead could be overcome by certain rites which were customarily observed by the Ga.⁴⁶⁷ Since the pre-colonial society was aware of these difficulties, they performed certain customs to set the ghost free and to transcend or transit the *susuma* (individual's soul) to the ancestral world.⁴⁶⁸

463 John Parker, "The Cultural Politics of Death & Burial in Early Colonial Accra," 210.

464 Interview with Naa Ohemea Bortsoo, 26/9/2016, 10.

465 The role of *Hɔmɔwɔ* and its attitude towards ancestors is described in Chapter Three.

466 Interview with Emmanuel Evans Anfom, 20/9/2016, 11.

467 Interviews with H.N.A. Wellington, 22/6/2016, 13, Chris Hesse, 21/9/2016, 11.

468 Interview with Emmanuel Evans Anfom, 20/9/2016, 11.

People who broke a religious taboo encountered similar difficulties and this could have an impact not only on the guilty person but on his children and the entire family as well. Certain rituals needed to be performed in order to reverse the curse which would end the misery and deaths within the family.⁴⁶⁹

The difficulty of passage into the next world is not an isolated example among the Ga since Van Gennep also reports that the Kol of India have a belief that those who have died an unnatural death remain evil spirits and cannot become ancestors because they cannot enter the land of the dead.⁴⁷⁰ These evil spirits are homeless and they dwell in the air, desecrated backwoods, and sometimes wander the whole world without any fixed destination, but committing all forms of mischief as they go along.⁴⁷¹ They could cause sickness even to an innocent soul. Even though the Ga understood that a disease might come by natural causes, they frequently claimed that it came from spiritual forces.

If the person died in an accident it was considered a taboo called *otfo gbele* – accidental death.⁴⁷² The family accompanied with a priest or a medicine man went to the accident spot and performed certain rites that usually involved the use of white calico,⁴⁷³ sacrificing of a ram, a sheep or a goat which was dragged from the point of the death to the person's home.⁴⁷⁴ There it was slaughtered in order “to break the spirit or the soul of that person from that place of accident in order to come home, before it will transcend to the next world”. If the soul remained at that particular place where the person died, it could not go anywhere.⁴⁷⁵ Such a soul remained at the place of accident, looking for other people to join him, thus killing other people by causing more accidents.⁴⁷⁶ When pacification rites were performed, the *susuma* was transferred to the world of ancestors. Traditionally such a person was not laid in state but the majority of Christian churches

469 Interview with Irene Odotei 17/10/2016, 18.

470 Arnold Van Gennep: *The Rites of Passage*, 152.

471 Ako Adjei, “Mortuary Usages of the Ga People of the Gold Coast,” 86.

472 Interview with Cefas Adjei Pinto, 11/11/2016, 12.

473 Interview with Naa Ohemea Bortsoo, 26/9/2016, 10.

474 Interview with Okyame Sikafo 17/6/2016, 13.; Irene Odotei 17/10/2016, 8.

475 Interviews with H.N.A. Wellington, 22/6/2016, 13. Okyame Sikafo 17/6/2016, 13.

476 Interview with Naa Ohemea Bortsoo, 26/9/2016, 10.

put such a corpse on display anyway.⁴⁷⁷ That is because the Christians do not think that the type of the death should influence the way funeral rites are performed.⁴⁷⁸

If unnatural death happened in the house, the goat was sacrificed in order to purify the place. The aim of these purification rituals was to lift a taboo and remove contamination caused by unnatural death. Some informants answered that this particular rite presently remains in practice⁴⁷⁹, while others stated that it is not observed anymore.⁴⁸⁰ In some cases today a black hen or a fowl is used instead since it costs less.⁴⁸¹

Because the Ga people believed that ghosts of people who died an unnatural death wander around they knew how to defend themselves and were also trying to protect sensitive young babies of their community with amulets. They used small pieces of hair against the dead man that were worn around their knees.⁴⁸² In Jamestown when a young child lost his father, they made a bracelet in a form of thread consisting of the hair of a deceased parent. It acted as a protection amulet for the child not to be haunted by the ghost of the deceased who could take away the child due to the strong emotional attachment. Since a child wore part of the dead, the spirit of the dead would not hurt the child without hurting himself and the child was protected against any onslaught. A grown-up person, however, could not be hurt in this way therefore an amulet was only given to children.⁴⁸³

Some people used to offer some money and talk to the dead so that the ghost would not come and disturb them. If a dead man had some girlfriends beside his wife, the ghost could approach them and have sex with them in a spiritual way. These girls had to perform certain rites to keep the ghost away.

The complex rituals for unnatural death including those caused by accidents have been abandoned due to the Christian belief in God and his actions.⁴⁸⁴ The Ga people in general consider a

477 Interview with Cefas Adjei Pinto, 11/11/2016, 12.

478 Influences of Christianity on funerals are described in Chapter Five.

479 Interviews with Okyame Sikafo 17/6/2016, 5.; Cefas Adjei Pinto, 11/11/2016, 5.; Chris Hesse, 21/9/2016, 5.

480 Interview with H.N.A. Wellington, 22/6/2016, 6.

481 Interviews with Nii Aryee Quarshie I., 27/10/2016, 6.; Naa Ohemea Bortsoo, 26/9/2016, 5.

482 Margaret Field, *Religion and Medicine among the Ga People*, 199.

483 Interviews with Okyame Sikafo, 17/6/2016, 4; H.N.A. Wellington, 22/6/2016, 4.

484 Interview with Chris Hesse, 21/9/2016, 11.

death to be natural if a person lived at least up to 70 years which is considered a good timing. If a person dies before reaching 70, it is regarded as premature or untimely death. Some rites previously performed for unnatural death have been abandoned while some persist but they are mostly performed at home, away from the public eye.

Death of a Child

When a pregnant woman died she was considered the virtual murderess of her child. The foetus was removed from the body after considerable ceremonial and if it survived it was named *Obiniona* (you have asked and you have received).⁴⁸⁵ The goddess of fertility and birth rites *Naade* or *Naa Yomo* supervised the ceremonies and rites performed in respect of a deceased pregnant woman.⁴⁸⁶

A Ga baby who died before the naming ceremony – before reaching the 8th day, was considered as having never been born, as being merely a ghost who came for a short visit. Such a child had no name and it was buried without funeral rites.⁴⁸⁷ That child was never considered a human being since it was not incorporated into the society, its progenitors were not considered its parents, and it could not achieve the status of the ancestor. The Ga believe that that baby belonged to the mother from the world of spirits who took it back to its place of origin.

The Catholics have a similar belief: they consider that the children who die without being baptised remain forever in the transition zone or in limbo; the corpse of a semi-civilized infant not yet named, circumcised or otherwise ritually recognized is buried without usual ceremonies.⁴⁸⁸ They considered such a being of not yet possessing a soul and was therefore burnt or thrown away.

If a Ga child lived up to the 9th day it meant that he went through the *kpodziemo* (naming ceremony) and was considered a person demanding a proper funeral in a case of death. The funeral

485 Madeline Manoukian, *Akan and Ga-Adangme peoples of the Gold Coast*, 88-89.

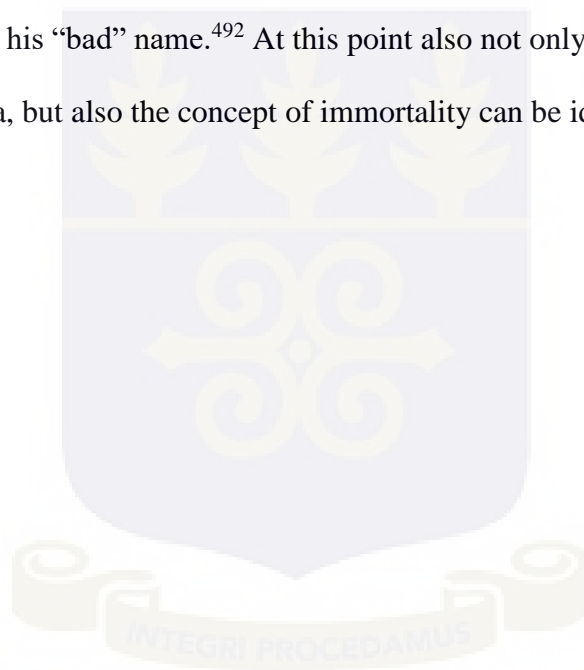
486 W.S.Akuffo-Badoo, "The Music of Kpa," 9.

487 Margaret Field, *Religion and Medicine among the Ga People*, 173.

488 Arnold Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, 153.

of a child, however, was simple and without much drama.⁴⁸⁹ When a young couple lost a child, they were supposed to be closed in a room for a week to fast, mourn and try to persuade the departed child to be reborn as the second child.⁴⁹⁰ This case alludes to the perception that reincarnation passed within the family when the departed souls were expected to return in a different body.

When two or more children died in succession the third came to life and then the parents performed some rites and gave him a foreign name unknown within the family in order to prevent him from dying.⁴⁹¹ This child was given some facial marks on its cheek and was called *gbobalɔ*, meaning the one who died and came back. According to the Ga belief it was the same person who had gone and returned. Usually he was given a funny name in the belief that he would not die again, but instead stay and defend his “bad” name.⁴⁹² At this point also not only the common belief in reincarnation among the Ga, but also the concept of immortality can be identified.⁴⁹³



489 Interview with H.N.A. Wellington, 22/6/2016, 3.

490 Margaret Field, *Religion and Medicine among the Ga People*, 202.

491 Margaret Field, *Religion and Medicine among the Ga People*, 177-178.

492 Interview with H.N.A. Wellington, 22/6/2016, 12.; There is a similar practice of giving ridiculous names to those children among the Ewe. Kofi Semanu Atsu Adzei, “The Rituals Associated with the Sacred Paramount Stool of Anfoega Traditional Area,” 66.

493 Reincarnation among the Ga is more thoroughly explained in Chapter Three.

Chapter 5: Transformation of Traditions

Factors of Change

“Some details in Rattray's account – and also in that of other writers such as Danquah (1928), Christensen (1954), Nketia (1955), Lystad (1958), and Mends (1978) – are not observed in today's funerals: the shooting of guns, the presentation of elaborate meals to the deceased, fasting and shaving of hair by close relatives, harsh treatment of the widow, and "carrying the corpse" (*funu soa*), a ritual practice to find the witch (*bayifoo*) responsible for the death. But it is remarkable that most observers pay considerable attention to the expenses of funerals and how they are recovered by those who bear the financial burden, the members of the *abusua*.”⁴⁹⁴

Though Van Der Geest wrote about some ancient Akan rites that have been abandoned, there is still great similarity with the abandoned funeral practices among the Ga. However, some features, such as the shooting of guns, are still present at the grand Ga funerals.

Even though the time of particular changes within the Ga funeral rites is difficult to determine, the numerous transformations are indisputable. By exploring the influences of Christianity, education, colonial administration or neighbouring cultures, one may come to the conclusion that these changes were profound and permanent. By looking at the details, one may notice that some traditional practices, such as libation, were not abolished but modified in order to fit in a new era; the inimical or backward practices on the other hand, such as widowhood rites which were infringing human rights have been almost completely abandoned. Traces of traditional ceremonies still persist at non-Christian funerals that are becoming a rarity. Instead of the verbal will, the dying now chooses to write a written testament to distribute his property in a formal way.

Funeral rites were also impacted by the introduction of technology and modernity. Many deceased people are sent to the mortuary to give the family some time to organize the funeral.

494 Sjaak Van Der Geest, “Funerals for the Living: Conversations with Elderly People in Kwahu, Ghana,” 105.

Instead of funeral women, it is now the expert undertakers who handle the corpse and prepare it for the funeral ceremony. In this way, traditional practices have been sanitized. The announcement and organization of the funeral became much easier with the assistance of communication technology that enables information to pass quickly to every corner of the world. People now carefully dress for funerals in specific colours which symbolize the extent and type of mourning of the deceased, and the coffin is often made in the symbolic form of the profession of the dead individual.

How and why some rites have changed and some have not? In general, all the rites that went against humanity were modified and rituals that excluded sanitized conditions were prohibited. From the point of view of available evidence it is clear that they have changed due to the unavailability of certain ritual materials, due to high costs, or simply due to the changing needs of a transformed community.

Despite all factors affecting the transformation of funeral rites among the Ga, the type and performance of the rituals still depends on the core family who is always in charge of the whole process.

