

# ABIBISEM

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*"The Plague of Pebbles/Stones': River Goddess, Black Stool And Re-Writing Adawso-Akuapem History"*<sup>294</sup>

Ebenezer AYESU

**Introduction: A Plague of Pebbles/Stones**

In 1982 a strange occurrence frightened the people of Adawso-Akuapem, a farming community and a market center in south-eastern Ghana. For five months (January to May), a number of houses including the chief's palace; and the only monument in the town were inexplicably pelted with pebbles (stones). As it turned out, the occurrence was the handy work of the river goddess of the town that was avenging the spiteful treatment meted out to her by the elders of the town.<sup>295</sup> Consequently, the elders embarked upon a process to make amends; the outcome of which in the view of this paper constituted the re-writing of the history of Adawso.<sup>296</sup> In this context, events in Adawso gave credibility to the assertion that in ancient Africa, matriarchy had preceded patriarchal kinship and inheritance system in Africa; and that it was colonialism that distorted and supplanted indigenous African kinship system.<sup>297</sup>

Was matriarchy fundamental to the ideals of kinship system in ancient and traditional Africa? Ifi Amadiume has strongly advocated for a re-interpretation of African history whereby the historical place of womanhood is restored to its rightful place. In doing this she rejects any attempt at "imitating" Eurocentric feminism to "construct" new structures arguing that, "we already have a history and legacy of a woman's culture" and that there is therefore the need to highlight it in a social enquiry.<sup>298</sup> This article, in agreeing with Amadiume's argument, stresses that whatever pre-eminence or domination men exercise in African societies should not be

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<sup>294</sup> As a citizen of Adawso and someone who witnessed and participated extensively in activities to unravel the episode under discussion, I write this article as a means of recording an aspect of the town's social history; and to contribute to discourse on gender relations in Africa.

<sup>295</sup> Nana Adu Amoah III (1979-1986), chief of Adawso; Okyeame Awuku, principal elder of Adawso; and A A Antl, former High School history teacher and a descendant of Abraham Adu.

<sup>296</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>297</sup> Ifi Amadiume, 1997: 165.

<sup>298</sup> Amadiume's work generally speaks to the brilliant studies of Cheikh Anta Diop on Africa under the titles, *Precolonial Black Africa: A Comparative Study of the Political and Social Systems of Europe and Black Africa from Antiquity to the Formation of Modern States*, Westport, Conn.: L. Hill, 1987; and *The Cultural Unity of Black Africa: The Damsins of Patriarchy and Matriarchy in Classical Antiquity*, London: Karnil House, 1989.



construed that their women counterparts tacitly accept the “status quo,” but at least, as the Adawso case will shortly demonstrate, that women’s willingly “subordinate” their influence and authority to those of men for the greater good of society. This notwithstanding, they have every right to reassert themselves when things “go bad.”<sup>299</sup>

Similarly, the paper speaks to the tendency by men in African societies to refer to women as “wicked.”<sup>300</sup> African women in their individual and collective endeavors have “pushed” the boundaries of “acceptable” and “respectable behavior” that has brought about profound changes in the reconfiguration of gender relations in Africa. In effect, African women “have always been key to processes of gender production and transformation”. Their achievement though laudable, is erroneously perceived as disrupting “the web of social relations...” a development that may be seen as “wicked”.<sup>301</sup> They are therefore stigmatized as “wayward,” “unruly,” or immoral. But however defined, this paper would argue that women in the interest of social harmony are prepared to keep to acceptable order. This notwithstanding, they can be “wicked” albeit when provoked by society.

Additionally, the Adawso episode and its aftermath showcased a religiosity characterized by a revealing difference in paradigm shift from that discussed brilliantly by Paul Gifford in his work on Ghana’s new Christianity.<sup>302</sup> Incidentally, Adawso population was predominantly Christian with both mainline (“orthodox”) and Pentecostal churches conspicuously present.<sup>303</sup> As a result, at the onset of the episode, the churches took steps to stop the occurrence but to no avail. Faced with the portentous failure of the churches, the chief and elders of the town approached the Akonodi shrine at Larteh for help. Following this development, this paper would broaden Gifford’s “paradigm shift” with its

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<sup>299</sup> This article agrees effectively with Amadiume that “... patriarchy and matriarchy have always been contesting systems which have been articulated and manipulated in the power struggle between interest groups in indigenous Africa” (*Reinventing Africa*, 163).

<sup>300</sup> Dorothy L. Hodgson and Shirley A. McCurdy, eds., *“Wicked” Women and the Reconfiguration of Gender in Africa*. Portsmouth, N. H.: Heinemann, 2001.

<sup>301</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>302</sup> Paul Gifford, *Ghana’s New Christianity: Pentecostalism in a Globalising African Economy*. London: Hurst and Company, 2004 (the focus here is on chapter 2: 20-43).

