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“Our Stool and its Rituals are the basis of Protection for our Chieftaincy and Community”: The Value of Stool Rituals among the Anfoega-Ewe of Ghana.

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### **Abstract**

Chieftaincy is the oldest traditional leadership institution in Ghana which combines religion and rituals, and which is charged with the responsibility of performing executive, legislative and judicial functions in order to ensure peace, stability and development among most traditional societies in the country. Despite the impact of colonial rule and post-colonial administrative measures that have weakened the functions of this noble institution, it has survived due to its ability to merge leadership and religious practices. Based on ethnographic data from the ritual experts of the paramount stool (Gablui Kofi Stool) of the Anfoega-Ewe of Ghana, this paper explores the specific rituals of this sacred stool and the spiritual entities attached to it, and argues that the stool is indispensable in the life of the Anfoega people as protector and source of solution to their existential problems; and that this benevolence is reciprocated with ritual events. It is emphasized that despite the influx of Christian religious groups to the area, the stool is still highly revered even by some local Christian converts, and that the people believe that abandoning the stool and its associated rituals is an anathema in the community.

**Key words:**

Chieftaincy, stool rituals, values, Anfoega-Ewe, ritual experts, libation

**Introduction**

Chieftaincy is an old and a highly revered traditional institution in Ghana. The institution represents indigenous system of government and has evolved through the centuries (Boateng, 1996). "The history of chieftaincy in Ghana", as Bob-Milliar (2009, 543) asserts, "is one of evolutionary tenacity and contradictions, but not refusal of change. It survived the exploitative British imperialism of the nineteenth century and has endured both civilian and military post-Independence regimes." During colonial rule, the British administrators, identifying the inherent positive features of the institution, exploited it in the indirect rule system by channeling their policies through the chiefs. Chiefs therefore became the enforcers of colonial policies such as the implementation of development projects and the collection of taxes (Boateng, op cit). In modern times, governments identify traditional leaders as partners in governance and also recognize the institution as the custodian of the resources which must be harnessed for national development. Thus, the chieftaincy institution has survived under successive governments, maintaining some level of authority over the people in the various traditional areas. At the moment, every traditional area within political districts in Ghana has its own chief who exercises control over his immediate locality.

A careful observation of this institution suggests that it is highly religious and ritualistic in nature. This is not surprising because the lives of Africans, and for that matter, Ghanaians, are closely intertwined with religious ideas and beliefs. Religion appears to be "at the root of African culture and is the determining principle of African life.... In traditional Africa, religion is life and life, religion. ... Religion gives meaning and significance to [Africans'] lives, both in this world and the next" (Opoku, 1978, p. 1). Thus, they are "a people who in all things are religious" (Idowu, 1967, cited in Opoku, op cit). As Akrong (2006) notes, "The pre-eminence of religion as a substance that holds society together is most visibly expressed in traditional leadership institutions" (p. 196). From the installation of chiefs to the performance of their responsibilities and roles, it is evident that the chieftaincy institution is full of rituals which legitimize the position. From the pre-colonial to the modern era, the chief, who is enstooled through

series of rituals and assumes a sacred status, has been a revered priest regarded as the successor of the founder of the state, town or village as well as the representative of the supernatural. Such rituals give him the power and right to perform religious, social, political and economic roles among his people (Busia, 1951; Akrong op cit). Though modern governance structures, such as elective political positions, have deprived the institution of most of its powers, what seems to have kept the institution alive, is its ability to combine both religious and political functions to promote the well-being of the people. This interface between religious practices and leadership is recognized by Gyekye (1996) when he asserts that the African chief is basically both the political and religious head of his people and is required by tradition to perform these functions for the benefit of his people. In most cases, chiefs are still responsible for the performance of customary rites and duties demanded by the stools (in southern Ghana) or skins (in northern Ghana) which they occupy, even though their political authority continues to dwindle due to current political arrangements.

According to Sarpong (1971), the 'stool' symbolizes the office of traditional leadership and is also regarded as the symbol of the 'soul' of the community. This stool, the source of kingly power and authority, sacralizes the leader and offers him the opportunity to communicate directly with the ancestors. Again, Sarpong states that in most traditional societies of southern Ghana, it is by reason of the stool that one becomes a chief and enjoys personal sacredness. The expression: 'To sit on the stool' is therefore used to signify 'to be a chief'. It is only in that capacity that a chief takes on a sacred and priestly posture. One would therefore agree with Dzobo (2001) when he asserts that "The veritable and crucial symbol of chieftood is the chief's stool" (p. 6). It is also confirmed that among the Ewe and other Ghanaian societies, when a people's sacred stool is taken away during a war or any invasion, the people are deemed to have been defeated, despite the successes they might have chalked in the war (Obianim, 1990). According to Gyekye (op cit), the stool which a chief occupies is an ancestral one and this is the source of the respect, dignity and veneration with which the chief is treated. These stools, believed to possess supernatural powers, have certain ritual practices that are associated with them. These rituals are performed occasionally and are based on certain ideas, claims or feelings that are supposed definitely to exist or to be definitely true.