Influences from the Environment

The environment and occupation of the Ga individuals influenced their way of performing traditional funerals. Fishermen traditionally worshipped the god of the sea called *Nai*. His priests have declared that Tuesday was dedicated to that particular God, thereby demanding for the fishermen not to engage in any activities on the sea. Thus fishermen rested on Tuesdays, which became the only free day of the week for them and that gave them an opportunity to conduct funeral rites on that particular day.

Due to frequent migrations, the Adangme fishermen in Ningo had a custom of an instant burial by performing a mass funeral only once a year for all their associates who died in the past year either at home or at distant places in Togo, Benin or Ivory Coast. For this grand occasion they

collected boxes with their fingernails and hair⁴⁹⁵, wrapped them in cloths for easier identification and placed them on a big bed while mourning their departure thus performing special funeral rites.⁴⁹⁶

Long before the introduction of fantasy coffins,⁴⁹⁷ the Ga fishermen had a custom to carve a little dummy canoe which they put on the grave of their deceased colleague.⁴⁹⁸ Another habit was to put a symbolical object the person used for his occupation into the coffin since he would need it in the next life.

Even today Tuesday is still recognized as a non-fishing day since it provides a resting period for the sea which enables fish to grow and multiply along the Ghanaian coast, an area where overfishing represents a serious problem for fishing industry. Funerals, however, are generally not performed on Tuesdays any more.

Farmers used to perform funerals on Fridays which was traditionally their holy day.⁴⁹⁹ Now they perform funerals on Saturdays which is the most common observance in modern Ghanaian society.

There have probably been even more environmental influences on conducting funerals but, unfortunately, they remain untraceable.

Influences from Neighbouring Cultures

When the Ga people occupied the Accra Plains, probably in the beginning of the 16th century, they found the indigenous people called the Guan living there.⁵⁰⁰ They were few in comparison with the Ga and consequently most of them had assimilated with the Ga. Even though they did not change the Ga language, they influenced some aspects of the Ga society including the

495 See Chapter Four - Rites for a Distant Death.

496 Interview with Irene Odotei 17/10/2016, 5-6.

497 For detailed description of emergence and development of fantasy coffins see Chapter Six.

498 Interview with Okyame Sikafo, 17/6/2016, 2.

499 Interview with Okyame Sikafo, 17/6/2016, 5.

500 The Guans were not everywhere on the coast. The area of later town Nungua was uninhabited when the Ga arrived. Interview with Naa Ohemea Bortsoo, 26/9/2016, 2.

traditional religion of the Ga in the form of the *Kple (Kpele)* cult that uses the Guan language among others.⁵⁰¹ Besides religious worship, the cult also channelled some funeral dirges in the autochthonic Guan language that are still known today but sometimes only in a form of gibberish. These dirges were sung among the wailing and mourning of a dead elder, chief, priest or priestesses.⁵⁰² Another characteristic feature of the Guan people was that they had a special rite for pouring libation. While among the Ga every chief or priest can pour libation for a dead person, the Guan demand a special “priest for the dead” who is in charge for the ghost to perform this rite.⁵⁰³ The Guan people were the first neighbouring ethnic group to influence the Ga and their kin Adangme, while the influences from Akan came more than a century later.

After a long period of foreign Akan occupation from 1677 to 1826, the Ga political institutions were strongly influenced by various features of their masters. The Ga people who were formerly ruled by *wulɔmei* (priests) had to appoint a secular leader who represented their side in foreign affairs. Thus they invented a function of *Maɲtse* (town father) who was hierarchically under the *wulɔmɔ* but eventually his position made him more important since *wulɔmɔ* was forbidden to travel outside the area of his town. After the defeat of the Asante at the battle of Katamanso in 1826, the kingdom of the Asante lost its supremacy of the coastal territories. The Ga people accustomed to being in a subordinate position that had lasted for a century and a half did not seize the opportunity for unification of their lands. They allowed the British to impose their colonial rule, who left the traditional role of intermediaries between whites and blacks of the interior to the Ga. However, many Akan migrants who stayed in Accra married with the Ga, adding to the Ga society their own cultural practices which gradually and eventually modified the existing traditions of the aboriginal Ga people. The Akan introduced a one-week funeral celebration and sometimes a meeting of the mourners after one month, which was unknown to the Ga before.⁵⁰⁴ They also brought the matrilineal succession system which was previously unfamiliar to the Ga who were

501 Other Ga cults use Twi, Fante or Adangme languages. Interview with Irene Odotei, 17/10/2016, 5.

502 Interview with H.N.A. Wellington, 22/6/2016, 3-4.

503 Interview with Okyame Sikafo, 17/6/2016, 2.

504 Interview with Nii Akwei Bonsu III, 16/3/2016, 5.

entirely patrilineal in that period.⁵⁰⁵

One of the influences of the Ewe funeral practice was the use of gunpowder and ceremonial shooting during funeral rites and the custom of burying people at midnight.⁵⁰⁶ Shooting at funerals is still present at grand funerals, while the Ga people bury only chiefs at midnight.

Some modern influences from foreign cultures have also impacted Ga funeral rites. When Ghanaians migrated to Nigeria in the 1970s and early 1980s they brought back some cultural practices from this nearby West African state. One of them was giving out gifts to the bereaved family members, and the other was providing meals to all invited guests which incurred extra costs for the organizers.⁵⁰⁷

In pre-colonial times the Ga people of Jamestown were fasting during the mourning and funeral, until the completion of the burial. In order to pay respect to the deceased whose mouth were shut and therefore could not eat all the bereaved had to fast, until the last rites were completed.⁵⁰⁸ This custom, however, might have come from the neighbouring Akan culture, where such fasting is still in practice today.

In general, the neighbouring cultures have influenced the mainstream Ga funeral rites through intermarriages with other immigrants, which is in particular true in their large urban settlements. These immigrants may be of Adangme, Ewe, or Akan origin, or members of northern ethnic groups or they might have come from elsewhere. When the deceased of mixed ancestry died, the funeral was usually in a form of a harmonious blend of two cultures. New elements are present at such funerals in towns, while funerals in rural background remain unaffected by foreign influences and are more likely to resemble the pre-colonial Ga indigenous practices. During the 20th century Accra became a metropolis attracting traders and settlers from all parts of the world who also brought their own traditions and culture that affected the Ga people.

505 Interview with Irene Odotei, 17/10/2016, 22.

506 Interview with Okyame Sikafo, 17/6/2016, 2.

507 Interviews with Nii Akwei Bonsu III, 16/3/2016, 4.; Emmanuel Evans Anfom, 13/9/2016, 14.

508 Interview with Okyame Sikafo, 17/6/2016, 1.

European Presence

Europeans who came as missionaries, merchants or colonial officers brought with them a completely different world view which they wanted to impose on the local population but without success for a long time. European presence in the forts on the coast at first did not have any influence on the death and funeral rites of the traditional Ga society. Gradually, some important issues were raised which contributed to profound change in traditional customs. Since 1677 the Ga people were practising ceremonial sacrifice that involved animal or possibly even human sacrifice for the medicinal or war purposes which included a ritual burial of a living thing.⁵⁰⁹ Even though these rites were performed in secrecy, there was evidence of these burials in the form of *otutui* which were built in the courtyards of family houses. Presence of an *otutu* did not imply a continuous sacrifice took place but merely a sacrifice that would last forever. Europeans though did not protest against animal sacrifice but were terrified by human sacrifice, well-known by governors and missionaries on the coast. With the expansion of British jurisdiction in the middle of the 19th century they proposed a “Bond of 1844” that officially forbade human sacrifice in any form.⁵¹⁰

The writings by Romer, a Danish governor, from around 1760 testify that gun-shooting and drinking of spirits were already part of all larger ceremonies of the indigenous peoples, including marriages and funerals.⁵¹¹ The next important influence from the Europeans was the practice of burial in wooden coffins that became popular among the Ga during the 18th century. These transformations of funeral rites did not occur immediately; they changed gradually over the decades that followed. In some cases traditional customs persisted well into the 20th century.

Two of my informants stated that the founder of Jamestown “*Wetse Kojo*” was buried in the British James-fort and since then they regularly perform rites for him.⁵¹² His burial inside a European fort shows how much foreigners appreciated and valued the Ga middlemen on the Gold

509 Margaret Field, *Religion and Medicine among the Ga People*, 121.

510 PRAAD, ADM 11/1727.

511 Ole Justesen Ed., *Danish Sources for the History of Ghana Vol.1: 1657-1735*, (Copenhagen: The Royal Danish Academy of Sciences and Letters, 2005), 342.

512 Interviews with Okyame Sikafo, 17/6/2016, 6; Nii Akwei Bonsu III, 16/3/2016, 8.

Coast.

Europeans who married Ga women in the pre-colonial and colonial periods were influenced by Ga traditional customs and some even abandoned their own traditions. Probably the most famous is the story of a Danish officer of the Jewish faith called Joseph Wulff who served at Osu castle but was left without any chance of promotion due to his religious background. Since he was well-acquainted with local people and their customs, he decided to become a merchant and live among the Ga people of Osu. His last wish was not to be buried at the Osu Christian cemetery, but in his own house in line with the Ga tradition of that period. A tombstone there still testifies that a European was buried in this Ga custom. His example is not the only one – there were some other foreigners buried at the Dutch Usher Fort.⁵¹³

Slaves who were captured during tribal wars from the 16th to the 19th century were employed as domestic slaves, as victims – offerings for sacrifice at grand funerals or sold to the Europeans who mostly shipped them to the Caribbean and North America. They took their traditional beliefs with them and some of the practices were preserved in the diaspora until today. Many of them disappeared or were modified, but some are recognizable. Their African relatives held the belief that even though they would not see their kin who passed through “the door of no return,”⁵¹⁴ at least their souls would return. On the beach of Ouidah in Benin local people built small shrines in the faith that they would help to lead the departed souls from America across the sea and back to their home village. Some descendants of the Ga people who were taken as slaves still observe a modified version of *Hɔmɔwɔ*.

British Administration

With the establishment of official colonial rule other agents of change including Christianity, formal education and modern institutions also started to work hand in hand with the

513 Interview with Irene Odotei 17/10/2016, 10.

514 “The Door of No Return” was the exit point from a coastal fort from where the slaves were taken to the ships headed for the Americas.

new governmental system by reinforcing each of them respectively. Colonialism on the one hand accelerated these transformations but on the other destabilized traditional Ga communities that became more dependent on the British government.

British colonial administration intervened to change some, to them, inappropriate funeral practices among the Ga. They saw an intramural burial as a potential danger for the spreading of diseases so they forbade it with a legislative act in 1888. But in order to be able to enforce it they needed to introduce an alternative to the common burials. In the same year they cleared some land in Christiansborg (Osu) for a new municipal cemetery.⁵¹⁵ Several other cemeteries were introduced in the following decades.⁵¹⁶ The Ga people, however, considered burial at the cemetery unnatural and incompatible with their traditional belief according to which the deceased stayed in their own houses due to the sacred connection between the dead and the living, and due to the principle of reincarnation within the family. The administration argued, however, that a house burial created bad atmosphere in overcrowded town quarters of early colonial Accra that might cause diseases. It took several decades before the majority of the Ga accepted cemetery burial.

The second significant intervention was the regulation of the *Hɔmɔwɔ* festival so that it could become acceptable to British law and Christian norms. Some religious rites and obscene dancing were considered immoral by the colonialists and were subsequently forbidden. The sexually explicit *oshi* dance was forbidden in 1904 and the new pro-traditional Ga-Mantse Taki Obili fined by the government officials.⁵¹⁷ In 1905 police raided the shrine of Naa Dede Oyadu due to several complaints of the continuing appropriation of the property of women who died during childbirth.⁵¹⁸ These were some of the features of *Hɔmɔwɔ* that demanded regulations from government officials but police actions created sharp political tensions that shook the traditional communities in Accra.

The creation of the Medical and Sanitary Departments in 1885 and 1888 respectively also

515 John Parker, "The Cultural Politics of Death & Burial in Early Colonial Accra," 213.

516 History of Accra cemeteries is described in Chapter Three.

517 PRAAD, ADM 11/1437.

518 John Parker, "The Cultural Politics of Death & Burial in Early Colonial Accra," 216-217.

caused protests by the natives because a pathological examination looked abhorrent to them as its consequence was the alienation of the bereaved from the deceased.⁵¹⁹ Medical authorities had to put a lot of effort into persuading the natives that their measures for the introduction of the health system, including mortuary practice, were crucial in order to stop the spreading of dangerous and contagious diseases which could otherwise cause an epidemic. In Volta Region the intramural burial represented the cause for potentially fatal respiratory disease called *alokpli* which was successfully eliminated with the introduction of public cemeteries.⁵²⁰ One of my informants stated that if the person died from cholera or AIDS the medical authorities did not return the corpse to the family.⁵²¹ Thus the funeral had to take place without a corpse.