<sup>303</sup> Ebenezer Ayesu, “Conflict of Institutions: Chieftaincy, Church and State, A Case Study of Adawso Akuapem, 1960-1980,” in I Odotei and A Awedoba, eds., *Chieftaincy in Ghana: Culture, Governance and Development*. Accra, Ghana: Sub Saharan Publishers, 2006, 493-504.

focus on the "Orthodox" and Pentecostal churches to include traditional religious practices.<sup>304</sup>

### A Profile of Adawso

Adawso lies 10 miles on the Mamfe-Koforidua highway in the Eastern Region of Ghana. It was once a farming village first settled by one Opanin Adu (a.k.a. Abraham Adu) from the Amoakade clan of Amanokrom.<sup>305</sup> Opanin Adu stayed at Amanokrom and visited his farm at 'Apasare', which was later renamed Adawso.<sup>306</sup> Opanin Adu together with his three sisters- Afoa, Amanimaa and Aboraa, eventually decided to settle permanently at Adawso.<sup>307</sup>

With time, two other people, Opanin Fugyaw, from Larteh and Opanin Ofei Angua, from Mampong, also came to settle at Adawso.<sup>308</sup> The three men subsequently initiated moves to the Akan political system based on chieftaincy in the town. Opanin Adu, who was the first to settle at Adawso, was installed the Odekro ("Ode" – owner, "Kro" –town/village). Odekro means the owner of the town or village); Opanin Fugyaw was made the Mankrado;<sup>309</sup> Opanin Ofei Angua became the Okycame (linguist). They each perpetuated their office through their descendants. Significantly, a dual system of succession to office emerged. As an Akan Opanin Adu was succeeded through his sisters' descendants, Opanin Fugyaw and Ofei

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<sup>304</sup> This was synonymous with the popular Ghanaian saying, "we shall put the bible aside," made often in the face of problems that defy Christian solution.

<sup>305</sup> It was not clear if the *Amoakade* clan is part of the Akan family structure. This was because none of my informants was able to tell me the origin of the clan.

<sup>306</sup> Interview with A. A. Anti, Okycame Awuku, Opanin Adu Mfum and Nana Akua Ansa (May 1997- June 1999). Any time Opanin Adu was visiting his farm, he would tell his relations "*mereko adow no so*"- (I am visiting the farmstead) the place then became "Adawso." Meanwhile, Opanin Adu Mfum was a CPP activist and principal elder of Adawso; while Nana Akua Ansa was retired trader and citizen of Adawso.

<sup>307</sup> Interview with Opanin Adu Mfum. According to Adawso traditions, Abraham Adu later banished his sister, Aboraa from Adawso for refusing to become a Christian and for an alleged misconduct which my informants including Opanin Adu Mfum declined to disclose.

<sup>308</sup> Ankobea Kwame Fosu is a transport owner and an elder from the Mampong group in Adawso. Moreover, he was a key supporter of the Session of Adawso Presbyterian Church in their litigation with Abraham Adu's family. He later changed course and actively supported Nana Adu Amoah III and his elders in the administration of Adawso. Opanin Kwame Doi, Presbyter, Adawso Presbyterian Church. Like Ankobea Kwame Fosu, supported the church but later became a principal elder at Adawso palace. Moreover, he was a retired cocoa clerk.

<sup>309</sup> *Mankrado* - "man"- state, "krado," – a lock. He initiates and closes matters between the chief and the Oman.

Angua, who were Guans, were succeeded through their sons and their male descendants. The right to elect and install a successor to any of the offices was reserved for the respective families subject to the public approval of the candidate so proposed Interview, A. A. Anti and Nana Osae Ntow.

Opanin Adu's citizenship of Amanokrom placed Adawso under the jurisdiction of the Chief of Amanokrom, the Gyaasehene of the Akuapem state. It was through the Gyaasehene that Adawso served the Okuapehene (the paramount Chief of the Akuapem state) at Akropong. It is however not clear if the office of Odekro of Adawso had a family stool attached to it from the beginning. Nevertheless, there is a tradition which claims that Opanin Adu originally brought a chieftaincy stool from Amanokrom but later returned it.<sup>310</sup> Another tradition also claims that Opanin Adu never had a stool, since he was not even a stool occupant before he left his original home (Amanokrom).

Interestingly, the foundation of Adawso coincided with the extension of the Basel mission evangelical activities beyond Akropong. Opanin Adu consequently became interested in the teachings of the mission and got baptized at Mamfe and was christened Abraham.<sup>311</sup> Abraham Adu later encouraged the Basel mission to establish a station at Adawso. The journey from Adawso to Mamfe at the time was made on foot, and covered a distance of over ten kilometers. It was thus a daunting task for a man like Adu, who was in his late seventies to regularly cover such a distance.<sup>312</sup> The social improvement that the presence of the mission was likely to promote at Adawso through good sanitation, better housing and schools also influenced Abraham Adu's request for a station at Adawso. His wishes were gratified when a station was established there in 1894.

The Basel mission was welcomed in Adawso with great enthusiasm. Within a short time, the entire household and relations of Abraham Adu accepted the gospel and played leading roles in the local church. For instance, Opanin Kwasi Bekoc, a grand nephew of Abraham Adu, became

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<sup>310</sup> Interview, A. A. Anti, Okyeame Awuku and Nana Osae Ntow.

<sup>311</sup> Interview with A.A. Anti. For more details on Basel mission's activities in Akuapem and the Gold Coast see, Kwamena-Poh, *Vision and Achievement: A Hundred and Fifty Years of the Presbyterian Church in Ghana 1828-1978*, 1980, (an unpublished manuscript); R. Addo-Fening, "Church and State: A Historical Review of Interaction between the Presbyterian Church (Ghana) and Traditional Authority," *Research Review* (IAS, Legon), Vol. 1, No. 2 (1985), pp. 129-151

<sup>312</sup> Interview, Opanin Kwame Date and Samuel Adu Borafo. This was corroborated by Papa Mossi, a descendant of Abraham Adu's sister, Aboraa; and Nana Osae Ntow.



the first senior Presbyterian of the church.<sup>313</sup> Rev. Charles Martin Adu, another grand nephew of Abraham Adu, also became the first native of Adawso to be ordained a Presbyterian minister. Other people who were not related to Abraham Adu also joined the church. Since the people enthusiastically accepted the Basel mission, it remained the only church in Adawso until the 1960s.