Most rituals, according to Ray (1976), have two basic and important dimensions: what they 'say' and what they 'do'. What rituals 'say', Ray asserts, are what the ritual words and symbols portray about the nature and form of what is being done. Rituals

say a lot about how and why ritual experts do what they do. For example, how and why they communicate with the deities, control and renew the flow of time and manipulate sacred power. What rituals 'do', or are believed to do, according to Ray, are a variety of practical things, such as revealing the future and changing people's social status, increasing fertility and curing illnesses. Ray therefore concludes that "What is 'said' in symbolic terms is what is 'done' in ritual terms to modify experience in accordance with what men desire" (1976, 78).

However, we can posit that all rituals do not 'say' and 'do' the same things: each ritual is unique and is based on the conviction and beliefs of its performers. Relating Ray's generalized assertions to the rituals of the paramount stool of the Anfoega-Ewe of Ghana, this paper interrogates the stool rituals on the premise of a number of related questions: what do the rituals of the Anfoega paramount stool 'say' and 'do'? How do the 'sayings' and 'doings' modify the experiences of the ritual experts in particular and the Anfoega people in general? The study also attempts to establish the relationship between the 'sayings' and 'doings' of the rituals of the paramount stool of Anfoega-Ewe traditional area, a situation why these rituals are continuously performed despite rapid religious, social and scientific changes in the Ghanaian society. Thus, the study, which used ethnographic research methods including participant-observation and interviews, traces the history of the establishment of the stool, explores the specific rituals of the stool and examines the benefits that the practitioners are believed to gain from these. It is argued that contrary to perceptions that stool and related rituals are evil and must be abolished, it seems that traditional political institutions cannot be sustained without them because of the enormous benefits they bring to practitioners despite rapid societal changes.

## **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework that underpins the study is the concept of material religion. According to Meyer, Morgan, Paine and Plate (2005, 4-9), the concept of material religion explores "religion through the lens of its material forms and their use in religious practice" and investigates the extent to which "religious identity and experience" are dependent "on the material stuff and ordinary practices of belief." This concept, which is premised on the notion that religion is basically material in practice, emphasizes what believers do with material things and places, and how these shape or structure their experience, their sense of themselves and of others. The concept views religion as a lived experience. Material

religion is therefore considered to include such elements as pilgrimages, image-guided meditation, the spaces that house shamanistic transport, spirit possessions, divination, or liturgical worship, the objects to which memory and genealogy are keyed, the costumes in which the ancestors are invoked, the images that make aesthetic experience a spiritual encounter. It also consists of the devotional paraphernalia given to the younger generation by the elderly generation, the bumper stickers that are used to invoke deities, and the objects which serve as amulets to ward off evil or summon benevolence. Material religion does not only involve “what people think about their images, but what the images or objects or spaces themselves do, how they engage believers, what powers they possess, and in what manner a community comes to rely on them for the vitality and stability of belief” (ibid, p. 7).

Rituals embody images and objects that are believed to invoke the powers of the supernatural when used to perform certain ceremonies. Again, materials used during rituals are not supposed to be considered or understood in their ordinary forms, making them symbolic. Rituals are performed on stools which are the symbols of chiefs’ power and authority. Therefore, stools are objects that represent power and authority. They are objects believed to possess certain powers that could bless or curse their worshippers, depending on their actions and inactions. Relying on the concept of material religion, this study would examine the materials and space used in the rituals of the sacred paramount stool of Anfoega and the extent to which the powers believed to be possessed by the stool help shape the lives of its devotees.

## The Anfoega-Ewe of Ghana

The Anfoega-Ewe are a patrilineal group located in the mid-central part of the Volta Region of southeastern Ghana. Anfoega is the capital of the North Dayi Administrative District. It is an independent<sup>1</sup> traditional area and one of the smallest paramountcies in Ghana, consisting only of its own satellite towns. The traditional area is made up of ten (10) satellite towns which, according to the 2010 Population and Housing Census in Ghana, are populated by about 9,886 individuals. The traditional occupation of the people is subsistence farming of food crops such as cassava, yam, maize and vegetables including tomatoes, garden

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<sup>1</sup> In a report submitted to the Registrar of the Volta Region House of Chiefs, the Anfoega Traditional Council made it emphatically clear that the paramount stool of Anfoega owes no oath of allegiance to any other stool in Ghana or elsewhere. See Anfoega Traditional Council [ATC]: ANF/TRC 20/31.

egg, pepper and okra. In addition to subsistence farming, they rear domestic animals such as sheep, goats and poultry. They also engage in the *agatawoe* (kaolin or white clay) industry at various stages: mining, pounding, modeling and marketing. While the mining aspect is the preserve of males, all the other aspects are patronized by both males and females. The final product, moulded into tiny cylindrical shapes, is used to make paint, plates and for medicinal purposes. Classroom education and modern government system have brought other occupations to the traditional area. Some natives have therefore become professional teachers, lawyers, doctors, lecturers, nurses and accountants.

