

DIPO



A rite of passage among the Krobos of Eastern Region, Ghana



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DEDICATION

To my godson, Anton Bernhard Olausen

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He was always smiling at me. His arms carried me through
Eternal Father to You, I am forever grateful.

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ABSTRACT

The transition from childhood to adulthood is a major one, not only for the individual but the society at large. In some societies, the rites of passage are observed to usher young people into adulthood. The Krobos in Ghana are no exception. They have the most elaborate puberty rites for girls in Ghana today. This study investigates the historical background of the practice, the changes it has undergone and reasons for these changes. The ways in which this practice forms part of the ethnic identity of the Krobos and more importantly, a Krobo woman is explored. The study draws on concepts such as gender, values, modernization, and ethnicity.

The study reveals that the practice was a form of vocational training for young women in which they were taught generally how to assume their roles as responsible women in the society. This was in the absence of formal education. It was also established in a bid to increase the status of the girl-child in the Krobo society. It is however common to find girls as young as two participate in the rite. Though the rites involved bodily exposure, initiates are allowed to cover their breasts sometimes during the rites instead of having them exposed the entire time as was the case in the past. The duration of the rites has also reduced from about a year to four days. Christianity, modernization, formal education and environmental changes have been attributed to these changes. The changes however serve to encourage its continuity.

The custom is however adept with symbols, the major one being that initiates are transformed into women. It also depicts the typical traditional life of the Krobos and the cultural construction of who a woman should be and what her roles and responsibilities are. The study shows that the custom is a means of female empowerment in a patrilineal society as it is aimed at bringing females into the limelight. People adhere to the practice mainly because it is tradition and the desire to have a place in their family home in Kroboland. The deep sense of belonging therefore becomes part of the motivation to engage in the practice. Christianity and modernization are however factors that make people refrain from the practice. The practice was however described as a rich custom and an ethnic hallmark of the Krobos.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

“No other ritual, in the life of a female Krobo, is of greater importance than – or equal to – the dipo.”

Hugo Huber, 1963

The time has come once again for the ultimate test – a couple of days spent in an event that can never be erased from the memories of the girls who take part. From within and outside the community, the girls prepare for this occasion. Some are very excited; finally, it is their turn to graduate from childhood. Others are skeptical; they are not sure what to expect. A good number of the girls travel from the cities and major towns and even from other countries to be a part of this event. The tension is high and so is the expectation. While some girls wonder how they will make it through the weekend, others are so excited they are telling their friends about it. The parents and other family members are excited; it is time to celebrate their daughters. They are also anxious and hope their teenage daughters make it through the initiation ceremony and bring pride to the entire family and lineage. The forthcoming days would be laden with song, dance, rituals of purification and cleansing and finally, they would be dressed up and outdoored. The girls gather as children and go through this transformatory process after which they emerge as women. It is a process that makes an indelible stamp on their identity as Krobo women and hence, their membership in this tribe.

The ceremony, a rite of passage called Dipo among the Krobos, a tribe in the Eastern Region of Ghana, is a very prominent event which has been carried out for years. The practice is held very strongly by the Krobos and it is ensured that every female in the tribe undergoes the rite. It is performed every year from February to June. Several girls partake in this event which lasts for a period of four days during which they spend most of their time in the Dipo house where the rite takes place. Several years ago, I was one of these girls who took part in this ceremony, now I observe, describe and analyze it as a researcher.

This study is about a cultural practice that has withstood the test of time even though it is continually undergoing changes due to internal and external factors. The Krobos have managed to ensure the continuity of the practice despite these influences which makes it a subject of interest as it is the most elaborate female transition rite in Ghana especially at a time when it is virtually non-existent in other parts of the country.

1.1 The ritual discourse

The Dipo custom is a ritual in itself and also comprises a number of practices performed within it. Turner (1967:61) refers to ritual as “prescribed formal behaviour for occasions not given over to technological routine, having reference to beliefs in mystical beings or powers.” For the Krobos these beliefs happen to relate to ancestors and deities who are often called upon for blessings and protection. This is prominent in the Dipo custom and is a means by which initiates are made increasingly away of the Krobo traditional belief systems. Monica Wilson (1954:241) as cited in Turner ([1969]2009:6) states that;

“Rituals reveal values at their deepest level... men express in ritual what moves them most, and since the form of expression is conventionalized and obligatory, it is the values of the group that are revealed. I see in the study of rituals the key to an understanding of the essential constitution of human societies”.

I definitely agree with this understanding of ritual especially from my own fieldwork experiences. The performance of a ritual is a means by which people express their values and make a statement about who they are and their way of life. The conventional nature is expressed when Dipo is performed to be a reflection of the traditional Krobo way of life and is obligatory in the sense that it is expected of every female member in the society. The girls are simply taken to be initiated, they do not have a say in the issue. It expresses the Krobo way of defining womanhood.

Shorter (1998) points out the fact that rituals are “symbols-in-action, with or without accompanying verbal symbols” thereby bringing out a major characteristic of rituals which is symbolism. Rituals are endowed with symbolism all leading to their main purpose. A lot of meanings can be derived from the symbolic actions observed in the Dipo custom and this is treated in a later chapters. There are different types of rituals which may be performed for different purposes and the rite of passage is the type of ritual this thesis focuses on.

1.2 Rites of passage

The life of a human being is a development process that involves several stages from conception to death with each stage having significant effects on the individual and also the society. Rites of passage refer to the transition to a different stage of life and have been defined as a set of “rituals which mark the passing of one stage of life and entry into another, e.g. birth, puberty, marriage, initiation to priesthood, or death. They are also known in English by the French equivalent *rites de passage* and by the term ‘life-crisis rituals’” (Barnard and Spencer, 2006:489). The rites observed when the individual attains the age of puberty are referred to as puberty rites and ensure a safe passage from one stage of life (childhood) to another (adulthood). During this transition period, initiates are taught how to perform their roles as responsible adults.

A number of African societies observe these practices on which research has been done. Among them are the Ndembu of Zambia (Turner 1967), the Bemba of Zambia (Richards 1982), the Kaguru of Tanzania (Beidelman 1997) and the Gisu of Uganda (La Fontaine 1972). Beckwith and Fisher (2002) and de Rachewiltz (1964) have also captured a number of initiation ceremonies for both boys and girls in various societies in Africa.

Rites of passage may involve incisions on the body, tests of physical endurance, genital cutting among others. For females, the emphasis is usually on fertility. According to Salm and Falola (2002), they are necessary for ensuring the propagation of a lineage and providing status. They also “help determine family organization, domestic hierarchies and future lineage relationships” (Ibid:127). This expresses how the individual who goes through the rite of passage gains a definite place in the lineage as a matured person and also a status as a member of the tribe or group. Cultural identity formation here is therefore of major importance. It also includes education in issues such as sex, marriage and family life while domestic skills are particularly stressed in the case of females as it is a major criterion for marriage (Salm 2002; Gyekye 2003).

Salm and Falola (2002:129) state that “all traditional Ghanaian societies celebrate girls’ transition to adulthood” and it is known as *otufu* among the Gas, *bragoro* among the Akans and *dipo* among the Krobos. Nukunya (2003) also mentions that a similar practice is found among the Ewes while it is virtually unknown in the north of Ghana. However, Sackey (2001) states that puberty rites are held for both boys and girls in the Northern Region of Ghana unlike the south where it is mainly for girls. In an article by the Ghana News Agency (2004), it is mentioned that in the Upper East Region, situated in Northern Ghana, female genital mutilation is actually practiced as a form of puberty rites. It is a fact that “Ghanaians

today do not go through the same initiation rites as their elders” (Salm 2002:129) and this is mainly because such rites have gradually faded out with the exception of the Krobo Dipo which is now the most elaborate rite of passage in Ghana.

Richards (1982) points out that rites of passage may coincide with physical maturity or be held irrespective of biological changes. When they are held independent of sexual maturation, the emphasis becomes that of social maturity. She further terms rites which precede marriage as nubility rites. It is common for Dipo to be termed a puberty rite as can be found in Anarfi (2003), Oppong (1973), Sackey (2001) and Teyegaga (1985). I however deem the term rite of passage more appropriate for the Dipo custom. With the background of its origin as presented in chapter three, it can be seen that the custom has never coincided with puberty. It is generally the parents who decide when the rite should be performed for their daughters; puberty is usually not taken into consideration. The term rite of passage also depicts the transitory nature of Dipo. It was originally intended for young adult females who were of marriageable age. It was also not meant to coincide with the first menstruation unlike the Akan Bragoro. The Dipo custom was intended as a pre-marriage ceremony in which young women acquired vocational training, house-keeping skills and the rudiments of married life. Chastity prior to marriage was highly valued and all young women of marriageable age were expected to be of high moral conduct. The completion of this custom gave participants entry into adulthood. They were considered matured women and given away in marriage. Dipo as it is now practiced does not precede marriage as the initiates are much younger and it occurs in most cases, several years before marriage.

According to Steegstra (2004:8) Dipo could be termed “puberty rites” or “initiation” but she preferred to use the term “initiation” because it is performed in groups, is not connected with menarche and the ages of the participants vary. Similarly, Huber (1963:165) uses the terms “initiation rites” and “rituals” in reference to Dipo and De Rachewiltz (1964:227) calls it a “female organization” which precedes marriage. The term initiation is also appropriate as one purpose at least is, initiation of girls into womanhood.

This study is therefore about the transitory rite, Dipo in the context of the Krobo culture. The Dipo ritual does not involve any genital cutting or test of physical endurance. Every Krobo girl is expected to go through these rites else she will never be fully recognized as a Krobo woman. Huber (1963:155) illustrates this fact when he states that “there is the conviction, dating from ancient times, that, no Krobo girl can even become a mature Krobo woman and a wife worthy of a Krobo man, unless she can show on her body and on her hands

the visible marks of her initiation.” The marks are no longer given partly because of photography but the practice still plays a major role in the formation of an ethnic identity.

1.3 The issue of Dipo in Ghana today

Dipo is not altogether praised in Ghana. The practice has aroused a number of debates. While some people believe it is a cultural practice that should be continued, others are of the opinion that it is old-fashioned and has no significance in the modern Ghanaian society. The practice has gone through a number of changes among which is a drastic reduction in the age of participants. Girls as young as two also undergo the rites. According to Anarfi (2003), the Krobos record some of the highest rates of HIV/AIDS¹ in Ghana and he attributes it partly to the “present cultural interpretation of the Dipo cult” (Ibid:32) particularly the young age at which girls are initiated and the fact that early pregnancy after initiation is not frowned upon. He therefore states that Dipo is “no longer a preparation for good marriage but a license for early sexual activity” (Ibid:32).

Sackey (2001) attests to this fact and advocates that aspects such as shaving of the hair which is a possible cause of HIV/AIDS should be stopped. She however believes that the prevalence rate has increased because of the wane in the performance of puberty rites for girls and suggests that “if the performance of puberty rites were to be enforced, sexual indulgence would be deferred and the youth protected from Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs) including HIV/AIDS...” (Ibid:71). Schroeder and Danquah (2000:5) also believe that Dipo could be used as a means of preventing the spread of HIV/AIDs and other STDs in Ghana “if the girls adhere to the teachings” and abstained from sex until they were married.

Some other aspects of the rite such as the exposure of initiates’ breasts, washing their feet with the blood of a goat among others have also been subject to critique. Tetteh (2006:3) states that these aspects “offends the 21st Century’s sense of women’s dignity... abuse human right and freedom of the girls involved, ...amount to more or less maltreatment of a child” and is also embarrassing to the girls and a means for ridicule from their friends.

Shroeder and Danquah (2000:5) further point out that “with the misconception of what rites of passage are, Western culture perceives all rites as devilish”, including Dipo. They also delve into the issue of religion and education when they state that “Christians and Muslims see puberty rites as devilish and the educated elites see it as outmoded” (Ibid:5). The religious discourse in relation to Dipo is a major issue in the Krobo society today. A number of Krobos

¹ Human Immunodeficiency Virus and Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome

profess to be Christians and do not wish to be associated with the rite as it is performed within the traditional religion and practices such as ancestral worship, pouring of libation among others are contrary to Christian beliefs. This discourse has persisted since the Krobos first had contact with missionaries and with the increasing number of churches springing up in the Krobo society, it is bound to persist for a long time to come. Meanwhile, the Dipo custom keeps undergoing changes as culture is not static but dynamic. These changes, such as the possibility of paying money to avoid shaving of the hair for instance, will be discussed in detail later in this study and they have been made partly in response to the above-mentioned factors.

1.4 Motivation for the study

As I observed this ceremony on the field and continuously engaged in conversations and interviews regarding the rite, I was constantly confronted with the question, “Why are you studying this?” by a number of informants. The answer to this question helped me gain information from them in many circumstances. At this point, it is expedient for me to explain my interest in this field of study and the topic in particular.

I am partly a Krobo, my father hails from this tribe while my mother is part of the Akan ethnic group, specifically a Fanti. Hence, in May 1996, I made a trip from Nigeria, where I lived at the time, to Ghana and specifically Krobo-Odumase to participate in the Dipo rite. I was almost a teenager and really wondered what was special about the ceremony that I had to travel all the way to be a part of. My curiosity was immediately piqued and I grew anxious. I had previously heard about it but it was only mentioned by extended family members during a visit for a funeral. They mentioned it briefly and simply said it was performed for girls to make them ‘Krobo women’ and I had to go through it as well. When the time came for my initiation, I hoped this would be explained further but was quite disappointed when this did not happen. I went through each stage with curiosity and anxiety. At the time, I thought it was a very interesting event but did not understand why it involved exposure of the breasts.

This kept on lingering in my mind and especially when I came across some discussions of it in newspapers. I have always longed to learn more about this ritual, as I believe that the more understanding is gained about a cultural practice, the better it is appreciated. Victor Turner (2009[1969]:7) has said that “it is one thing to observe people performing the stylized gestures and singing the cryptic songs of ritual performances and

quite another to reach an adequate understanding of what the movements and words mean to *them*.” It is the desire to reach this adequate understanding of what Dipo means to the Krobos that made me embark on this project. Going back home for fieldwork in the summer of 2009, for me, was a return to a history of over a decade as I had never been to Kroboland since that time. My personal involvement is therefore a major reason for conducting this study.

The Dipo custom has also been generally understudied. Steegstra (2004) has the most comprehensive work I have ever come across on the topic while Huber (1963) is believed to be the most elaborate account of the Krobo tribe in general. Literature on the Dipo custom is limited to a few writings by students as dissertations, some publications by clergy (cf. Teyegaga, 1985), newspapers and journal articles. My study of this custom therefore adds to the few existing literature on the subject especially from a one-time participant’s view.

1.5 Research approach

This is an ethnographic study of the rite of passage, Dipo, practiced by the Krobos in Ghana. It therefore falls within the discipline of social and cultural anthropology. The Dipo custom can be said to be indigenous to the Krobos. Beidelman (1997), in his study of the Kagurus of Tanzania mentions that they believe rituals of initiation was “critical in establishing... sociocultural identity.” I have this similar experience with the Krobos and it could not be overemphasized how the Dipo custom served to promote the Krobo ethnic identity, an issue I will demonstrate in this thesis.

1.5.1 The ethnicity focus

There are so many dimensions to the study of Dipo. Issues that arise within this study include gender, modernization, sexuality, values, and also some aspects of economics and politics. It is however beyond the limits of this dissertation to delve deeply into all these issues as such, they will only be mentioned briefly and the main focus that would run as a general theme within the study and also in relation to these aspects would be ethnicity. The Krobos are a tribe who belong to the Ga-Adangbe ethnic group in Ghana. The Shai who also belong to this group also observe the Dipo custom. The ethnicity discourse will be discussed more in chapter four as part of the theoretical basis of this study. I seek to bring out how Dipo serves as an emblem of ethnic identity.

1.5.2 The indigenous discourse

While in the field, an informant used the term “*indigenous people*” in reference to the Krobos. By this term, she meant the local people, Krobos who lived in the Krobo towns and villages. The term ‘indigenous’ is a dicey one especially in the African context. According to Saugestad (2001:303), from the historical point of view, “indigenous peoples are the descendants of those who occupied a given territory that was invaded, conquered or colonized by white, colonial powers.” This view creates a notion that all native Africans are indigenous because “in relation to the colonial powers *all* native Africans were (a) first comers, (b) non-dominant and (c) different in culture from the white intruders” (Ibid:303). In Ghana, the term is not used to describe any groups of people. Terms like ethnic group and tribe are commonly used instead. It is believed that almost all tribal groups in Ghana migrated from other parts of Africa and finally settled in the geographical area now known as Ghana. The term indigenous is thus a complicated one to use in the Ghanaian setting. The only instance in which this term can apply is when it is taken to mean “ ‘local’, ‘native’ and ‘non-European’ as such, we could refer to ‘indigenous agriculture’ or ‘indigenous plants’ (Saugestad 2001:302). It is in this regard that writers such as Salm and Falola (2002:29,31) make mention of “indigenous culture” and “indigenous music and dance” in reference to Ghana. On one hand, the Krobos could be said to be indigenous since they were the first comers/settlers on the Krobo Mountain. However, they have not been ascribed the status of indigenous and do not regard themselves as such. It is beyond the limits of this study to go into the indigenous debate or refer to the Krobos as indigenous. It is therefore in the sense of ‘local’ or ‘native’ that the term is used in this study.

1.5.3 The emic perspective

This study makes use of the emic model which “explains the ideology or behaviour of members of a culture according to indigenous definitions... emic models are culture-specific” (Barnard 2000:180). The emic approach “seeks to understand human behaviour within a single culture from the point of view of members of that culture” and it also “uses categories that have been determined as meaningful in one culture to describe behaviour in that same culture...” (Glass & Bieber, 1997 cited in Jávo, 2003). This approach is employed because it seeks to describe the practice of Dipo from the Krobo perspective. I deem this approach appropriate as it is best to see Dipo in the eyes of the Krobos and also because, I as the ethnographer happens to be a member of the tribe. The major question with this approach is the questions of cultural authority and how to identify such a person (Barnard 2000:182). I did

not seek to find a single cultural authority in the area of Dipo during my fieldwork. Instead, I gathered information from as many people as possible regarding the rite. I especially gained a lot from the Queen mothers, some clergy and elders at Krobo-Odumase.

1.6 Research objective

This is an enquiry into Dipo – rite of passage among the Krobos of the Eastern Region in Ghana. The historical background of the rite, the changes it has undergone over the years and reasons for these changes will be explored. The significance of such a practice in modern Ghana today as well as the future of the rite will also be discussed. The research looks into how a tribe manages to preserve a cultural practice indigenous to them despite external and internal influences and also how this practice serves as an emblem of ethnic identity.

1.6.1 Research questions

To achieve the above-mentioned aim of this research, the following questions would be investigated:

- How does the practice of Dipo serve as an emblem of ethnic identity?
- What are the symbolic representations of the rite?
- In what ways have aspects of the rite been modified and what factors have influenced this change?
- What are the factors that make people adhere to or refrain from this practice?

1.7 Significance of the study

There have been a number of studies on rituals and rites of passage. The study seeks to throw more light on a rite of passage indigenous to a Ghanaian tribe and discuss the issues that relate to it in the midst of a struggle - a struggle to maintain identity and obtain a sense of belonging in the midst of opposing factors within and outside the community. It will therefore contribute to the academic literature on rites of passage within the discipline of social and cultural anthropology. A major theme of the study is ethnic identity while other sub-themes like gender, symbolism and modernization are related to. The study will therefore contribute to knowledge in these areas and possibly give ideas for future studies on the subject of the Dipo custom.

1.9 Outline of the thesis

There are six chapters incorporated into this thesis. The first is a general introduction of the study and rites of passage while the second chapter discusses my field experiences, the methods used to gather data for the study and how effective these methods were. The third chapter presents the origin of the Dipo custom, the changes it has encountered and a description of the ceremony. The theoretical basis and concepts for this subject is captured in chapter four while the fifth chapter explores factors that influence the decision to adhere to, or refrain from the practice. It further shows how the custom serves as an ethnic emblem. The sixth and final chapter gives a conclusion to the thesis and suggestions for future work on the subject.

CHAPTER TWO

Methodology

“Educated people always doubt everything. They lie awake at night thinking, ‘What was that? Why did it happen? What is the meaning and the cause of it?’ Uneducated people pass judgment and walk on. They get a good night’s sleep.”

Kirin Narayan, 1993

The above statement describes my position in relation to the Dipo custom. The categorization of ‘educated’ and ‘uneducated’ has its own relativity as one may be educated in one area and uneducated in another. The statement, made to an anthropologist, Kirin Narayan during her fieldwork however, depicts researchers’ desire to know more and understand things better instead of just passing judgment and walking on. They lose their good night’s sleep in the process. This is the stance I have chosen with the Dipo custom. Having had a personal experience of it, I refuse to just accept it as custom and ‘walk on’. This chapter expatiates on my experiences during the field and the methods employed to gather and analyze data.