The Basel Mission responded to the increase in membership by acquiring landed property in Adawso. There are nonetheless two traditions concerning the Mission's land acquisition. One tradition is that, the Basel mission bought the entire area of present day Adawso Township and gave it as a present to Abraham Adu and his people. The other tradition, probably the more authentic, was that the mission bought some parcels of Adawso land, settled its early converts on part of it, and built a chapel and a school on the remaining part.<sup>314</sup> Meanwhile, the Basel mission gave Abraham Adu a linguist staff, a black umbrella and gong-gong to use as his regalia. Beyond that, the church did not interfere with the town's political arrangement as discussed earlier.<sup>315</sup> However, Adawso was designated a Basel mission town; and Abraham Adu, a Christian Chief. Moreover, Abraham Adu's successful reign; and active support for the Basel mission and probably colonial officials was celebrated with a grand monument that bore the citation, "Abraham Adu, the first Christian Chief of Adawso".<sup>316</sup> The monument was located in front of the Adawso palace and as we shall see later, was one of the scenes for the episode under discussion. Meanwhile, Opanin Adu's farming activities and eventual settlement at Adawso was made possible by the availability of water from a near-by river called *Bekyee*. With time, the river's name was changed to *Borebea* -female python. The change was necessitated by a mysterious occurrence at the time when the people of the town were cleaning the river site. According to Adawso traditions, in the course of the work, a strange snake emerged from

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<sup>313</sup> Samuel Adu Bofo is a director at Ghana Post, and the grandson of Rev. Charles Martin Adu (interviewed with Opanin Kwame Date and Samuel Adu Bofo in February, 2001).

<sup>314</sup>Interviewees :(Opanin Nicholas Kesse Atiemo and Rev. T. A Osei). Rev. T.A. Osei was a former Synod Clerk of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana and as would soon emerge, he played a leading role in the Adawso Presbyterian Church-Abraham Adu's family dispute.

<sup>315</sup> Interview with Nicholas Atiemo Manu. Also see letter from District Commissioner, to Commissioner, Eastern Province, PRAAD, Adm. 11/1/110, Accra.

<sup>316</sup> Nicholas Atiemo Papers. The papers, "Chronicle of Events from the Chief's Palace, Adawso" are the undated private collections of Mr. Nicholas Atiemo Kesse, a retired Court Clerk and a descendant of Abraham Adu. Meanwhile, I have deposited a copy of it at the Asafu Documentation Centre, Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, Legon.

the forest moved towards the direction of the *Odekro* and his elders. For fear of their lives, the elders understandably ordered that the reptile be killed; and it was instantaneously carried out. In an apparent attempt to bury the snake, the people detected that it was a female and with the consent of the *Odekro* and his elders, it was agreed that they immortalize the incident and also highlight the sustaining motherhood of the river by naming it *Borebea* (a female python). Then after, the people performed a ritual to consummate the change and in the process buried the snake.<sup>317</sup> Later, the community in a clear departure from honoring womanhood appointed a male, Christian Owusu Agyei (Kofi Agyei), a nephew of Opanin Adu, to be responsible for all rituals connected with the river.<sup>318</sup> Their action highlighted gender ambiguities and perpetuated the “error of taking patriarchy as given, or as a paradigm.”<sup>319</sup>

In the mean time, the fortunes of river *Borebea* experienced devastating decline in the affairs of the town. The decline was however not related to the characteristic reduction in volume of most water bodies in Ghana in the 1970s (Konye Obaji Ori, 2009).<sup>320</sup> It was due to Adawso’s perennial chieftaincy disputes; the 1960s and 1970s being central to this article.

### **The River Python and Adawso Chieftaincy Dispute**

*Borebea*’s problems started when the power nodes in Adawso politics- the family, chieftaincy, the Presbyterian Church and the Ghanaian state engaged each other in a struggle over the control of the town’s administration. Adawso as we already know was Basel mission (now Presbyterian) controlled town. This did not change even after the British proclamation of the Gold Coast colony in 1874. For the British authorities continued to recognize the right of the Basel Mission to play a leading role in the affairs of the town. As a result, successive rulers of Adawso were all members of the church and were urged as was the case of *Odekro* Christian

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<sup>317</sup> Interviews with Nicholas Atiemo Manu, (Yaw Nicho), an elder at Adawso chief’s palace (January- June, 2009).

<sup>318</sup> Interview with Opanin Adu Mfum: This was corroborated by several people I interviewed in 2008 as part of efforts to update the data for this paper.

<sup>319</sup> The Adawso situation ran contrary to Ifi Amadiume’s argument about the motherhood paradigm and patriarchy. For more on her argument, see, Ifi Amadiume, *Reinventing Africa*, 35.

<sup>320</sup> “Ghana and West Africa to Brace for Mega Draught: A-Hundred-Year-Long Draught Predicted by US Researchers,” *Afrik News*, Friday 17 April, 2009 (<http://www.afrik-news.com/article15581.html>).