The Anfoega-Ewewere part of the larger Ewe ethnic group of West Africa who are believed to have migrated from Ketu, a walled town in present-day Republic of Benin (formerly Dahomey), through Notsie in Togo to their present locations in Ghana (Amenumey, 1989; 1999).<sup>2</sup> The Anfoega-Ewe used to practise African Traditional Religion before the advent of Christianity which was introduced later by the European missionaries in 1888 (Anfoega Traditional Council [ATC], 1998). At the moment, the majority of the people are Christians attending the Catholic Church, Evangelical Presbyterian Church and Assemblies of God Church among others, while those in the minority adhere strictly to the indigenous religion. However, there are instances where in practice, just as in other African societies, the beliefs and practices of the two religions are combined.<sup>3</sup> That is, it is highly difficult, if not entirely impossible, to separate true Christians from true Traditionalists on certain occasions. For example, a Christian, who is also a family head, could pour libation at family events. Also, during state events at which traditional religious performances are observed, all the natives, no matter their religious background, partake fully in

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<sup>2</sup> There are varied versions of the origin of the Ewe. Mamattah (1976, p. 33) traces the origin of the Ewe to the “Tower of Babel” story in the Bible. Kludze (1973, p. 7) asserts that the Ewe, together with the Akan, might have migrated from the Sudan. According to Dzeble (2006, p. 6), some sources even trace the origin of the Ewe to the region of Congo River in Central Africa. On his part, Dzobo (2004, p. 4) states that the original home of the Ewe was Oyo in Western Nigeria. However, Amenumey (1999) argues that claims of the origin of the Ewe beyond Ketu do not have any scientific basis. After their departure from Notsie where they were callously ruled by King Agokoli, the Ewe have never lived under one king again but have been ruled by chiefs in statelets. Oral tradition has it that due to their experiences at Notsie, the Ewe swore before their departure that they would never put their sovereignty and independence into the hands of one person who was likely to be power-drunk. Their ability to keep to this oath reveals their strong attachment to and respect for rituals. It is therefore no wonder that the Anfoega-Ewe, who were part of the Notsie group, believe in and perform many rituals including those of their sacred paramount stool.

<sup>3</sup>Mbiti (1969) suggests that when the African is introduced to a new religion, he/she does not completely do away with his/her own religion but combines or integrates the two religions without seeing any contradictions in this practice.

them. This attitude could be due to, as Nukunya (2003) asserts, the interrelatedness of traditional religion to the African social set-up as a whole. Africans are so immersed, according to Nukunya, in their own traditions and cultures that it will be very difficult, if not entirely impossible, to separate them from their traditions which are based on their perception of the universe.

### The Creation of the Gablui Kofi Stool

The Gablui Kofi Stool, the paramount stool of Anfoega-Ewe, was created by Tɔɔgbe Gablui Kofi, the *Fiaga* (Paramount Chief) who reigned from 1791 to 1830.<sup>4</sup> The initiation and establishment of the Stool, took place on *Asitoegbe-Fida*, that is, a Friday that followed Thursday market day on the traditional four-day calendar.<sup>5</sup> The Stool was carved with wood and besmeared with the royal blood of the first son (also called Gablui Kofi) of Tɔɔgbe Gablui Kofi to initiate it.<sup>6</sup> After that, the spirits of important Sigbe (royal clan) ancestors were called to enter the stool. This ritual made the stool sacred and is the reason why the stool is regarded as the soul of the Anfoega community.

To test for the stool's potency, that is, whether or not these spirits had entered it, a virgin boy was made to carry the stool which was placed in an *agbedze* (literally, 'red bowl'), that is, the bowl which was used during the besmearing of the human blood on the stool. The expectation was that if the boy moved unsteadily after the chanting of some spiritual words, then that was the confirmation that the stool was powerful. When this was done, the boy eventually moved unsteadily. Having realized that it was

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<sup>4</sup> The paramount stool was created after the people's interactions with the people of Akwamu, an Akan group of Ghana, who are well versed in the art of stool rituals. However, it is also important to emphasize that the Anfoega-Ewe, just as the other Ewe groups, knew about sacred stools while at Notsie in Togo. King Agokoli and some of his divisional chiefs had sacred stools. However, due to the escape saga and unexplained circumstances, it was only the Anlo (another Ewe sub-group) sacred stool which was taken before the departure from Notsie. All other stools owned by the Ghanaian-Ewe were created after their arrival at their present locations. One therefore agrees with Mamattah (1976) that the Ewe did not learn the whole art of chieftaincy from the Akan of Ghana. Rather, they learnt only certain aspects of this noble institution from the Akan during their interactions. This is the reason why the Anfoega chieftaincy institution and its structure are unique from that of other areas. That is, the nature of the rituals is neither purely Ewe nor purely Akan but a blend of the two systems together with innovations.

<sup>5</sup> The people have a four-day calendar which is based on their market days and farming days. It is this calendar which is used to determine the days for ritual performances.