The term initiation will be used interchangeably for rite, ritual or ceremony as the practice can also be termed female initiation (initiation into adulthood, specifically, womanhood). Initiates, on the other hand is used to denote the young people being initiated. Initiates and participants will be used interchangeably. I use this term instead of always referring to the ‘girls’ because in some cases, as would be seen in subsequent pages, boys may participate in this ritual. Custom is a term I heard a lot while in the field. It was used either to denote the entire ceremony, hence the term ‘Dipo custom’ or particular activities that take place during the ceremony, such as slaughtering of a goat, pouring of libation among others. It is in this sense that I use the term in this thesis.

2.1 The native anthropologist discourse

In carrying out this project, I enter into the discourse on defining a ‘native anthropologist’. Anthropologists may choose to explore a culture they do not belong to and probably one completely unknown to them or they could study their own culture – doing anthropology at home. According to Narayan (1993:671)

“Those who are anthropologists in the usual sense of the word are thought to study others whose alien cultural worlds they must painstakingly come to know. Those who diverge as “native”, “indigenous” or “insider” anthropologists are believed to write about their own cultures from a position of intimate affinity.”

This ‘intimate affinity’ may serve to increase the subjectivity of the researcher. Hau’ofa (1982) shares a similar experience with his research in Tonga. However, he states that “being an indigenous researcher can open all kinds of opportunities, and that instead of being a hindrance, emotional involvement can be channeled creatively” through non-academic writings which reflect “not only the individual’s subjectivity but also the immediacy of events in the society in which the anthropologist lives” (Ibid:218). The daily writing of my journal was a means by which I creatively channeled my emotional involvement.

The disclosing of one’s ‘native’ identity could also serve as an advantage during fieldwork. Jacobs-Huey (2002) shares how she had to disclose her racial identity during e-mail conversations about hair styles. By sharing information about who she was and how she wore her hair, her respondents easily opened up to her. This was my experience as well during fieldwork. My being a part of the tribe and a one-time participant in Dipo was a sort of ‘door-opener’ in many instances. I could therefore be described as a native anthropologist in this sense. The advantage of being a part of the Krobo tribe is the fact that I get to write about the Dipo custom as a one-time participant with first hand experience of it. Below is a description of the research location and data gathering methods.

2.2 Country background and study area

The research was carried out at Krobo-Odumase in the Eastern Region of Ghana. Ghana, formerly known as Gold Coast, is a country located in West Africa. It is bordered by Burkina Faso, Cote d’Ivoire and Togo. It is a former British colony and as such, the official language is English. It is however a multilingual country with about sixty language groups. Agriculture is the primary occupation and the major export products are gold, cocoa and timber. Oil was recently discovered in the country in 2007. It is also a popular tourist destination. The major

forms of religion are Christianity, Islam and the African Traditional Religion². The country has ten regions and is populated by about twenty-two million people, about forty percent of which reside in urban areas. There are about one hundred cultural and linguistic divisions but the country generally consists of five major ethnic groups namely the Mole-Dagbani, the Akan, the Ewe, the Guan and the Ga-Adangbe (Salm 2002).

The Krobos are part of the Ga-Adangbe ethnic group and are among the residents of the Eastern Region of Ghana. They are believed to have migrated from Seme which “today is a semi grassland between Dahome now (Benin) and Nigeria in the Ogun State called (Seme)” (Teyegaga 1985:11). Their migration has been attributed to political strife and wars (Teyegaga 1985; Salm 2002). The Krobos were the first to inhabit the Krobo Mountain, also known as *Kloyo* upon arrival in the area now known as Ghana. They were forced to leave the mountain in 1892 by the British. Agriculture was and still is the major economic activity of the Krobos and as such, markets were established in areas surrounding the mountain such as Sra, Somanya, Odumase, Agomanya, Manyakpongunor among others. The major Krobo cash crops were maize and palm oil (Arlt 1995). Major annual festivals of the Krobos include the *Koda*, which ensures rainfall, soil fertility and a bumper harvest, the *Nmagyem* (millet eating) festival which is a thanksgiving for a good harvest. During this festival, the Krobos make a trip to the mountain as a form of pilgrimage to their ancestral home, the Krobo Mountain (Wilson 2003). There are two Krobo groups – the Manya and Yilo Krobos. The major Manya Krobo towns are Odumase and Agomanya while that of the Yilo Krobos is Somanya (Ibid). The Yilos mainly consist of people from other tribes who sought refuge in Kroboland (Arlt 1995). This study was conducted at Odumase among the Manya Krobos.

Apart from the traditional religious beliefs, Christianity is also a major religion of the Krobos as they had early contact with Basel missionaries and the first church was established by a missionary called Johannes Zimmerman. Some Krobos also belong to the Muslim faith.

Chieftaincy is the form of government in the Krobo society like any Ghanaian society. A Paramount Chief known as *Konor* is the traditional head of the Krobos. Before the position of *Konor* was permanently established however, the Krobos were ruled by a council of priests called *Djemeli*. The priests still have a very strong influence in the Krobo society. They see to

² This is the term commonly used for religious practices native to Africa. Salm and Falola (2002:5) refer to it as “indigenous religions”. According to Soothill (2007:10), African “traditional” (*sic*) religions are informed by a world-view which “holds that events in the material world are influenced by the activities of a spirit world with which human beings interact.” Some people practice this alongside Christianity and Islam. It is the confines in which traditional cultural practices such as festivals and initiation take place and involves ancestral worship, pouring of libation, animism among others.

the performance of festivals and also the Dipo custom. Queen mothers³ are also of importance in the Krobo society. Just like the chiefs, they are enstooled and there exists a Paramount Queen mother to whom the other Queen mothers pay allegiance. There is a Many Krobo Queen Mothers Association to which all the Queen mothers belong. They “reinforce group identity and solidarity” with their presence at functions (Steegstra 2009:114).

Krobo-Odumase is a major town with several communities within it such as Kodjonya, Whekper, Mampong, among others. It is a major market centre in the region with every Wednesday marked out as a market day which brings people from far and near. The Krobos are well-known for the production of beads and Krobo-Odumase has been termed the “Cradle of Ghana’s beads”⁴. It was the venue for the first ever Ghana International Beads Festival which was arranged as two festival-packages - the first in October 2009 and the second in May 2010. The beads are elaborately used during the Dipo custom, the significance of which will be discussed in chapter five. On the two occasions that I visited the Queen mothers during my fieldwork, they were busy making beads, one of the means by which they raise funds.

The rite is made to coincide with the Easter holidays and usually commence at that time. It is held from April till the first week of June every year. It is held in Dipo houses in the various communities. Kodjonya, which is believed to be the stool of the deity, Nana Kloweki (discussed further in the next chapter), commences the rite after which other Dipo houses in the other communities follow suit. Each house holds it for three consecutive weeks. I therefore observed the rite in two communities; Kodjonya and Whekper.

2.3 Field methods

On arrival at Odumase, I learnt that the chief was out of town but I was introduced to some clan elders and was given permission to carry out the research and contact them when in need of help. I was also introduced to the priests at Kodjonya and my mission was explained to them. As tradition demanded, I had to present a bottle of schnapps. I was given permission to take pictures, videos and talk to anyone within the premises. It was the same at the house at

³ The Queen mother could be the mother of the King or a close female member such as his sister or aunt however, “the term designates much more an office than a family status” Owusu (2000:121). Unlike the Akan Queen mothers who influence the selection of a new chief, the Krobo Queen Mothers do not play such a role Steegstra (2009).

⁴ National Commission on Culture
<http://www.ghanaculture.gov.gh/index1.php?linkid=368&archiveid=1503&page=1&adate=05/08/2009>

Whekper. I also visited the Queen mothers and was well received. The elders, priests and Queen mothers expressed pleasure in the fact that ‘one of their own’ was studying the tradition especially because I had previously gone through the rite.

I had a camcorder and took a lot of pictures and videos. Secondary sources such as literature on the subject were also used. Some of my informants were very helpful in this regard, they referred me to Huber (1963), Steegstra (2004), Teyegaga (1985) and de Rachewiltz (1964). I sought permission from each respondent before interviewing them. I had a cousin with me who served as an interpreter because I do not speak the Krobo language. He was very useful when I had to interview respondents who neither spoke English nor Twi (the most widely spoken Ghanaian language).

Most of the time, my methods produced valid results. However, I also found myself in awkward positions on some occasions. For instance, I interviewed a ‘girl’ and wondered why at age fourteen ‘she’ still had not developed breasts, only to discover that ‘she’ was actually a boy. It was then that I discovered that male fraternal twins are made to go through the rite with their twin sisters. They participate in almost all the aspects of the rite. When I held the focus group discussion with the youth in the church, one male respondent who was a fraternal twin shared his experiences with the rite when he participated with two of his sisters.

2.4 Data collection methods

Methods refer to “ways in which evidence is obtained and manipulated, or, more conventionally, to techniques of data collection and analysis” (Blaikie 2000:232-233). Since this is a qualitative study, the following methods were employed in gathering data: in-depth interviews, informal ethnographic interviews, focus group discussions, participant observation, and ethnographic records (field notes, photographs and videos).

2.4.1 In-depth interviews

This kind of interview according to Blaikie (2000:234) “can get close to the social actors’ meanings and interpretations, to their accounts of the social interaction in which they have been involved”. I got a number of ‘accounts’ from respondents with regard to their experience with Dipo especially the female respondents who had previously been initiated. An interview guide was designed to seek answers to the research questions. Different sets of questions were drafted for the organizers of the rite, mothers of younger participants, people from other ethnic groups, clergy and other individuals within the community. The voice recorder was

used when respondents were comfortable with it. I usually explained to them that the use of the recorder would save a lot of time. In most cases, I was allowed to use it and responses were not hindered by it. I carried out twelve in-depth interviews.

2.4.2 *Informal ethnographic interviews*

Spradley (1980:123) states that this kind of interview “occurs whenever you ask someone a question during the course of participant observation”. I did this a lot during fieldwork so I could immediately understand what I was observing and take accurate notes. Such interviews occurred at the Dipo houses, en route to perform the ritual bath, the visit to the sacred stone, among other occasions.

2.4.3 *Focus group discussions*

According to Berg (1998:100), “focus group interviews are either guided or unguided discussions addressing a particular topic of interest or relevance to the group and the researcher.” For this research, the topic of interest was the Dipo rite. Berg also recommends that this discussion should be limited to no more than seven participants. I had four focus group discussions – with initiates, three generations of women (that is, grandmother, mother and/or aunts and an initiate), a church youth group and students at the Krobo Girls Secondary School. In one instance, such as during the church group’s interview, it was not possible to limit the number to seven. The youth group had gathered at church for their weekly meeting and that was the best opportunity to address them. This discussion therefore involved fifteen people. A lot of issues came up during these discussions and some questions were answered even before I asked. The advantage of this method according to Berg (1998:101) is a “synergistic group effect” in the sense that there is group interaction where members react to comments made by others. This synergy “allows one participant to draw from another or to *brainstorm* collectively with other members of the group” (Ibid:101). I witnessed this group synergy during my focus group discussions and a lot of information was gathered as a result. It is also less expensive than individual interviews particularly with respect to time costs (Ibid).

2.4.4 *Participant observation*

Spradley (1980:56) states that participant observation requires the ethnographer to “increase his/her awareness, raise the level of attention to tune in things usually tuned out.” As an ethnographic research, my observation of events was crucial to this study. According to Berg

(1998:106), “when you are involved with participant observation, you are able to observe naturally unfolding worlds of the population under study.” Moderate participation which involves seeking a balance between being a part of the activities and observing them was employed since I did not participate in the rituals but mainly followed the rite closely and went wherever the initiates were taken to (as far as I was allowed to go) (Spradley 1980). The challenge with this method is that “the more you know about a situation as an ordinary participant, the more difficult it is to study it as an ethnography... The *less* familiar you are with a social situation, the *more* you are able to see the tacit cultural rules at work” Spradley (1980:61-62). I therefore had to guard against my familiarity with the rite hindering the kind of things I looked out for during my observation. This is also in line with the subjectivity of the native anthropologist mentioned above. My observations were noted down in a notebook on daily basis. Berreman (2007 [1963]:157) states that “participant observation as a form of social interaction always involves impression management.” I was therefore cautious of front-stage and back-stage performances by my subjects for instance, the slaughtering of the goat ritual which I did not witness and was not given prior information about. I describe this in the next chapter. Descriptive observations were made because I wanted to “catch everything that goes on” (Spradley 1980:128).

2.4.5 Ethnographic records

This includes field notes, maps, photographs, artifacts, tape recordings and other means of recording the social situation being studied (Spradley 1980). As mentioned earlier, I used a voice recorder during interviews and focus group discussions when permitted. I recorded my observations and experience on the field. I made two types of notes; the condensed account which involved noting down everything that occurred - things I saw and heard and the expanded account which is an expanded form of the condensed account (Spradley, 1998). I made the expanded notes at the end of every day and it involved detailed accounts of my observation which I could not record on the spot. A lot of photographs and videos were taken whenever I was permitted to. The pictures and videos served as a reference of recollection for me while writing this thesis. Some of the pictures can be found in the picture appendix and are useful illustrations to the description of the rite.

2.5 Reflections on my roles

My presence in Krobo-Odumase was mainly to carry out research for my Master's thesis. However, I found myself playing a number of roles consciously or unconsciously. I discuss these below:

2.5.1 Insider/Outsider

As a member of the tribe and a one-time initiate, I was regarded as an insider and given access to places and people which was necessary for my research. In fact, my entry into the Dipo house and some other places, as a member of the tribe, was made possible because of this. Respondents easily answered my questions and relaxed when they learnt I had personally been through the rite. Even though this was to my advantage, there were times when it did not work in my favour as some respondents would say "You have been through it before so you should know everything, what more do you want to know?" I had to be very persistent before such respondents granted me an interview.

I was also regarded as an outsider because I had never lived in the community, did not speak the Krobo language and was pursuing education in a foreign university. Some people were a bit reluctant to grant me audience because of this. I learnt that it was common to find people from outside the Krobo society being curious about the Dipo custom and so made a lot of inquiries about it. Some people were not very comfortable with such inquiries from outsiders and probably felt it was because of my outsider background that I was particularly inquisitive about Dipo as insiders should already be informed about the practice.

2.5.2 Journalist

My use of the camcorder and voice recorder made some people regard me as a journalist and they frequently asked which newspaper or television station I was working for. Some people claimed that outsiders had come in the past with cameras to take pictures of the participants for the production of calendars for their own financial benefit and suspected that was my purpose of carrying out the study. What saved the situation a bit was the presence of the staff of Premier Productions (producers of Ghanaian documentary and TV series) who were there to cover the event as part of a documentary series on Ghanaian cultural heritage they intended to show on TV in the nearest future. Since they were present with professional cameras and a tripod stand, it was easy to spot the difference between us so some believed I was not a journalist.

2.5.3 Mentor

As the days went by and I got more familiar with the participants, some of them became very close to me, gave me a lot of information even when I did not ask and requested that I take pictures of them frequently. They regarded me as a mentor and began to aspire for higher education. I had the same experience at the Krobo Girls Senior High School where I carried out a focus group discussion with some of the students.

2.6 Influence on respondents

As I carried out the research – interviews and focus groups discussions, I realized that most respondents started reflecting on the reasons for each stage of the rite and they started thinking about logical explanations for the practice. Some admitted that they had never reflected on it until I spoke with them. They just regarded the practice as a custom and never saw the need to ask why things were done the way they were. So I unconsciously got my respondents especially the participants and their parents/guardians to reflect a lot on the reasons for each stage of the rite. Accordingly, the presence of a researcher can also produce new insights into peoples' perceptions of their lives and visions about the future. In that respect, peoples' ascriptions of the researcher sometimes resemble 'role models', regardless of the intentions of the field worker.

2.7 Challenges

This thesis would definitely not be complete without some information about the challenges I faced during the fieldwork. All was certainly not rosy. I discuss them below:

2.7.1 Change of location

It was the initial plan to carry out the research in Somanya and then in Odumase so I could make comparison. However, upon arrival, I learnt that the rite had ended in Somanya. They had started very early during the Easter holidays. I however discovered that the Dipo rite actually originated from the Manya Krobos who lived in Odumase. Kodjonya, where I started my fieldwork, was claimed to be the actual location of the original Dipo stone that was used when the Krobos lived on the mountain. It is also home to the Kloweki shrine. Even in Accra, respondents referred me to Kodjonya and claimed that if I had witnessed Dipo there, I had

witnessed the most original form of the ceremony. I was however disappointed with the fact that I could not do a comparison of the rite in the two towns as was my original plan.

2.7.2 Restrictions

Even though I was permitted to carry out interviews, take pictures and videos in the Dipo house, there were times when the priestesses prevented me from viewing certain proceedings. For instance, they expressed displeasure when I was seen taking pictures of the participants grinding millet on the grinding stone even though this was an outdoor event. I could tell that my presence there was not pleasing to all of them as some of them never gave me audience.

2.7.3 Difficulties in data collection

There were times when my respondents digressed during interviews, they would change the topic of discussion and I had to be very tactical in bringing them back to the issue. Observations were sometimes difficult especially when a lot of people gathered to watch a particular ritual being performed. Some of my pictures did not turn out well because people unconsciously passed by when I was taking a picture. I had this difficulty especially on Sundays which was the climax of the ceremonies as the Dipo houses were jam-packed on those days. There is also the fact that people cannot be sure of their anonymity when pictures are taken as such, there were people who made sure to avoid my camera at all cost while I observed in the Dipo house. This is irrespective of the fact that I had been given permission by the priests to take videos and pictures within the premises. There were also times when focus groups discussions and interviews were interrupted by phone calls, some informants discussing among themselves and the like. There were also people who avoided me completely and made sure their children/wards who were being initiated did not get a chance to speak with me.

These difficulties are typical of every research and they made me aware of the issues concerning the custom for instance, people initiating their children in secret and generally, people not trusting where their pictures would end up. I could also tell from their actions that there were some things that informants did not want me to know and so I did not continue my inquiries into those areas. A typical example is the calling of initiates' souls which is described in the next chapter.

2.8 Reflections on my use of research assistant/interpreter

It was my aim to engage the services of a research assistant but upon arrival in Ghana, this person was no longer available to accompany me to fieldwork because she had acquired a new job. A cousin of mine, Felix, therefore accompanied me and was more of an interpreter than a research assistant because I do not speak the Krobo language and could not communicate with respondents who neither spoke English nor Twi. The presence of an interpreter was therefore helpful, however, some meaning is lost during interpretation and there were times when my interpreter asked the wrong questions and so I got wrong responses to the questions I asked. I therefore had to explain a couple of times before he understood. There were also times when my interpreter received phone calls in the middle of an interview therefore interrupting the flow of the conversation. There were days when he was not available especially when I observed at Whekper. On those days two people, Grace and Peter offered to be my assistants and were very helpful in this regard. Peter happened to be a teacher in one of the primary schools and was related to the priest at Whekper. He was also a youth leader in one of the churches and made it possible for me to carry out the focus group discussion with the youth during one of their weekly meetings. He and Grace were cousins. They complemented each other when they served as my field assistants in the sense that Grace was able to take me to places where men were not allowed, for instance the venue for the ritual bath.

Berremen's (2007 [1963]) recounts his experience with the use of two different field assistants, one a Brahmin and the other a Muslim. He mentions the Brahmin's skill at impression management and how he was able to get more access to the low-caste people when he had the Muslim assistant. In my case, I had the different assistants for the two places of observation. I however noticed how influential Grace was on informants. She managed to get them to pose for pictures even when they were initially reluctant. Since she and Peter were both related to the priest, I did not face any form of restriction while observing at Whekper.

On some occasions for instance, when I interviewed the Chaplain of Krobo Girls Secondary School, the Queen mothers at Odumase and carried out the focus group discussions with the students of Krobo Girls and the Young People's Guild at Zimmerman Presbyterian Church, I chose to venture out alone. This is because these groups of informants were fluent in English and so I had no need of an interpreter. I had more control on the discussions that I carried out alone and was able to gear the discussions in such a way that I got penitent answers to my research questions. The use of the assistant/interpreter was

therefore more needful in the Dipo house and on arranged interviews with some respondents whom I could not communicate with in the Krobo language.

2.9 Research population and sampling

The target population for this study was Krobos and non-Krobos mainly residing in Krobo-Odumase. Krobos and people from other ethnic groups in Ghana were also interviewed outside of this area, mainly in the capital city – Accra. Information was also sought from officials at the Ministry of Chieftaincy and Culture, National Commission on Culture and Center for National Culture. Respondents at Odumase comprised of organizers of the rite (the priests and priestesses), parents\guardians of initiates, initiates themselves, three generations of women, church groups and clergy, students at the Krobo Girls Senior High School, the Queen mothers, two Dutch women. Respondents were randomly selected by purposive sampling which was most appropriate for this study. The snow-ball effect – where one respondent referred me to others also occurred. My networks were also helpful in linking me with potential informants. One of them, a very close friend in Accra, referred me to a particular Queen mother whom she had had previous contacts with. Another also referred me to a staff at the Ministry of Chieftaincy and Culture, who granted me an interview on the spot.