The fourth interference of the British Administration was an unsuccessful attempt to limit enormous expenditure of funeral rites that were creating huge debts and caused impoverishment that could end in slavery. The people rather withdrew all their savings of several years from the bank than to fail to organize a decent funeral that would disgrace the family. The usual amount for regular funeral custom in 1909 was at least 300 to 400 Pounds.⁵²² One of the chiefs stated that legislation on the subject would be difficult and inadvisable. He further advised to the colonial government that the natives of education and position in the colony should take action in the matter and make some improvements. They should induce various chiefs to take concerted action with a view to the introduction of general regulations restricting the expenditure and excess.⁵²³ The governor then issued a circular letter and received different answers from traditional chiefs in the period between February 1909 and June 1912 with suggestions on how to impose new regulations. All efforts to limit expenditure at funerals proved unsuccessful and became even a greater issue in the present.⁵²⁴

519 Ibid., 213.

520 Sandra E. Greene, *Sacred Sites and the Colonial Encounter*, 74.

521 Interview with Nii Akwei Bonsu III, 16/3/2016, 8.

522 PRAAD, ADM 11; SNA 43.

523 PRAAD, ADM 11; SNA 43.

524 Issues of present funeral expenditure is discussed in Chapter Two.

In 1858 they tried to restrict the duration of funeral rites but this attempt also failed.⁵²⁵ The long duration of funeral rites was more of an issue among the Akan peoples where a traditional ceremony lasts for a week. Among the Ga, however, the funeral rites were normally completed in a day or two.

Excessive drinking at funerals represented another problem for the administration which was a kind of paradox since it was the colonial government itself that introduced plentiful of alcoholic beverages. From the 18th century it was a custom that when a person who was a friend of the deceased arrives he brings an anker (anchor), or a half anker of brandy to be contributed to the enjoyment of the whole party.⁵²⁶ The issue, however, was more acute among the Akan since they had a custom of fasting during funerals, which meant that after drinking only small quantities of alcohol it made them drunk fast and the intoxication at funerals was actually encouraged.⁵²⁷ Alcohol did not represent a major problem in the pre-colonial times when the usual drink served at funerals was palm-wine. When Ghanaians started producing cheap and easily procured rum and gin, the effects of intoxication came rapidly and the period of mourning became a time of continuous intoxication.⁵²⁸ In 1911, a provincial commissioner from Akuso wrote that the amount of drink could be regulated with the by-laws but he did not state a concrete quantity. The practice, however, was that “the higher position of the deceased, the greater the expenditure in rum and consequently more drunkenness.”⁵²⁹ Spirits and other alcoholic drinks which were customary a few decades ago are not served any more since presently only water and soft drinks are usually served at the Ga funerals. Alcohol is only used for libation which still represents an important rite as a part of the traditional ceremony. There is no evidence as to why the alcohol consumption during Ga death rites gradually diminished.

Indecent dancing and singing of ribald songs were closely linked to high intoxication. In

525 John Parker, “The Cultural Politics of Death & Burial in Early Colonial Accra,” 213.

526 Romer Ludewig Ferdinand, *A Reliable Account of the Coast of Guinea (1760)*, 184.

527 Emmanuel Kwaku Akyeampong, *Drink, Power and Cultural Change*, 39.

528 PRAAD, ADM 11 SNA 43. Case No. 32/1909. Subject: Funeral customs.

529 Ibid.

order to suppress certain native dances on funerals a by-law to this effect was passed by Ga-Mantse in 1911. After the notorious *Oshi* dance was already forbidden, he also forbade obscene songs and dances of *Ashiko* and *Sibi-saba*. An offender should be liable to a fine not exceeding five pounds and two sheep.⁵³⁰ A video recorded in January 1994, however, showed some obscene dancing at a funeral of a young fisherman.⁵³¹ In general, such behaviour is absent at contemporary funerals, proving these regulations effective. Administrative regulations of such rites were successful due to the Christian values and sets of moral conduct which gradually became rooted in the Ga communities.

Gun-firing that announced the beginning of the rites was also an issue that disturbed the British government. It was a principal feature of funeral custom for generations. If the deceased was a *caboceer* or a “Big Man”, in addition to an anker of brandy, forty to fifty pounds of gunpowder which was fired off had to be given.⁵³² In fact it was the British who introduced firing minute guns for the internment of Alata *Mantse* in 1796.⁵³³ Since the beginning of the 20th century the colonial authorities wanted to limit the quantity of gunpowder distributed at grand funerals.⁵³⁴ Similarly to the attempt to limit expenditure at funerals this one also failed. At Osu they still fire old Danish guns when a royal person passes away.⁵³⁵ Presently *Asafo companies* of youngsters equipped with ancient rusty muskets of their ancestors fire blank shots at most of grand funerals of important people. Therefore gun-firing remains part of big funerals among the Ga, as the author of this thesis witnessed at two funerals in 2016 (in Kokrobite) and 2017 (in Ofankor).⁵³⁶ The purpose of gun-firing is to let the long-dead know that an illustrious newcomer is arriving.⁵³⁷ Another function of gun-firing is to scare away the ghost of the deceased not to molest the bereaved family.

Widowhood rites were also problematic since they included some inhuman treatment of

530 PRAAD, ADM 11/1/316. Case No. 45/1911. Subject: By laws made by Ga-Mantse – resuppression of certain native dances.

531 *African Cross Rhythms*. Directed by Peter Bischoff. Bortianor, Ghana: Loki Films Denmark, 1994. DVD.

532 Romer Ludewig Ferdinand, *A Reliable Account of the Coast of Guinea (1760)*, 184.

533 Henderson-Quartey David K., *The Ga of Ghana: History and Culture of a West African People*, 173.

534 PRAAD, ADM 11 SNA 43.

535 Interview with H.N.A. Wellington, 22/6/2016, 5.

536 From funeral attendance at Kokrobite, 27/2/2016; Ofankor 10/12/2016.

537 Margaret Field, *Religion and Medicine among the Ga People*, 201.

women that was a breach of human rights. Thus they were modified or abolished.⁵³⁸

In 1927 the colonial administration introduced “Native customs examination” for all future provincial government officials so that they could get a good background of traditional knowledge necessary for dealing with natives. The examinations included questions demanding detailed knowledge of funeral rites of the paramount chief, captain of a company and a funeral in general.⁵³⁹ Future governmental officials were thus better acquainted with the proceedings of traditional funerals and related customs.

In conclusion, the impact of colonial administration greatly influenced Ga funeral practices, but some of the traditional customs remain in place. The British succeeded in introducing cemeteries and mortuaries thus implementing western medicine and sanitation measures, and in forbidding human sacrifice, excessive drinking, obscene songs and dancing during “Hɔmɔwɔ” and funerals. Enormous expenditure and duration of the funeral were only partially limited, depending on the status of the deceased and the organizational plans of the family. Gun-firing, however, remained a feature at larger funerals. These influences were gradually applied through the whole colonial period from 1874 to 1957. People mostly accepted them but their attitude towards death remained mainly unchanged. After Ghana gained independence nationalism encouraged the preservation of national life and culture but the changes were already rooted as a part of modern society. Presently there are still no formalized funeral services in Ghana, which means that every individual is buried according to his status, religion, gender and age.

Religion

One of the strengths of the two world religions has been the way in which they have been able to unite people of different cultural background.⁵⁴⁰ This is especially evident in West Africa where they have almost totally overwhelmed the indigenous beliefs and the majority of people

538 See Chapter Four, Widowhood Rites.

539 PRAAD, ADM 11/1/964. Case No. 7/1927. Subject: Native Customs Examination.

540 Jocelyn Murray ed., *Cultural Atlas of Africa*, 31.

converted into one of their faiths. Not only that a great proportion of them have been overtaken by the intellectual packages embedded in Islam and Christianity, including their foreign cosmologies, but their influence had jeopardized the very existence of African traditional beliefs.⁵⁴¹ Indigenous faith has more or less become history and the new monotheistic religions now represent a dominant world view with a large impact on traditional culture.

Initially, Christianity did not influence funeral rites. Even though the Portuguese first set foot in what is today's Ghana in the 1470s, it took a long time to gain the first converts. Colonial governors, missionaries, merchants and adventurers established their own view and attitude towards traditional religions of the natives on the Gold Coast. Their success in converting indigenous population was scarce and only limited to mulattoes born from mixed marriages, some outlaws seeking refuge in a foreign religion and some curious and greedy individuals trying to make some profit from the Europeans.

The first missionaries arrived to Accra not earlier than in 1828 when the Evangelical Mission Society from Basel landed at Osu and the foundation for a mission among the Ga people was laid in 1843. Later they established several workshops and opened elementary as well as secondary school in Accra. These missionaries contributed a lot to the socio-economic development in Accra but this was still not a major shift towards the practising of Christianity yet.⁵⁴² Early missionaries also struggled with rapid deaths due to the tropical climate and dangerous diseases such as malaria, dengue fever and yellow fever.

Since they were not successful in converting people to Christianity due to the language barrier and cultural divergence, the missionaries attracted pupils to schools so that they would become teachers.⁵⁴³ Some of these students, who were mostly mulatto boys, were trained to become translators for trading or negotiating purposes. One of them was J. Zimmermann who became a missionary teacher and later translated parts of the Bible in the Ga language and wrote a grammar

541 Kwasi Wiredu, "Death and the Afterlife in African Culture," 148.

542 Emmanuel Isaac, Kpakpo Addo, *Worldview, Way of Life and Worship*, 33, 40.

543 J. Kofi Agbeti, *West African Church History II* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1991), 36.

book on the Ga language.⁵⁴⁴

Basel and Bremen missionaries who engaged in their activities on the Gold Coast had big troubles converting indigenous people into Christian faith. The differences between the traditional religion of the Ga and Christian doctrine were great. The indigenous world view that was not compatible with biblical cosmology presented a great obstacle for winning aboriginal souls to the Christian faith. One of my informants stated that these initial attempts to convert indigenous people were unsuccessful due to the negative bias of the missionaries who were refusing to accept any feature of the traditional belief of the Ga people. They regarded traditional drums and other musical instruments as evil, therefore they were forbidden in churches. Another difference was the Christian belief that souls of the dead could not communicate with the living and that the ghosts did not exist.⁵⁴⁵ The primary purpose of missions – trade and exploitation of the African continent – also represented a barrier to winning the natives to the Christian religion.⁵⁴⁶ The early Christian converts distinguished themselves from those believing in the traditional religion by opposing puberty rites, dancing, payment of bride-wealth, polygyny, pre-adolescent betrothal and anything at all that displeased them.⁵⁴⁷ All these rejections created frequent conflicts throughout the territories with the followers of different religions.

The early missionaries did not have any influence on the traditional funeral and burial rites of the Ga people. They had prejudices about the native traditional music, traditional dressing and anything connected with indigenous cultural practices which they did not understand and therefore considered them demonic or heathen. That was a mistake that distanced them from the native population for decades.

Later they introduced changes into the funeral ceremony which were initially optional depending on the decisions of the family or the community. If they were Christians, they could decide to forgo certain rites such as libation. That was more an exception than a rule since the

544 Ibid., 37.

545 Sandra E. Greene, *Sacred Sites and the Colonial Encounter*, 69.

546 Interview with Chris Hesse, 21/9/2016, 2.

547 G.K. Nukunya, *Tradition and Change in Ghana*, (Accra: Ghana University Press, 2003), 122-123.

missionaries experienced difficulties getting established and the traditional practices just went on.⁵⁴⁸ For a long time the non-Christian community remained unaffected but the converts needed to adapt to the customs of their new faith. Church regarded some of these traditional practices as pagan even though they looked quite harmless. That is why they abolished most of them and so the Christian communities started to differ from the ones practising indigenous beliefs.