<sup>6</sup> Since a human being was used to create the stool, the stool hates human blood. Thus, human blood does not enter the stool room, else the stool is defiled. Again, it is because of this human being factor that it is not advisable for a non-royal to be installed a chief on the stool. If this happens, it is believed, the spirit in the stool will haunt the person and force him to abdicate or even kill him.



powerful, the creators of the stool then placed it at a secret place away from the public where its rituals are performed.<sup>7</sup>

The sacred stool, therefore, is considered a spirit and so it is highly revered. It occasionally receives sacrifices and libation in very elaborate rituals. Since its creation, the Gablui Kofi Stool replaced the Gourd as the Symbol of Authority among the Anfoega-Ewe.<sup>8</sup> The stool was therefore created to serve as the symbol of authority of the *Fiaga* and to command respect for the institution. This is because among the Ewe, any chief who does not own a stool is not considered a chief in the true sense of the word by his peers (Obianim, 1990). The establishment was also to give a spiritual foundation to the chieftaincy institution so as to stabilize the position of the *Fiaga* and the institution as a whole. Establishing the Gablui Kofi Stool was also to portray the bravery of Anfoega-Ewe. Creating a stool was a serious enterprise because human life and spirits were involved. Therefore, any society which established a stool, commanded respect and awe from other societies and was considered as a great and powerful society.<sup>9</sup>

## The Nature of the Sacred Stool

The Gablui Kofi Stool is wooden but inhabited by a human spirit and so it is treated as a human being, preferably an old man and also an ancestor. Thus, it is referred to as *Tɔgbɛ*.<sup>10</sup> It is black due to the animal blood and fat smeared on it over a period.<sup>11</sup> The sacred stool is given food (mostly mashed yam and animal blood) and drinks (hard liquor and palm wine) as humans also do, and is made to stand upright when it is being 'fed'. After each ritual performance that involves only libation, the stool is placed or made to 'lie' on its side to enable it 'rest' and 'sleep' till the next performance. However, when food and animals are sacrificed on it, it is made to stand upright till the next ritual day, because it is assumed that just as humans do not sleep while eating, the sacred

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<sup>7</sup>Interviews with *Tɔgbɛ Denuɔ*, *Zikpuitɔ* (Stool Father) of Gablui Kofi Stool, and Efo Peter Hayibor, a royal clan member.

<sup>8</sup>The creation of the Gablui Kofi Stool was followed by the creation of divisional, sub-divisional and clan stools among the people. Currently, there are thirty-four (34) sacred stools in the Anfoega Traditional Area, all of which receive ritual attention.

<sup>9</sup> According to Obianim (ibid), there are, generally, two main types of sacred stools of chiefs among the Ewe: those that were created (like the Gablui Kofi Stool) by their current owners and those that were seized as booties during wars, raids or invasions.

<sup>10</sup>*Tɔgbɛ* is a title of respect for chiefs, for old age and also for the ancestors. Describing the stool as *Tɔgbɛ* combines all these attributes.

<sup>11</sup>This process of the stool becoming black differs from that of the Akan areas of Ghana where, according to Sarpong (1971), stools are deliberately blackened with the mixture of broken eggs and soot.

stool must also not be made to 'sleep' while it is 'eating' (when food is placed on it). The sacred stool is covered with pieces of clothing after each ritual performance but 'unclothed' by the main ritual official before each performance takes place. These pieces of cloth are provided by the various generations of the royal clan and also as gifts from beneficiaries of the stool. These are used to cover Tɔgbe at the state of rest. In addition, the sacred stool is bathed with locally-made soap and wooden sponge periodically to cleanse it of dirt, just as humans do.

It is interesting and important to state that even though the sacred stool itself is a spirit, it also has three different spiritual entities attached to it. The first two are deities (*trɔwo*), Tovi and Asio-Kofi, and the third is a 'charm' (*dzo*) called Dzabunu. The Tovi and Asio-Kofi are the mouth-piece of the sacred stool and so the stool 'speaks' through them. They also reveal issues concerning the stool, its occupant and the clan as a whole, especially issues that relate to pending misfortunes or disasters. These deities receive periodic rituals in the form of libation, sacrifices and offerings. In such cases, their priestesses become possessed and reveal to the *Fiaga* and his elders, any eventuality that was bound to happen to the people and also indicate the measures which must be taken to forestall it.<sup>12</sup> The *Fiaga* and the *Zikpuitɔ* also go to these deities to divine about the future of the chieftaincy institution and important events of Anfoega.

The Dzabunu is the 'charm' (*dzo*) which protects the occupant of the stool (the *Fiaga*) against any human or spiritual attack. In the past, it was the Dzabunu which protected the *Fiagain* wars against enemy attacks but in modern times, it protects the *Fiaga* against human and spiritual forces who plot the downfall of the *Fiaga*. It therefore immunises the *Fiaga* from evil magical powers, and, in some cases, gives instant justice to such evil plotters (Adzei, 2011).

## Nature and Categories of the Stool Rituals

A careful look at the rituals of the Gablui Kofi Stool suggests that they are unique, that is, they do not strictly follow the format of performance of the stool rituals of any particular society. They are,

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<sup>12</sup> One typical example was when the priestess of Asio-Kofi got possessed after the installation of the current *Fiaga* and revealed that someone brought a very bad *dzo* ('charm') to the town which he wanted to use to cause instability among members of the royal family because he thought he was denied of becoming the paramount chief. The priestess therefore requested for and ensured that certain ritual measures were taken to make the power of the medicine impotent. Of course, nothing happened to the chief. Eventually, rumours abound on the said evil plotter's identity.

for instance, different in form from stool rituals among the Ewe and the Akan.<sup>13</sup> This is because apart from learning from the Akwamu, they also learnt from other Ewe groups. They then modified and integrated these rituals, thereby making them their own.<sup>14</sup> Again, some of the rituals came through divinations and revelations as certain rituals were recommended to be performed at certain times to ward off certain eventualities or to sanitize the stool, the clan or the state. One striking feature which distinguishes the Anfoega concept of stool from that of the Akwamu and other Akan, for instance, is that while the Anfoega paramountcy has only one ancestral stool which receives ritual veneration, most Akan groups initiate stools for every dead chief.