2.10 Data analysis

Data analysis generally involved coding which is “the use of concepts (labels placed on discrete happenings, events, and other instances of phenomena) and categories (a more abstract notion under which concepts are grouped together)” (Blaikie 2005:239). Open coding which is “breaking data down into categories and sub-categories” and axial coding which involves “finding relationships between these sub-categories and categories” were employed (Ibid:239).

In analyzing visual data, I sought to do a content analysis of the pictures and videos in which I answered questions relating to the content of the photograph/video, the people being shown, the circumstances in which the picture/video was taken and if the people posed for the picture. This aided my understanding of events the pictures and videos portrayed and particularly themes like symbolism and my insider status.

Silverman (2005:162) states that “like any kind of data, the analysis of tapes and transcripts depends upon the generation of some research problem out of a particular theoretical orientation”. The theoretical orientations used for data analysis are discussed in

chapter four and include ethnic identity, gender, symbolism, modernization. Silverman (2005:169) further states that sorting out what one is seeing and hearing is actually data analysis and this 'sorting out', I did based on the concepts I employ in discussing the Dipo custom. Generally, the analysis of my data involved reflections into the themes my data portrayed and the messages my informants gave out and especially stressed upon. This helped me understand the social and cultural settings better. The concepts I had in mind when I set out for fieldwork did not change, my data rather reinforced them. I however feel that there is more to the Dipo custom than my analysis can demonstrate within this thesis. This is partly because I did not fully grasp some issues, for instance, the role of the male twins during the rite. The time-frame within which the data was collected, three months, is probably a factor and I might have gained a better understanding of such issues if I had the opportunity to be in the field a lot longer and also had more discussions with people in the community.

2.11 Ethical considerations

I had to bear a lot of ethical considerations in mind while doing fieldwork. The major concern was the fact that I was dealing with initiates who had their bodies exposed. Even though I was allowed to take pictures and videos, I was cautious in the way I took coverage. Also, I did not take any video coverage or pictures when the initiates took the ritual bath. I had to respect their privacy. Pictures used in this study are therefore carefully chosen and ensures that the privacy of my informants is respected. Videos taken are only used for my personal reference. I follow the ethical principles listed in Spradley (1980-20-23). With regards to the use of a voice recorder, some respondents were not comfortable with it. When dealing with such respondents, I just took notes. There were some respondents however who did not mind my use of the voice recorder.

One thing I was also very particular about during fieldwork was confidentiality. I made it a point not to disclose information I had from other respondents during interviews especially when I got different information about a particular issue. I urged my field assistants to be cautious about this as well.

In order to maintain the privacy of my informants in this thesis, I use fictitious names - female names for females and vice versa. Quotations of informants are in italics with double quotation marks, quotations from literature are not italicized but have double quotation marks and in situations where I am expressing my idea, it is in single quotation marks and not italicized.

2.12 Study limitation

Backstage performances by my subjects, a typical example of which, is the slaughtering of goat ritual, prevents me from describing it first-hand. I mainly relied on second-hand information and literature for this ritual since I did not witness it during fieldwork. My inability to observe Dipo at Somanya prevents me from making a comparison in the way the two Krobo groups perform the rite.

Fieldwork was also carried out during the summer holidays, which is the long vacation in the Universities. I therefore was not able to get in touch with researchers at the University of Ghana. I felt that they would have been able to give me some more insight into cultural issues and the factors relating to change and continuity probably based on their own research experiences and that of students they had supervised.

I have a page limit to this thesis hence the need to be brief in my discussions and select only the relevant information from my data. I was also limited by time during fieldwork as I had only three months which involved intensive fieldwork and data collection, analysis of data and visit of libraries for relevant literature. There are so many dimensions to Dipo but for this academic purpose, I would just highlight a few of them and delve more into the main categorizations mentioned above. The theme of ethnic identity would however run through the entire thesis. Having discussed how I gathered information for this study, I would now proceed to give a description of the Dipo ceremony.

CHAPTER THREE

Dipo in time and through time

The nature of a people is in their traditions, culture, religion and customs.

B.D. Teyegaga, 1984

The Krobo rite of passage, Dipo as mentioned earlier, is the most elaborate of its kind in Ghana. It is a colourful event that attracts the interests of people from within and outside Ghana. In this chapter, I give a brief background to the origin of Dipo and how the practice has changed since its inception will be highlighted. I would also describe the rite from three standpoints - as I observed it during fieldwork in May 2009, as a participant in 1996 and as it has been presented by other writers.

3.1 On the issue of origin of Dipo

Dipo has been said to be a major “integrating element of the Krobo society” (Arlt 1995:3). The practice was observed when the Krobos still inhabited the mountain and was continued when they settled in the areas surrounding the mountains. The two Krobo groups observe the practice. There are different versions as to how Dipo originated in the Krobo society. These versions however are not contested even though some Krobos are more inclined to some versions than others (especially the one about the nobleman who had two wives). I believe that accounts of the origin of the custom would help give a better understanding of its significance and why it is still strongly adhered to, as would be discussed in subsequent chapters. The different versions I got are given below.

An account from the Queen mothers in Krobo-Odumase⁵ refers to Dipo as an informal family life education for a true Krobo girl child. It starts from the first week in April until the

⁵ Interview conducted with Krobo Queen mothers in May 2010 at Odumase-Krobo

first week in June⁶ and is done to usher girls into womanhood. It involves training through home management to motherhood in order to make an ideal woman. In the past, the birth of a male child was cherished a lot by the men because of their predominant occupation – farming and hunting. The male child was expected to accompany the father to the farm, hunt and also get the property inheritance. Males were held in higher esteem than females and as such, some customs were performed for them and their mothers. They were given gifts and a cock was slaughtered for them after circumcision but nothing was done for the female child. The women got jealous and decided to put their heads together with *Nana Kloweki*⁷, a female leader, to come out with something cultural which makes a girl of importance in the society. They therefore decided to shape and mould the lifestyle of the girl-child in order to make her a proper and ideal Krobo woman fit for the Krobo home, family and society. Some standards were set – the girls had to be virgins and about 27 years of age before Dipo was performed for them. It involved a one-year home training in confinement. During this confinement, the girls were taught housewifery by the old women and this involved; how to shine their pots, clean the drinking calabash, cooking, sweeping, and washing among others. A similar version is recounted by Teyegaga (1985).

Another version I got about how Dipo started also traces it to a legend that a man had two wives one of whom had only male children while the other had female children. Circumcision is a very important aspect of the Krobo society and every Krobo male is expected to be circumcised. In the past, the circumcision and some rituals were performed for teenage boys after which, they were adorned with nice attire and beads and paraded in the community. A feast was also held in their honour. The woman with female children got jealous of this and as such, an initiation for girls was instituted.⁸ Huber (1963) attests to this legend on the origin of Dipo.

It is also believed to have been originated by the ancient priestess *Nana Kloweki* (“Klo” meaning the Krobo, “we” meaning people, and “ki” indicating a first-born child) who came with the Krobos in migration. She instituted the practice as a form of vocation. The young girls were brought together and given to aged women. They were secluded and taught the nine arts of domestic science – cookery, personal hygiene, home-keeping, care for members of the family (including the extended family), commercial activities (farming) and

⁶ This pertains to the Many Krobo areas, the Yilo Krobos usually start in February.

⁷ Nana Kloweki is believed to be a goddess who incarnated into human form and dwelt among the Krobos. She was a spiritual leader and steered the affairs of the Krobo nation. She disappeared suddenly from the Krobos and is now a deity especially associated with the Dipo custom (Teyegaga, 1984).

⁸ Interview with Mr. Gbartey at Odumase-Krobo

marketing, first aid (mainly herbal practices), poetry, singing and dancing. The girls were thus, prepared for marriage at the end of which, a formal certification was done by the outdoorings of the girls.⁹ Huber (1963) also reports the origin of Dipo to be linked to the worship of *Nana Kloweki* who eventually became a deity.

In another interview, I learnt that Dipo was initially held as a family affair where all the young girls of marriageable age were gathered for about six months and later reduced to three months. The “old lady” (who was the female family head) took the girls through several processes and training in home management. Due to tribal wars, a lot of fear was created in the Krobo society and as such, the priests gained a stronger hold on the society and Krobo customs, Dipo being one of them. They therefore took charge of the performance of Dipo and introduced certain elements in the rite such as the stone¹⁰ that the girls had to sit on.¹¹

Huber (1963:191) relates another version where it is claimed that a ceremony which involved “washing of the girls” was previously observed before the inception of the Dipo ceremony. Water was poured on the head of the girls three times and the water flowed down their bodies. This was carried out by the “old lady” of the house or a priestess. After this, the girls were blessed and their bodies “marked with the powder of the reddish *boa* stone” (Ibid:191). Huber (1963:192) however traces three major sources of the origin of Dipo:

- a. “The worship of *Nana Kloweki* which appears to have been brought from Togoland by the *susui* sub-tribe” (one of the Krobo sub-tribes or clans).
The elements of *Nana Kloweki*’s cult such as wearing of the hats, the use of the Roan antelope’s skin and goat sacrifice are therefore observed.
- b. “The worship of sacred rocks which, on the Mountain, probably existed prior to the coming of the *Kloweki* deity.”
The Krobos had a rock on the Mountain known as *Totroku* or *Tekpete* which were of spiritual significance to the Krobos.
- c. “The “washing of the girls” which has its counterpart in the first menstruation ceremonies of the Akan and Guan people, and possibly originated from that side.”
This assumption is further confirmed by the fact that some groups of the Krobos migrated from the Akan tribe.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ This would be discussed further in subsequent pages.

¹¹ Interview with Mr. T. K. at Odumase-Krobo in May 2009

Having given accounts of the origination of Dipo, I present the form in which Dipo was carried out in the past.

3.2 The ‘ancient’ form of Dipo

The Dipo ceremony used to last a very long time as there was no formal education and it served as vocational training for matured girls. It could last several months and even up to a year. The girls were camped and made to go through several processes, in the form of a “curriculum” for the training. They were taught how to tend a farm, collect firewood for cooking in the home (they had to have a reserve of firewood in their homes as good women because they could have visitors at night), fetching of water, doing dishes and laundering clothes. They were sent to a riverside and taught how to wash their clothes and learnt personal hygiene in the process. The girls also took turns to do the cooking during the period of seclusion. Pounding of the traditional *fufu*¹² was taught and also how to serve food to the extended members of their husband’s family when they were married.

After going through this process, the blessing of the gods were sought for the girls and the ‘old lady’ gave the consent or approval that the girls have passed the training process and were ready for marriage. Some of the girls may have been betrothed before going through the rite. Their suitors were therefore expected to contribute to the performance of the rite for the girls. They also carried the girls from the shrine after the ultimate test of sitting on the sacred stone¹³ as a means of warding off other interested men. This also signified that they would one day carry the girl to their bed. The girls had their bodies exposed during the rite as a form of marketing – to show the members (especially men) of the community that the girls were beautiful and ripe for marriage and therefore attract potential suitors. They were taken to the market place to dance also as a form of exposure to the outside world. It was common in those days, for girls to be married soon after Dipo was performed for them. As evidence of initiation, marks were made on the back of the palms and wrists.¹⁴

In line with this account, Teyegaga (1985) mentions three aspects of the Dipo custom as was originally performed by *Nana Kloweki* – the social, religious and outdoor aspects. The social aspect involved training in home management, housecraft and child-bearing. After this training, they went through three tests. The first was a test of their ability to perform

¹² A Ghanaian dish prepared by pounding boiled cassava and plantain in a mortar. The Krobo traditionally prepare it with only boiled plantain which has been left to dry.

¹³ This is the stone believed to determine if a girl has previously conceived or aborted a pregnancy. It is discussed in subsequent chapters.

¹⁴ Interviews with Mr. Gbartey and Mr. T. K. at Odumase-Krobo in May 2009

household chores after which marks were made on their wrists. The second was the observation of their naked bodies by *Nana Kloweki* to confirm that she was physical mature for marriage and childbirth. Marks were given on their bellies after this test. The last test was a seal which comprised of incisions on the back of the waist which signified that it was only a girl's husband who should be allowed to hold her waist. The religious aspect involved the climbing of the sacred rock, on which the girls were expected to dance amidst drumming and singing. A girl who fell during this activity was suspected to have conceived, which if confirmed, resulted in her expulsion from the tribe. The outdoor aspect involved a great feast which served as a family reunion. The girls were dressed in expensive beads and cloths and made to perform the Klama dance. Most girls entered into customary marriages immediately afterwards and as such, "the real aim of establishing dipo custom..... that is to train and outdoor grown up girls for marriage" was fulfilled (Ibid:30). Teyegaga (1985:30) further states that "this is the original form of dipo custom in ancient days when Nana Kloweki was living with the Krobos on the Krobo Mountain..." There is however a difference in the way it is now performed. A description of the custom as I witnessed it during fieldwork is given in a later section.

3.3 Culture is not static but dynamic - changes in the Dipo custom

The Dipo custom, in the form in which it is practiced today, has marked differences from what pertained in the past. I highlight these differences below.

3.3.1 The stone and duration of Dipo

When the Krobos lived on the mountain, Dipo was performed there and when they settled on the plains, it was performed in the various communities. The sacred stone on which the girls sit at the climax of events was located on the mountain. According to Teyegaga (1985), it happened to be one of the sacred rocks which were on the mountain. The girls were expected to climb and dance on the rock. Huber (1963) however mentions that there was only one large rock, *Totroku* or *Tegkpete* on the mountain and it was this rock the girls had to climb. He further points out how the number of stones has multiplied since the settlement on the plains but his informants claimed that each stone "contains at least a particle of the original sacred rock on the mountain" (Ibid:178). Girls no longer have to climb a rock during initiation. They are rather made to sit on the sacred stone which is located within a shrine. This change was also observed by Huber (1963).

The period in which the Dipo custom used to be held as have been mentioned earlier has drastically reduced. My informants said it was formerly three years, then reduced to a year, six months, three months, three weeks, one week and finally the five days which was the case during my fieldwork. My informants in their mid-thirties who had been initiated claimed it was held for a period of three weeks during their time. The older ones however mentioned that theirs took a very long time – months. One of them mentioned she was initiated in 1976. The shortened length of time does not permit tutoring of the girls in household chores as was the case in the past.

Education was mainly attributed to this change. It was common to hear people say “*In those days there was no school so that was our form of training*”. They however pointed out that with the introduction of formal education, they cannot confine the girls for long periods of time. One informant mentioned that the teachers in those days had a lot of influence and did not tolerate absenteeism. As a result, the girls were taken away for week to perform Dipo and return to school just in time before their absence becomes an issue. It is for this reason that the rite coincides with the Easter holidays so it does not interfere with school. Another explanation I got for this was also that the girls really did not do anything during that period, “*they just ate and slept*” as such the long confinements were not necessary. This view was however contradictory with that of most informants who claimed that the long seclusion served to train the girls in their household responsibilities which was an important part of their training.

The length of time in which the practice is held, February through to June with the major events occurring on the weekends enables as many girls as possible to undergo initiation every year without it interrupting their education. Some informants also claimed that disciplines such as home economics, life skills and religious and moral education which were taught in school replaces the education given during the period of seclusion. As such, the long seclusion was no longer necessary.

3.3.2 Age of initiates

Unlike the past when Dipo was performed for matured young women who were of marriageable age, it is now performed for girls as young as two years and even infants. Huber (1963:193) mentions it, even at the time of writing, when he stated “even little infants are nowadays initiated”. My informants who were parents/guardians of young initiates had a number of reasons for this. Most of them claimed that they had older children who were being initiated and so felt it convenient to initiate the younger ones along with them. Some claimed

it was cheaper to initiate girls at a younger age in terms of time and cost. They did not have to go through all the processes and they also did not have to be dressed up in a lot of beads as pertained with the older ones. One mother however felt otherwise. She claimed it was not cheaper because the same cost was incurred for each child no matter the age. Also, when the girl is in the late teenage years and refuses to be initiated, nothing could be done about it. She could not be forced to get initiated despite knowing the consequences of this (she will be 'spoilt' and not accepted in the family house). When young however, she is oblivious of the happenings around her.

Another reason for initiating young girls was religiously inclined. Informants claimed they wanted to baptize the girls and as such, initiation had to precede baptism. This according to other informants, was because baptism was seen as a means of "*washing away their sins after initiation*". Dipo in this respect was therefore regarded as something sinful for which the cleansing of baptism was required. The fear of teenage pregnancy is also another factor that influenced this. Parents could not guarantee that their daughters would pass the test of initiation if it was performed at an older age. They claimed that as a result of civilization, the youth experience sex at an earlier age. It was therefore safer to initiate their daughters early to avoid any inconveniences. This is not surprising as the occurrence of pregnancy prior to initiation was shameful but should it occur after initiation, it was not a problem and not regarded as a taboo.

Some of my informants expressed strong concerns about this. They claimed that Dipo lost its potency or its significance when initiates are young and it promoted immorality as the girls were at liberty to have sex afterwards. An informant put it this way, "*There is a pale shadow of Dipo today because of the young age at which it is performed. It was performed for older girls in the past.... You cannot teach eight year olds about marriage and mother care. The main aim of Dipo is shattered*". The purpose of marketing girls to potential suitors is also lost. "*How can you market something that is not ready?*" an informant asked. The Queen mothers also did not encourage this and said it was "*spoiling the girls*" as they think they are of age to have sex. They therefore advocate that initiates be not younger than twelve years when initiated and should go back to school or learn a trade after initiation instead of exploring their sexuality. The priests also claimed that it was not their wish to initiate young girls but did so upon the request of the parents. They are however in the position to object to this but this is never the case.

3.3.3 Bodily exposure of initiates

Initiates are now allowed to cover their breasts with a wax-print cloth except when a ritual is being performed. This covering is allowed even in the Dipo house which was not the case in the past. Initiates had to be exposed the entire time during the initiation whether in the Dipo house or not. A reason given for this change was the numerous criticisms against the practice. The Queen mothers explained that the bodily exposure served to attract men to the initiates and was a form of temptation for them. They therefore advocate that the girls be covered. In the house at Whekper, I noticed that some of the older girls had their breasts covered with a white cloth as part of the dressing for the visit to the shrine. The common practice was to have the breasts completely exposed for this ritual. This issue has also been a very strong bone of contention against the Dipo custom and will be treated in another section of this chapter.

3.3.4 Secret performances

Another change has to do with the performance of some rituals outside public view, the goat ritual for instance. The intestine it was claimed was still placed on the initiates but this was done secretly. The criticisms against the custom were attributed to this change. It was claimed that such practices made people regard the custom as fetish. An informant said the fat of the intestine placed on the head is regarded as *juju*¹⁵ and so people criticize it. It was however just a part of custom. Such backstage performances also serve as an issue against the custom. Some people argue that if there was nothing to hide, no activity would be done secretly. It thus gave them the impression that something fishy was going on.

Apart from some rituals performed in secret, some girls are also secretly initiated. They are usually taken to other towns in the care of family friends or extended family members. This was not the case in the past. There was no thought of being secretly initiated as it was a family celebration and a time for strengthening kinship ties as mentioned in Huber (1963). This change was mainly attributed to Christianity. Even though some Krobos professed to be Christians and so criticized it, they still felt the need to initiate their daughters hence, the secret initiation. The priests and priestesses claimed they could identify some initiates who were pastors' children. They were usually informed of such cases and told to be discreet about them. This demonstrates that Christianity does not break some people away from their traditional beliefs and customs. They therefore practice Christianity alongside the traditional beliefs.

¹⁵ A very potent fetish mainly used for evil purposes.

3.3.5 Female carriers

Gone are the days when it was a reserve of men to carry initiates from the shrine. These days, women also engage in the carrying. It was more practical for men to do the carrying in the past as they were probably potential suitors. The girls were also a lot grown-up than they are now and with the large number of beads on their waists, they were very heavy. It was therefore easier for men to carry them. Women now engage in the carrying because the girls are now much younger. They are no longer betrothed so there is less motivation for the men to carry them as was the case in the past. Some of my respondents in the focus group however claimed that they had carried a lot of initiates but stopped doing so when they became Christians as they did not want to be associated with the practice.

3.3.6 Elimination of initiation marks and ability to avoid being shaved

While my elderly informants, who were previous initiates, showed off the marks on the back of their hands, this is no longer the case for initiates. The marks which initiates were given at the back of their hands, on their bellies and their waists are no longer given. It is only done symbolically. The priestesses only passed the blade on the hands without making any marks. Shaving of the hair could easily be avoided by paying money to keep it. Civilization was attributed to this change. Some informants felt those things were no longer necessary in a modern society. Parents claimed that their children would be returning to school after the initiation and so did not want them to get shaved. The initiates pointed out that their colleagues would mock them if they were shaved and had marks on their hands because of Dipo. These however served as evidence of initiation in the past. With the advent of photography however, photographs of initiation serve this purpose.