Awuku (Kwasi Botwey) to use only the regalia given to his predecessor and founder of Adawso, Abraham Adu by the church.<sup>321</sup>

Initially, the unusual interest shown by the Basel Mission and the colonial government in Adawso chieftaincy did not affect the unity of the people very much. Whatever suspicions and disagreement that emerged between the traditionalists and the Christians remained subdued and did not pose any threat to peace until the era of the government of the Convention Peoples Party (CPP). As it happened, the CPP government in an apparent recognition of the town's agricultural potentialities established a worker's brigade camp to provide employment to the people.<sup>322</sup> However, the well intended project aroused latent antagonisms, inflamed popular feelings and deepened the nascent polarization in Adawso society. It all began with a fight between Mr. Tiekue, District Commissioner (DC), and an unnamed camp commander over a woman.<sup>323</sup> The tension between the two was exacerbated when the chief of the town, Odekro Ntow Boafo, unbecomingly of a chief bizarrely supported the camp commander.<sup>324</sup> In the heat of events, opponents of Nana Ntow Boafo possibly dissatisfied with his conduct made a serious allegation of embezzlement against him. He was accused of embezzling monies given to him by the government as compensation for people whose lands were taken over for the brigade camp.<sup>325</sup>

As if by design, the young men of the town led by one Kwasi Adu Mfum, a CPP activist and counselor also accused the Odekro of harassment.<sup>326</sup> Faced with mounting pressure from all angles, Odekro Ntow Boafo abdicated the stool. Consequently, Adawso experienced a long interregnum. This was because the Afoa line that was to provide a replacement failed to do so.<sup>327</sup> In the absence of a substantive ruler, the government appointed regents including controversial Adu Mfum to administer the affairs of the town. This was not taken kindly by the Basel mission. Led by its senior presbyter, Opanin Debrah, Opanin Earnest Okraku Manu, Madam Beatrice Asamoah and Madam Aboagye (Maame

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<sup>321</sup> Odekro Christian Awuku succeeded Odekro Solomon Amoah. See letter from District Commissioner to Commissioner, Eastern Province, PRAAD, Adm. 11/1/1102, Accra.

<sup>322</sup> Interview with Ankobea Kwame Fosu. His claim was corroborated by Auntie Mina (Mrs. Obuo Manu). She claimed her ancestral land was also taken for the camp.

<sup>323</sup> According to Ankobea Kwame Fosu and Okyeame Kwame Awuku, the two competed for the heart of the same women.

<sup>324</sup> Interview, Okyeame Awuku and Nana Osae Ntow.

<sup>325</sup> Nana Afari Ntow was a grandnephew of Abraham Adu and rose to office through the Amanimaa line.

<sup>326</sup> Interview, Okyeame Awuku and Nana Osae Ntow.

<sup>327</sup> Meanwhile, no one could tell whether their failure was deliberate or not.

Lawyer), it passed a resolution in which they asserted the right of the church to appoint and install the *Odekro* of Adawso. In their submission, they argued that from its foundation, the town had been successively ruled by a member, usually senior presbyter of and appointed by the church.<sup>328</sup>

The church subsequently installed Opanin Debrah, a grand son of Abraham Adu as the *Odekro of Adawso*. The choice of Opanin Debrah violated the Akan customary practice governing succession to the stool. Under the Akan system of inheritance, only brothers or nephews can inherit their brothers or uncles or grand uncles. Abraham Adu's family understandably resented the action of the church.<sup>329</sup> It therefore instructed its representative, A.A. Anti to take action which it won at the Gyaaschene's court at Amanokrom. The church was not satisfied with the ruling and therefore appealed against it at the Omanhene's court at Akropong. In the course of the appeal A.A. Anti testified that Abraham Adu until his conversion occupied a blackened stool which like Akan leaders constituted the chief's source of legitimacy, and ipso facto, authority. He could however not produce the said stool when demanded to do so.<sup>330</sup> The head of the Amoakade clan at Amanokrom whom the former had called as witness could not amid contradictory claims, confirm the existence of the stool.<sup>331</sup> Faced with contradictory testimonies, the Omanhene's court upheld the appeal against the Gyaasehene's ruling.<sup>332</sup> The ruling by the Omanhene's court, to say the least, was unfortunate. The inability of A.A. Anti's party to prove the existence of the blackened stool did not change the fact that Adawso chieftaincy predated the establishment of the church. And for that reason, the pre-existing rules and custom of succession should have been upheld.

Meanwhile, A.A. Anti and his party further appealed against the Omanhene's court ruling at the Eastern Regional House of Chiefs then sitting at Dodowa. At this juncture the case was given a new twist with the dramatic yet conceivable appearance of Rev. T.A. Osei; the Synod Clerk of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana. He came as a representative of the parent church and in support of the local Session at Adawso.<sup>333</sup> By his involvement in a purely local dispute, the Presbyterian Church had declared its intention,

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<sup>328</sup> His claim was confirmed by A.A. Anti and Okyeame Awuku. Interestingly, most recordings in the "The Church Chronicle" - a station diary of the church have been tempered with making it difficult for one to cross check facts available

<sup>329</sup> Interview with Okyeame Awuku, Auntie Mina and Opanin Kwame Doi.

<sup>330</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>331</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>332</sup> Interview, Ankobea Kwame Fosu and Opanin Kwame Doi: see also, "The Church Chronicle."

<sup>333</sup> Interview, Rev. T. A. Osei.

albeit tacitly to support claims of its members to stools in areas with a view to influence local politics.<sup>334</sup>

Another twist to the case was the untimely death of Odekro Debrah who was succeeded by his able lieutenant, Opanin Earnest Okraku Manu who revolutionalized the chiefly regalia of Adawso with his adoption of a copy of the Holy Bible as the symbol of authority.<sup>335</sup> Incidentally, Odekro Okraku Manu was a great grand nephew of Abraham Adu. His father was Nana Kwabena Okraku who had earlier ruled Adawso.<sup>336</sup> As the new leader of the church, Odekro Okraku Manu naturally took over the case that had been referred the Judicial Committee of the Eastern Region House of Chiefs, chaired by Nana Kwaku Boateng II, Omanhene of the New Juabeng Traditional area. At the end of its deliberations, the committee overturned the ruling of the Omanhene's court (Interview, Opanin Kwame Doi, Ankobea Kwame Fosu and Okyeame Awuku). In giving reasons for its action, the committee convincingly argued that chieftaincy was governed by the customs and traditions of a people; and the church, being an alien institution, had no role in the determination of succession to stools.<sup>337</sup>