All the rituals of the Gablui Kofi Stool go through three main stages of performance, namely preparatory stage, performance stage and the post-performance stage.<sup>15</sup> The preparatory stage involves the gathering of ritual materials like drinks, foodstuff and sacrificial victims, as well as the performance of certain compulsory rituals to sacralize the time, place and the participants before the main rituals begin. The performance stage involves the main ceremonies like pouring of libation and besmearing of animal blood on the sacred stool, as well as other actions and words meant for the particular occasion. The post-performance stage involves the performance of certain acts that 'bring participants back to the secular world', such as placing used ritual materials back at their respective places and locking the stool room. During the performance of all the rituals, the ritual experts pay particular attention to the ritual materials as well as the words and actions employed during the ritual process, ensuring that all these follow the accepted pattern. This is based on the belief that the use of inadequate materials or improper words and actions would make the rituals unacceptable to the sacred stool and thus making the whole process become fruitless.<sup>16</sup> The rituals of the sacred stool, therefore, can be put into two: the important rituals and the main rituals respectively. The important rituals are those rituals which

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<sup>13</sup>Sarpong (1971) and Obianim (1990) have described generally the various rituals performed for sacred stools among the Akan and the Ewe respectively.

<sup>14</sup> This is an excellent example of adapting an adopted cultural practice to suit local needs.

<sup>15</sup> These three stages are similar to the stages of separation, transition and incorporation posited by Gennep (1960).

<sup>16</sup> This attitude of the ritual experts seems to agree with the concept of material religion which explores why religious people use certain materials, places and processes but not others, in their religious activities to achieve particular results that shape their experiences (Meyer, Morgan, Paine & Plate, 2005). It is also in line with the concept of the 'doings' and 'sayings' nature of rituals proposed by Ray (1976) and referred to earlier. Rituals cannot achieve their desired results if they do not follow the tested and proven patterns.

are constantly and always performed anytime the stool room is to be entered, no matter the occasion. The main rituals are the real rituals performed for the stool and for which days and periods are designated.

### Important Rituals

The first important ritual is that during every *ade* (ritual day), the sound of froyal drum and animal horn is heard from the early hours of the day to inform the people about the impending rituals. Also, an important ritual performed before the stool room is entered involves the use of 'holy water' (the mixture of water, eggs and some herbs) by the ritual performers, one at a time, to wash themselves head, face and arms. Any other person entering the stool room must also wash himself or herself. This special 'holy water', referred to as *danie* (literally, 'remover of stains'), is meant to purify the participants of any form of ritual 'uncleanliness' which is likely to affect the ritual performance in the stool room. An 'unclean' person in this case is a person who had sex the previous day, or had sex with a menstruating woman a week prior to entering the stool room, or had gone to a funeral on the day of the ritual performance. This is important because the stool room is a sacred place and the sacred stool itself does not entertain 'unclean' or 'polluted' persons coming to it. The *danie* is also used as a protective liquid against evil attack so participants send some of it home which they use for ritual bath.

Another habitual ritual regarding the stool room is that anytime the room is to be entered for rituals, an egg is broken to check whether *Tɔgbe* in particular and clan ancestors in general, are in favour of the ritual performers' entry into the room or not. This ritual is performed by the sacred stool's spokesperson who is also the *Fiaga*'s spokesperson (called *Tsiami*). Holding an egg in his right hand, he calls the attention of the sacred stool to seek permission to enter, informing him that his children were seeking admittance into the room. He says these words: "*Tɔgbeago;<sup>17</sup> your children are coming to you.*" The *Tsiami* says these words three times and then hits the egg<sup>18</sup> on the ground to ask for permission to enter. The

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<sup>17</sup>*Agoois* is a local word said by a person entering a house or room to inform the people therein about his or her entry.

<sup>18</sup> Egg (*koklozi*) is considered among the people as a symbol of life force that begets life and is therefore a symbol of continuity of life or nature. It also symbolizes the continuity of life-nourishing relationships between the living and the supernatural. Sarpong (1971) gives other reasons for the use of eggs in rituals. The first reason is that since eggs are very delicate objects, their use suggests that the living must treat the stool with the utmost delicacy and care that it deserves. The second reason is that since eggs are not composed of bone or any hard material, they are thought of to be peaceful. Therefore, their use

pattern of the broken egg suggests whether the sacred stool has granted permission for entry or not. To suggest that permission is granted, the broken egg shells must not cover the albumen and the yolk but must either be below or beside them. This expected pattern of the broken egg is described as *aziake*, that is, 'the egg has opened properly'. Any other pattern suggests that permission is not granted for entry. This egg-breaking ritual is referred to as *Kpabie* and without its performance, the ritual experts cannot enter the stool room. Sometimes, eggs have to be hit on the ground many times before permission is granted. Such a situation is an indication that something is wrong in the clan or community and therefore just after the ritual performance in the room, the sacred stool's deities must be consulted to find out what went wrong. At other times too, when many broken eggs do not show the expected pattern, the *Blabu* (the state's chief ritual expert) is called upon to perform purification rituals first before the next egg is hit on the ground. The belief is that the hitting of the egg by the *Tsiami* does not need any special style of throwing but that in whatever manner that the egg is thrown, it will open up in the required pattern if there is no problem.