With churches and schools network and with the readjustment of certain Christian principles which became more practical to the indigenous population, the missionaries eventually started to attract converts and with their help they began to affect traditional communities and some particularities of their funeral rites. Traditional wailing was a sign of hopelessness since the person was dead and the future of his soul uncertain. Christian missionaries persuaded some people that crying was unnecessary if you believe in God because the departed went to a good place called heaven.⁵⁴⁹ They also initiated the rephrasing of traditional funeral dirges in order to introduce more hope to mourners and they changed the idea of worshipping. A funeral service became the worship where people sing to express joy, even though it is closely linked with sadness.

After stubborn resistance to evangelization and half a century of labour with scant rewards, the Basel Mission and the Wesleyan Methodists – Accra's principal missionary churches that by that time almost lost all hope began to attract growing numbers of converts in the final decades of the 19th century.⁵⁵⁰ These churches survived because they showed certain tolerance to traditional customs. In the 1960s it became common for the Ga people to attend Christian church on Sundays but they still participated in traditional Ga religious rituals when they were ill.⁵⁵¹ It was a clear sign that the majority still deeply believed in traditional gods and they turned towards them in a case of crisis.

The individuals who became influenced by Christianity realized that it also showed a path to

548 Interview with Emmanuel Evans Ankom, 13/9/2016, 6.

549 Interview with H.N.A. Wellington, 22/6/2016, 7.

550 John Parker, "The Cultural Politics of Death & Burial in Early Colonial Accra," 212.

551 Marion Kilson, *Dancing with the Gods*, 89.

deeper thinking that was different from their traditional belief. Others saw the new faith as a tool of indoctrination of indigenous people, their tradition and culture. Religion sometimes caused disputes among family members, who practised different faith, which often led to isolation or separation of particular individuals who refused to attend funeral of a person belonging to another religion.

In a family where educated and baptised individuals were enough in numbers to persuade the others not to follow the traditional, pagan burial they performed traditional rites but the burial was performed in a Christian manner. In some cases, such as the burial of Gbese *Manɔtɛ* Okaija, the clash of cultural values between the traditionalists and Christians in his family ended in a riot.⁵⁵²

Christians also made ties with each other to form a kind of burial-insurance societies.⁵⁵³ Even presently it remains a common practice that Christian children stimulate their dying parents to convert before death so that they would be able to enter heaven and they would have the right to a Christian funeral.

Recently there have been several attempts to revive traditional religion in Jamestown but these attempts have only been successful in that the modified traditional practices have been introduced into Christian masses, such as libation, the use of traditional percussion instruments, modified traditional melodies, etc.

Some of the traditional ceremonies such as puberty rites have disappeared almost completely from Jamestown due to the influence of Christian churches. Other rites of passage including funerals were also modified in order to fit into Christian services. The first changes applied by the Ga Christians were the replacement of libation with Christian prayers and the substitution of drumming and dancing with the singing of hymns.⁵⁵⁴ These Christian rites were usually added to existing traditional ones and started to appear around the 1920s, in the period of intensified relations between the Ga and Western technological societies.⁵⁵⁵ These transformations, however, were not consistently implemented. Some churches tried to persuade people not to engage

552 David K. Henderson-Quartey, *The Ga of Ghana: History and Culture of a West African People*, 263-264.

553 Hans W. Debrunner, *A History of Christianity in Ghana* (Accra: Waterville Publishing House, 1967), 318.

554 Diana Gladys Azu: *The Ga Family and social Change, African Social Research Documents*, 97.

555 Marion Kilson, *African Urban Kinsmen, The Ga of Central Accra*, 61.

in traditional festivals such as *Hɔmɔwɔ* and other entertaining gatherings. Certain individuals from traditional background decided to leave home and dedicate their lives to the church, neglecting all traditional aspects of their everyday life. It is not problematic that the Ga people accepted these foreign ideas but it is regrettable that they took them without evaluative examination.

One of my informants said that Church authorities in Jamestown became more liberal by allowing fetish priests to enter their church buildings, which was strictly forbidden in the past.⁵⁵⁶ On the other hand a fetish priestess from another Ga town stated that she could not attend a Christian funeral as people would remove her on the spot because they feared the deities from traditional religion she is connected with.⁵⁵⁷ The majority of Christian churches, however, allow the pouring of libation, splitting the sponge, traditional drumming, certain traditional rites linked with clan houses, and other rituals that are now somewhere between traditional and Christian faith.⁵⁵⁸ The acceptance of Christianity came as an external influence of a foreign culture, but present conceptualization of Ghanaian modes of Christianity may also be regarded as an internal creation of their society.

The Christians also prefer to calculate all funeral expenses in advance because of difficult economic circumstances. That helps the organizers to avoid over-expenditure by the end of the ceremony.

Christian-type funerals have become increasingly popular since the children of the new generation who were born or later became Christian decide to perform a Christian funeral for their deceased parent who was baptised just before his death.⁵⁵⁹ From a video footage recorded in 1994 at a funeral ceremony of a young fisherman from Bortianor, a village near Accra, it is evident that no Christian elements were present.⁵⁶⁰ There was a lot of dancing, drinking, and imitating events from the life of the deceased in a happy-sad manner. Due to the visual evidence from this videoclip it becomes clear that Christianity found its way into funeral ceremonies in rural areas only recently.

556 Interview with Nii Aryee Quarshie I., 27/10/2016, 7.

557 Interview with Naa Ohemea Bortsoo, 26/9/2016, 7.

558 Interview with Irene Odotei 17/10/2016, 10.

559 By “Christian type” I mean funerals with church liturgy, singing choristers and Christian pastor conducting the funeral ceremony and performing Christian rites.

560 IAS Video Archive, Peter Bischoff, *African Cross Rhythms*, Loki Films Denmark, 52 minutes, 1994.

Presently some Christian families, who decide to perform an entirely Christian funeral, offer a Christian prayer before the body is laid in state. The Saviour Church and the Full Gospel Church, for example, also gives the body a ritual bath since they consider it decent and not in conflict with their principles and laws.⁵⁶¹ Christians in general do not consider it necessary to put items such as money or clothing in the coffin.⁵⁶² When the body is sent into the church auditorium, the ministers perform all Christian rites and take care of the burial as well.⁵⁶³ However, some of the Charismatic Churches and Apostles Revelation Society forbid bringing the dead body into their chapels, while Christian Action faith Ministry allow a corpse into their Temple only if a person was as least 70 years old before dying.⁵⁶⁴ This kind of burial is becoming increasingly popular since it is also much cheaper than the traditional one.⁵⁶⁵ A modern-church Christian burial is becoming quite different from the traditional. The ceremony opens with prayers followed by church service before they let the public come in. During the wake-keeping they sing Christian songs or hymns and sometimes they even ban the whole wake-keeping and make a small family gathering instead.⁵⁶⁶ Traditionalists carry the person in the coffin on their shoulders, going from house to house, before it is taken to the cemetery, while Christians carry the coffin lower down or drive it in a hearse from home or church straight to the cemetery.⁵⁶⁷ Christians carry the casket low because they do not consider the death itself as a triumph since only Jesus Christ had resurrected from the dead. If they carried it up on their shoulders, the spirit would rise and they could not control their hands any more.⁵⁶⁸ There are also many funerals where traditional elements blend with the Christian ones. In that case the traditional ceremony remains unchanged and Christian rites would be added as supplementary.

561 Asare – Danso Seth, “The Rites of Passage in African Independent and Charismatic Churches of Ghana: A Case Study of the Saviour Church of Ghana and the All Nations Full Gospel Church in Agogo-Asante,” (MPhil Thesis, Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, Legon, 2000), 149.

562 Emmanuel Isaac Kpakpo Addo, *Worldview, Way of Life and Worship*, 207.

563 Interview with Nii Akwei Bonsu III, 16/3/2016, 8.

564 Frederick Mawusi Amevenku Rev., “The Impact of Charismatic Churches on African Indigenous Churches: A Study of the Apostles Revelation Society,” (Mphil Thesis, Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, Legon, 2010), 103.

565 Interview with Nii Aryee Quarshie I., 27/10/2016, 8.

566 Interview with H.N.A. Wellington, 22/6/2016, 8.

567 Ibid., 11.

568 Roberta Bonetti, “Coffins for Wear and Consumption: Abebuu adekai as "Memory Makers among the Ga of Ghana," 276.

Presently, after a funeral of the deceased several Christian churches perform a “thanksgiving service” around three weeks after the burial to praise the God for a successful burial.⁵⁶⁹ This service may be compared with the traditional three-week memorial celebration that was practised by Ga traditionalists. Since most of the funerals are performed on Saturdays, the thanksgiving follows on Sundays. The exception are some orthodox churches which forbid burials on weekends and rather conduct them before Friday.⁵⁷⁰ For this service some friends or relatives and especially women who can afford it buy cloth with the same pattern.⁵⁷¹ Memorial service is observed during the official twelve-week mourning period following death.⁵⁷²

In general, Christianity has had a profound influence on the culture, tradition, customs and ceremonies such as funeral rites. It may be found in hymns, women fellowships, praying over the dead body and other Christian rites. This is not only a new belief but also a lifestyle of a new generation. Reading and discussing of the Bible and visiting Sunday mass has become compulsory for everybody. At some point Biblical implications have been subtly incorporated into the Ga traditional thought, without much questioning.

The traditionalists are saying that Christianity also brought a lot of negative influences, especially on the rites of passage which were considered heathen rituals. The outdoor ceremony is largely replaced by baptism, initiation rites for boys and girls are almost extinct, marriage ceremonies are replaced by Christian weddings, and funerals with burial rites are also largely affected as described above. Christians regard traditional religion as archaic and obsolete and consequently they are introducing new funeral and burial rites. Christianity, on the other hand, abolished inhuman practices infringing human rights such as human sacrifice and other actions breaching the law while some of the rituals including widowhood rites have been modified and aligned with Christian principles.

The influence of Islam was well established in the northern parts of Ghana in the pre-

569 Interview with Nii Akwei Bonsu III, 16/3/2016, 4.

570 Ibid., 6.

571 Diana Gladys Azu: *The Ga Family and Social Change, African Social Research Documents*, 98.

572 Marion Kilson, *African Urban Kinsmen, The Ga of Central Accra*, 63.

colonial period, but during the colonial period the first migrants, usually merchants, came to Accra and surrounding areas forming “Zongo” communities. In the same way as Christianity, Islam also affected certain sections of the Ga society albeit to a much smaller extent.

The Tabons from Brazil were the first Muslims who arrived to Accra in 1836 and they settled at the Otublohum quarter. By the late 19th century their area was taken over by Hausa/Fulani brand of Islam and eventually multi-ethnic mosques were built in various “Zongo” areas of Accra.⁵⁷³

Certain ceremonies, including funerals, were superimposed on the traditional system as a combination of two systems.⁵⁷⁴ The Ga converts who accepted Islam as their faith started following Muslim funeral customs. According to one of my informants, Muslims prioritize family traditions before the religious ones, therefore the head of the family decide which rites are to be performed, before the Islamic ones and all these rites are always performed at the home of the deceased.⁵⁷⁵ The person who has accepted Islam as his own faith has done “Tuba” and such a person is buried instantly when he or she dies.⁵⁷⁶ There is no waiting and the funeral ceremony takes place on the next day after death in a mosque and after that the corpse is buried wrapped in a mat, without a coffin. A coffin is only used to bring the corpse from the house to the burial ground.⁵⁷⁷

In general, the world religions had an important influence on Ga ideas and practices related to death, burial and ancestors’ relations with the living.

Modernity and Modern Institutions

By modernity and modern institutions I refer to contemporary changes in the funeral practice in the Ga society that exist separate from the technological improvements and have origins in Western ideas. Modifications of funeral practices in Jamestown and neighbouring communities

573 Emmanuel Isaac, Kpakpo Addo, *Worldview, Way of Life and Worship*, 41.

574 G.K. Nukunya, *Tradition and Change in Ghana*, 130.

575 Interview with Nii Akwei Bonsu III, 16/3/2016, 9.

576 Interview with Irene Odotei 17/10/2016, 13.

577 Interview with H.N.A. Wellington, 22/6/2016, 8.

are many and some of them are described here.

Many wealthier families decided not to employ *yalayei* (funeral women) for bathing and preparing the death body but rather to bring the corpse straight to the funeral home where the experts took care of the whole preparation for the funeral. From there, the undertakers sometimes brought the body directly to the church without lying in state.

Another important impact of modernization was dressing the corpse. After the funeral washers bathed the dead body, the dressmaker made a shroud and a dress to equip the corpse for the presentation at laying in state. The cloth was skilfully tied and they applied make-up to the face. If the deceased was a man, the undertakers would dress him in a suit; if it was a woman, she was be dressed in a frock. They also decorated the room with laces and frail for a public display.