3.3.7 Absence of ostracism

It is common knowledge that a girl who did not pass the litmus test of visiting the sacred stone was ostracized from the Krobo society. She was hooted at, banished and regarded as a shame to her family and the community at large, a bad example of womanhood. Such an occurrence is now virtually non-existent. It is not common to hear of a girl being ostracized. Some of my informants attributed this to the possibility of paying for purification rituals so girls who had previously conceived can be initiated. Others also mentioned that they knew several girls who were not virgins and yet successfully went through the initiation. This, however, is due to the fact that the focus is not on virginity as such, but previous conception and abortion. One priest recounted an incidence where it was discovered that a girl was

pregnant during her initiation. They discovered this when tying the palm frond on her neck at the very start of the initiation and she confirmed it. She was not initiated as a result. This was however not a public thing as would have been the case in the past.

Another reason for this change is also the fact that it has been claimed that the ostracized girls used to travel especially to Cote d'Ivoire and engaged in prostitution. It has therefore been another point of criticism of the practice. Having discussed the changes the practice has gone through, I will proceed to give a description of the ceremony.

3.4 Description of the Dipo ceremony

I had the opportunity to observe the Dipo ceremony in two Odumase-Krobo communities – Kodjonya and Whekper, during my fieldwork in May 2009. The ceremony was held for a period of five days – from Friday to Tuesday and a lot of activities were held during those days. The ceremony took place at the house of a priest, which serves as a 'Dipo house' for that period. In the house at Kodjonya, it was not allowed to have any footwear within the premises (everyone had to be barefooted). This was not the case at Whekper. The only place where it was compulsory to be barefooted was the verandah which was considered the entrance to the most sacred place of the house. Each house can hold the rite for different groups of girls every week for three consecutive weeks. When I witnessed the rite at Kodjonya, I was told that a group of girls had been initiated a week earlier and it was the second group that was being initiated. The cost of participation for each child was GH¢10.00 (about US\$7) and parents were responsible for acquiring all other items needed such as the red cloth, white calico, wax print wrappers, items for the ritual bath among others.

Mostly family members serve as the audience in the early stages of the ceremony but on the Sunday in particular, the audience comprise of a number of people from within and outside the community. If you take a walk through any of the Krobo towns during the Dipo season, common sights to behold would be girls under initiation. They would either be on their way to perform the ritual bath, returning home at the end of the days' proceedings, on their way to visit the sacred stone or being carried on the way back from the sacred stone. In all these circumstances, the appearance is what quickly draws attention to them. For the Krobos, they understand that it is a time in which the girls are being made Krobo women while for strangers it is a subject of curiosity and so some end up becoming audiences especially on the last days of the ceremony when the girls are elaborately dressed in beads.

Ritual mothers

When I went through the Dipo custom, I was given a ‘ritual mother’ who was to see to my every need and accompany me to all places during that period. She was not a relative and probably hired just for that purpose. During my fieldwork however, I noticed that most ritual mothers were relatives of the girls – grandmas, grand-aunts, aunts, cousins and in some cases family friends. I learnt that some girls whose parents especially did not want to be seen associated with Dipo, were given to women who were not related to them to be their ritual mothers¹⁶. Beckwith and Fisher (2002:16-17) make mention of these ritual mothers and state that “these women are not the actual mothers of the girls but serve as mentors to the initiates. The ritual mothers are empowered to teach the girls to become mothers in their own right.” They also mention examples of ritual guardians among the Taneka of Benin and the Maasai of Kenya. However, there are some roles played by the priestesses which Beckwith and Fisher (2002) continually mention as performed by the ritual mothers. It could be that they used the term to refer to all women who were involved in the rite. From my understanding and experience with Dipo however, ritual motherhood is a special role performed by women assigned specifically for that purpose.

Calling of initiates’ souls

I also learnt that the souls of the initiates are called prior to the performance of the rite so they could tell what exactly they wanted to be done for them during the rites. For example, if an initiate’s soul demanded she be dressed in a certain way or be given a certain dish, the organizers would grant this request. It is believed that if this is not done and anything is performed contrary to the wish of the initiate’s soul, it could have serious repercussions on her. I do not remember this being done for me or any of the initiates when I went through the ceremony and did not witness it during fieldwork. I was informed about this by one of the Priest’s assistants, some initiates and a lady from another tribe who had come to witness the initiation of her two nieces. Teyegaga (1985:46) mentions this when he states that “the souls of candidates are invoked to ascertain the style of Dipo to be performed for them, and to ascertain whether the soul has an Akan, Hausa or Krobo descendency.” Steegstra (2004) also describes this as she witnessed it in 1999. This she said was performed by a diviner who called for the souls of the initiates and coaxed them into agreeing to it in cases where they refused. The souls also told which part of the country they were originally from and any

¹⁶ Christian beliefs basically accounted to this and would be further discussed in chapter five.

special thing they wanted done for them during the rite. This same diviner also performed a cleansing for the initiates by washing their hands and feet with water from a calabash and also pouring the water over their heads. He slaughtered two fowls – one red and one white, and sprinkled the feet of the initiates with the blood. Steegstra (2004:245) however attests to the fact that “people did not do this in the open” thereby emphasizing how secret this ritual is supposed to be. The criticisms that the rite have encountered may account for this and particularly Christians see this as fetish for instance, Teyegaga (1985:46) states that “this is clear divination”.

Friday

Marking of initiates (“Dipo-yo”)

On this day, the girls were brought to the Dipo house very early in the morning. They were stripped naked and a string, bead or both (probably determined by what the soul demanded) was tied around their waist. A red loin-cloth was passed between their legs and through the beads such that it hanged on the front and back to cover their loins. A stick was passed over their heads three times by one of the priestesses who shaved a little of their hair in front with a blade. A string of palm fibre called *soni* was then tied around their necks. The girls were thus identified as Dipo-yo (which means Dipo girl. The plural of this is Dipo-yi). Huber (1963) states that the girls are made to stand on the skin of Roan antelope for this to be performed. However, during my observation, the participants did not stand on the antelope skin when this was performed. I also do not remember standing on antelope skin for this purpose during my participation. He also states that the tying of the string is performed by the old lady of the house called *yomoyo* but this was done by either the ritual mothers or the priestesses during my fieldwork. The tying of the *soni* was particularly done by the priestesses.

Grinding of millet

This event is known as *wεε-tomi*. The girls took turns to grind millet on a grinding stone. Two priestesses were in charge of this. One of them placed the girls’ hands on the stone three times after which the girls ground a bit of the millet (see appendix 2; picture 2). The younger girls were guided to this. During my initiation, we were all guided to grind the millet. They then went to the other priestess who gave them a sip of millet drink in a calabash and smeared their necks and chests with some of the drink. Huber (1963:170) also describes this process and states that,

“the old lady in charge holds the hands of each candidate. Three times they perform together the action of grinding, according to the old traditional way, i.e. by means of a smaller cylindrical stone they mash the millet grains upon a larger hollowed stone or a clay base to flour, which another initiate collects into a calabash.”

Steegstra (2004) also indicates that the millet was put in the girl’s calabash after which water was mixed with it. During my participation and fieldwork however, no initiate collected the ground millet into a calabash. Steegstra (2004) and Teyegaga (1985) mention that a millet drink was prepared in a traditional pot on this day as well. This drink was to be drunk during the main rituals over the weekend. I however did not notice this in the Dipo houses at Kodjonya and Whekper but in one house at Odumase Mampong where I happened to have been passing by, I noticed a pot on the fire which probably may have been this millet drink.

Shaving of hair

The girls had their hair shaved with a blade or shaving stick leaving just a little in the middle to be shaved on the Sunday (see appendix 2; picture 3). This is called the *Yisi-pomi*. Not all girls had their hair shaved because they could pay to keep it. I was told that this costed GH¢2.00 (US\$1.40). Most girls had their hair short already but for a girl who had long hair and did not want to be shaved, the hair was parted into six parts, the end of which was tied with raffia and made into a bun (see appendix 2, picture 4). This is the traditional way of dressing the hair and is also described by Huber (1963). He however states that this was done after three months of the period of seclusion when the shaved hair had grown again. According to Steegstra (2004), this style has a religious connotation. It is also depicted in pictures of Fanti priestesses in Beckwith and Fisher (2000). When I participated in Dipo, my hair was not shaved. I knew my parents paid for it but did not know how much was paid at the time.

Saturday – Ritual bath

On Saturday morning, the girls lined up with big calabashes in which they had a strip of red loin cloth, raffia sponge, soap, waist beads, wax print cloth and towel which were needed for the bath (see appendix 2; picture 6). A young woman, whom I was told was the secretary called out the names of the girls from a list. The girls joined the queue as soon as they were called. They had their breasts exposed but wore the wax print cloth on their waists. The priestesses led the way to the well followed by the girls with the younger ones in front, amidst singing by women. The very young girls were carried by their mothers. On the way there, we had to cross a water source which I was told used to be a river where the ritual bath used to

take place but now it had become very small and was also polluted so the bath was not performed there any longer. There was a little bridge over it which some of us crossed but the initiates walked through the water.

At the venue, water was drawn from the wells for the girls to bathe with. They stood on plantain branches to bathe and first had to wash the red cloth they had been wearing. The very young initiates were bathed by their mothers. After bathing, they had their necks, chest and shoulders smeared with a brownish substance which served as powder. The initiates wore new red cloths and covered themselves with a wrapper from their waist downwards. They then walked back to the Dipo house with their calabashes containing the bathing sponge, soap, towel and the washed red cloths. When observing at Whekper a week afterwards, I was allowed to take pictures of the venue (see appendix 2; picture 7) after the initiates had left and noticed that girls from the house at Kodjonya were leaving the place from another side. So the two Dipo houses performed this at the same venue.

According to Huber (1963), this bath was performed at the *Okwe* stream on the foot of the Krobo Mountain. On the way to the stream, members of the family may give them dirty linen to wash. The girls were also forbidden to speak to anybody on the way. I did not learn of any speech restrictions during this period but noticed that none of the initiates spoke on the way to and from the bath.

Upon return to the Dipo house, a priestess sprinkled chalky water and a substance made from red camwood on their faces and they were given roasted maize, groundnut and sugar cane to eat. The maize and sugar cane was placed three times on their lips before a portion was placed in their palms for them to eat. Huber (1963:171) mentions that “coconut-substance” was given to the initiates as well but I did not notice this during my fieldwork. In the house at Whekper, the girls formed a circle with their calabashes in front of them while women stood in the middle of the circle singing and dancing. A priestess and the daughter of the priest sprinkled the chalky water and red substance on the girls and later gave them the roasted maize, groundnut and sugarcane in the same manner as described above.

While this was going on, the women prepared the traditional meal, *ho-fufui* (Saturday’s fufu made from plantain, see appendix 2; picture 8) and palm nut soup with traditional cooking utensils. This meal was distributed to the girls to eat. According to Huber (1963), if a girl was betrothed, her groom had to contribute to this meal by providing foodstuffs from his farm and some of the food was served to maternal relatives of the girls. In some of my interviews, I also learnt that such grooms even had to help in the pounding of the

*fufu*¹⁷. When the food was ready, it was served in traditional bowls and once again, placed on the ground for initiates to eat in groups. At the house at Whekper however, I noticed that a custom was performed before the initiates ate the *fufu*. The names of the initiates were called by the priest from a register. Upon hearing their names, the girls went to the priestess who first put pieces of the food in their mouth three times and they swallowed the third time. The initiates were allowed to eat the *ho-fufui* in groups after this.

Later that afternoon, the girls had their bodies marked by the priestesses with charcoal on the sides of their faces, chests and stomachs. The triple libation was performed by the priest and his assistant after which, water from a well was placed in a big calabash with some leaves in it. The assistant priest then poured this water over the priest's head and also on his feet. The girls were then made to line up and take turns to wash with this water. They had to scoop the water with their palms and pour it over their heads so that it flows down their bodies. This was done three times. Some girls however, did this several times as they kept joining the queue after they had had their turn. Huber (1963) and Steegstra (2004) do not mention this activity and I also do not remember this being performed during my participation. Beckwith and Fisher (2002) however, make mention of this splashing of water, over the head by initiates, from a calabash in which water, white chalk and leafy branches had been put. Bands made of raffia with two black beads on it were tied on the arms of the girls. A yellowish substance from a tree was crashed on a grinding stone with water and the liquid smeared on the arm band.

A sponge was used to smear dissolved charcoal on the shaved portions of initiates' heads by the priestesses. After this, they were given sticks and made to go around the neighbourhood to invite people to the big event the next day. This was also done amidst singing by the women who accompanied them. They were gone for just about fifteen minutes so they obviously did not go very far and it was mostly the older girls who went while the younger ones stayed behind. Huber (1963:171) sites this event as well and mentions that the songs sang mean "Tomorrow come and light the fire for us!".

Slaughtering of the goat

I did not witness this event personally during fieldwork but was informed by some of the girls the following day. It was compulsory for all the girls to spend Saturday night in the Dipo house. Late at night, all the girls were awakened, a goat was slaughtered and the blood used to

¹⁷ *Ho-fufui* can simply be called *fufu*

wash the girls' feet. Before the goat was slaughtered, its back was used to touch the foreheads of the girls who in turn had to push the goat away. This was done three times. The girls also placed two of their fingers on the goat's forehead and then on their foreheads three times.

I remember a goat was slaughtered during my initiation but do not remember touching the forehead of the goat with my fingers and it was performed very early one morning. The blood of the goat was used to wash our feet and also sprinkled on us. Huber (1963:173) describes it thus:

“The head of the “house” grasps the fore and hind-legs of the first goat and, holding it, he pronounces..... (a) formula of dedication:.... Before he stabs the animal, the girl ... steps forward. He first holds the goat to the earth and then pushes it against the candidate's head; but the latter, parrying it with her two hands, pushes the animal back. This is repeated three times, people and girls having their fun with it. Then – at some places previous to it – the initiate touches with her two index fingers, first the animal's forehead, then her own and then her breast. Now one of the young men cuts the throat of the goat. Some of the blood is collected in a basin, while the rest is made to flow upon the girl's feet...”

Steegstra (2004:263-265) also describes this event. The touching of the goat was performed on the Saturday evening and the initiates stood on antelope skin when it was performed. It was the priestess who touched the goat's forehead with her palms and then touched the foreheads and chests of the girls three times. She also mentions that monetary donations by parents were called out by the diviner during this event. The goat was slaughtered early Sunday morning and the blood was used to wash the feet of the girls after which libation was poured. In the past, a goat had to be slaughtered for each girl but now just one goat is slaughtered for the group. This activity is very discreetly done and the place is cleaned up immediately afterwards such that there is no sign of it on the premises afterwards.

Sunday - The ultimate test

Dede's outdooring (see appendix 2; picture 11)

On this day, Dede, the girl chosen to be the leader of the Dipo-yi was outdoored. She was dressed up in a lot of beads on her neck, arms, wrist and waist with cloth hanging from the waist beads. She performed the Klama dance amidst singing and the priest poured libation to invoke the blessing of the gods on her. Later that afternoon, she was fully dressed in *Kente*¹⁸ cloth still with a lot of beads, did a lot of dancing and took a lot of photographs after which, she finally left the Dipo house for home.

Preparation for Tekpete – the sacred stone

¹⁸ The traditional Ghanaian cloth made by the weaving of different colours of silk threads in intricate patterns.

In the morning of this day, the girls wore the white calico cloth and were marked with a black substance on their chests, feet and backs. Some initiates from another house came to join them for the marks. A Dipo-yo led this procession holding in her hands a bowl which contained some food prepared from millet with dried fish on it. These girls held sticks and wore wax print cloths on their chest but upon arrival at the Dipo-house, they removed their cloths leaving their breasts bare and revealing the white cloth. After receiving the marks, they left in a procession as they had come. This group of girls might probably have been from the house at Whekper because when I observed it there the following week; the girls were sent to Kodjonya for the marks. A few girls were however marked by the priestesses over there, especially the younger ones. After this was performed, the girls changed into the red loin-cloth. Steegstra (2004:265) recounts initiates, from the house in which she was observing, being led to Kodjonya “to see the ‘old lady’, referring to Nana Kloweki”. They were taken to the house at Kodjonya where the girls were marked with “dots of clay on their temples, breasts, lower back, back of their knees and... feet” (Ibid:267). She also mentions that there were initiates brought from other houses to Kodjonya for this purpose as well.

The climax

That afternoon, a lot of people gathered at the house. They were relatives of the girls and people from the community. The place was packed! The girls were made to stand on antelope’s skin (see appendix 2; picture 10) or on mats and female members of their family brought lots of beads and white cloth to dress the girls for the visit to the sacred stone. There was a lot of singing and dancing by women as this was performed. A lot of beads were used to decorate the girls on their necks and waists especially and they wore the white loin-cloth. Raffia and strips of white cloth were hung across their necks and shoulders in a crisscross manner (see appendix 2; picture 12). In the past, it was the intestines of the slaughtered goat, which had been filled with air that was hung on them (Huber 1963). Also according to Huber (1963:176), it was the fathers of the initiates “who pull long white loin-cloths between their legs and fasten them to the waist beads”. During my participation and fieldwork, this was a reserve of the women. Pieces of the white cloth, cut into square shapes, were wet with water and placed on their heads. It was however the “fat of the goat... spread out like a veil” that was “placed upon the girls’ heads” in the past (Huber 1963:176). When they were done with the dressing, a priestess holding a calabash with white chalky water and leaves in it sprinkled the water on them after which she pressed a leaf between each initiates lips. They held their sticks and walked in a line to the shrine amidst loud singing by the women. Some initiates had

small cross-like sticks with raffia tied around them. I learnt this was introduced by *Nana Kloweki* before she disappeared and Teyegaga (1985) recounts that she saw the cross in a vision and it was revealed to her as the greatest sign of purification. She made a model of a wooden cross before her disappearance.

The priestesses lead the way to the shrine. I was not allowed near the shrine but was told later on that the girls were made to sit on the sacred stone three times. It was believed that if they were not virgins or were pregnant or had aborted a pregnancy, they would be stuck on the stone. All the girls who participated in the rite however were successful and came out of the shrine carried shoulder high or on the back of men or women as their feet were not supposed to touch the ground until they got to the Dipo house (see appendix 2; picture 17). During my initiation, this shrine was in a grove around a huge tree and covered with palm fronds. Inside the shrine was a big stone surrounded by several smaller rocks. Two priestesses, one on each side, held both of my arms, lowered me gently on the stone, and lifted me back up. They did this three times. The third time, they left me on the stone for a few minutes before lifting me up again. I left the shrine from another side where lots of people were gathered, men in particular. My father quickly spotted me and carried me shoulder high. He and a distant cousin took turns to carry me. It was therefore a surprise to see women carrying initiates as this was a reserve of men even when I participated in rite.

At the house at *Whekper*, the girls were taken to the stone at *Kodjonya* for this purpose. The priest, draped in a white cloth and wearing his hat, led the way. His assistant followed behind sprinkling water from a big calabash with leafy branches as he moved. The priestesses with the girls and their mothers behind followed in the procession. The very young ones were carried by their mothers who had the white square-shaped cloth on their heads, the leaves in their mouths and held the sticks instead (see appendix 2; picture 13). Some of the girls from this house had their breasts covered with white cloth (see appendix 2, picture 14). This time I was able to observe the shrine from a distance before the procession arrived. The shrine was inside a structure built with cement blocks which had two wooden doors in front of it (see appendix 2, picture 16). The girls were supposed to enter through one door and leave from the other. When the girls came out, they were carried back to *Whekper*.

Upon return to the Dipo house, the girls were placed on antelope skins or mats in a sitting position. The rest of their hair was then shaved (see appendix 2; picture 18). At *Whekper*, it was done in unison by both men and women, some using blades, others shaving sticks. The raffia and strips of white cloth were removed from them and they wore the straw hat which was placed on their heads and then on the floor three times after which it was

finally left on their heads. A bowl of food prepared with millet was then placed in front of the girls between their spread out legs. Their hands were placed on the bowl three times and their lips touched with bits of the food thrice before they were allowed to taste it. They were then lifted from the mats or antelope skins. The girls then performed the Klama dance and took several pictures the rest of this day. They had to spend the night in the Dipo house and wear the hat all the time except when they went to bed.