The church objected to the ruling and therefore returned the case to the Okuapehene's court, which they perceived to be sympathetic to their cause. Once again their expectation was rewarded with a favorable ruling (interview, Opanin Kwame Doi, Ankobea Kwame Fosu and Rev. T. A. Osei). A.A. Anti and his party in the fashion of the former, appealed against the latest ruling at the Eastern Regional House of Chiefs.<sup>338</sup>

In the course of filling papers politics development in Ghana with far reaching consequence for Adawso chieftaincy took place. A military coup led by Acheampong overthrew the then government of Dr Busia and gave the church a powerful ally. Incidentally, Col. I.K. Acheampong before his rise to power had had children (twins) with a niece of Odekro Okraku Manu. And so when the church eventually lost its case once more at Regional House of Chiefs, it sought and won the support of Col Acheampong. The latter refused to revoke the government's recognition of Nana Manu Okraku as the Odekro of Adawso as demanded by the turn of events.<sup>339</sup>

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<sup>334</sup> Similar attempt was made in Akyem Abuakwa. See R. Addo-Fening, chapter. 5: 193-231 for details.

<sup>335</sup> Interview, Rev. T. A. Osei, A. A. Anti and Ankobea Kwame Fosu. Thus the Holy Bible replaced the linguist staff given to Abraham Adu by the Basel Mission.

<sup>336</sup> According to Adawso traditions, Nana Kwabena Okraku came from the Amanimaa line.

<sup>337</sup> Data from the judgment (see, Nicholas Atiemo papers).

<sup>338</sup> Interview, A. A. Anti, Okyeame Awuku and Ankobea Kwame Fosu.

<sup>339</sup> Interviews, Opanin Kwame Doi, Ankobea Kwame Fosu and Okyeame Awuku.



Odekro Manu Okraku thus continued to rule at Adawso in defiance of the ruling of the Regional House. Given the heavy political clout to the case, A. A. Anti and his party had to wait for time and possibly believed in the adage that "no condition is permanent." In the end, they were proved right.<sup>340</sup> They were not long offered a golden opportunity to redeem themselves. This was made possible by the military coup of the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) that took over the reins of power in 1979. They resurrected the case and won a decisive victory.<sup>341</sup> The A.A. Anti party immediately prayed the ruling family to nominate and install a new Odekro with the probable intent to pre-empt further action by the church. The family nominated, elected and installed one Bekoe Tabiri, a retired Civil Servant, from the Amanimaa line under the stool name Nana Adu Amoah III (1978-1986). He was later elevated to the status of Ohene (Chief) of Adawso by Oyeeman Wereko Ampem III (1975-2005), Chief of Amanokrom and Gyaasehene of Akuapem. Oyeeman's action probably intended to bolster the image and position of the occupant and office of the Akuapem Gyaase stool was pleasantly welcomed by Adawso kingmakers; who used it to "reintroduce" a blackened stool in Adawso. Moreover, they introduced the traditional *adae* calendar and rituals associated with the Akan-type chieftaincy institution. These actions erased whatever relevance the *Borehea* goddess might have left in Adawso. For the stool and the *adae* rituals took the center stage in the governance of the town. Consequently the office of queenmother was established for the first time in Adawso's history. As a result, they elected and installed Nana Akua Amanimaa (1979-1988) as queenmother.<sup>342</sup> Meanwhile, the restoration of descendants of Opanin Adu as the rulers of Adawso coupled with the "reintroduction" of the stool and the institution of the *adae* rituals were celebrated with pomp and pageantry befitting such an occasion. But the celebrations did not last forever.

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<sup>340</sup> See Mike Oquaye, *Politics in Ghana*, Tornado Pub., Accra, 1980, 72-79; Deborah Pellow, *Ghana: Coping with Uncertainty*, London: West View Press, 1986, chpt. 2: 36-90; Emmanuel Doe Ziorklui, *Ghana: Nkrumah to Rawlings*, EM-ZED Books, Accra, (1988), 199- 224; Vincent Okyere, *Ghana: A Historical Survey*, Cape Coast, Ghana: Catholic Press, 2000, chpt. 12: 179-221.

<sup>341</sup> Interview with Opanin Kwame Doi, Ankobea Kwame Okyeame Awuku. See also, Mike Oquaye, *Politics in Ghana*, 133ff.; Naomi Chazan, "The Rawlings Revolution", in *Ghana: Coping with Uncertainty*, Deborah Pellow, *Ghana: Coping with Uncertainty*, 75ff.; Vincent Okyere, *Ghana: A Historical Survey*, 211ff.

<sup>342</sup> Nana Amanimaa abdicated the stool in 1988 due to ill health grounds and was replaced by Nana Aboraa, a descendant of Aboraa, the exiled sister of Abraham Adu. Nana Abora was at the time of writing this paper litigating with Adawso kingmakers. The dispute is a subject of another forthcoming paper by me, "'She Owes a Fishing Trawler': Bending the Rules in the Name of Development."