Furthermore, Schnapps and palm wine (*deha*) are the drinks used to pour libation on the sacred stool. Schnapps is used on ordinary *ade* days while palm wine is used on special occasions such as the self-introduction of the paramount chief to the sacred stool and rituals of harvest. Palm wine used for libation on the sacred stool must be brought directly from the bush and its carrier must speak with no one on the way to and from the bush because he could speak with an evil-minded person and thereby pollute the wine spiritually. He is also not expected to have sex seven days preceding the rituals, lest he pollutes the wine and his state of ritual impurity eventually revealed by the sacred stool's deities.

Added to the above, libation in the stool room is not poured on the ground but on the surface of the sacred stool itself. During ordinary *ade*, this drink that settles on the surface of the sacred stool is used to besmear the face, head, chest, arms and other parts of the body of each participant to renew the spiritual bond between the participant and *Togbe*, and also as a protective measure against evil forces and wicked persons. This ritual is referred to as *nudodo* and is also believed to be efficacious and heals any ailing part of the body when it is applied there. Finally, after every libation in the

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suggests the peaceful nature of the stool and the ancestors. This is a clear example of the fact that symbols represent things other than themselves, as posited by Turner (1967), Zuesse (1979), Kottak (2002) and Haviland (2003).

room, the remainder of the libation drink is shared among performers and participants (Adzei, 2011).

## The Main Rituals

The main rituals of the Gablui Kofi Stool can be grouped as ritual of revitalization, self-introduction ritual, rituals of harvest, sacrificial ritual and rituals of stool-cleansing. The ritual of revitalization (*ade*) is performed every twenty eight days and takes place on the sacred stool's 'birthday'. It is performed by pouring libation with a bottle of Schnapps. In the prayer, the sacred stool is recognized for its protection and asked to continue to protect the people against evil attacks as well as help them make progress in various aspects of their lives. Thus, this ritual is meant to energize and revive the sacred stool as well as renew the existing bond between the sacred stool and the performers. Below is the translated version of a libation prayer during this ritual performance:

Oh! Oh!! Oh!!

Three is Life<sup>19</sup>

Supreme God, this is your drink

Oh! TɔgbeGablui Kofi,

The Anfoega State as well as all your children at home and abroad

Are thanking you for your care and protection of their lives.

Today is your day of feasting;

So this is your drink.

We ask that you protect the whole community against evil forces and persons.

We also ask for peace and progress for the people and the community.

Peace, peace, peace.

Then, there is the ritual of self-introduction (*zikpuixɔme-dede*) which is performed to introduce a new *Fiaga* (Paramount Chief) to the sacred stool which is his symbol of authority and protection, and for him to see it for the first time. This ritual is performed by the chief, for the first time, pouring libation on the sacred stool, symbolically sitting on it and sacrificing a ram to the sacred stool. The rituals of harvest (*Nunenekɔnuwo*) are meant to inform and

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<sup>19</sup>Among the Ewe, the number three is sacred and symbolic, due to the belief in the three most powerful supernatural beings: Mawuga, MawuSodza and MawuSogbla. The number three is used in rituals and prayers. In the performance of rituals for individuals, their names are mentioned three times to introduce them to the most important supernatural beings. In prayers, the number three is used at the introductory stage. At the closing stage of libation, the prayer drink is sipped and spewed out three times. See Dzobo (2008).

'feed' the sacred stool with new yam because yam is a precious crop among the people. With this ritual, fresh yam tuber is sliced and placed on the sacred stool and then taken and used to touch the body of ritualist experts to show that the citizens are now permitted to harvest and eat the new yam. The ritual of sacrifice (*dzododo*) is performed to revivify the sacred stool with animal blood through animal sacrifice in which the blood of the slaughtered animal (ram) is used to besmear the sacred stool. This is because blood is considered the symbol of life and a precious gift, and so is given back to the supernatural. The rituals of stool-cleansing (*tsilele-na-zikpui*) are performed to bathe the sacred stool with a locally-made soap and wooden sponge, and to cleanse the sacred stool to make it neat, clean and to purify it when it is defiled through any human (action such as menstruating women entering the stool room). It must, however, be emphasized that one feature which is common to all of these rituals is that they all perform thanksgiving roles in addition to their specific roles (Adzei, 2011).

### **Importance of the Stool Rituals**

The various rituals performed for the Gablui Kofi Stool are meant to 'feed' it so as to nourish and empower it as well as to persuade it to perform two main functions for the people: political and social stability.