Monday - Outdooring

On this day, the priestesses formed different 'stations' where they carried out different tasks for the girls. One of them took off the hat, passed a small stick round their heads, dipped her fingers in a substance from red camwood and touched their heads with them. Then she placed a leaf on their heads and put the hat back on. The next priestess took off the hat and the leaf and washed their heads with raffia sponge, soap and water and then dried them with a towel. The girls then went to another priestess who had traditional cooking utensils, serving dishes and a broom by her side. The girls demonstrated sweeping, cooking and serving food for a few seconds at this point and were given a piece of boiled plantain to eat. Mothers of the very young girls held their hands when they performed this task. They then entered a room (I was not permitted there) where I was told that a group of priestesses were gathered. In this room, the girls had to pay Gh¢5.00 (US\$3.50) and were sung to by the women. Steegstra (2004:274-275) mentions that the girls were moved into a hall where the girls had their head swayed while a plume of elephant hair was held on top of their heads. This might have been performed in the room which I was not permitted to enter but I do not remember it being performed for me during my initiation.

At the house at Whekper, I noticed that one priestess used a blade to symbolically mark their wrists and the back of their palms (see appendix 2; picture 19). No incisions were made, it was just done symbolically. This might have been done at Kodjonya as well when the girls went into the room. It was performed the same way when I went through Dipo, no cuts were made on us. This event marked the end of all food restrictions for the initiates. They were now full Krobo women. The priest and priestesses at Whekper, I was informed, took a group photograph with all the initiates early that morning.

Later that afternoon, the girls were dressed up with a lot of beads on their necks, waists, arms and legs. Pieces of wax print cloth were hung on the beads such that they touched the floor. They were also worn wigs or scarves and went round the neighbourhood performing the Klama dance and thanking friends and relatives for their help during the

initiation. This was an opportunity for the families to show off their wealth by adorning the girls with a lot of beads and expensive cloth. For some girls, this was done at the Dipo house while for the majority; it was done in their family homes. I witnessed this dressing up of a Dipo-yo called Paulina in her family home. It was so elaborately and carefully done with all the patience in the world amidst singing by the women. All the women in the family brought their beads and wax print cloth, mostly new ones, for this purpose. Short breaks were taken during which Paulina danced after which the dressing was resumed (see appendix 2; picture 20). Decorative marks were made on her arms, neck and chest with chalky water. One of her aunts gave her a boiled egg to show how proud she was of her. Two girls, Freda and Felicia, with whom she had been initiated were dressed at the Dipo house but accompanied me to Paulina's house. They danced with Paulina and at some point, four girls from another house, were brought there and joined in the dancing amidst loud singing by the women. Perfume was sprayed on the girls and some people gave them money. A lot of photographs were taken as well. Paulina was fully dressed with *Kente* cloth that very evening because she was not going to be present for the Durbar the next day.

Tuesday – Durbar

This was the day of the durbar and once again, the girls were dressed up as women with lots of beads and *Kente* cloth. This was the first time they were fully dressed after the ceremony was performed and did not have their breasts exposed. They gathered at the Dipo house and performed the Klama dance amidst singing (see appendix 2; pictures 21 and 22). The girls were called out to dance in pairs or singly. They moved gracefully waving their left hand, turned forwards or sideways with their toes and moved their heads slowly to the left and right. It was easy to spot girls who had not learnt to dance properly. On this day, even the priests joined in playing the music instruments as the girls danced. Very few girls participated in this event as most of them had to leave to the cities because of school. This pertained to me as well during my initiation.

The girls were also required to go to the market place on Wednesday which happens to be a market day to perform the dance and announce to the world that they were now full Krobo women but here again very few girls participated in this event. I saw some girls dressed in two pieces of cloth and beads on their necks and arms in the town. I was informed that those girls had recently been initiated and in the past, it was required that all girls dress like that for about a month but now it was mostly done by a few girls (mostly those who lived in the community and surrounding areas).

After this set of activities, Krobo girls gain the status of women and are acceptable citizens of the Krobo society. If they are of marriageable age, they could be given away in marriage which is hardly the case today because initiates are much younger. The description of the ceremony as it was performed in the past, during my fieldwork, my participation and as recounted in literature reflect material that support my analysis of the custom. Common themes that arise from the description include ethnicity, change and continuity, gender, and symbolism. I discuss my use of these concepts in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

Analytical frame of reference

“every ethnography always implies a theory.”

David Graeber, 2001

It is my attempt in this thesis to add a voice to academia on the issue of rituals, specifically, rites of passage. Numerous theories and concepts have been propounded that relate to initiation ceremonies such as ethnicity, values, gender and symbolism among others. I intend to relate to some of these concepts in the discussion of my findings. The purpose of this chapter therefore, is to discuss theories as they relate to the Krobo rite of passage.

4.1 The structure of Dipo and symbolism

Victor Turner (1986) writes extensively about the rites of passage practiced by the Ndembus of Zambia. In the liminal period, the initiates are thought to be going through several states and transitions until they are reintegrated as mature individuals fully accepted into the society. Turner therefore presents a model for rites of passage which involves three phases: Separation, Liminality and Reaggregation¹⁹.

4.1.1 Separation

Separation involves the camping or seclusion of initiates from their normal, everyday lives. It gives them a break from their current state and allows for the transformation to take place. It involves a peculiar form of dressing for identification and food restrictions. Dipo is characterized by this. The first stage of Dipo as described in chapter three involves taking all initiates to the Dipo house where they are stripped and dressed in the red loin-cloths, have their hair shaved and have the *soni* tied on their necks to identify them as initiates. Everyone who sees the girls in this manner immediately identifies them as initiates and they become

¹⁹ Also referred to as reincorporation (Turner, 2009[1969]:94).

distinct from other members of the society even though camping does not start immediately. Their food restrictions also commence at this point. They are not allowed to eat any ‘foreign foods’ but food mainly indigenous to the Krobo like the *plaintain fufu* they eat on Saturday after the ritual bath, water yam, and palm oil sauce. They are also not permitted to drink tap water but only water drawn from wells. Some girls like Dede, have a longer period of separation because they were specially chosen by the gods for that purpose. The rest of the girls however, are secluded for the period of four days – Friday to Monday in which it is compulsory for them to spend the night at the Dipo house on Saturday and Sunday.

This seclusion provides a break from a usual routine, creating a period of rest while partaking in activities that brings about transformation – cleansing through washing, anointing with oils and sprinkling of liquids, performance of Klama dance, eating of indigenous Krobo foods and visiting the shrine where they give proof of being a good example of a Krobo woman. During my initiation, a lot of time was spent learning how to dance during this period. A priestess especially took pains to teach me how to dance properly. When we were not dancing, we spent our time conversing or playing games. It was the same with the initiates I met during fieldwork.

4.1.2 Liminality

During the period of seclusion, initiates go through a period of liminality which is the transformation process – the transition from girls to women. According to Barnard and Spencer (2006:422) “Turner argued that long periods of liminality lead to the development of a transcendent feeling of social togetherness which he called ‘Communitas’” which basically implies “...a generalized and eternal social bond which transcends social structure and brings the ritual participant under the authority of the community. Represented by ‘symbolic inversion’ during the liminal phase.” They further stress that it is these “bonds between people which enable society to exist”. Submissiveness and passivity are two very observable features of initiates at this stage of initiation. They simply comply with all instructions. Turner (2009[1969]:95) sums up their situation as follows:

“Liminal entities, such as neophytes in initiation or puberty rites, may be represented as possessing nothing. They may be disguised as monsters, wear only a strip of clothing, or even go naked, to demonstrate that as liminal beings they have no status, property or insignia, secular clothing indicating rank or role, position in a kinship system – in short, nothing that may distinguish them from their fellow neophytes or initiands. Their behaviour is normally passive or humble; they must obey their instructor implicitly ... among themselves, neophytes tend to develop an intense comradeship and egalitarianism.”

The initiates at this stage are not girls and neither are they women. They are in a transitional phase – neither children nor adults and the ritual is meant to help them pass through this transition. Initiates experience this ‘feeling of social togetherness’ at this point. It is consolation to know that they are not going through it alone. Others are going through it with them – being dressed as they are, restricted from some food as they are, taking part in the activities just as they are. This gives them courage to brave it through the rite which otherwise would have been difficult – possible but difficult. I understood how the girls felt when they continually said in response to how they felt about exposing their breasts “*I am not the only one like this, all the girls here are also exposed*”²⁰. Casting my mind back to my initiation, I remember that it was a lot easier to see other girls of my age-group being initiated along with me.

It is this feeling of togetherness that leads to the creation of a ‘social bond’ which transcends the social structure at that time. As such, initiates could carry on this bond even after the initiation is over. As I observed the rituals, I saw this feeling of togetherness develop, this social bond being created among three girls – Freda, Felicia and Paulina. They became increasingly close and stayed together. Freda and Felicia were siblings, Freda being the elder. They accompanied me to Paulina’s house on the Sunday afternoon to witness her outdoorings as earlier mentioned. Paulina was excited to see them. When her dressing was over, they danced with her and when it was time to leave, they exchanged contacts and Paulina saw them off to a distance. Their parting was touching – they hugged and encouraged each other to keep in touch.

I had a similar experience during my initiation. I remember a girl called Maud who was initiated along with her sister at that time. We got close during the period of seclusion and stayed together a lot. On the two nights we spent at the Dipo house, we stayed up chatting through the night. It felt very good to have someone to share with in those circumstances. Unlike the three girls mentioned above, Maud and I did not exchange contacts. I left a day earlier and only saw her briefly when I was taken to the Dipo house to thank the priestesses and bid them farewell. Dipo is a shared experience which would be recalled should Maud and I meet some day. Some of the women who took part in the focus group discussion had been initiated together and shared memories from ‘those days’ with me. Others claimed they were still in contact with some fellow initiates. There is however no association of past initiates which could serve as a platform for previous initiates to meet once in a while and share

²⁰ Freda – an initiate; Fieldwork 2009

experiences. Everyone can relate to such a 'bond' or 'comradeship' especially with people they share dramatic experiences with.

Turner (1967) further discusses how initiation candidates are deemed polluting because they are in a transitory state. This is particularly so during the liminal period. It is this idea that informs their seclusion from society. This is true of the Dipo custom as a number of activities are performed as a form of cleansing or purification of the initiates.

The ritual bath which is one of the major events in the custom is a symbol of cleansing. Initiates need to be cleansed by taking a bath. The red camwood substance and white chalky water sprinkled on the girls after the ritual bath serve as a sign of purification and protection. The washing with water from a calabash is meant to purify them before the climax of activities. The slaughtered goat also serves this purpose. The blood poured on the feet of initiates is a form of purification. An informant puts it this way, "*The blood is poured on the feet for purification, cleansing.... like the blood of Jesus to cleanse our sins*". Huber (1963:173) was also given a similar explanation about this and states "the blood is thought to wash away anything in the adolescent girl which could be harmful for her healthy development towards mature womanhood and motherhood". The blood of the goat is therefore a strong symbol of cleansing and the washing away of impurity. The sprinkling of water by the priest's assistant on the way to the shrine is also meant to ward off any polluting element along the way.

The cross-like stick which initiates hold in their hands on the way to the stone has also some purification significance. According to Teyegaga (1985), *Nana Kloweki*, just before her disappearance from Kroboland had a vision in which she saw a man holding a cross and the man said to her "This is the symbol of purification that is coming" (Ibid:31). The cross was therefore meant to signify the purification of the girls. I was informed that it served as a kind of protection for the girls as they approach the stone which is similar to that given by Huber (1963). Steegstra (2004:270) on the other hand, mentions that this was "the symbol of Kloweki". However, not all the girls had this cross so its purpose is not very consistent.

4.1.3 Reaggregation

At this stage, initiates are re-incorporated into the society – this time not as girls but as matured women, ready to take their place in society. Among the Krobos, this re-entering of the society involves the painstakingly dressing the initiate with a lot of beads on the neck, arm, wrist and the waist especially. They are worn expensive silk cloth, scarves or wigs, light make-up and golden earrings. A durbar is held and initiates are called to perform the Klama

dance individually or in groups to the admiration of all. They are also taken from house to house, to dance, thank family and friends and generally announce to the entire community that they have been initiated and are now full-fledged Krobo citizens. This re-incorporation gives the initiates the license to engage in sexual activities and as such, should pregnancy occur even outside of marriage, it is not seen as taboo. This is, however, one of the reasons the rite has been criticized.

4.1.4 Symbols and meanings

Symbols, according to Turner (1967:19) is “a thing regarded by general consent as naturally typifying or representing or recalling something by possession of analogous qualities or by association in fact or thought.” With this definition in mind, symbols may be understood to be representations due to the quality they possess to be compared or identified with some things which are deemed similar. Symbols in a ritual are therefore used to typify something and therefore carry along with them some meanings. A property of symbols Turner highlights is their ability to give several meanings and represent a number of things which he terms the “polysemy or multi-vocality” of rituals (Ibid:50). People may share symbols but the meaning of these symbols may vary among them. The Dipo custom for instance, is a symbol of the Krobos which they all share but they have different understanding of the various aspects of the custom as such, I got different explanations for some of the features observed in the custom.

To effectively interpret symbols in a ritual, Turner advocates three standpoints “(1) the level of indigenous interpretation... (2) the operational meaning and (3) the positional meaning” (Ibid:50). Native informants give the indigenous interpretation while the positional meaning can be inferred from observing not only how people talk about the symbol but what they do with it. The meaning therefore has to be inferred from its use. The positional meaning on the other hand would stem from its relationship to other symbols a whole, very much pointing to the ability of symbols to give off different meanings. It is with this background that I discuss symbolism in Dipo.

Turner (1967:19) gives examples of symbols he observed during the Ndembu rituals as “objects, activities, relationships, events, gestures and spatial units in a ritual situation”. I also observed these things as they occurred in the Dipo custom and carried meanings with them.

Being barefooted throughout the initiation also had an implication aside being a form of identification. It was claimed by an informant that there was a leaf, which, when stuck

under the feet or any footwear for that manner, was capable of driving away all spirits in the household shrines. Since some people had bad intentions, it was a strategy to remove the spirits in shrines by sticking the leaf to their footwear. The leaf however had no potency if placed anywhere else but under the feet. Another interpretation was the fact that the ritual house was a holy place, just like a mosque and so everyone present there had to be barefooted. Though the appearance of initiates serves ritual purposes, it is a major issue of contention against the Dipo practice as it is deemed outmoded.

The red-loin cloth worn by initiates symbolizes menstruation which of course is a sign that a girl is capable of conception. This red cloth is worn most of the time and only interchanged with the white for some rituals like the visit to the stone. The white cloth is also a sign of fertility, purity and holiness. This is in line with having gone through purification. The charcoal marks given before initiates visit the stone imply that initiates are participating out of a “free heart” and so enter marriage out of a “free heart”. The marks also signify fertility. Initiates are given the permission to give birth to as many as possible. In the past, marks used to be made on the waist along with those on the back of the hand also as a sign of fertility. Waist beads also represent the fecundity of initiates.

The symbolic entry into womanhood inspires the leaf placed in their mouth on the way to the sacred stone. As Krobo women, they are not supposed to speak unless invited to. They are supposed to be discreet and think through their words before they are said. Discretion on the part of women seems to be strongly emphasized in the society but I also notice that is the case even with the ceremony itself as not everything is revealed. This however has an identity twist to it as discussed in a later section. The white, square-shaped piece of cloth placed on the head of initiates as they visit the shrine represents the value of the victorious thing being performed for them. It is not supposed to fall off because it should be treated like an egg which should not break. This indicates that their lives were precious and so they should not let it fall, or better still, mess it up.

Some activities and objects also serve the important function of determining if a girl is pregnant for instance; the antelope skins they are made to stand on. It is believed that a pregnant girl or one that has previously aborted would go mad if she stood on the skin. Huber (1963) and Steegsra (2004) also mention this. During my focus group discussion with three generations of women, I was informed by the elderly women that a millet drink was prepared from the millet ground by the girls. Fermentation of the drink was an indication that one of the girls was pregnant. In another interview, my informant claimed that meat or soup was boiled in a clay pot, if one of the initiates was pregnant, the pot got broken. The stone is also

believed to determine this. It is claimed to reject any girl who has conceived or aborted. The success of these activities was therefore an indication that no girl had defiled herself by conception or abortion prior to the performance of Dipo.

Upon emergence from the shrine, the initiates are carried, shoulder high or on the back, hurriedly back to the Dipo house amidst shooting in air. In addition, people encourage the carriers to run faster by shouting that the Akans were at their heels. This, I learnt was the result of the past event when the Akans used to lie in wait in order to capture the Krobo women when they emerged from the shrine. According to an informant, this was because Krobo women are deemed very beautiful and they were supposedly virgins at the time of initiation.

The Klama dance performed by the girls which involves intricate movement of the hands and toes with the head bowed is also an indication of womanhood. It implies that as women, they are to “*dance gorgeously and not throw their legs about when they dance. They had to bow their heads when dancing so the men could not see their faces properly because they were virgins.*”²¹ Even in dance, a woman is expected to display some form of decorum. A lot of time is spent teaching the girls this dance and this is the order of the day during the outdoor ceremony.

Marks given in the past served the purpose of signifying that a girl had been through initiation. Those given at the back of the hands, called “*sweeping marks*” indicated that a girl had gone through the training in house-keeping skills taught during initiation. This is the essence of passing a blade over initiates’ hands (without making cuts) after they swept and imitated cooking with traditional cooking utensils before the outdoor ceremony. That mark served as a kind of certificate to show that the girl was capable of performing the household duties required of her as a Krobo woman. Marks were also made on the belly and they signified that the girls were matured enough to bear children. These marks were given after physical examination of their naked bodies by the priestesses, basically relying on their indigenous ways of knowing. Another set of marks were made on the waist which indicated that the girls have been given permission to engage in intercourse and bear children. She was therefore to permit only her husband to touch her waist. A woman, who could show these marks, gave clear evidence that she had been initiated. This is no longer the case as discussed earlier.

The initiates are worn straw hats after their visit to the shrine. These hats are also worn by the priests. According to Huber (1963), these hats were indicative of the girls’ initiation into

²¹ Queen mother A

the priestly cult of *Nana Kloweki*. One priest, however, pointed out that it served to signify that the girls have been through initiation. This was due to the possibility for people to dress up and take pictures without passing through initiation. The hats however could not be worn “*anyhow*” and so served as a sign that one had really been through the custom.

Turner (1967:31) classifies symbols as being dominant or instrumental. In the Ndembu ritual he observed, the dominant symbols identified were a series of trees or plants and shrines. He claims that dominant symbols in life-crisis rituals represent “kinds of efficacy” in other words, their ability to produce a desired outcome. The examples he gives from male rituals are trees and medicines which may represent strength, virility, masculinity, an erect phallus among others. In the same vein, it can be inferred that dominant symbols in the Dipo custom are the sacred stone and the loin-cloths used by initiates. Dominant symbols are regarded as such because of their ability to produce a desired outcome. The visit to the stone serves as the climax of the ritual and is the main focus of the initiation. A girl who successfully emerges after her visit to the stone is the one who is regarded as a Krobo woman and she is reinstated into the society as such. The loin-cloths worn by the girls symbolize fertility and purity which is a major theme of the ritual. These are regarded as such because, as will be discussed in a later section, it is a woman’s fecundity that establishes her place in the patrilineal society.

Instrumental symbols on the other hand, are those which are used as a means of accomplishing the goals of rituals. Turner (1967) gives examples of this in the context of women’s rituals as trees that bear fruit or have a large number of rootlets. Since the focus of the ritual is fertility, these symbols are used as a means to an end – the emphasis on fecundity. As earlier pointed out, the goal of the Dipo custom is to make women out of the girls – proper Krobo women who would be able to perform the roles and responsibilities expected of them. The activities such as the washing of the loin cloth during the ritual bath and the grinding of the millet depict gendered roles and responsibilities and serve as instrumental symbols. It is through these activities that the goal of Dipo can be achieved and is also the reason why they are activities that are still observed despite the short period in which the initiation is carried out.

Mendonso (2001:322) also draws attention to the fact that symbols could either represent “continuity or change, tradition or modernity”. Giving an example from the Sisala of Northern Ghana, the use of traditional symbols such as a headscarf may indicate a couple’s desire to have a relationship that leads to marriage and a man’s ability to provide for his wife. On the other hand, when a young man decorates his home with modern furniture and uses this

as a means to attract girls, he indicates his attainment of a modern status, independence and ability to support a girl to live the modern life. This clearly indicates how symbols may be used to indicate a change in thought pattern and/or social status or the adherence to traditional norms and values. It further illustrates the point that people may not totally agree upon what symbols should mean even though they share them. The symbols used in the Dipo custom mostly depict the Krobo tradition however I did notice some girls carrying little purses which were by no means traditional. It was also common for female relatives to spray expensive designer perfumes on the girls as they danced; an obvious indication of the modern life.

An entire ritual could also be a symbol. The performance of an initiation gives off a message – entry into adulthood. The Dipo ceremony itself therefore carries a meaning and not just aspects of it such as the objects and activities performed during the initiation. It depicts the transformation of Krobo girls into Krobo women and the perception of who an ideal Krobo woman should be.