Another influence of modernity and showing off luxuries was that the mourners started changing into expensive clothes for different parts of funeral celebration. During the colonial period educated people wore western clothes, but after Ghana's declaring independence everybody could wear anything. And this was also the case at funerals. Suit or coat, which was previously an imperative for funerals was not important and people could wear their casual clothes. Kwame Nkrumah, the first Ghanaian president, was encouraging people to wear traditional cloths such as kente, adinkra or batakari. As seen in the video from a funeral in Bortianor in 1994 the village people wore their everyday-clothes since they probably could not afford better ones.⁵⁷⁸

Presently most people, women in particular, wear specially designed black, white or red dresses. I was also told that black means gloom and mourning for the departed person and is most common among funeral attires. Red is a fierce colour, usually used by the core family, by the mourners of a chief, traditional leader, *Asafo Okyame* (linguist), or somebody who died prematurely since it symbolizes extended grief. White colour means victory and is used when people celebrate a funeral in a more joyful manner if the deceased died aged at least 70 or 80, which qualifies him automatically as an ancestor. A combination of black and white shows that a person lived a good

578 IAS Video Archive, Peter Bischoff, *African Cross Rhythms*, Loki Films Denmark, 52 minutes, 1994.

life and reached old age. This two colours are also used when a twin or the mother of twins dies, since they are supposed to have special spiritual gifts. Children usually wear black, while other non-family attendants may wear any dark coloured cloth which used to be a regular practice in the past. White, or black and white is also used at funerals of a *wulɔmɔ* – a fetish priest, or a *wɔyoo* – priestess. According to one of my informants, people also wore white dresses when a fisherman died.⁵⁷⁹ In Jamestown a group of women who were announcing the death were dressed in black with a red scarf around their head.⁵⁸⁰ Presently young people wear all sorts of clothes for the funerals, changing them for each part of the ceremony.⁵⁸¹ Some friends or relatives and especially women who can afford it buy the same cloth with the same pattern. Throughout the history of the Ga people the elaborate textile represented symbolic meanings and acted as a medium through particular patterns that were comprehensible only to the members of the domestic society.

Wreaths brought by friends and family are another modern feature of funerals. Specially carved fantasy coffins also became a well-known feature not only among the Ga, but throughout the world.⁵⁸²

The use of written will is another feature of modernity that was incorporated into the Ga inheritance and traditional customs.⁵⁸³ Some common people also decide to make an insurance policy so that when the time of death arrives the insurance company takes care of funeral costs and the family do not have to carry the financial burden. It guarantees some sort of protection, since the funeral thus costs less and it is certainly done properly. Some churches also advocate for such an insurance.⁵⁸⁴

Another underestimated effect of modernization on the funeral rites is the socio-economic status, which determines the extent and type of funeral. In traditional areas in the middle of a

579 Interview with Nii Aryee Quarshie I., 27/10/2016, 9.

580 Interviews with Nii Aryee Quarshie I., 27/10/2016, 10; Irene Odotei 17/10/2016, 21-22.

581 Interviews with Okyame Sikafo, 17/6/2016, 1.; Nii Akwei Bonsu III, 16/3/2016, 5; Nii Aryee Quarshie I., 27/10/2016, 10.

582 Fantasy coffins are described in Chapter Six.

583 A written will is more thoroughly discussed in Chapter Six.

584 Interview with H.N.A. Wellington, 22/6/2016, 10.

commercial quarter, such as Jamestown, modernity blends with tradition and forms a distinctive urban unit.

Technology

On the one hand, industrial urban civilization brought increased secularization of society, but on the other the decline of ceremonialism. Some funeral practices were separated from religious sphere and taken over by professional services such as undertakers and mortuaries.

The most important technological invention in terms of funerals in Ghana was the introduction of mortuary storage. By the end of the 19th century mortuaries were introduced in urban areas, having a significant impact on traditional funeral rites. These storage facilities for the deceased enabled the families to postpone the burial and carefully plan the funeral and the rites. According to some of my informants wealthy families sometimes decide to postpone the funeral for up to 18 months.⁵⁸⁵ During this time the corpse stays in a fridge without decaying. The thus extended time for planning allows a particular family to prepare a funeral carefully which includes inviting relatives living in distant countries. The preservation of the body in the morgue, however, costs a lot of money but that does not present a problem for the rich who are ready to pay every bill. The longer the corpse is preserved, the more respect the funeral attendants will pay and the bigger the admiration of the family will be.

Western technology has also introduced cremation, but the Ga traditional society has not recognized it because it presents a difficult concept for understanding this way of burial.⁵⁸⁶

With the introduction of computers, mobile phones and other information and communication technology tools (gadgets, social networks, etc.) the news of the death of an individual and organization of the funeral becomes easily accessible to all scattered family members regardless of the distance. Even the news of a chief's death leak to the public more frequently nowadays.

585 Interviews with Nii Akwei Bonsu III, 16/3/2016, 7.; Naa Ohemea Bortsoo, 26/9/2016, 2.

586 Interview with Emmanuel Evans Anfoam, 13/9/2016, 7.

Means of transportation, especially planes, enable people to travel long distances in a short time, making it possible for relatives to come to funerals from other countries or continents. General mobility also enables transportation of the corpse which renders the possibility for everybody to be buried at the place of origin.

In the last couple of decades the organizers show interest in documenting the funeral. They also distribute pictures of the deceased that are pinned to the shirt or even printed T-shirts for the occasion. In the previous decades pictures and videos of the event used to be taken by a hired cameraman, but now everybody can take pictures and videos with a smart phone. The reason is that they want the dead to be remembered through images for eternity.⁵⁸⁷



⁵⁸⁷ Roberta Bonetti, "Coffins for wear and consumption: Abebuu adekai as "memory makers among the Ga of Ghana," 275.

Chapter 6: Funerals Today

Abandoned and Transformed Elements of Funeral Rites

“Each one normally has a book in his hand. The young and the old pretend to sing from the books, and this is to signify that the deceased, who can now read a book, is as wise as a European. They steal books from Europeans for this purpose. I have seen books printed in Latin and other languages that the Blacks have stolen from the Europeans and saved to be employed in this way.” The carrying of books may have symbolized the individual's employment by Europeans, or possibly the belief in the inherent power of the written word to ward off evil. But Romer may have been generalizing from a single incident he had witnessed.”⁵⁸⁸

In the middle of the 18th century the indigenous people in the area believed that for reading a book a white person had to possess some kind of magic. Their way of magic was performing a final rite of passage for their deceased member with those books. Since there was a belief that dead ancestors possess wisdom, which surely includes the skill of reading, they wanted to unify these two supernatural elements.

Transformed funeral rites of the Akan were thoroughly observed by Sjaak Van Der Geest, who compared the situation from 1969 to 1996. The customs of shaving the head as well as fasting were completely abandoned, while traditional drumming and dancing were replaced with Highlife music and the food was served for everyone. In general the secularization and commercialization had replaced the ritual while the whole performance was done more to please the attendants than the deceased.⁵⁸⁹

If we compare the above description with the situation in Jamestown and other Ga communities, it becomes evident that a very similar transformation took place. There were many

⁵⁸⁸ Romer Ludewig Ferdinand, *A Reliable Account of the Coast of Guinea (1760)*, 184.

⁵⁸⁹ Sjaak Van Der Geest, “Funerals for the Living: Conversations with Elderly People in Kwahu, Ghana,” 111 – 112.

abandoned and even more transformed elements of funeral rites within the Ga society which were used by fetish priests but are not acceptable by Christians or modern laws. The main features are described below:

At traditional Ga funerals visitors were supposed to fast, while now they prepare different kinds of food.⁵⁹⁰ Since fasting was a part of the funeral custom, the majority of people who drank alcohol quickly became drunk. Before foreign spirits were introduced, palm wine and *akpeteshie* (local gin) were widely-spread and common at funerals where everybody got intoxicated.⁵⁹¹ Presently, however, alcohol is not served at the funeral itself, therefore a person who intends to drink needs to find an alcoholic beverage elsewhere.

During some funerals a possession of an individual by the ghost of the deceased, especially female, was a common occasion. Another person or traditional priest interpreted the frenzied gestures and sounds of the possessed one and explain them to the bereaved.⁵⁹² Rituals involving possession are now removed from public eye.

Casual clothes were used in the pre-colonial period, while now people change different clothes during one-day celebration.⁵⁹³

Rigid widowhood rites from the pre-colonial era were greatly reduced or modified by Christian church.⁵⁹⁴ Azu reported that by 1974 Christian or educated widows at Labone were only kept indoors until the ceremonies were completed and the will read, while widowers were not obliged to perform any rites.

There was a custom among the Ga people to place a precious personal object into the coffin so that the deceased could take it with him. Presently people prefer to keep these objects as a inheritance for the next generations.⁵⁹⁵

590 Interview with Okyame Sikafo, 17/6/2016, 7.

591 Sjaak van der Geest, "Family Dynamics an a Changing Society, A Case Study of Rural Ghanaian Community", (Thesis of the Degree of Master of Arts Sociology, University of Ghana Legon, 1972), 57.

592 Interview with Nii Aryee Quarshie I., 27.10.2016, 15. Sjaak van der Geest, "Family Dynamics an a Changing Society, A Case Study of Rural Ghanaian Community," 58.

593 Interview with Okyame Sikafo, 17/6/2016, 7.

594 See Chapter Four. Widowhood Rites.

595 Interview with H.N.A. Wellington, 22/6/2016, 9.

Gbebimo (way-asking) was a traditional provision of death for a suffering, chronically sick person who wanted to die in peace. It was literally seeking allowance from the ancestors and consent of the elders to speed up the death since every treatment option was unsuccessful.⁵⁹⁶ Similar mercy killing is applied today by medical doctors in a case of difficult terminal disease.

Presently the use of libation as a belief system remains a popular issue at a national level. Since it is so deeply rooted not only in the traditional religion but also in contemporary culture, chieftaincy and other customs it is difficult to neglect. Libation means pouring of few drops of alcohol on the ground in order to invoke or communicate with supernatural forces such as ancestors, deities, lesser gods and the creator. It is widely spread among all peoples of Southern Ghana, including the Ga. Christianity and colonial forces considered it a fetish and thus tried to suppress it in the last two centuries but without success. Now it is used for grand processions such as the National day celebration, *Hɔmɔwɔ* festival, as well as within some Christian churches and for many traditional rites. It is most important as a means of communication with the ancestors. Libation is poured at traditional or sometimes even Christian funerals. First time it is poured it is to prepare the corpse to be laid in state, and then libation is poured again so that the spirit of the dead would be accepted in the afterlife.⁵⁹⁷

The Ga people believe that the ancestors somehow continue their life in the presence of their former family. In order to communicate with such an ancestor a person sprinkles some food or a few drops of an alcoholic drink to the ground by saying some words that invoke the spirit. The majority of the Ga people, including many Christians, believe that libation is not against the Christian God when it is not used for fetish purposes.⁵⁹⁸ The Ga people still believe that they can find out the true cause for the death of the person, not by doctor or medical examiner, but through libation whereby the spirit of the dead would convey the truth.⁵⁹⁹ People also pour libation to

596 Deborah Atobrah, "Caring for the Chronically Sick within Ga Families; A Study of Modern Innovations and Traditional Practices," 143-144.

597 Emmanuel Isaac Kpakpo Addo, *Worldview, Way of Life and Worship*, 207.

598 Interview with Nii Aryee Quarshie I., 27/10/2016, 8.

599 Interview with Irene Odotei 17/10/2016, 14.

communicate with their departed ancestors by calling their names and telling them that even though they are dead they are still part of the living. Libation is somewhat controversial but it could be easily compared to the Christian prayer to the God. It is the way the Ga people maintain their connection with the departed souls.⁶⁰⁰ Along the Christian and Muslim prayers, libation was used as an official part of the recent 60th anniversary of the Ghanaian state, celebrated on the 6th March as an independence day.