As the sacred stool is the symbol of authority of the *Fiaga* and is believed to possess the 'soul' of Anfoega, the rituals performed on it are aimed at nourishing it so as to stabilize the position of the *Fiaga* as the most authoritative chief who must command respect from all citizens and sub-chiefs of Anfoega. The rituals maintain the potency of the sacred stool as the spiritual entity that protects its occupant, the *Fiaga*, who is responsible for ensuring, through the performance of his roles, the well-being of his people. It is also asked to protect the *Fiaga* against human and spiritual enemies and to give him long life to rule. In addition, wisdom is asked for the *Fiaga* to enable him perform his duties effectively and to win the support of all his subjects so that in unity, the entire Anfoega will work towards prosperity. It is important to note that during the period of the performance of these rituals, some issues of grave concern to the people are also discussed.

Again, the rituals performed for the Tovi and Asio Kofi deities also empower them to reveal to the *Fiaga* and his elders, any impending danger. It is these deities that prescribe the necessary remedy to ward off such misfortunes. Before embarking on any major endeavours such as the celebration of festivals and taking part in events outside the traditional area, the *Fiaga* and his elders

do consult these deities to know what lies ahead of them and what they should do to be safe or successful. This in no small way helps to stabilize the position of the *Fiaga* in particular and the chieftaincy institution as a whole. Furthermore, the rituals performed for the Dzabunu empower it to ward off any attack against the person of the *Fiaga* so that he could rule without any fear. In the past, it was the Dzabunu which protected the *Fiaga* in particular and the people in general during wars. The power of the Dzabunu is evident in the fact that, after settling at their current place, the Anfoega-Ewe had been successful in warding off all external attacks. They have therefore never played any subservient role to any other community. They have also not ceded any part of their territory to any external power.

In the daily lives of the people, devotion to the Gablui Kofi Stool is aimed at addressing the existential problems of life so as to ensure social stability. The stool rituals, therefore, are means through which the people express their feelings to the sacred stool and ask for its protection and blessings as it protects them also from all dangers. Consequently, whether the people are present in the stool room or not, they express these feelings through the ritual experts who perform the rituals of the sacred stool. They thank the sacred stool for its blessings and put their litany of existential problems before it. These problems – joblessness, childlessness, inability to get a compatible marriage partner, bad dreams, evil spiritual attack, stubborn children, unnatural or accidental deaths in the clan, failure in enterprises such as examination, trade or farming – are believed to be addressed by the sacred stool when laid before it. Therefore, citizens – traditionalists and Christian converts<sup>20</sup> – put their problems before the sacred stool while they

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<sup>20</sup> Throughout the study period, the researcher witnessed ritual performances during which Christian converts, whom he knew personally, presented petitions to the sacred stool either in person or in absentia through the ritual experts and other participants. Their absence from the ritual performances could be attributed, to a large extent, to the fact that either most of them were women and could not enter the stool room, or, they felt shy from entering the room as other church members might complain and report them to church authorities for punitive measures, when it was found out. In any case, their petitions were duly presented by the ritual experts. The respondents of this study also confirmed this phenomenon as usual. On one occasion, I witnessed an instance during which a devotee asked for the sacred stool's protection during the ordination of his nephew as a Catholic priest. The continuous patronage of the stool rituals by known Christian converts forced the researcher to interview a few of them as to whether participation in stool rituals does not contradict their Christian beliefs. Such Christian converts admitted that the church teaches against such practices. However, to them, the sacred stool and its rituals do not constitute evil. The tendency of African Christians to syncretize African Traditional Religion with Christianity has long been noted by scholars like Mbiti (1969), Opoku (1978), Quarcoopome (1987), Abotchie (1997) and Nukunya (2003). These scholars conclude that for Christian converts to partake in traditional religious practices, it is a clear indication that they still have faith in the tested and proven



show appreciation through offerings such as drinks, pieces of clothing used to cover the stool, or money supposed to be used to buy *adehezi*, literally, 'egg of appreciation' for the sacred stool. Naturally, getting solutions to these existential economic and social problems<sup>21</sup> relieves the people from stress and makes them feel secured. This is because they believe in and expect to get benefits from the ritual performances, so they have a peaceful mind to go about their productive activities without any mental stress. Also, as they put their numerous problems before the sacred stool, the devotees are hopeful and thus become less worried about these problems as they are very sure that the problems would be solved.

In addition to the main stool rituals, citizens also frequent the Tovi and Asio Kofi shrines for personal reasons. These may include finding out the cause of any personal misfortune or divining about what the future holds for the individual so that any pre-emptive measures could be taken to forestall any impending disaster. Considering the belief that the inability of the people to perform these rituals could lead to instability among the people, the ritual experts try as much as possible to perform these rituals at the stipulated times. Due to this belief, there has never been a time when these rituals had not been performed and this shows the extent to which importance is attached to the stool and its role among the people.

Again, the Gablui Kofi Stool and its rituals are a rallying point for the people as they come together to perform these rituals. This helps to promote communal living and unity among the people as they see one another as partners in the ritual process. This feeling alone promotes unity and avoids hatred and unnecessary in-fighting because it is believed that the sacred stool detests enmity among its people and devotees. It will therefore punish any devotee who harbours ill-feeling against another. In addition, the rituals serve as a check against the use of evil spiritual

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Traditional Religion and that to them, resorting to traditional practices in times of crises does not constitute apostasy.