Turner (1967) and Richards (1982) also draw attention to colour symbolism. In the Chisungu ritual, Richards brings out the importance of colour in the rite. She indicates the use of red camwood powder which symbolizes blood and that the colour red in most rituals represents menstrual blood. White on the other hand, represented cleaning or washing and white beads were representative of fertility. Turner (1967) also noted the use of red and white clay in the Ndembu ritual and the fact that these two colours may sometimes carry gender connotations for example, red representing femininity and white masculinity. However “color symbolism is not consistently sex-linked, although red and white may be situationally specified to represent the opposition of the sexes” (Ibid:61). Similarly in the Dipo custom, the colour red represents fertility while white stands for purity, victory and holiness. The red colour of the goat’s blood, however, symbolizes cleansing and purification. With regards to gendered use of colours, I noticed that the male initiates did not wear the red loin-cloth. They mainly wore the wax-print cloths and the white cloths. This is not surprising as the red cloth is mainly associated with women as a symbol of menstruation and fertility. This is the only case in the Dipo custom where there is a marked difference in the use of colours between the genders.

Another important feature of the Dipo custom is the triple repetitions observed when initiates grind the millet, are placed on the stone and worn straw hats among other situations. My informants claimed it was simply ‘custom’. Adjaye (1999:19), however, interprets it this way; “the triple repetition of certain actions not only had a dramatic, affirming effect, but also underscored the propitiousness of the number three in ritual situations. Purposive repetition

was a deliberate action to enhance dramatic effectiveness.” It can therefore be inferred that such repetitions serve to place a marked emphasis on the activity being performed especially pointing to the fact that the girls were transformed to Krobo women by the process. I, however, cannot claim to fully understand what it implies in this situation.

4.2 Dipo and Krobo ethnic identity

There are two schools of thought in relation to ethnicity – the primordial and the constructional/instrumental. Primordialists view ethnicity as “the embodiment (or at least sediment) of primary bonds – or ‘primordial ties’ – which are deeply rooted in the past and turn on a common history, culture and language” while constructionists point out how ethnicity is used to distinguish a group from others and emphasize how it could be manipulated for self-interest (Lentz 2000:4). Ethnicity seen from these two points of view could therefore exist when a group shares a common background or origin and have certain characteristics they identify with like language. On the other hand, these very characteristics could be used as a means of differentiation.

Barth (1994:12) points out that membership into an ethnic group requires “ascription and self-ascription” as long as individuals “embrace it, are constrained by it, act on it”. He also states that the features of ethnic groups are “highly situational, not primordial” because they are “produced under particular interactional, historical, economic and political circumstances” (Ibid:12). These circumstances lead to the creation of boundaries which serve to distinguish ethnic groups and serve as the criteria by which people are accepted into the group. Cohen (1982:3) emphasizes that “it has been cogently argued that it is at the boundaries of ethnic groups that ethnicity becomes meaningful: that is groups become aware of their ethnic identity when they engage with others.” The presence of ethnic ‘others’ therefore makes a group more conscious of who they are and what identifies them. The historical strife between the Krobos and their neighbouring Akans probably contributed to the inculcation of a strong sense of Krobo ethnic identity.

To further buttress Barth’s view that ethnic group characteristics are situational and based on particular circumstances, I refer to Okamura’s (1981) discussion on situational ethnicity. This understanding of ethnicity places a level of importance on the social situation in which ethnicity and ethnic relations are analyzed. Okamura (1981:452) states the “variability in the affirmation of ethnic identity may be dependent upon the immediate social situation and it relates this variability to the actor’s perception of that situation”. The

situational nature of ethnicity is therefore determined by the social contexts in which they are expressed and have the ability to change depending on the understanding of the people involved. As a result, people may be more inclined to express their ethnic identity in some situations more than in others. He further points out that “ethnicity first consists of the actor’s perceptions of various customs, beliefs, practices, and other cultural elements by means of which he is able to identify another person as a member of a certain ethnic group...” (Ibid:462). This perception of features which help to identify a person to particular ethnic group thereby determines how the person is related to depending on the circumstance.

I readily identified with this idea of situational ethnicity while in the field. I had to express myself as a Krobo especially in relation to my previous participation in the Dipo custom. This, as I mentioned earlier in chapter two, had an influence on the way people related to me. They readily opened up to me and referred to me as ‘one of their own’ who had come to study their custom while at other times, they expected me to recount my previous experience with the custom before they gave me any information. This situational ethnicity therefore worked a lot to my advantage while on the field. In the same vein, outside of Kroboland, a Krobo woman may not need to stress so much on her ethnic identity when relating to people but within the Krobo society this is of importance and readily linked with her initiation. The cultural symbol of Dipo therefore determines how she is related to or even regarded within the Krobo society. This exhibits the varying nature of ethnicity as “individuals have the option of asserting either their primary ethnic identity or other social identities, such as those derivative of class or occupation, that they legitimately hold” (Ibid.460). On an analytical level however, Okamura (1981:462) states that “ethnicity is an abstract attribute of actors by means of which the analyst is able to achieve some understanding of their behaviour.” As I would demonstrate in the next chapter, ethnicity is one major theme that aided my understanding of the perpetuation of the Dipo custom as informants readily made mention of how it served to identify them as a people.

Following the self-ascriptive view, a woman who identified herself as a Krobo must have passed through initiation to be appreciated as such by other Krobos. Steegstra (2002) also mentions that the performance of Dipo was a criteria for admitting women from other tribes into the Krobo community when they dwelt on the mountain. This demonstrates that for the Krobos, it is not just biological ties that makes one identify with the group. During my fieldwork, I was informed by some priestesses that a white girl was initiated the previous year. She requested the initiation and it was performed for her. This girl can therefore identify herself with the Krobos on this ground. There are cases however, when Krobo women still see

themselves as such even though they have not been initiated, mainly due to the influence of Christianity. In such instances, it is the biological ties that aid their identification with the group. In Wilson (2003:11), the Paramount Queen mother of the Manya Krobo traditional area, Nana Mamle Okleyo states,

“neither my sister nor I went through the Dipo festival. In fact, none of the daughters of Sir Emmanuel Matekole went through the Dipo. He was a catechist in the Presbyterian Church, and made a covenant with God in which he dedicated all his girl children to God. His girl children could not stand before the fetish priest at the Dipo festival. He and his children were blessed and so it continues in the family to this day.”

Despite the fact that she has not been initiated, she is regarded as a Krobo woman and all other Queen mothers owe allegiance to her. She is a granddaughter of the Christian *Konor* under whose reign Dipo was banned as I mentioned earlier. Her ascription and self-ascription into this ethnic group is therefore mainly based on her biological ties.

Barth (1994) also puts ethnicity into the discourse of ‘us’ and ‘them’ when he states that “ethnic relations and boundary constructions in most plural societies are not about strangers, but about adjacent and familiar ‘others’”. He further brings out indicators of ethnicity such as language and dress. Though he points out that it should not be limited to these items, it is important to note that the ethnic marker may be used to form the boundary as well as the basis for differentiation. Beidelman (1997) explains how the Kagurus, though they had practiced initiation since time immemorial, felt the need to reinforce it in the face of colonialism. The practices in their view could “serve to identify them as special and particular people” (Ibid:49). External pressures therefore increased the value of their customs. In the same vein, despite external and internal influences, the Dipo custom is still practiced and readily associated with the Krobos.

Banks (1996) brings out other aspects of ethnicity that may have to do with economic or political factors and not merely psychological ones. The Krobos are well known for the manufacture of beads in Ghana partly because of its extensive use in the Dipo ceremony (Wilson 2003). The girls being adorned with beads could very well be a very good advertisement for the bead makers. Also, the priestesses and others involved in organizing the rites make some financial gains from it. A fee of 10.00 Ghana Cedis (US\$7) is charged for each initiate and the items left over at the end of the ceremony, for example food stuffs, are distributed among the priests, priestesses and their assistants. There are also women who display their wares (items used for the initiation, cooked food, water, torch lights) at the place of initiation. The economy of the community in general is probably impacted during

initiation. These comprise the economic aspect of the rite and leads to another discussion on how the rite may be commoditized which I highlight in the next chapter.

However, there are cases where some aspects of ethnicity could be a form of embarrassment. Eidheim (1971:56) using the coastal Sami of Norway as an example, mentions situations where people made efforts to “get rid of, or cover up, those social characteristics” that others would take as signs of their identity because of the inferior status the Sami had at the time. Similarly with the Krobos, it has been argued that the marks made at the back of the hand as evidence of the rite have been used as a form of ridicule on the girls by their colleagues from other tribes (Tetteh 2006). This has also contributed to some changes in the performance of the custom, for instance, the possibility of paying to avoid being shaved and no cuts are made on the back of the hands as was the case in the past. I spoke to a one-time initiate who informed me that she tore up all her initiation pictures (except the outdoorings in which she was fully dressed) because she did not want anyone to see them. She also did not tell her friends about her initiation. This could be seen as a deliberate attempt to conceal the fact that she had been initiated. Okamura (1981:460) points out this fact when he discusses an aspect of situational ethnicity he terms the cognitive dimension in which “the individual actor has the option, on the one hand, of emphasizing or obfuscating his ethnic identity, or on the other, of assuming other social identities that he holds.” Though the girl discussed above chose to cover up the major evidence of her initiation, by saving her outdoorings pictures, she had the ability to emphasize her ethnic identity, in association with Dipo should the need arise.

4.3 Krobo values and the Dipo ceremony

Everyone should belong somewhere. There should be a place regarded as home and where one is embraced. This sense of belonging usually points to something for instance, identity. Lowell (1998:1) points out that “belonging to a particular locality evokes the notion of loyalty to a place” and this loyalty may be expressed through, among other things, religious and ritual performances. She further states that belonging may be “defined through a sense of experience” but then, as identity markers, belonging and locality usually “extend beyond individual experiences and nostalgic longing for a particular place” (Ibid:1). Furthermore, the ways these loyalties are created, perpetuated and modified are of importance in grasping an understanding of identity at both individual and collective levels. To illustrate this point in reference to the Krobos, I refer to Steegstra (2004:32-33) who states that “most Krobo people

maintain a strong sense of Krobo identity and return ‘home’ as often as possible, especially for feasts, funerals and ritual ceremonies.” The Dipo initiation is inclusive of these ritual ceremonies especially in creating a sense of Krobo female identity and enhancing a Krobo woman’s sense of belonging. Her experience of Dipo creates an attachment to Kroboland and her place in the community; she is assured that she belongs there.

The performance of ritual ceremonies, are not only inspired by the need for belonging but also the sense of value. For the Dipo ceremony to have withstood the test of time and be observed as it is today, it obviously shows a set of values the Krobos adhere to and depict in their culture. Values generally are things cherished, highly esteemed and strongly held on to. Gyekye (2003) discusses communal and individualistic values in the African society specifically in Ghana. Some of these communal values include solidarity, interdependence and social harmony. He gives a definition of communalism as “the doctrine or theory that the community (or group) is the focus of the activities of the individual members of the society” (Ibid:36). Communalism therefore “appreciates and espouses values that in African cultures are seen as essential – in fact intrinsic – to a human society of which membership is considered natural” (Ibid:36). This implies that for members of a group to identify with the group, they must share the values of the group and these values happen to be ‘intrinsic’. For the Krobos to go through this extent to preserve their culture, indicates an intrinsic value in the initiation of female members of the society. This value expects females to be good examples and not fall victim to conception prior to the performance of the ceremony. In the past, when marriage followed immediately after Dipo, chastity on the part of the girl was an important factor which might not be the case today. This will be discussed further under sexuality and gender.

There are certainly acknowledged individual values but even these are partly influenced by communal values and the individual is therefore challenged to seek a proper balance between his/her communal and individual values. This balance involves an attempt to “integrate individual desires and social ideals and demands” (Ibid:50). The individual is therefore indebted to himself/herself and to his group. Africans generally attempt to seek this balance. It partly accounts for why they adhere strongly to traditional beliefs and practices despite embracing outside influences.

Graeber (2001) gives three ways of looking at values, which include the sociological sense, the economic sense and the linguistic sense. For the purpose of this thesis, I would like to concentrate on the sociological and economic sense. Economically, Graeber (2001:1) states that it is the “degree to which objects are desired, particularly, as measured by how much

others are willing to give up to get them.” The gratification or sense of pleasure an object is likely to give increases its worth so people go the extra mile for their acquisition. It is said that despite the Christian Krobos’ open condemnation of the Dipo custom, they still secretly initiate their daughters and some also participate in some of the activities such as carrying initiates. While on the field, I learnt about a prominent church member who was seen in the Dipo house and playing active roles in the custom. She was not penitent when reprimanded and was therefore deposed from her position and placed on suspension from church to serve as an example to others. In addition, the distance some travel with their daughters to get them initiated is worth considering. Many of them come from other parts of the country and in some cases outside of the country just for the purpose of the custom. The practice is so inculcated into the Krobo culture that even when it was banned during the reign of a Christian *Konor*, it was still performed secretly in a simplified form and with another name “bobum” which means “dressing up” (Steegstra 2002:223). Parents in the colonial era even preferred to keep their daughters from school thus denying them formal education (which was used by the missionaries as a means of converting them) than give up the Dipo custom (Ibid). This illustrates the concept of economic value. The ‘worth’ or ‘gratification’ in the Dipo custom is linked to the sense of belonging associated with it.

Though the extended family system is gradually losing its stronghold and people are getting more individualistic especially in the urban areas, people still have an attachment to their customs. For Krobo women, being a part of the Krobo society and keeping with that identity requires participation in the Dipo custom. Other factors that come into play here with regards to this economic value are the sale of items used for the custom, the showing off of a family’s wealth in the display of beads and wax print cloths during the outdoor ceremony and of course, the satisfaction a family derives in having their daughters successfully initiated.

The sociological meaning of value implies “conceptions of what is ultimately good, proper or desirable in human life” (Graeber 2001:3). He emphasizes the term “desirable” and explains that they do not merely signify what people want but what they “ought to want” (Ibid:3). Values therefore form “the criteria by which people judge which desires they consider legitimate and worthwhile and which they do not” (Ibid:3). The values of a people are therefore things they find worthwhile and can legitimize. As such, when we see the Krobos finding it worth their time to carry out elaborate rite of passage for their female members, it expresses how much value is placed on womanhood. This usually is related to the unique ability of the woman to bear children which serves to ensure the continuity of the tribe. Richards (1982) states fertility as an important value of the Bembas that is expressed in the

Chisungu ritual. As a result of this value, females have to be prepared for their procreative roles by the initiation ceremony. Beidelman (1997) also notes this in the Kaguru initiation ritual and is also a major theme in the Dipo initiation (Steedstra 2004).

4.4 Gender and sexuality in the Dipo custom

The Krobos as I have mentioned earlier are patrilineal. Links to the father's lineage are therefore very strong and children inherit their fathers. The father's kins are therefore influential in the life of a Krobo. Sackey (2001) finds it ironic that the patrilineal Krobo society in which continuity is dependent on its males rather has a more complex and elaborate rite of initiation for their females than the matrilineal Akans. However, there are a number of forces at play with respect to gender in the Dipo custom. It is the father who performs the custom for his daughter (Huber 1963; Steegstra 2004). In the past, in instances where the girls were betrothed, it was the prospective groom and/or his family who took responsibility for this. With respect to organization of the ceremony, the priests in charge of the ceremony as I witnessed in the two communities and also during my initiation are men. The Okumo as I mentioned earlier is in charge of the three main customs of the Krobos of which Dipo is a part. When I conducted interviews with some of the priestesses at Kodjonya, there were some questions they refused to answer and referred me to the priest and his assistants – an indication of the authority the priests have in the custom.

It is also a castrated he-goat that is slaughtered and serves a symbol of fertility. In the case of fraternal twins, the male twin undergoes the ritual with his twin sister. There were two such cases during my fieldwork. The male initiate whom I managed to converse with (the other avoided me completely) also mentioned being at the ritual bath but the priestesses told me otherwise. One place they certainly did not visit was the shrine. They were dressed up in white cloth but without beads on their waists like the girls and accompanied their sisters to the shrine. They however waited outside until they emerged and were also carried back to the house.

A former male initiate during one of my focus group discussions, happened to be born after a set of female twins and went through initiation with his twin sisters. He also claimed he performed the ritual bath with them and did not go into the shrine but waited in front of it till they came out. Describing how he felt about it, he said:

“In fact, I was happy because my twin sisters were doing it, we sleep together, we eat together ... by then I was... I think thirteen years old but I was not having any bad mind, you understand? Because we all gathered at a place, we bath, you'll be seeing everything...almost

everybody is naked. Even some of the mothers half-naked ... you see some of the children cannot bath so they have to bath them... I see Dipo to be a custom rite just like other people have their rites."

He obviously did not have any problem with being associated with it but was proud of his sisters. While observing at Kodjonya, I inquired from a young woman in charge of the registration how many initiates there were. Her response was one hundred and thirty girls. When I asked about the boys, I was informed that they were not counted. They were regarded as one with their twin sisters and so were not counted separately.

Initiating fraternal twins probably serves as a point of departure between the two sexes. The female twin becomes detached from the male and is increasingly aware of her roles and responsibilities as a Krobo woman. The Krobos do have a distinct twin ritual which is beyond the limits of this paper. The male twin participating in the Dipo custom with his twin sister may be a different phase of the twin ritual and his link to the twin sister is emphasized. There might be something more to their participation which I have not fully grasped.

There is an emphasis on gendered roles and responsibilities in the activities performed during the Dipo custom. The domestic and sexual education given the initiates during the period of initiation depicts the girls' wifely duties not only to their husbands but to his family as well. The millet grinding activity depicts a woman's responsibility to ensure that her family is well-fed and that she knows what typical Krobo foods are. This same message is carried across at the end of the ritual when initiates imitate cooking with traditional cooking utensils after the washing of their heads. In the days when there was a long period of seclusion, a lot of time was spent teaching the girls how to cook for a large number of people.

The ritual bath is also a means of educating initiates on the personal hygiene they had to observe as women. The washing of the red cloth before they take their bath is symbolic of the woman's role in caring for the clothing of her family. It was her responsibility to see to the proper care and maintenance of her family's clothing. Huber (1963) mentions that in the past, while on their way to the riverside for the bath, family members gave the girls clothes to launder for them. The essence of equipping initiates with housekeeping skills was to reinforce their understanding of their roles and responsibilities as women. They were home-makers and responsible for the general upkeep of the home. It is common in the Ghanaian society for young girls to be told that they would not get husbands if they did not sharpen their housekeeping skills.

The bodily exposure of the girls also has a male advantage to it among other reasons of course. It shows the physical maturity of the girls and readiness to reproduce hence, their availability to prospective suitors. This accounts for why marriage used to follow immediately after initiation in the past. We therefore see a male predominance which is typical of a patrilineal society. Men are also not restricted from the places of initiation but are not allowed close to the shrine where the sacred stone is situated. According to Ardener (1972:210), the very term nubility rite has a social function in that “the girl takes her place in the system of relations between kin groups” in reference to the Bakweri rites of passage in Cameroun. La Fontaine (1972) in reference to the life-crisis rituals of females in the patrilineal society of the Gisu makes a similar point. She states that,

“... although emphasis on descent through males is the overt theme of many Gisu rituals, fertility and procreative power is associated with and demonstrated by the women of the lineage. As sisters, women demonstrate through their fecundity the strength of their *patrilineally given fertility* and hence the power of their ancestors; as mothers they enable another lineage to perpetuate itself in their *sons*. Thus it is intelligible that Gisu should manifest concern with the reproductive powers of women.” (Ibid:162) (emphasis mine).

The above statement implies that even fertility on the part of the women is patrilineally endowed and her involvement in continuity of a clan is basically through the birth of sons. It is therefore the reproductive ability of women that motivates the elaborate initiation ceremonies performed for females in a patrilineal society and I have earlier on pointed out that a major theme of the Dipo initiation is fertility.

The strong emphasis on female initiation in the Krobo society and the historical background of its probable emanation from women’s protest shows an attempt of women to come into the limelight of society. Steegstra (2002:207) expresses this very well when she states that “*Dipo* was essential for the creation of Krobo gender and ethnic identity. *Dipo* was not only important in a Krobo girl’s individual life cycle, it also meant she became a part of her family and the group”. Since they are not counted in the line of inheritance, they make themselves visible through the Dipo custom. The females are therefore seen to exert some power as people to be reckoned with just as the males are. The Queen mothers during my interview with them emphasized that “*Dipo is a form of girl-child empowerment*” and that “*the women decided to put their heads together with Nana Kloweki, a female leader to come out with something cultural to make a girl child be of importance in the society.*”²² This was at the time when a feast was held for boys after circumcision. The women therefore vouching for recognition by demanding a ceremony similar to that for boys and which eventually

²² Interview with Queen mothers; Odumase Krobo 2009.

overshadowed the male celebrations expressed their desire to rise above the dominant male-child celebration and shift focus on the female child.