## Plague of Pebbles: Vengeance by River Goddess

Suddenly, Adawso Township was struck with intermittent dropping of pebbles/stones on houses and compounds for a period of about three months in 1982. The stones fell heavily at isolated places including the chief's palace: Opanin Adu's monument; the area in and around River Borebea. In addition, some of the pebbles fell on the houses of Solomon Amoah (Corner House); ex-Odekro Christian Awuku; and ex-Odekro Afari Ntow. Finally, it also fell on the house of the late Christian Owusu Agyei (Kofi Agyei); and this was believed to be the hardest hit.<sup>343</sup> As it turned out, all these places were revealingly important heritage sites and power nodes in Adawso polity for which reason they became targeted.

Luckily enough, there were no injuries throughout the period; yet the episode caused great consternation and sparked off desperate measures intended to stop it. As a first step, parents were asked to admonish their children who were suspected of throwing the pebbles. In addition, the chief and his elders passed a bye law to check truancy in schools.<sup>344</sup> But none of these produced results. The youth of the town were then mobilized to look out for and report suspicious characters they might see in town. Nothing came out of this either.<sup>345</sup> The local Presbyterian Church on its part invited a soothsayer to help unravel the mystery. This also proved ineffective (Interview, Rev. Johnson Obuo Manu).<sup>346</sup> The local branch of the Church of Pentecost on its part invited its prayer "warriors" from Koforidua to join the local group and organized spirited prayer sessions that ended in near disaster. For their prayer grounds were pounded with hail of pebbles that forced them to flee for safety.<sup>347</sup> The Ghana Police Service eventually sent police contingent to join the youth of the town<sup>348</sup> in an effort to arrest the miscreant; but without success.<sup>349</sup> This compelled Nana Adu Amoah III and his elders to conclude that a calamity had befallen the town. They therefore mobilized the people to perform an ancient spiritual warfare, eradication and purification ritual called "*usera yere*". In the process, the people moved

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<sup>343</sup> House Number A.E. 18 shared a common boundary with the Adawso Presbyterian Church building.

<sup>344</sup> Generally, school children playing truant were most noted for such mischievous activities.

<sup>345</sup> This was confirmed by several members of the church.

<sup>346</sup> Rev. Johnson Obuo Manu is the pastor of the Presbyterian Church, Koforidua Nursing Training School; and a Social Science tutor, Koforidua-Ada Senior High School, Koforidua. He is a descendant of Abraham Adu.

<sup>347</sup> Interview, Deaconess Hagar Tandoh and Madam Esther Mantebea.

<sup>348</sup> This was confirmed by Deaconess Yaa Otutuwa, Elders Kwasi Forson and Papa. Donkor (Kofi Goldsmith), leading members of the Adawso Church of Pentecost during interviews to update data for this paper (June 2012).

<sup>349</sup> The police were responding to Nana Adu Amoah III's request to the police to assist the elders of the town to help resolve the crisis.

from one end of the town to the other, singing war songs, drumming, pounding the ground with wooden pestles and sweeping and pouring libation at vantage points.<sup>350</sup> The elders then decided to report the matter to their divisional ruler, Gyaasehene Oyeeman Wereko Ampem III. Consequently, a high powered Adawso delegation led by Nana Adu Amoah III and comprising Okyeame Awuku, Ankobea Kwame Fosu,<sup>351</sup> Paa Joe, and Nicholas Atiemo (Yaw Nicho), went to Amanokrom as planned.<sup>352</sup>

To their unutterable surprise, Oyeeman and his elders did not believe their story. They were of the view that the events in Adawso were the work of some disgruntled youth.<sup>353</sup> They therefore charged them to intensify their search for and bring them to justice. The delegation returned to Adawso profoundly disappointed but did not fail to send reports on deteriorating condition time and time again to the Amanokrom court.<sup>354</sup> Eventually, Oyeeman and his elders visited Adawso to observe events there. Their visit was intentionally planned to coincide with *awukudae* (*adae* Wednesday) to ostensibly perform and use the *adae* rituals to unravel the mystery behind the episode. Strangely enough, not a single stone fell on that day. Oyeeman Wereko Ampem III and his entourage left the Adawso palace, the venue for the rituals visibly exasperated. But their anger was short lived.

For just as he was leaving House Number A.E. 18 where he had gone to visit his relations, the only pebble for the day fell very close to his left toe.<sup>355</sup> He hurriedly ran to his car; and instructed the elders of Adawso to go wherever possible to look for the cause of the strange happenings; and left Adawso at the bewilderment of Nana Adu Amoah III, his elders and the people of Adawso.

Thereafter, Nana Adu Amoah III persuaded the descendants of Opanin Fuguyaw to use their historic ties with neighboring Larteh to invite

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<sup>350</sup> This was a pre-colonial ritual for warfare and was meant to test the battle readiness of the men-in-arms; and was also used to drive away evil forces in the community.

<sup>351</sup> His claim was corroborated by Okyeame Awuku.

<sup>352</sup> These were key players in the administration of the town. For instance, Okyeame Awuku was the chief spokesperson at the palace. On his part, Paa Joe was the town crier (gong-gong beater) who made public announcement on behalf of the chief. Nicholas Atiemo was the *ohenekra*, the soul of the chief. For more details on these offices, see, R. S. Rattary, *Religion and Art in Ashanti*, Oxford University Press, 1927; Peter Akwasi Sarpong, *Ghana in Retrospect*, Tema: Asempa Publishers, 1976.

<sup>353</sup> Interview, Oyeeman Wereko Ampem, Paa Joe and Nicholas Atiemo Manu (January 2000- May 2001).

<sup>354</sup> Interview, Okyeame Awuku, Paa Joe and Nicholas Atiemo Manu (May 2000).