In the first decades of the 20th century certain “native customs” and “fetishes” were suppressed by law since they were considered unethical or provocative by the colonial administration. The Ga custom called *afunsoa* or *sasa* was used to detect a criminal in the case of an unnatural death. After the rites were performed the culprit was subjected to hooting and all manner of torture by the crowd during drumming and singing of the *Asafo*. The criminal was obliged to pay all the costs of the funeral, *afunsoa* ritual and had to give another 50 to 80 pounds to the victim's family. In some cases the culprit left his native land and never returned, or he even committed suicide. This atrocious custom was observed almost throughout the Gold Coast except in the Northern Territories or the British Mandated Territory and was eventually forbidden by the colonial authorities in 1901.⁶⁰¹

Another custom called “Witch finding” or “Wizard finding” was performed when death was caused by witchcraft or wizardry. The symptom of death caused by witchcraft was vomiting a lot of blood prior to death. The fetish priest threw a fowl in the air for every suspect individually and declared the culprit according to how the sacrificed fowl landed. If the criminal was found guilty, he was fined, hooted at, tortured and taken before a tribunal where he was warned not to practice it again on the penalty of death. This custom was forbidden in 1930.⁶⁰²

There was a common fetish among the Ga called *Oyeadu* which employed a *wulɔmɔ* on a *wɔyoo* and was composed of a large locally made earthenware pot for water, containing water and a

600 Interview with H.N.A. Wellington, 22/6/2016, 8.

601 PRAAD, ADM 11/1437.

602 Ibid.

live black river fish. A woman who was cursed or put into this fetish generally died during pregnancy but since such a death was regarded abominable her body was not buried but placed bare against an anthill outside town with no mourning. Some families wanted to hide the cause of death but the fetish priestess would reveal it sooner or later. The family had to pay a large amount of money (50 to 60 pounds) for the ceremony where the fetish priest would reverse the curse in order to avoid the recurrence of the misfortune amongst the members of the family of the deceased. This fetish was officially forbidden in 1906.⁶⁰³

Formal education vastly contributed towards abandonment of some inhuman practices and other traditional rites which were considered dangerous, dishonourable or merely unnecessary. Some would say that education together with foreign culture and Christianity more or less worked hand in hand to influence these certain traditional ancestral rites to a very large extent.

Traditional Rhythms, Dances, Songs and Dirges

In the traditional Ga society drumming, singing and dancing represented one of the most important parts of the funeral rites especially when they were escorting the body to the burial grounds.⁶⁰⁴ The procession of drummers and singers going from one corner of the village to another also meant that the community was being alerted and invited to an impending funeral.⁶⁰⁵ They used sacred horns, drums and rhythms because a funeral without music was not considered a proper one.

Dances, songs and rhythms usually have a single name among the Ga people, therefore, hereinafter, I will refer to them as “rhythms,” since a rhythm forms a basis for accompanied song and dance which are part of the performance of the drummers.⁶⁰⁶ In the pre-colonial period, the Ga used a rhythm named *Tete* when a man died, and a rhythm *Teteley* when a woman died. Both rhythms are still in use today but they are mixed with modern ones and played in a different way so that they cannot be heard in their original composition any more. A special rhythm called *Oshieka*

603 PRAAD, ADM 11/1437.

604 In pre-colonial era there were no coffins and no cemeteries.

605 Paschal Yao Younge, *Music and Dance Traditions of Ghana*, (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co. Inc., 2011), 155.

606 Author's interpretation.

was used for sending the dead body from the funeral ceremony towards the cemetery.⁶⁰⁷ These ancient rhythms and accompanying dances were specialized for funerals signifying sorrow by symbolic gestures. When the Ga people occupied Accra Plains in the early 16th century, they encountered the Obutu people who were part of the Guan ethnic group which influenced the Ga in the form of a religious cult called *kpele* that included songs and dirges.⁶⁰⁸ Some of them are still known but since they are sung in a forgotten dialect they sound meaningless.

In the 1870s the Gold Coast Company founded some mines but in a tragic event several miners were killed by flood. For their funeral a rhythm called *Kurunku* was invented. It became a wide-spread type of music which was performed mainly in the time of mourning and included songs about death in general and about vicissitudes of life.⁶⁰⁹ The Ga sang their *Kurunku* and *Asafo* songs in the Akan language due to their cultural and linguistic affiliation with Akwamu.⁶¹⁰

The above mentioned old rhythms for the funerals were replaced by modern ones, namely *Gome* and *Kolomashie*. *Gome* drumming and dancing originally came from the Ga carpenters who were expelled to Bioko (an island in the Gulf of Guinea, also known as Fernando Po) by the British. During their stay on these islands they also invented a special square-shaped drum with the same name – *Gome*. The other rhythm frequently used at funerals was called *Kolomashie* which originated from the carnivals and was usually performed at street processions. This rhythm was invented by the fishermen of Accra and was originally played on Monday nights which is known as their weekly holiday when they abstained from their work. Both of these contemporary rhythms, *Gome* and *Kolomashie*, are also used for outdooing and wedding ceremonies, festivals, recreational and other social occasions, since the purpose of playing a particular rhythm is not strictly defined any more. *Kolomashie*, in particular, is presently used to express farewell to the departed person and since it involves small percussion instruments they can use it for a funeral procession as well. Even

607 Interview with Mustapha Tettey Addy, Kokrobite, 9/9/2016, 1.

608 J.H. Kwabena Nketia, *Ethnomusicology and African Music*, (Accra: Afram Publications, 2005), 10.

609 Asiama S.D., "Music and Dancing in Ghanaian Community: Pokuase," (Diploma in African Music, University of Ghana, Legon, 1965), 34,39.

610 Ibid., 67.

presently, because they cannot carry the sound system, musicians use *Kolomashie* to escort the coffin to the burial ground.⁶¹¹ *Kolomashie* also relates to *Kolomashie songs* that are sung in remembrance of deceased relatives and the lineage of clan or families. Due to massive conversion of the Ga to Christianity the *Kolomashie* repertoire now also includes Christian hymns and biblical texts.⁶¹²

Other contemporary rhythms include the *Asafo* and *Obonu*⁶¹³ which developed in the surrounding areas. *Asafo* though was performed at funerals only by men when a member of their company dies.⁶¹⁴ In general, if the deceased was initiated into one of the dances, that served as a main reason to perform that dance at his funeral. Another popular rhythm performed by traditional cultural groups for the Ga funerals was *Adowa* that could also be performed for the enjoyment purposes. *Obonu*, which may seem similar to *Asedua* rhythm⁶¹⁵, and *Adowa*, which was played with sticks, were originally featured at royal funerals. *Adowa*, a social dance used both for funerals and joyful occasions was named after a diminutive for antelope and expresses its grace of movements.⁶¹⁶ Its songs and rallying cries were supposed to have some magical influence apart from rousing the spirits of the soldiers.⁶¹⁷ Another traditional rhythm used for funerals is *Ojogban* played when the body is lying in state.⁶¹⁸ The widowhood rites when the spouse/widow was supposed to stay in the room for three days were accompanied by the rhythm called *Adesan*.

There are several traditional songs and dances used specifically for funerals in Tema. During the wake-keeping they play *Ochokobila* on a car-tyre rim in order to keep people awake during the night. For the funeral they use variety of multi-purpose rhythms such as *Agbadza*, *Kpanlogo*, *Gome*,

611 Interview with Okyame Sikafo, 17/6/2016, 9.

612 Paschal Yao Younge, *Music and Dance Traditions of Ghana*, 157-158.

613 *Obonu* are two giant drums used for royal funerals which probably evolved from Akan ceremonial drums called "Fontomfrom".

614 Asiana S.D., "Music and Dancing in Ghanaian Community: Pokuase," 10.

615 Interview with Naa Ohemea Bortsoo, 26/9/2016, 8.

616 A.M. Opoku, Willis E. Bell, *African Dances – A Ghanaian Profile*, (Accra: Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, Legon, 1965).

617 Ansah M.P., "Akwamu, A Study of its Social and Cultural Institutions and their Diffusion" (MA Thesis, University of Ghana, Legon, 1968), 146.

618 Interview with Chris Hesse, 21/9/2016, 9.

and *Sonte*, among which only the latter is meant for expressing farewell to the deceased.⁶¹⁹

Kpanlogo is played in La during funerals in a ceremonial way that includes pouring of libation in order to invoke the spirits of traditional gods of the land and ancestors who used to be members of the band.⁶²⁰

A royal death among the Ga in pre-colonial Jamestown used to be announced with the *gon gon* drums. Their rhythm conveyed the message for everybody to be informed that a chief or a ruler died. Jamestown fishermen were also famous for their drumming groups, which could be hired for funeral processions.⁶²¹ Hiring at least one traditional dance troupe for a funeral of a dignitary was an old custom. A funeral procession of Ga-Mantse in 1925 was accompanied by a dancing company from Togo.⁶²² This implies that the use of Ga funeral music was not that strict in the colonial period since it was influenced by some neighbouring cultures.

According to one of my informants the traditional musical styles used for Ga funerals in Jamestown were *Sonti*, *Oge* and *Kpanlogo*.⁶²³ *Kpanlogo*, however, is only a recent composition that dates to the middle of the 20th century. At some funerals they perform the *Kple* dance which is a part of their *Kple* cult. The only melodic instrument used at the Ga funerals was a flute which accompanied singers.⁶²⁴ All-night dancing at funerals used to be a norm until recently.

Some of the Ga communities used to cleanse the drums with the blood of a fowl and by sprinkling a few drops of rum in order to protect the instruments and players from any ill luck or misfortune.⁶²⁵

Hymns and dirges were sung by women at these funerals especially around the focal point of the funeral, i.e., the corpse while it was being prepared for burial.⁶²⁶ A fetish priestess, one of my informants, remembers some of these symbolic songs:

619 Interview with Cefas Adjei Pinto, 11/11/2016, 9.

620 Paschal Yao Younge, *Music and Dance Traditions of Ghana*, 162.

621 Ibid., 155.

622 PRAAD ADM 11/923.

623 Interview with Okyame Sikafo, 17/6/2016, 9.

624 Interview with Chris Hesse, 21/9/2016, 9.

625 Asiama S.D., "Music and Dancing in Ghanaian Community: Pokuase," 15.

626 The dirges of the Ga people have not been as thoroughly researched as those of the Akan people by Kwabena Nketia.

Amanase gbe jeke, su mli miiye nortso – Amanase, this is a long journey, the earth eats great things. Meaning that, no matter how great you are, no matter how tall you are, no matter how rich or powerful you are, when you die the earth will consume you and you have no power over that.⁶²⁷ Similar Akan dirge includes a refrain that “the earth does not get fat” in a reference to the way the earth is always receiving the dead yet is never satisfied.⁶²⁸

Tsiekwei kaashie mi otee okee ooya ni oba – Tsie Kwei, do not leave me, you promised you will be back. This means that even though you are dead, somebody is coming to take your place.

Sane le efee mi huu, mileee boni makee maha – I am so surprised by the issue that I do not know what to say.⁶²⁹

These dirges were particularly suitable for women as men never took part in wailing, sobbing and weeping. These songs which were often accompanied with drumming and dancing were almost always topical and ephemeral – composed for use at the funeral of a particular person and related to him only, though they naturally used the accepted idioms and forms described above. In some instances they were originally composed for other occasions but were taken over for funeral use.⁶³⁰ Dirges always focus on the deceased, his qualities, character, ancestors and the place where he is going with the purpose of praising the dead person.

At some Ga funerals every few verses of a local song or a dirge would end with the name of the dead person and a phrase *Dzee Ya Se!* - It's dark. Be off!⁶³¹ This and other similar phrases were considered very important because they feared that the ghost might haunt a relative who mentioned his name. The bereaved family members continued to address the dead individual explaining to his soul that the funeral was the last common occasion after which the ghost should never reappear to the living, but rather protect them. For the procession they sometimes used profane songs called *Gyama*.⁶³²

627 Interview with Naa Ohemea Bortsoo, 26/9/2016, 8.

628 Ruth Finnegan, *Oral Literature in Africa*. (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2012), 150.

629 Interview with Naa Ohemea Bortsoo, 26/9/2016, 8.

630 Ruth Finnegan, *Oral Literature in Africa*, 147.

631 Thierry Secretan, *Going into Darkness*, 14.

632 IAS Video Archive, Peter Bischoff, *African Cross Rhythms*, Loki Films Denmark, 52 minutes, 1994.

With the arrival of Europeans and freed slaves in the 19th century, western melodic music instruments were gradually introduced. Those Gold Coast citizens who enlisted in colonial armies brought brass instruments from abroad that were included and are still used for funeral processions. This new type of music became so popular that it was also introduced at *Hɔmɔwɔ* and other festivals as well as for recreational purposes.