In the past, when the initiation was performed on the mountain (they had settled on the plains but still performed rituals on the mountain including Dipo), the women were with the girls throughout the period of seclusion (Steggstra 2002). It was during this time they were educated about sex, motherhood and childcare. Beidelman (1997:163) mentions that the purpose of Kaguru female initiation is to teach “proper sexual and domestic behaviour... sexual relations, proper sexual etiquette and comportment and also about the special care women must take regarding menstruation and pregnancy.” However, the central aim of the initiation is the ““cooling”... that is, subduing and controlling their new sexuality” (Ibid:163). Since this education is the reserve of women as we also see in the Dipo initiation, the ‘subduing’ and ‘controlling’ therefore lies in the hands of the women.

Beidelman (1997) also recounts that during the girls’ confinement, only women are allowed inside while loud laughter and singing could be heard from the house. He states.

“I believe that the laughter of women asserted their power, even their disdain of men. It seemed a form of playful castration. I believe that men were banned simply because the women, just like the men, wanted this occasion of isolated solidarity to confirm their interpretations of the attributes and meanings of gender against any counterclaims and different interpretations made by the opposite sex” (Ibid:167).

Similarly, only women are allowed into the sacred shrine during the Dipo initiation, dressing of initiates and singing are the sole reserve of women and the priestesses are also solely responsible for some rituals such as millet grinding and the ritual bath. Female initiation could therefore be used as an assertion of female prowess.

The quote from Beidelman (1997) also shows an attempt of women through ritual to assert themselves and give their own meanings of gender indicating a limitation of women in this discourse. In light of this, Ardener (1972) discusses a technical problem with women which involves the boundary between society and nature where men model the society and women, nature. This influences the presentation of women from a masculine point of view. Getting women to present themselves is therefore the problem with traditional ethnography. I identified with this problem when the priestesses referred me to the priests for more information on a rite that involved women. Just before the Dipo initiates visit the shrine as mentioned in chapter two, a leaf is placed in their mouths so they do not speak and this signifies the discretion a woman is supposed to have.

Arnfred (2006:73) opens up a very nice discussion about the “culture of silence” with regards to female sexuality. She points out the fact that “What was important in African systems of kinship and marriage was *fertility* and not sexuality as such” (Ibid:73). If the focus therefore was on reproduction, little was generally said about sexuality. This silence regarding sexuality issues is gradually being broken especially with the emergence of HIV/AIDS and the increase in feminist movements. She further draws attention to the fact that there are “*different types of silences*” which need to be acknowledged (Ibid:73). One of these silences she explains to be “*performative rather than discursive*” (Ibid:74). She relates this to Richards’ study of the Chisungu ritual where some meanings happened to be obscure and had no linguistic reference. Taking a critical look at this performative silence, I wish to point out that it reflects a silence that is even present in a performance, in actions and not just in speech. Definitely, not everything is revealed when a ritual is carried out and even when observed, not everything is completely understood. An experience I had with this performative silence was when a priest told me “*we do not disclose everything we do*”. Beidelman (1997) also experienced a similar silence with regards to the female Kaguru initiation. This silence however has a twist that has to do with identity which I will discuss in the next chapter.

Arnfred (2006) also brings out another issue of discretion in relation to sexuality which she observed in relation to extra-marital affairs and further illustrates how such affairs are not punishable as long as they are not spoken about. Should they be disclosed by a third person, say a son who witnessed his mother’s infidelity, it is the son who bears the responsibility for the punishment meted out on his mother (in worst scenarios, death) by his jealous father and not the mother or her lover. This might seem strange but it is a good example of the motivations for discretion in African societies. As I claim in relation to the leaf, the Dipo initiates learn this discretion symbolically during the rite.

I would however like to emphasize in relation to female sexuality that it is not just the silence that shields the existence of say illicit sexual relations but the absence of an outcome of such relations specifically, conception. Therefore, even in societies where chastity is valued, every girl may be regarded as such, as long as she does not conceive, though she may not necessarily be a virgin. It becomes important to note that initiations in their forms today are not primarily a means of preventing people from exploring their sexuality per se, but a means of regulating reproduction – a check on the time when a girl can conceive. It is generally believed that Dipo initiates are supposed to be virgins at the time of initiation.²³

²³ This was the understanding most of my respondents had and also the notion I had before I went for fieldwork.

However, the priestesses informed me that the focus was mainly on conception and abortion. Any woman could therefore be initiated and sit on the stone as long as she had not previously conceived or performed an abortion – virginity was therefore not the issue.

Even though the originator of the Dipo custom is said to be the female deity Nana Kloweki (in conjunction with the women of course), Teyegaga (1985) claims that some aspects of the Dipo custom today did not exist in her time. The stone happens to be one of this and according to Teyegaga, it is the priests who introduced it later after her disappearance though there were sacred stones on the mountain. One of my respondents also confirmed this view stating that the girls were not placed on a stone when the initiation first began and the priests originated this to emphasize their power. If this is really the case, could it be taken as a sign of male dominance of female sexuality even within the custom that is supposed to liberate women from it?

Ortner (1974:73) states explicitly that “everywhere, in every known culture, women are considered in some degree inferior to men”. One of the data she uses to back this observation are “symbolic devices, such as the attribution of defilement, which may be interpreted as *implicitly* making a statement of inferior valuation” (Ibid:73). There is therefore the categorization of a defiled/unchaste woman and an undefiled/chaste woman especially when the visible evidence of conception is available. It is the woman who has to be chaste – not the man. She further suggests that the relation of women to nature and men to culture contributes to this subordination. Culture is always attempting to manipulate nature to its benefit as such, everything close to nature falls under this manipulation. She gives three reasons why women are regarded as such namely; their physiology, roles and psyche are closer to nature. Menstruation is shrouded in a number of taboos which determine how a woman is treated when it occurs such as seclusion, restricting her from sacred sites and objects and contact with men going to war (de Rachewiltz 1964; Ortner 1974).

Though Ortner clearly has a point in her analysis, it is also worthwhile to consider how these states could be used to the advantage of women – how it gives her power over her sexuality. In the Dipo ritual, a girl who menstruates during the time of initiation is held in high esteem. It is seen as a good sign and indication of the absence of pregnancy (Steegstra 2004). Menstruation also signifies women’s reproductive abilities hence the continuation of lineages through childbirth. Besides, the taboos and restrictions associated with menstruation are declining or non-existent in most societies today. The feminine role of motherhood, Ortner mentions, such as staying home to care for children could also give her an advantage as she is responsible for the proper upbringing of both males and females in the society.

4.4.1 A note on nudity

In the discussion of female sexuality, exposure of the body is a major issue. One thing that has drawn attention to the Dipo custom as mentioned earlier is the exposure of initiates' breasts and thighs and has gingered calls for its modification or abolishment.

In almost all forms of initiation ceremonies, there is some form nudity for example, Ashanti nubility rite (Sarpong 1977), Chisungu ceremony (Richards 1982), and many of those mentioned by De Rachewiltz (1964). According to De Rachewiltz, nudity has different meanings for example, among the Khoe-Sans of Southern Africa, it is a part of fertility rite. Rain is believed to be brought during drought by some form of nudity by the Muslim women of Tsul and Ait Warain. He terms this "ritual nudity" (Ibid:103). However, among the Nandis, it had a negative implication; "that of punishment and incest" (Ibid:104). De Rachewiltz (1964:104) claims, at the time of writing, that complete nudity was still "a predominant feature of the tropical and sub-tropical zones". He attributes the steadily decline to the influence of religion (Islam and Christianity) and colonization but states that "Africans may be said to have gone to the other extreme" as the European clothes they now wear are not suitable to the tropical climate (Ibid:137). It can therefore be inferred that nudity was a way of adjusting to the warm tropical climate and not a form of indecency, it was basically, functional. In the Congolese Bwaka society for instance, covering of the breasts was a form of identification for prostitutes (Ibid). In the Dipo custom, the bodily exposure of initiates serve the function of identification. Accordint to an informant, "*it is one of the processes they have to go through, if they leave one out, it is incomplete. Just like a soldier man puts on uniform, this is what indicates that someone is going through the process.*"²⁴ Everyone who sees girls dressed in that manner knows they are under initiation and therefore "*untouchable*" so men do not go after them. This is in line with them being in a period of liminality. An informant put it this way,

"... when you are in town, people in the community when they see you they know that this boy or this girl is going through Dipo rite so nobody needs to touch you because when you touch that boy or girl you would be fined according to the rules and regulations of the community."

This 'fine' I was informed was the responsibility to bear the cost of a set of purification rituals. The 'touching' also denotes having sexual relations with an initiate which is not acceptable until initiation is over.

²⁴ Mr. Ghartey

De Rachewiltz (1964) further mentions that among the Ibo of Nigeria, only married women were clothed while unmarried girls wore beads on their hips. It was believed that an unmarried girl who was clothed was trying to conceal a pregnancy (Ibid). Similarly the bodily exposure of the Dipo initiates is also a means of determining pregnancy. The women are able, by looking at the exposed bodies of initiates, to tell if they are pregnant or not. It also serves to attract men. An informant explained that *“It is an exhibition, a kind of marketing, showing that you have a good in your house so people can come for it.”*²⁵ He further explained that men were moved by sight and so showing off the bodies of initiates attracted potential suitors. Another explanation given for this was that it signifies that the girls were virgins, untouched and had good figures since they had not given birth or previously had an abortion. They were matured enough to be given in marriage. It was thereby *“a form of marketing her so that men could come forward and marry her”* (Ibid.) Physical maturity and readiness for marriage is therefore stressed in their appearance during initiation.

Steegstra (2002:211) however states that the missionaries regarded the exposure of Dipo initiates as “evidence of the sensuality of ‘the Negro’ (*sic*).” One of them described the girls as being “almost naked but for the many glass beads and other jewellery they wore” and saw this as a contrast to their acclaimed chastity. The Krobos however had a different meaning for this – “if a girl who was not yet fully initiated covered herself, it was taken as a sign of her defilement” (Ibid:211). The controversy on the ‘nudity’ of Dipo initiates has existed from missionary times.

It is not uncommon to find women with their breasts exposed in Krobo homes. I noticed this during fieldwork and one elder I interviewed said *“We have seen the breasts of all the women in this house. It is nothing to hide”*. They however would not walk on the streets in this manner. Dipo initiates are easily identified because of the manner in which they appear. The issue of nudity is therefore relative and has a lot to do with the circumstances in which it occurs. It can be inferred that the bodily exposure of initiates is a form of ritual nudity as it is the requirement for the initiation. Thus, it can be argued that when exposure of the breasts occurs within the confines of the Dipo initiation, it is acceptable for that purpose. These days, initiates are allowed to cover their breasts except when they have to go through part of a ritual. This forms part of the changes the Dipo ceremony is encountering.

²⁵ Mr. O.K.

4.5 Change and continuity

As I have stated earlier, culture is not static but dynamic. This however does not imply that the dynamism of culture involves a complete transformation. It is merely aspects that are changed but the central aim and features always remain the same therefore accounting for their continuity. Feit (1994) describes a ceremony practiced by the Waswanipi Crees of Quebec called the Shaking Tent Ceremony. This ceremony served a number of purposes in the community such as linking the living with the dead, representing the world and gaining knowledge about hunting among others. He points out that, cultural practices have not been stopped as a result of Christianity and they have not “remained unchanged” either but the changes could be a form of variation instead of a “radical break from tradition” (Feit 1994:289). Feit further attributes this variation to factors such as missionization, environmental and social changes including a change in thought patterns of the younger generation of Crees. With this in mind and the experiences I gained from fieldwork, I would like to treat this issue of change and continuity with three major concepts in mind: modernity/modernization, missionization and power relations.

4.5.1 Modernization and modernity

This has been commonly attributed to the changes in tradition and a term I heard a lot during fieldwork. O'Brien (1999:23) in discussing Anthony Giddens' theory of modernity states that “Giddens contends that modernity is inherently transformational. Change is built in the social systems that make up a modern society.” A modern society is therefore open to change and continually undergoes a transformational process. It is this “*changing nature* of order” that Giddens uses to explain the differences between two societies – the traditional and the modern (Ibid:23).

In the traditional society, the individual, as a result of being bound to ‘place’ which may be the village or town dwelt in has very little access to events in distant places. As a result, “experience and awareness are always spatially situated and institutions are grounded in local customs and habits” (Ibid:23). The limited access to distant people and events keeps the individual tied to local events and situations with the outside world having no influence on local settings. What modernity does, however, is bring this world which was formally out of reach close to the traditional society through “global production, trade and media” (Ibid:23). Individuals in traditional societies are therefore “no longer bound by the habits and customs of place and their actions extend beyond any familiar territory they may occupy” (Ibid:23). “Global change and local action” are therefore interwoven (Ibid:23). This accounts for the

change we observe in local societies. The world is at the fingertips and with it come a myriad of other activities, habits and ideas that one could draw on thus impacting customs and beliefs.

A characteristic of modernity is its “plastic” nature (Ibid:24). This plasticity implies an endless transformation of habits and customs as a result of the acquisition of new information, knowledge and resources. This endless revision and transformation I presume is what adds to the dynamism of culture. It cannot remain static as it embraces the plasticity of the modern world. This is what my respondents understood by the term modernity and attributed it to the changes observed in Dipo.

Fägerlind and Saha (1989) in an attempt to explain modernization refer to a rationalization process indicating that the modern person is more rational in his thought thereby making him more susceptible to change. They do mention however, another form of rationalization that resists change in traditional societies. These societies are aware of the consequences the changes may have for them and their way of life. Their resistance therefore indicates their rationality as well. It is not only the modern person who is rational. The traditional person is also rational and that influences social systems. Fägerlind and Saha (1989:115) further state that “the “bearer of modernization” is inevitably the “modern” person, and thus a stranger to the traditional.” I do not agree with them on this. A person who embraces modernization does not necessarily have to be estranged from the traditional. It is a matter of choice. Estrangement from traditions is a decision made by the individual but we see modernization and tradition co-existing today. In modern African societies today, people still take active part in traditional customs and practices, festivals are observed and even used as tourist attractions. The Krobos living in urban areas who travel all the way to the hometowns for the Dipo initiation also demonstrate this. Modernization does not necessarily break a person’s ties to traditions and beliefs rather, it is now modern to be preoccupied with the traditional such as practices, stories and the like of former times.

The term modernization was used a lot by my informants when discussing the reasons for the change. This led me to inquire about what my informants meant by modernization. One of my respondents claimed

“It is all about the control of the mind - Culture from outside that comes from TV, radio etc that we use to mould our lives; things that make life easier and more efficient.” Another respondent shared this view when he said “Formal education brings along with it exposure to alien culture and traditions. The scientific marvels we enjoy – gadgets, TV, radio etc transmit new culture and new ideas. You can live in Ghana and still live like in Europe but in the villages it is different.”

Modernization is therefore a culture that comes from another society and is mainly transmitted through formal education, television, and other modern gadgets. This clearly confirms Fägerlind and Saha's (1989) perspectives and also Giddens theory of modernity discussed above. The emphasis of it being different in the villages implies that there is a lot more modernization in the urban areas while the rural areas are closer to traditional ways of life. An elderly informant told a very interesting story which further emphasizes this point:

*"In those days, there was no church in the land, it was brought by a white man called Zimmerman... The time he was coming to the mountain, Krobo man had not seen white man before. Those days, there was no car, if you are going anywhere, you have to walk. He was at Akwapim and saw the mountain. He was told that there were some people there so they gave him an escort to the mountain. The people stared at him when they saw him. When he was going to the mountain, he had in his possession, sugar, biscuits and children's clothes. He put the biscuit in his mouth and threw some to the children. The children tasted it and saw that it was sweet and so everywhere he went, the children followed him. This is the way the white man passed to get nearer to a Krobo man."*²⁶

This story illustrates the white man's first contact with the Krobos. It is a simple story of the Krobos contact with the West but it is worthy of note that he did not visit them empty-handed. He brought along with him some things they had never seen before like the biscuits. In the same manner, modernization brings along with it some things which are not only enjoyable but also make life easier. Along with this white man also came a new religion – Christianity. It was Zimmerman's main aim to establish a church in the land. His entrance into the community however introduced a new culture which was formerly alien to the Krobos. Now the Krobos live in modern Ghana with all that comes along with it and this has strongly impacted the Dipo custom.

Fägerlind and Saha (1989) further discuss modernization agents namely education, media and exposure to modern institutions with education being the most powerful agent of modernization. They attribute this to the "hidden curriculum" of school implying that it is inclined to western thought (Ibid:107). They claim that "Education broadens perspectives and mental horizons, it instills new values and beliefs supportive of modernization programs and goals..." (Ibid:110). It is therefore the agenda of western education to make its students fit into the modern world in which they find themselves. They however bring out, using Koranic schools as an example, how education could be used as a means to instill traditional beliefs and practices. Nukunya (2003:134) similarly notes how formal education is tilted to the European system of thought because of the "foreign content of the school syllabus".

²⁶ Translated from Krobo by my field assistant, Felix.

Traditional culture was therefore “not only absent from the school curriculum but concerted attempts were made to prevent the pupils from following it” (Ibid:134). This implies that recipients of formal education would have little or no knowledge of traditional culture. Majority of the initiates are in Junior or Senior Secondary School where they do learn about Ghanaian culture but this is not detailed. This form of education was however introduced by the missionaries which brings us to a discussion of missionary influence.

4.5.2 Missionization

The early missionaries brought the Christian religion to Africa. At the time, African societies had their own forms of religious beliefs and practices now termed African Traditional Religion as earlier mentioned. It was under this religion that traditional customs and rituals were performed. The missionaries were opposed to this and Nukunya (2003:122) states that “the missionaries opposed not only religious practices but also anything traditional or African and considered them pagan.” In light of this, all Christian converts abstained from traditional customs. The consequences being that “Christianity was also destroying African culture... it contributed to the further alienation of the Christians from their traditional values” (Ibid:123). As people embraced the Christian religion, they ceased to appreciate traditional values and culture. Narrowing this down to the Krobos, it has been noted that the Basel missionaries had a very strong influence on them. According to Steegstra (2002), the first contact was in 1836 and they regarded the Dipo custom as “a mighty obstacle to the gospel” because the initiates did not attend school due to the long seclusion and so could not be converted (Ibid:213). The school was used not only to educate them formally, but also as a means of instilling the Christian faith.

As mentioned earlier, this missionary influence led to the ban of the Dipo custom. Though it was still practiced secretly, some changes came about as a result. For instance, it was performed in a few weeks instead of the long seclusion on the mountain. Girls were also initiated at a much younger age to cope with traditional demands and Christianity at the same time” (Ibid:222). These changes were however not without some negative effects. It was believed to have encouraged the girls to engage in sexual activities at an early age and was also difficult to differentiate between initiated and non-initiated girls in a bid to ensure decent dressing (Steegstra 2002).

To further emphasize how strong the Christianity discourse and the Dipo practice is, Teyegaga (1985) recounts that *Nana Kloweki*, just before she vanished, had a vision in which she saw the sign of the cross depicting the new light in Krobo and a symbol of purification.

He contrasts Dipo practiced in the time of *Nana Kloweki* as “a puberty rite and as an ancient training for home management and for marriage. It was in simple terms a custom for outdoorizing matured girls for marriage” whereas the Dipo custom of today has been “enshrined into paganism” (Ibid:45). He mentions the invoking of ancestral gods and spirits, calling of initiates’ souls as some of the signs of paganism and explicitly states that “Dipo is an ancient traditional institution for puberty rite and training for marriage. It belongs to the traditional community. It does not belong to the Christian community” (Ibid:49).

In his comparison of Dipo in the time of *Nana Kloweki* and that of today, he appears to indicate that it is the practice of today that is fetish but his above statement shows that he does not approve either of them, his reason being that it has nothing to do with Christianity. I encountered similar views from people I spoke to. The missionaries did not meet Nana Kloweki but they regarded the form of Dipo they met even those times as fetish. It is evident that even if Dipo today was practiced just as it was in the time of *Nana Kloweki*, and was not pagan, Christians would still not have anything to do with it.

Christianity, however, does not stop the Krobos from practicing Dipo. They initiate their daughters early so they can still be baptized in the church. This is mainly because of what Dipo meant (and still means) to them, “... for the Krobo the general significance of *dipo* was linked to the centrality of women to the reproduction of a Krobo cultural and social base. The costs of converting were too high for them if they had to give up *dipo*” (Steegstra 2002:223). Also, “*Dipo* was linked to kingship ties, reproductive health, and the integrative aspect of the rituals that culturally constructed Krobo identity” (Ibid:223). As a result of this understanding of Dipo, “although the vast majority of Krobo as individuals are Christians today, there were no ready substitutes for *dipo* as a symbol of overall communal identity” (Ibid:223). It was also this female initiation that allowed the admittance of people from other tribes into the Krobo society (Ibid). Christianity does not encourage Dipo and has confirmation as a ‘rite of passage’ for its youth but it still does not give the Krobos, a ready substitute to express their identity hence, the practice continues.