<sup>355</sup> Interview, Oyeeman Wereko Ampem III, Okyeame Awuku, Paa Joe and Nicholas Atiemo Manu (June 2004).



the Akonodi shrine located in that town to come to their aid.<sup>356</sup> The *Akonodi* shrine was widely known throughout Ghana for its prowess to unravel mysteries like what was happening at Adawso and which they were already aware of.<sup>357</sup> This made the work of the emissaries from Adawso easy. After a brief exchange of protocol and consultation with the Akonodi oracle, Okomfo (priestess) Kyerewaa and two other priests left for Adawso. They were met at the outskirts of the town by an expectant crowd singing a combination of war songs and hymns of the Presbyterian Church amidst drumming and dancing.

And when they arrived at the Adawso palace, an elated Nana Adu Amoah III could not hide his confidence in the ability of the *Akonodi* shrine to unravel the mystery. He declared, "*ne musu yi a ekoso wo oman yi mu to betwamu*"- the ongoing abomination in the town will end today.<sup>358</sup> Without wasting much time, Okomfo Kyerewaa and her team quickly set down to work. For instance, they inspected the houses where the pebbles were dropping. And as it happened on the day of Oyeeman's visit, nothing happened. They finally went to river *Borebea* where they were met with a hail of pebbles; its intensity far heavier than ever.<sup>359</sup> Instantaneously, Okomfo Kyerewaa and her party fell into a prolonged trance during which they claimed the *Borebea* goddess disclosed to them that she was responsible for the calamity in the town. According to Okomfo Kyerewaa, the goddess was using it to register her displeasure conspicuous contempt she had suffered at the hands of chief and people of Adawso.<sup>360</sup> According to the goddess:

1. The elders of the town failed or refused to inform her of their decision to "bring back" the blackened stool to the town. They also failed to inform her when it was finally brought. Her argument was that, she had protected the town and its people since its foundation, warding off evil calamities like accidents, outbreak of diseases, earthquakes and others.

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<sup>356</sup> The delegation was led by Okyeame Awuku.

<sup>357</sup> Since the 1970s, the *Akonodi* had received international attention following the visit of a group of African Americans to the place and the subsequent tour of the United States of America by its High Priestess.

<sup>358</sup> Interview, Nicholas Atiemo Manu (December, 1999).

<sup>359</sup> Interview, Nana Amanimaa, Paa Joe, Okyeame Awuku and Osafohene Kwabena Donkor

<sup>360</sup> Although Adawso did not have an asafo company, the office of *Osafohene* (leader of the Asafo Company) had been created ostensible for the incumbent to mobilize the youth, the backbone of asafo membership for the development of the town; and emergencies including the one under discussion.

2. The elders for over many decades had defaulted in the performance of all rituals and observance of taboos associated with the river which were meant to keep her potency and reverence and most importantly to show the people's appreciation of her motherhood.

The reaction and response from the people gathered to the charges were revealing. For instance, there was unanimity especially among the elderly, in agreement of the goddess' claim of protection. They attested to the fact that Adawso had been spared a number of calamities, including the cholera outbreak of the 1970s in Ghana. They averred that though some deaths occurred during the outbreak, the number of deaths did not reach alarming proportions as it happened elsewhere in Ghana.<sup>361</sup>

On the second allegation, the chorus at the riverside was "*yɛntee saa mpanyinsem yi da*" (we have not heard of this tradition before).<sup>362</sup> They were completely dismissive of the charge; arguing that Adawso had since its foundation been a Christian town.<sup>363</sup> The only dissenting voice however, came from one Joseph Wilson (Paa Joe), a septuagenarian. Commenting on it in a whisper, he said he could recollect that during his boyhood days Opanin Kofi Agyei was in charge of the mobilization of the people in clearing bushes around the river. In an apparent confirmation of Paa Joe's "confession," I once overheard my maternal grandmother and her sister attributing the cause of a strange sickness of a great grandson of Kofi Agyei as punishment for the neglect of an ancestral duty by the family.

The doubting and dissenting voices notwithstanding, the day and event was not the time to challenge the goddess. To this end, Nana Adu Amoah III and his elders held an emergency meeting and asked the priestess to intercede on their behalf.<sup>364</sup> As a result, the priestess demanded three sheep, seven fowls, a carton of schnapps, and a bottle of *akpeteshie* (Ghana's version of America's moonshine). The animals were then slaughtered and their blood collected in a big bowl. Entrails and some selected parts of the animals were added to the blood and cooked. In addition, mashed yam, both "plain" and "red" (mixed with palm oil) was prepared. The priestess and her team then constructed an *nsorem* (a platform for sacrifice) at the banks of the river on which they poured libation and offered the food prepared to the goddess to appease her. Some of the food was later sprinkled at the sites of the stone droppings with the exception of

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<sup>361</sup> Interview, Opanin Kwame Doi.

<sup>362</sup> Opanin Kwame Doi was an octogenarian.

<sup>363</sup> Adawso oral traditions.

<sup>364</sup> I participated in the meeting.



the palace which was deferred to the next *adae* celebration.<sup>365</sup> In the case of House Number A.E. 18, stones collected from all sites and heaped under a nearby mango tree. This was after the priestess had poured libation and sprinkled food in and around the house.

After all these, Okomfo Kyerewaa and her party passed onto the people a set of taboos the goddess instituted in the town. These were:

1. no woman in her menstrual cycle should go to the riverside to fetch water; for as pollutant, menstrual blood it would imperil her potency;
2. no one should fetch water from the river with a black pot/pod or any black container;
3. on no account should anybody dip a bucket or big bowl directly into the river to fetch water. They are to use a calabash, cup or a small container to fill the bucket or whichever bigger container one might take to the river;
4. no one should fetch water from the river with a big bowl popularly called *hweaseammo* in Akan or *pan* by Asante people, or *agbaa* by the Ga and Ewe people of Ghana; and commonly used by women in view of its capacity to carry more water and thereby facilitating the speedy delivery of household chores; and,
5. no one should fetch water from the river at night nor go to the riverside with a lantern.