In the late colonial period some communities respected the new type of music called *Highlife* and they included it in their traditional funeral ceremonies. *Highlife* was deemed appropriate since some songs were composed in a mourning, sorrowful manner. When the band performed at a funeral some bereaved relatives joined in with the song and sometimes included the deceased's name.

With the introduction of the sound system they included *jamboree* – very big speakers. With the invention of cassettes and CDs many families decided not to play live music but selected songs with the sound system which was cheaper than a live band. At the chief's funeral there are still some traditional songs performed, but for the rest of the ceremony it is left to DJs to entertain the crowd with their sound system. Young generation has taken over the organization of the music backdrop which may also be recognized as a major transformation in the funeral ceremony.

Christian funerals usually include a church choir with singers while music is played with a sound system, and a pastor conducting the ceremony is equipped with a microphone. At every funeral that I attended in the past two years the sound system and microphones were set too loudly making it impossible for the visitors to talk to each other.⁶³³ Some of the traditional dirges have been influenced by the Christian faith.⁶³⁴ Christians used old traditional melodies but altered the text in order to fit their rituals, while some famous pop musician also used a traditional dirge and made popular songs from it. Since gospel music of American origin with adapted Ghanaian lyrics have become a common feature at Christian funerals traditional drums and rhythms are rarely used. Live choir music has largely replaced traditional and even dirges that used to eulogize the event are

633 From funeral attendances at Kokrobite, 27/2/2016; Kpone 1/10/2016; Ofankor 10.12/2016.

634 Interview with H.N.A. Wellington, 22/6/2016, 11.

no longer considered adequate. More liberal Christian denominations have recently allowed traditional drumming during their masses allowing the indigenous tradition to blend with Christian practices. Catholic Church in Ghana does not prescribe pipe organs as a necessity any more for their rituals.⁶³⁵ Traditional music has somehow “Africanized” the local version of Christianity.

Drum appellations by the *Obonu* ceremonial drums are still performed at traditional royal funerals and at the three-week memorial celebrations where everybody dances to the syncopated rhythm.

Since the observance of traditional customs is still in practice, some traditional rhythms have been modified or merged to fit into modern funeral ceremonies. Presently, funeral ceremonies are not limited to traditional funeral music which opens space to recent recreational rhythms such as *Gome*, *Kpanlogo*, etc. Even these “modern” rhythms usually start with a religious introduction before any dance-drumming activity. The character of performance of different rhythms depends on the family of the deceased and their attitude towards religion.

Presently, after the burial is over, a funeral might continue in a more relaxed way with all kinds of music available which makes people dance and forget the sorrow and sadness. Recent reintroduction of “cultural dance companies” who put a great effort in making funerals appear traditional has not been successful. A more successfully introduced “neotradition” were fantasy coffins.

Fantasy Coffins

The Ga traditionally buried their dead wrapped in a woven mat although following the arrival of Europeans on the coast the use of wooden coffins became increasingly common.⁶³⁶ In the middle of the 18th century there was a serious dispute and consequently a conflict between a “mat party” and a “coffin party”, arguing how to bury the deceased chief. Up to that time the priests and

⁶³⁵ Interview with Chris Hesse, 21/9/2016, 5-6.

⁶³⁶ John Parker, “The Cultural Politics of Death & Burial in Early Colonial Accra,” 210.

chiefs used to be buried in mats but after that incident coffin burial gradually prevailed.⁶³⁷

In the early 1950s new designs emerged as an idea of a coffin-maker from Teshie. Chief fisherman in Teshie died in 1951 and since his father was still alive he decided to employ an experienced wood carver Kane Kwei to make a special coffin for his son. Since the departed was a fisherman they wanted his coffin to be something original that would remind everybody about his greatness. They showed a particular type of fish to Kane and he skilfully made a very beautiful and unique coffin in the shape of that fish. People who were present at that funeral were impressed and some of them also wanted to bury their relatives in this way. That is how Kane Kwei got his first commissions. This idea that originally came from fishermen who wanted to bury their colleague in a specially carved coffin in the shape of fish that is a symbol of his lifelong occupation became widely popular. Many other fishermen wanted to copy that idea, so carpenters started making special coffins for them in the shape of a canoe, a paddle or a particular type of fish he was catching in order to express honour and pay the last respect to the deceased. The idea spread and soon farmers also wanted to have symbolic coffins in the shape of a cutlass or some other tool they were using during their lifetime.⁶³⁸ The second major masterpiece of Kane was an aeroplane which he made for his own grandmother since she always dreamed about flying abroad but she could not get a chance during her lifetime.⁶³⁹ Kane Kwei made more than a hundred coffins before his apprentices took over his workshop by the road side in Teshie where they still produce the most elaborate *abebuu adekai* – fantasy coffins.⁶⁴⁰

The apprenticeship for a coffin carver now takes three to four years and the profession usually passes from father to son. It takes from two to three weeks to complete a coffin and the workmanship costs 500 EUR to 1,000 EUR. The commissions now come from everywhere. After the Ga, the neighbouring people of Adangme, Fante, Akan and Ewe became interested, followed by the ethnic groups from the North, but recently the workshops in Teshie has been receiving

⁶³⁷ Ibid.

⁶³⁸ Interview with Okyame Sikafo, 17/6/2016, 2-3.

⁶³⁹ Interview with Ernest Anang Kwei, 24/6/2016, 1.

⁶⁴⁰ Thierry Secretan, *Going into Darkness*, (1,8).

commissions from all over the world.⁶⁴¹ The Ga people order such a coffin if they can afford it.

Almost every coffin represents the deceased person's occupation during his lifetime.

According to one of my informants the shape of such a fantasy coffin is only partially connected to the mission of the life of the individual.⁶⁴² Some dying individuals express their wish to be buried in such a coffin, while sometimes the family decides about the type they want to use for their dead relative. In the latter case, relatives usually want to emphasize the traditional position held by various clans and families.⁶⁴³ In most cases the shape of the coffin depends on the vocation of the deceased in order to commemorate his work, but sometimes it represents a hobby or even a life-time desire that did not materialize during the individual's life.

Fishermen are usually buried in a coffin in the shape of a canoe, pirogue, or a particular type of fish. I have personally attended a funeral of a Ga fisherman who specialized in fishing of lobsters and his coffin was made in the shape of this crab.⁶⁴⁴ Other symbolic objects mean that a farmer can be buried in a hoe-like coffin, maize cob or pepper; a cattle breeder in a cow; a hunter in a wild animal; a clerk in a pen; a baker in a flour-sack-shaped coffin; a mechanic in a car; a driver in a lorry; a tomato seller in a tomato-shaped coffin; a mirror seller in a mirror shaped casket.⁶⁴⁵ A boxer can be buried in a giant sport boot; a carpenter in a large saw; and a garage owner in an oil can-shaped coffin.⁶⁴⁶

The following dead people were glorified by displaying the source of their success in life:⁶⁴⁷

A rich farmer from the village of Botianaw (Bortianor), who earned his wealth by extensive onion field cultivation, was buried in a gigantic wooden onion. Another person who made his fortune with cocoa farming was buried in a big cocoa pod. A wealthy motorist was buried in a Mercedes Benz-shaped coffin.

641 Interviews with Ernest Anang Kwei, 24/6/2016, 2; Daniel Mensah Obri, 24/6/2016, 2.

642 Interview with Ernest Anang Kwei, 24/6/2016, 2.

643 Interview with Daniel Mensah Obri, 24/6/2016, 1.

644 From funeral attendance at Kpone 1/10/2016. See photograph on the next page.

645 Interview with Okyame Sikafo, 17/6/2016, 16-17; Thierry Secretan, *Going into Darkness*, 6.

646 Thierry Secretan, *Going into Darkness*, 2.

647 Ibid. 1-2.

The invention of the shape of the coffin for a university lecturer was even more sophisticated as his children came up with the idea of a coffin representing a parrot holding a pen in its beak which also became a favourite design for other academics.⁶⁴⁸



Lobster-shaped coffin for a fisherman with church choir singers in the background⁶⁴⁹

In Jamestown the head of the family was buried in a key-shaped coffin, but some other chiefs were buried in an eagle-shaped coffin.⁶⁵⁰ That implies that the form of a casket does not necessarily depend on the direct characterization but rather on the symbolic figure as in both above mentioned cases. In that example, the key symbolizes a leading role of the head of the family, while the eagle implies a superior control over the community. Another symbolic figure would be a hen with plenty small chickens depicting a woman who gave birth to many children.

648 Ibid. 2.

649 From author's attendance of a funeral at Kpone 1.10.2016.

650 Interview with Okyame Sikafo, 17/6/2016, 16.

In the La quarter of Accra a red cock represents their symbol of strength since they won many battles in the past by surprising the enemy at the break of dawn. Therefore, a red cock is the favourite form of the coffin for La chiefs.

Chevrolets, cocoa pods, whales, canoes and other shapes intended for lavish burial ceremonies were the privilege of chiefs in the 1950s and 1960s, but presently every member of the society can choose his own type if he can afford it.⁶⁵¹

Making fantasy coffins for Christians was an important innovation; some wanted to be buried in a coffin shaped as a bible, a church or a chapel. Protestant and Catholic churches however do not allow this type of coffin to enter their church.⁶⁵² Because the coffin carver Kane Kwei became a Methodist himself, he was buried in a traditional rectangular shaped casket adorned with small wooden objects – a saw, a hammer, a chisel and a set square – at each of the four corners and was escorted by his latest emblems (new coffins) from the church to the cemetery.⁶⁵³ The Muslim, however, do not use such coffins as they do not bury people in caskets at all.

The symbolism of this craft was closely related to the traditional Ga proverbs expressing their traditional philosophy. Fantasy coffins are not only treated as an object of remembrance but also metaphorically as an item that can be worn as a cloth by the deceased in order to express the power of wealth.⁶⁵⁴

The imagination of the people has prompted coffin carvers to enhance their skills beyond the initial expectations of the first products. The Ga fantasy coffin carvers have been recognized all over Ghana and they are slowly gaining ground on the international scene where this new art form became widely appreciated. Since they have started to present their works in art galleries their fame spread all around the world which also increased the demand for such original craft that can be named a “neo-tradition” since it did not evolve from any African or Ghanaian custom. This new

651 Thierry Secretan, *Going into Darkness*, 8.

652 Ibid. 24-25.

653 Ibid. 11.

654 Roberta Bonetti, “Coffins for Wear and Consumption: Abebuu adekai as “Memory Makers among the Ga of Ghana”, 263.

approach to tradition is the result of the inspiration, the ingenuity and the creative mind of the Ga people.

Lineage and Wills

In pre-colonial Ga society the successors were obliged to consult the deceased in order to share his legacy properly among themselves. They had to visit a shrine and see the medium to speak to the dead who instructed the descendants on how to share his property that was left behind.⁶⁵⁵

All Ga towns were patrilineal during their independent state in the 17th century.⁶⁵⁶ Later they remained as such with the exception of Jamestown where the inheritance system was both patrilineal and matrilineal. The matrilineal system that obviously came through foreign invasion of Akwamu, Akyem and Asante⁶⁵⁷ and also from foreign intermarriages with the Ga and was partially present for some centuries was recently abandoned so that presently also the people of Jamestown only inherit in a patrilineal way.⁶⁵⁸ The Ga people inherited two forms of property – the lineage property in the form of a room in the family house or personal property in the form of houses, furniture, clothes, etc.⁶⁵⁹ The “death duties” from the pre-colonial and colonial era featured by Asante chiefs who claimed a one-third share of the deceased commoner's estate were not applied by the Ga chiefs.⁶⁶⁰

According to Diana Azu, Madeline Manoukian and one of my informants the inheritance of property of the traditional Ga society passed on to the siblings until the extinction of a generation. That means that after the death of a man his eldest brother inherited everything, younger brothers after him, and the property only passed on to the children of the deceased when the last sibling of their father died.⁶⁶¹ Thus distribution of property only took place after the death of the last person of

655 Interview with Cefas Adjei Pinto, 11/11/2016, 11.

656 Irene Odotei (Quaye), “The Ga and their Neighbours, 1600-1747,” 251.

657 Akwamu occupied the Ga territory in 1680, Akyem in 1730 and Asante in 1742.

658 Interview with Nii Aryee Quarshie I., 27/10/2016, 3.

659 For more information about the Ga inheritance look: Diana Gladys Azu: *The Ga Family and social Change, African Social Research Documents*, 58-60.