<sup>21</sup> Testimonies abound among the people that it was through the power of the sacred stool that they got good jobs, usually after making pledges to the sacred stool. During an interview with the *Tsiamion* 3<sup>rd</sup> July, 2010, he gave an instance of a citizen who once lost his job in the United States of America, came home to ask the sacred stool to help him get a job and pledged that he would offer a sheep to be sacrificed to the sacred stool if he was employed again. After some time, he called his relatives back home and informed them that he had secured a good job. Eventually, he came home and provided the sheep and some drinks which were offered to the sacred stool. From that time, he always partook in the sacred stool's rituals anytime he came home. There was also a young driver who once lost his job. After asking the sacred stool for help, he got a job with the Judicial Service of Ghana as the driver of a High Court Judge in Accra. He therefore came to thank the Stool with a sheep and some drinks. This writer witnessed the sacrifice of this sheep on Friday, the 30<sup>th</sup> of July, 2010.

powers to attack one's neighbours. For instance, the belief that a person cannot partake in certain stool rituals if he or she has evil intentions or plans, helps to check morality. Thus, it behoves every ritual participant to do away with all evil plans to be able to perform such rituals as 'eating or drinking with the sacred stool'. This is because refusal to partake in such rituals is a betrayal of one's evil plans against the neighbour. This practice is a sure way of maintaining social stability and brotherliness among the Anfoega-Ewe. In the same vein, as women are informed that they would experience perennial menses when they enter the stool room during their period, they obey this taboo strictly to avoid this misfortune. Adherence to such a taboo could be translated into the secular life of the people when they are made to obey law and order. The rituals therefore serve as a means of social control.

From the foregoing, it can be inferred that what the rituals of the Gablui Kofi Stool 'say' and 'do' for the Anfoega-Ewe cannot be overemphasized. The ritual words, symbols and actions performed for the sacred stool portray the level of reverence given to it. These rituals are meant to re-vitalize and revive the sacred stool so that a variety of life-nourishing benefits can be gained in order to modify the experiences of the people. Indeed, it is evident that, as the ritual experts assert, the sacred stool is really considered the source of protection for the chieftaincy institution and the community. It is no wonder that the lives of the ritual experts in particular and the people in general appear to rely, to a very large extent, on the sacred stool and its rituals, despite the incursion of many Christian groups.

## Conclusion

Considering the findings of this study, it is concluded that the persistence of the Gablui Kofi Stool and its rituals among the people of Anfoega traditional area, despite social and religious changes that have taken place over the years, is a clear indication of the political, religious, social, economic and medical roles which the sacred stool is believed to play among the people. The sacred stool is the basis of the chieftaincy institution and the symbol of authority for the *Fiaga* and his ruling class. Of course, just as it is believed among other traditional societies in Ghana, without the stool, kingship is not recognized among the people of Anfoega too. Therefore, the Gablui Kofi Stool is given the necessary respect and reverence it deserves. This is done through the ritual attention it receives at various times because of the belief of the people that the sacred stool is a spiritual entity and a benefactor which reciprocates ritual attention with the provision of existential needs.

Furthermore, the benefits as mentioned derived by the people from their devotion to the sacred stool are numerous and cannot be quantified. This encourages them to continue to perform these rituals. This phenomenon brings to light the value of reciprocity among African cultures in which parties in a relationship are expected to play complementary roles for the mutual benefit of both parties. In this vein, African traditional religious believers expect the supernatural powers to provide them with their needs as they give reverence to the supernatural through the observance of rituals such as stool rituals. It is also evident that to the Africans generally, life is a process of never-ending human and communal relationships which are defined in terms of reciprocal obligations and privileges.

Opoku (1978) has already indicated the fact that in Africa, traditionalists usually abandon their object of worship if they realize that they are not making any gains from the engagement as a result of failure on the part of the object of worship to perform its reciprocal role of blessing and protecting the devotees. Therefore, the fact that the people of Anfoega continue to uphold their sacred paramount stool in high esteem and perform its rituals appropriately is an indication of the invaluable contribution of the stool to their general well-being.

The fact that some Christian converts also partake in giving ritual attention to the sacred stool re-emphasizes the relevance of the sacred stool among the people. Such converts readily assert: "God exists and the ancestors also exist," meaning that both God and the ancestors are valuable and require human attention. Thus, the generality of the Anfoega-Ewe consider their paramount sacred stool as *tɔgbenu*, that is, a valuable ancestral heritage, and therefore realize that it must be sustained without fail. They thus fear that relying on only the church and relegating ancestral devotions to the background could lead to both disaster and non-fulfillment of their basic needs and aspirations. Thus, it is evident, as Dzobo (2008) has pointed out, that the greatest spiritual yearning of the African, no matter his/her adopted religious orientation, is to be human in this life and this involves participating in the beliefs, ceremonies, rituals and festivals of one's community to ensure cosmic balance. From these, it is clear that humans are continually interested in acknowledging the divine while the divine beings are also interested in the well-being of the living, especially in the conditions necessary for the realization of the ideal life. The beliefs and rituals of the sacred paramount stool of the Anfoega-Ewe are no exception.

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