In retrospect, the taboos were designed to consolidate the restoration and ascendancy of the feminine principle in the town's power structure and of *Borebea's* motherhood. But the restoration presents ambiguities considering the fact that Adawso women were the hardest hit if one considers the implications of the injunctions on menstrual cycle, comportment at the riverside; and the prescribed containers. They were at best limitations which could impact negatively on the daily functions of women in the domestic realm. This is especially so considering the fact that Adawso women's menstrual cycle, at a point in time, would become a barrier between them and water from the river, a vital resource without which little or nothing could be done domestically. In short, Adawso women were "seen as polluting objects to be controlled by taboos ..."<sup>366</sup>

Meanwhile, the intercession was completed with the cleansing and purification rites ten days later at the Adawso palace. In the course of the

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<sup>365</sup> It should be remembered that the day was for the *Borebea* goddess angered by the "re-introduction" of the stool whose *adae* ritual had taken prominence over everything connected with the river.

<sup>366</sup> Ifi Amadiume, 144.



celebration, a sheep was slaughtered and its blood mixed with water. It was later passed round for Nana Adu Amoah III, Nana Akua Amanimaa and all elders gathered took turns to wash their faces, forearms and feet with the purpose of cleansing and absolving themselves from their sins against the goddess. Later on, Okomfo Kyere used some of the concoction to cleanse stool regalia and paraphernalia; walls, furniture, and entrances and door posts. This was also done at fore court of the palace and on Opanin Adu's monument.<sup>367</sup> All this while, attendants at the palace were cooking a ritual meal with the left-over animal blood and entrails. Later on, a large portion of it was taken into the stool room where libation was poured to inform Opanin Adu and the departed ancestors of Adawso of what had transpired and the solution of the stone dropping episode. They also asked for their continued blessings and protection.<sup>368</sup>

The day's activities were brought to a close after Paa Joe was officially appointed the one responsible for rituals practices connected with river *Borebea*. This was followed by the beating of a gong-gong throughout Adawso to announce the coming into effect of the taboos on river *Borebea*. Nana Adu Amoah III then brought proceedings to an end when he thanked Okomfo Kyerewaa and her party for their triumphant intervention. This was after he had given them an undisclosed sum of money; two sheep in lieu of a bull they had initially demanded; twelve yards of white calico and a carton of schnapps. The thanksgiving exercise was climaxed with a grand thanksgiving service the following Sunday at the Adawso Presbyterian Church.

### **Gender Politics: Interpreting the Plague of Pebbles**

The calamity had come to an end but what is the take on Paa Joe's appointment in relation to the restoration of women playing major roles in the central administration of Adawso? Truth be told, the appointment coupled with the taboos virtually disrupted the balance of power the episode had sought to achieve.

Meanwhile, matters were not helped by the worrying silence of Nana Amanimaa and Adawso womanhood who were active participants the day's deliberations over Paa Joe's appointment. But ingrained in their silence and of interest to this paper was their interpretation of the events. They saw the episode and its resolution as the "true restoration of Adawso womanhood as the pivot around which Adawso's progress and wellbeing would forever revolve".<sup>369</sup> To them, their menstrual cycle and their daily activities in and around the river as regulated by the taboos constituted the protective shield for the town. Moreover, they saw Paa Joe as their son and

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<sup>367</sup> Personal observation.

<sup>368</sup> Personal observation.

<sup>369</sup> Interview, Nana Amanimaa, Auntie Mina and Madam Esther Mantebea

brother and by extension, their servant who in the discharge of his duties would serve their interest. Of course, these kinds of analogies cannot be taken literally. Nevertheless, they symbolized a socio-political reality. Predictably, a breach of any of the taboos on the part of the women meant an invitation of the anger and visitation of the goddess; an event too fresh in the minds of the people and yet too terrifying to wish for. To this end, Nana Adu Amoah III and the men of Adawso would recognize the need for moderation in the administration of the town and to accord the womenfolk their rightful place in the socio-political life of the town. Herein lies the truism that women's "values and moral system which generated the concept of love, harmony, peace and cooperation .... imposed a check on excessive and destructive masculinity."<sup>370</sup>

One other important significance of the stone dropping episode was the flexibility of African society in the use of religion to resolve crisis. Adawso generally was considered a Christian town yet the people did not hesitate to "put aside" their Bibles and the veneer of modernity to seek help from the *Akonodi* shrine. They did not see their actions as contradictory as they argued albeit out of contest, that Jesus Christ had demanded that His followers "give to Caesar what is Caesar's".

### Conclusion

It was initially thought of as the work of mischievous children. But it was not. It was the work of the river goddess of the town who was pelting the people with stones to register her displeasure of the astonishing contempt she had suffered over the years. At the end of it all, her pre-eminence was restored but only after the people had sought the intervention of the *Akonodi* shrine. This became necessary when Christian measures proved in effective to resolve the crisis. Meanwhile, the restoration of the goddess' pre-eminence notwithstanding, Adawso women became "victims" of the taboos instituted to forestall a repeat of the disquieting episode.

But the women were undisturbed; they realized the inherent power of the one-sided taboos. The burden of the taboos notwithstanding, it presented them the potential to incur the wrath of the goddess when provoked by their men folk. And should this happen, they would be seen as "wicked" women.

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<sup>370</sup> Ifi Amadiume, 123.

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