660 Kwame Arhin, “Some Asante Views of Colonial Rule: As Seen in the Controversy Relating to Death Duties,” in *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana* Vol. XV. No.1 June 1974, 63.

661 Diana Gladys Azu: *The Ga Family and social Change, African Social Research Documents*, 59-60; Interview with

the same generation. After the death of a woman her sister inherited all the property and it passed on to the next generation in the same manner as described above. Land, boats, etc. belonging to a woman, and returns from these were divided between her sisters and all her children, sons and daughters being treated equally.⁶⁶² A younger sister usually took care of the dead sibling's children. If the person was not suitable for looking after the children or was not responsible enough to handle the property, the family consulted and chose another convenient person. Traditionally, in a case of a dispute, the chief and elders acted as a legal authority while contemporary the courts deal with the inheritance and deliver proper arbitration.⁶⁶³ Usually the family leaders distribute fairly among the children but sometimes it happened that the deceased's siblings took the whole property and left nothing for the children.⁶⁶⁴

However, according to the majority of my informants, the common practice was that the children always inherited after their parents, except if they were too young to handle their affairs. The inheritance of the property by the siblings was an exception when the elders used coercion for taking over the legacy of the deceased. If the individual greedily took over the property of the deceased without sharing what tradition demands a *sisá* (ghost) would strike him with illness or death.⁶⁶⁵

In the 1930s there was a conflict between Native customary law and Christian practices regarding the fate of a widow. According to Native custom, upon the death of her husband a widow was inherited by the nearest relative of her late husband who could dispose of her against her will. In the case of a Christian widow, this renders the practice of her religion impossible for her and her children.⁶⁶⁶ It was decided that no woman can be forced against her will to marry any particular man or remain with the clan if she prefers to go back to her father's home and her guardian consents

Okyame Sikafo, 17/6/2016, 17-18.

662 Madeline Manoukian, *Akan and Ga-Adangme peoples of the Gold Coast*, 75.

663 Interview with Nii Aryee Quarshie I., 27/10/2016, 2.

664 Interview with Cefas Adjei Pinto, 11/11/2016, 14.

665 Deborah Atobrah, "Caring for the Chronically Sick within Ga Families; A Study of Modern Innovations and Traditional Practices," 132.

666 PRAAD CSO 18/12/49. Subject: Conflict between Native Customary Law and Christian Practices.

to that.⁶⁶⁷ This instance marks the period when the official law replaced traditional patriarchal customs which were dominant in the past.

Whenever a man in the lineage house died, either a successor or one of his sons moved into his room. Besides conducting funeral ceremony the head of the major lineage also appointed a successor to a deceased member and if the dead person was poor, he paid his debts and arranged for a proper burial.⁶⁶⁸

In a modern Ga society it is the children who inherit after the deceased, starting with the first-born. After the children, the widow or widower inherits as the second in line and then the rest of the family. A person may also choose some friends who made service or have done good things to become part of the share. Each of the children, however, is to be given a certain share of the inheritance. If a younger person dies, it is the father's side that inherits if the person was a Ga, or if a person was an Akan it is the mother's side that inherits. The successor usually tries to honour the dead in order to complete an undone project, pay all the debts of the departed and take care of his children and attend to all other necessary issues.

In every Ga town there are quarters that are headed by chiefs. In every quarter such as Jamestown, there are one to three ruling houses with royal families from where the people choose their next chief in lineage. The turns go in rotation, which means that after death of a chief from the first house the successor is elected from the second house. The ancestors of these rulers can be easily traced to a distant past since they all came from the same houses. The only condition for this system to function is the availability of suitable candidates when it is the turn of the next house. These rotating successions are also used for some other “town” officials.

The next chief in Jamestown is ritually captured and his cloth that he was wearing at the moment of capture, is sent to next chief's house and kept there until the time for succession arrives.⁶⁶⁹ This symbolic act ensures proper rotation of chiefs and makes the next in line eligible

⁶⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁸ Diana Gladys Azu, *The Ga Family and social Change*, African Social Research Documents, 16, 18.

⁶⁶⁹ Interview with Okyame Sikafo, 17/6/2016, 18.

after the death of the previous leader.

Formerly a chief's son could not inherit his father's position, only his grandson, if it came to his turn. But this grandson might not come only from the previous chief's son, but also from his daughter, if he proves himself better than his cousin.⁶⁷⁰ Presently these rules are not so strict any more, which means that a chief's son with good education and attitude may reach a stool status but certain rites have to be performed.⁶⁷¹ Usually the boy who is meant to become a chief is sent to another chief's house for training and learning all the rights and duties of a chief. At the point of election the elders decide by looking at different factors such as education, manners, respect, character and other qualities of the individual that count for someone to become a chief. A person should not be a womaniser, a drunkard, but rather a literate hard-working person who also needs skills and competences for representing his community at chieftaincy conferences and wider publicity.

Another of my informants stated that traditionally it was the nephew from the paternal lineage who was the eligible successor of the stool.⁶⁷² However, the Ga-Adangme chieftaincy system is very controversial because of its complex inheritance rules but within Ga-Mashie it functions in a quite settled manner. The chieftaincy succession system with rotation is also applied in Tema where it functions well and is exchanged among three royal houses.⁶⁷³ Complications usually arise with the involvement of polygyny where all the chief's wives insist on the entitlement of their own children and the notion of primogeniture is not applied. According to one of my informants the decision is taken by the traditional election college that chooses the right successor.⁶⁷⁴ When an office became vacant, the elders appointed an assistant who acted as a deputy until the next office-holder is elected.

In pre-colonial Ghana people could not write and therefore a written testament did not exist.

⁶⁷⁰ Interview with Nii Aryee Quarshie I., 27/10/2016, 13-14.

⁶⁷¹ Interview with Nii Aryee Quarshie I., 27/10/2016, 9.

⁶⁷² Interviews with H.N.A. Wellington, 22/6/2016, 15.

⁶⁷³ Interview with Cefas Adjei Pinto, 11/11/2016, 14.

⁶⁷⁴ Interview with Irene Odotei, 17/10/2016, 22.

The usual procedure for the distribution of property was a meeting of the core family members after the completion of the funeral, when they shared the property of the deceased. Another common way was when the dying person expressed his wishes in a verbal way to his trusted family members while he was still alive they had to do it in line with what he wanted.⁶⁷⁵ This practice was called *Shamansho* among the Ga.⁶⁷⁶ Sometimes this verbal expression became controversial and was challenged, causing disputes among the family members because of the intervention of the chief or the elders who took the responsibility to manage and distribute the property of the deceased in their own way.⁶⁷⁷ In post-colonial Ghana the court of law has superior authority over the traditional leaders and all cases are settled by court officials.

The modern written testament was introduced by the Europeans but it only became widely used after the colonial period. Previously it was only used by some educated people; in the last decades it has also become a growing practice for the majority of educated people. The majority of the Ga people now rely on a written last will but some illiterate members of the society still apply spoken will in the presence of witnesses. If a person decides to write a testament, he signs, registers and seals it, and keeps it in his room until death. Sometimes people hire a lawyer to write the document properly. Then the family takes the testament to the court of law where they open it and share the deceased's property in accordance with his last will. Some rich people are afraid and decline a written will because they think that they would die soon afterwards.⁶⁷⁸ In a case of a wealthy man or woman, the whole surviving family expects a fair distribution and a share of his legacy, otherwise they may argue or bring a lawsuit to the court.

Other Aspects of Death and Funeral Rites

There has been a lot of arguing that among all of the ethnic groups of Southern Ghana, where the Ga are not an exception, the living take much better care for the dead body than for their

⁶⁷⁵ Interview with Okyame Sikafo, 17/6/2016, 17.

⁶⁷⁶ Interviews with Irene Odotei 17/10/2016, 21; Cefas Adjei Pinto, 11/11/2016, 13.

⁶⁷⁷ Interview with Emmanuel Evans Anfom, 13/9/2016, 15.

⁶⁷⁸ Interviews with H.N.A. Wellington, 22/6/2016, 15; Emmanuel Evans Anfom, 13/9/2016, 15.

old relatives. Surviving kin uses funerals as an excuse for celebration in terms of gathering, displaying wealth and reuniting with other members of the extended family and community. For instance, medicines for the sick person would cost around GHS 100 but nobody buys that to save a sick relative. When this person dies because he could not get proper medication his family will raise up to GHS 10,000 for the poor person's funeral dignifying their status and honouring the deceased.

The majority of my informants agreed that the modern state of Ghana supports and helps to preserve national traditions and their heritage including the Ga ethnic group. Some dignitaries stated that more effort should be put into education of young people in order to preserve national culture at a high level or it would soon dwindle and gradually disappear. Children must learn about their national and regional or local culture including languages to revive the ancient knowledge. Other of my informants mentioned that the Ghanaian government pays respect to all of the chiefs but forgets to respect old rites which also form part of the national identity. Buah reported by 1980 that since the country regained independence, conscious and successful efforts have been made both by the government and by individuals to revive much of what was spoiled by the influence of the white men.⁶⁷⁹ The state and the government did not influence funeral rites as such. These rituals were more exposed to the dynamics of the society that directed and guided the whole process. Some informants mentioned that the state could always do more to protect the orphans who have suffered the loss of their parents.

⁶⁷⁹ F. K. Buah, *A History of Ghana*, (Oxford: Macmillan Education, 1980), 43.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

Funeral celebrations among the Ga underwent tremendous changes from the pre-colonial to colonial and post-colonial periods. This thesis is an attempt to track all major transformations that occurred in these periods and contributed towards the contemporary form of funeral rites and the attitude towards them, however, the dating for some of these modifications remain undefined. Even though the funeral rites among the Ga lost their fundamental role as rites of passage as a result of the weakening of traditional beliefs that determined posthumous destiny of the deceased and became a display of communal wealth and status they continue to be an affirmation of solidarity and kinship bonds through modified but still dynamic and authentic ceremonies. Symbolic expressions of traditional customs were recreated in new befitting forms such as fantasy coffins and inter-religious rituals.

History witnessed a lot of disasters in terms of losing legacies of earlier civilizations, e.g., the destruction of Alexandria's library where thousands of books were permanently lost, and recently, the demolition of ancient Syrian and Mesopotamian sculptures and architecture. The fast pace of forgetting West African traditions should be countered with reviving some of the ceremonies or modified rituals not in a form of religious worshipping but in a shape of cultural events such as festivals. According to some of my informants, these old rites and customs, which are being supplanted and negatively impacted by bias or abolishment, should not have been abandoned and left in oblivion, since they are part of the culture and national identity.⁶⁸⁰ Certain traditional cultural practices and pagan customs are quite harmless, as mentioned by another interviewee.⁶⁸¹ Historians of African history can assist in preserving some of these indigenous traditions by exploring hidden areas of private lives even though they are perceived as sensitive issues such as funerals with death rites. By exploring small communities and their transformations

⁶⁸⁰ Interviews with Cefas Adjei Pinto, 11/11/2016, 6-8.

⁶⁸¹ Interview with Emmanuel Evans Anfom, 13/9/2016, 6.

in time as a result of both external and internal factors historians can trace important shifts that left a permanent impact on the society. The Ga society absorbed and adopted these changes that were adapted into a modern blend of beliefs and practices, occasionally forming “neo-traditions.”

Funeral has always represented a loss for the family and the community, but the belief –may it be a traditional, Christian, or Muslim belief – is that life does continue into another world, regardless of whether it is named heaven, paradise, or the world of ancestors, in order to serve in a different capacity. The Ga people express their grief at their funerals in a merry-sad manner since they know that the dead have taken a journey to another world. The dead join the ancestors and can come to the aid of the living if necessary. The living, however, are obliged to organize a proper ceremony in solidarity, sympathy and reciprocity through public expression of reunion of the scattered members and practical mutual help.

Even though the Ga time perception was traditionally cyclical, a spiral concept may have been used on a sublime level that matches with the belief of reincarnation. If one lifetime represents one coil on a spiral, the reincarnation then represents an invisible passage to another life or the next coil on this spiral of subsequent lives. The four rites of passage may represent four quarters on the coil of a lifetime spiral. All passages on this coil are celebrated by the Ga but the funeral is celebrated the most extensively because it presents an important transition into the next world. The death for the Ga people does not mean an ending of someone's life but merely an invisible transition to the afterlife from which a new human being is born.

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