On the other hand, I learnt that the Islamic faith does not condemn the practice. I encountered some Muslims who were initiating their daughters. It was easy to identify them by their dressing. The religious discourse concerning Dipo therefore mainly has to do with Christianity.

4.5.3 Power relations

This issue is a theme that obviously runs through with respect to the change and continuity of the custom. The initiation brings out the important roles of certain people in the Krobo community including religious and political leaders and family members. As captured earlier, it is the father's responsibility to get his daughter initiated. The words pronounced before the slaughtering of the goat clearly illustrates this; "Ei! Tettey's daughter has reached her maturity. We are performing the Dipo rituals for her today. This is therefore the goat which the father presents to her and through which he dedicates her as a Krobo woman..." (Teyegaga 1985:27). This father's role here is of prominence since it is a patrilineal society.

The priestly influence in the Dipo ceremony cannot be undermined. They are in charge of traditional religious and cultural activities of the Krobos, Dipo inclusive. They are responsible for organizing the custom. The priestess, Nana Kloweki initiated it and priests today are still in charge of it. After expulsion from the mountain, the priests did not lose their power but had more influence on the people. The council of priests, *Djemeli*, until the mid-nineteenth century headed the Krobo society and had not only religious but political functions as well. The priests and priestesses are also responsible for the ritual duties during girls initiation (Steggstra 2009).

Teyegaga (1985:29) attributes the changes in the custom, for instance the duration to the "pagan priesthood" and holds them responsible for neglecting and corrupting the teachings of Nana Kloweki and moral issues of the customs. He attributes the change of focus of Dipo, from domestic training for marriage to religion, to the priests. He also claims that they have added to the "simple original form of the Dipo custom which was a house-craft institution and outdoor training at puberty age" (Ibid:33). This shows how much influence the priests exert on the Krobo society through the Dipo custom. The custom is also held in their homes and they determine the timing for the commencement of the rite.

Another group of people who exert an influence in the Dipo custom are the Queen mothers. According to (Steggstra 2009:108), they "represent and mobilize women" (Ibid:114). In Many Krobo, where this study was conducted, they have a resource centre where they conduct workshops and also produce beads. Those I met and interviewed claimed they had been initiated and would not have been Queen mothers otherwise. They explained to me the role they play in making some changes to the custom for instance, they advocated that the girls be covered more often during initiation so as not to attract men. They also advised that clean water be used for the ritual bath to prevent illness and encouraged the initiates to return to school or get some apprenticeship training after initiation instead of engaging in sexual

relations resulting in teenage pregnancy. They had also organized a workshop for the initiates the previous year in cooperation with a non-governmental organization in which they were taught batik and tie/dye production, personal hygiene and sex education among others. The workshop was held prior to initiation. The custom therefore serves as means for these people to exert their power and they also influence the changes that can be made to the custom.

A group of people who need to be highlighted is the audience of the custom. They include women who do the singing and cooking, people who do the carrying, those who sell ritual items at the Dipo house and those who are simply spectators (who may not be Krobos). They, along with those who exert some form of power as mentioned above all play an important role in portraying a very vital aspect of the Krobo ethnic identity.

CHAPTER FIVE

Dipo: an ethnic emblem

“As members of society most of us only see what we expect to see, and what we expect to see is what we are conditioned to see when we have learned the definitions and classifications of our culture.

Victor Turner, 2009[1969]

Rituals generally serve as a form of identity management. The fact that they change does not imply that tradition is lost. They are still practiced to keep up an identity. People may express their beliefs and sense of place through their practices. It is basically ideas of ‘who we are’, ‘what we do’, ‘where we are from’ that are depicted in customs and traditions. Every year, several hundreds of girls are initiated in the Krobo towns irrespective of the fact that some people choose to refrain from the practice. All that the custom portrays – beliefs, belongingness among others serve the ultimate aim of depicting the Krobo ethnic identity.

5.1 To initiate or not to initiate - that is the question

I continuously encountered two main categories of informants - those who were highly in favour of the practice and those who were not. This led me to inquire about the reasons behind their stance.

5.1.1 Christianity

Many of my informants who were not in favour of Dipo claimed they were Christians. Some girls in my focus group discussion, who were Krobos pointed out that they had not been initiated because they were Christians. Others claimed that they were related to reverend ministers and so even their grandmothers were not initiated. These respondents regarded Dipo as a fetish custom because it is held in the confines of traditional religion which involved ancestral worship, pouring of libation and shrines. These things are contrary to the Christian faith so they are not encouraged. Calling of the souls of initiates is also contrary to Christian

beliefs. The bodily exposure of initiates was also strongly condemned by these informants. One of them put it this way, “*God said our body is the temple of God and you don’t have to show it like that.*” These informants claimed they would not encourage anyone to get initiated and would not initiate their daughters. It is with the aim of discouraging Christians from being associated with Dipo that the late Rev. B. D. Teyegaga wrote his book on Dipo.

However, informants in favour of the practice always emphasized the point that despite Christians’ open condemnation of the custom, they secretly initiated their daughters. While observing at Whekper, a conversation between a group of women was interpreted to me by my field assistant. A woman was saying that the pastors who told people to abstain from Dipo were only deceiving them because they also initiated their daughters. This aroused laughter from her listeners. The priests at Whekper and Kodjonya also stressed this fact. An elderly informant further mentioned that by discouraging the practice, the churches were “*spoiling their girls*” and the pastors who discouraged it ended up marrying women who had been initiated.

Christians are however aware of this counter argument and also attested to this fact. One of the members of the focus group, held with a church’s youth group, strongly encouraged Christians to desist from the practice as it was contrary to the faith and made void their open rebuke of Dipo.

5.1.2 Modernization

As discussed above, this was mentioned a lot by informants. Some felt that the Dipo custom was not suitable for the modern Ghanaian society. An informant, who was from another tribe and had come to witness the ceremony, was of the view that if the Krobo towns became cities, Dipo would eventually die out. It mainly continued because it was held in these areas. Others claimed it was an effective institution in the absence of formal education but now with the introduction of formal education, it was no longer necessary. The aim of vocational training in the Dipo custom no longer existed and as such, it had lost its significance.

Formal education also contributes to a change in thought patterns of the younger generations of Krobos which is line with Feit (1994) in reference to the Shaking Tent Ceremony. It is commonly believed that a girl cannot have a successful marriage if she was not initiated. She also would never be accepted in the family home and would not prosper in life as a result. My informants who were uninitiated Krobo girls in a Senior High School however did not believe in these. Their usual responses were “*I don’t believe it*” and “*It is not true*”. With regards to not being able to visit the family home, one quickly said “*I’ve been*

coming home, they don't even say anything.” On the other hand one said she visited her mother’s hometown instead (her mother was not a Krobo). Another was of the view that it may have been the case in the past but now in modern Ghana, it was not an issue. These girls also claimed that they would not marry Krobos because of the Dipo custom and would definitely not have their daughters initiated. On the other hand, they did mention that some of the knowledge they had about the custom was gained at school because it is taught in some of the disciplines. This is an indication that formal education though tuned to Western ideology does not leave students ignorant on traditional customs and practices. The knowledge gained however, is not enough motivation for engaging in the practices.

5.1.3 “Nudity, a potent form of expression in Africa”

The ritual requirement of initiates to expose their breasts is one reason why people shun from the practice. My non-initiated informants saw this as a very big problem. They did not see why they had to expose their breasts simply in the name of culture and saw it as inappropriate even as a form of marketing. *“Must a man see my nakedness before he marries me?”* one asked. In response, her colleague said *“He sees you but he doesn't touch you”*. These are the two opposing views about this issue. While some see it as old-fashioned and unnecessary, others see nothing wrong with it. Most of my male informants were of this view. They claimed that the girls are not completely naked and wore a lot of beads. There was nothing wrong with it since it was part of exposing the girl to the outside world so she could attract suitors. It was a way of showing off a girl’s beauty and her nice figure and so was not a problem since everyone is proud of their beauty and would like to show it off. Most of the initiates claimed it was not a problem for them as every girl being initiated was also exposed. They also said it was the demand of the custom and so there was nothing they could do about it. Besides, it was for a short period of time and they would never have to dress like that again. Their predecessors (mothers and grandmothers) had also been through such a process so it was nothing new. They readily accepted this because it was a requirement of the ritual and has been since time immemorial. They were not pioneering the bodily exposure but simply conforming to the rule that had already been set.

One male informant said *“Nudity is a potent form of expression in Africa”* and stressed the fact that until the 1920’s most people went around naked and it was not a problem. It was this informant who referred me to Boris de Rachewiltz (1964). The Queen mothers I interviewed however advocated for the girls to be covered since it was rather attracting men and was now a form of temptation. A counter argument from some informants

in this regard was the fact that rape was not an issue even though the girls were exposed. This is in line with the awareness that girls under initiation were not to be touched. The point made about the bodily exposure serving as an attraction to men was probably in reference to post-initiation. The men could be incensed to go after the girls when initiation was over which was something to be discouraged since the girls were still young and had to go back to school.

5.1.4 “This is our culture”

People who were in favour of Dipo mainly encouraged it because “*it is culture*”. They constantly referred to it as being a part of tradition and as such, something which cannot be done away with. Initiates said they were going through the custom because it was part of their culture and they did not go through it alone. The feeling of togetherness, or better still, *communitas*, made it easier for them to go through initiation. It was believed that they would not have good marriages otherwise. Should they even get married, their marriages would not last. Their future husbands would not marry them if they were not initiated. Some said they would have been driven out of their homes if they had refused initiation. Those who lived outside the Krobo towns claimed they would not be accepted in the family home if they were not initiated. Dipo was a tradition that had to be continued. The male initiate claimed that he would prefer to marry a girl who had been initiated because people would make negative comments otherwise. A former initiate mentioned that her father had threatened not to cater for her if she did not get initiated. This stresses the importance of the custom to Krobos and how this is instilled in children at all cost.

Older respondents pointed out the fact that a Krobo woman who had not been initiated could not be married to a chief or any prominent person in the Krobo society. No woman would be regarded a true and ideal Krobo woman if she had not been through the Dipo custom. They could also not assume positions such as that of a Queen mother. An exception to this rule is the Paramount Queen mother mentioned in chapter four. A woman who was initiating her daughters at Kodjonya, mentioned that the other tribes were of the view that the Krobos did not have a culture but “*We have a culture... this is our culture.*” She also saw nothing fetish about the practice. Everything done was simply a part of culture. She further stressed that the non-performance of Dipo was a taboo. This shows a strong sense of identity and cultural pride. It accounts for the continuity of the practice and indicates that it serves as an ethnic emblem.

5.1.5 Other dimensions of Dipo

Dipo serves as a means of family unification. It is a ceremony which involves a family gathering to celebrate girls who have now become ideal Krobo women - an expression of a family's pride. Family members bringing their beads and cloths to dress up the initiate also serve to reaffirm the sense of belonging and the initiate's ethnic identity. One parent was overjoyed during the outdoor ceremony and was lost for words to express how she felt. She was extremely joyful because her daughter had made the family proud because there were cases when girls ran away from the custom. Also, a girl who did not successfully go through the initiation brought shame to her family. According to Huber (1963), it was also a way of reaffirming kinship ties among extended family members.

Apart from serving as a family reunion, it also has an economic significance. The sale of items used for the custom such as the loin cloths are in their peak during the Dipo season. Bead-makers also benefit from this as it promotes the sale of their products. The priests also enjoy economic benefits during this season as money is paid for initiating the girls and keeping of their hair as previously highlighted. Whether people choose to initiate their daughters or not, the fact still remains that the Dipo custom is one of the means by which the Krobo culture is strongly expressed.

5.2 'Commoditization' of Dipo

Along with the development of a modern Ghanaian society comes the industry of tourism. As mentioned in chapter two, Ghana is a popular tourist destination and the Dipo custom has been captured in diverse ways within and outside the country. One of those ways is in the area of tourism. Steegstra (2002) mentions that her first encounter with Dipo was when she saw a picture of initiates in a brochure by the Ghana Tourist Board. It is also listed as a festival on the cultural calendar²⁷. Olsen (2003:5) with reference to the Sami, states that "tourism depends highly on easily recognizable visual images" and Dipo is definitely rich in visual images. He further mentions that the ethnic has become an item of consumption in various spheres including tourism. In light of this, it is possible for the custom to be packaged and presented in the tourist market not just in exchange for monetary gains but to show how strongly attached Krobos are to this custom and how it helps define their identity and reinforce their sense of belonging. As such, the Dipo could become a 'commodity'.

²⁷ National Commission on Culture: <http://www.ghanaculture.gov.gh/index1.php?linkid=280>

Kopytoff (1986:64) gives a simple definition of commodity to mean “an item with use value that also has exchange value.” He also claims that commodities require a cultural marking as being “a certain kind of thing” (Ibid:64). A commodity therefore has to be something that is culturally defined as an item that could be given away in exchange for some use. The item is valued for what it is, yet should an opportunity demand its exchange, it should still be found worthy of that exchange. An object is thus commoditized because of its intrinsic value and ability to provide some gratification. I saw a woman in a t-shirt with the very bold inscription “Dipo Fest” on it while on the field (see appendix 2, picture 25). She told me it was given out the previous year by the elders in the community but there was no such production of t-shirts that year. I was informed during fieldwork that a number of tourists come to witness the event every year. They are warmly received and allowed to take pictures but are not charged anything. These go to show how the ceremony meets the tourist eye.

I met three women – two Dutch and one German who came on the Sunday to witness the climax of the ceremony – the visit to the stone. The two Dutch women had mixed feelings about the custom. One was witnessing it for the first time, just like the German woman, and did not have much to say about it. She also had little understanding of what was going on. The other was witnessing it for the second time. She claimed she was not well received the first time and had to make frantic efforts to catch a glimpse of the activities. She was of the view that the girls looked very sad and did not have to go about with their breasts exposed. Both of them said they wept while witnessing the event and would not encourage others to observe it. They would also not like to witness Dipo again – they would rather go to the beach. They did mention however, that an explanation of what was going on and the essence of the practice would help them appreciate it better. Despite these views, Dipo still attracts a lot of people, from within and outside Ghana, to the Krobo towns and villages every year.

The initiates themselves could also be commoditized – not in the sense of being sold out or exposed for the tribes’ economic gain but rather as suitable women for procreation. The ancestors are highly valued in African societies and Kroboland is definitely not an exception. The girls who have met the approval of the ancestors by being successfully initiated are encouraged to have many children to ensure the continuity of the tribe. They therefore become highly valued ‘commodities’ as prospective wives and mothers for strengthening of kinship ties as addressed above.

5.3 Krobo Beads - “Bead is to the Krobos as gold is to the Ashantis”

Another factor that has to be noted in the performance of the Dipo custom is the beads. As mentioned earlier, the Krobos are well known for the production and use of beads. People in prominent positions such as Chiefs and Queen mothers adorn themselves with a lot of beads when attending functions. I once attended a wedding in Accra where the groom wore neck beads with his suit and people easily identified him as a Krobo. Wilson (2003:3) highlights the importance of beads in the Dipo custom stating that it is the “most well known bead-wearing occasion of any ethnic group in Ghana.” The ceremony therefore also becomes significant in the sense that it provides an opportunity for girls to really dress up and adorn themselves in a mass of beads thereby showing off their family’s wealth. Beidelman (1997:171) also notes this in relation to the Kagurus and states that “in general, one could say that for girls their one big chance to indulge freely in adornment and frivolously seductive apparel is just after they emerge from initiation”. No other time in the life of a Krobo girl can she be extensively dressed in beads, not even during her marriage ceremony. Dipo therefore provides a once-in-a-life time opportunity for a limitless adornment of beads which also have symbolic meanings.

In Wilson (2003), it is stated that bauxite beads are worn by pregnant women for protection, yellow eye beads generate envy while white beads are mainly used in childbirth, after recovery from an illness and a time of mourning. It denotes victory. Black, brown or red beads give off the message that one is in mourning. Waist beads on the other hand, serve a different purpose; they “differentiate between men and women, and to give shape to the body from the hips down. They also make a difference for sex, as waist beads arouse a man... beads around the leg, under the knee, also give shape” (Ibid:73). This also accounts for the amount of beads placed on the waist of initiates during the initiation. It serves to emphasize feminine curves the essence of which also stems from the theme of fertility.

According to one of my informants who happened to be a bead maker, beads were used in the past, to buy people during the slave trade. A knot of bead could cost GHc100 (about US\$110). The amount of such knots on a strand of bead therefore showed the wealth of a person. People adorned themselves with very expensive beads to show their position in the society. White beads depicted purity and the yellow beads wealth. However, even though the colours of beads carry meanings, it is now commonly used to match outfits rather than to give off the meanings attached to them.

Another respondent emphasized the fact that Kroboland cherishes beads. It is their jewellery and “*beads is to the Krobos as gold is to the Ashantis*”. Expensive beads are

therefore used to dress the girl to show that she is humble and submissive and also from a rich home. All the family members therefore bring their beads to honour her. The elaborateness of an initiate's outdoor regalia therefore gave indication of how humble and respectful she was. Not much attention would be paid to a disrespectful girl. Beads therefore play a very significant role in the Dipo custom. While observing the custom at Whekper, I noticed two initiates who wore a necklace of white string with the pendant being a clay mould (see appendix 2, picture 24). When I inquired about this, I was informed that their fathers were bead-makers and this had to be depicted in their initiation.

During the dressing for the outdoor, there is a sheer display of beads – not merely for dressing initiates but they are spread out in little baskets to show them off. When I witnessed Paulina's outdoor ceremony, one of the women in her family made a comment that the items on display (the beads and cloths) have not been borrowed but were the family's possessions. I had previously learnt that some people hired out beads during the Dipo custom and so some girls wore these hired beads which are later returned. This family therefore wanted to emphasize that none of the items had been hired. In Wilson (2003), a bead-maker stated that his family, for many generations, has provided beads for the Dipo custom. It is not clear if he meant they were hired or sold (or both) but the fact remains that the use of beads in the custom contributes to its continuity.

5.4 Dipo – an ethnic insignia

If there was one factor that my informants both Krobos and non-Krobo continuously emphasized, it was the fact that Dipo served as an ethnic emblem for the Krobo. It is also a platform in which a birds-eye view of traditional Krobo life was given.

5.4.1 A return to tradition – Sankofa

The manner in which Dipo is performed is meant to reflect how life used to be before the entrance of modernity – the very traditional way of life. The Akan word *Sankofa* literally means 'Go back and take it'. It is a plea to return back to the past and take up the good morals and values that existed then.

During initiation, the girls are not allowed to drink tap water, only well water is allowed. The food restriction is meant to prevent them from eating any food that is not typically Krobo, hence, the *fufu* which is made only with *plantain*, the water yam and millet. A bamboo cup is used for libation and to serve schnapps to visitors. Mortars cut out of tree

trunks are used to pound the *fufu*. A palm frond is used as a broom for sweeping the Dipo house. All these items can hardly be found in homes today. Food served initiates is placed on the ground and they squat around it to eat. This, I learnt was the form in which they ate prior to the use of tables. Also, no foreign language is allowed in the Dipo house. This was strictly ensured in the past but it is no longer the case. The organizers however observe this. One morning, the priests showed my field assistant and I a certain clay pot and explained that it was used to store palm wine in the past when there were no bottles. This return to tradition also influences the initiates and organizers being bare footed all the time and also why shoes are not allowed in the Dipo house. With regards to gendered roles and responsibilities emphasized through Dipo, it is no longer the case that these responsibilities are strictly feminine inclined. Men now take part in home management and the performance of household duties. A reflection of this in the Dipo custom serves as a reminder of the times when such duties were strictly a reserve of women.

Dipo therefore depicts an old way of life and institution which the Krobos do not want to lose. Taking the origin of the custom in retrospect, it can be inferred that the Krobos make use of history and tradition to construct their ethnic identity.

5.4.2 Krobo ethnic markers

An elderly informant made mention of three things which can be called the Krobo ethnic markers. They are Dipo, circumcision and language. All Krobo girls are expected to go through the Dipo custom at some point in their lives, Krobo men on the other hand are expected to be circumcised. With regards to language, the informant said

“The white man has his own language, the Akans and so on. If you learn another language, you have only learnt it but you are not a part of it so you learn a language – your native language from your parents. One might learn the language but if she has not gone through the custom, she is not regarded as a Krobo”.

The initiation ceremony was therefore a more potent ethnic marker than the Krobo language. This explains it being the criteria for admitting strangers to Kroboland as earlier mentioned. For a woman, the main indication of her being a true Krobo is mainly in the performance of Dipo and not necessarily her ability to speak Krobo.

The rationale of making true Krobo women out of the girls runs throughout the performance of the custom. The teaching of gendered roles and responsibilities as discussed above, the slaughtering of the goat, grinding of the millet, adornment with beads, and visit to the shrine are all meant to signify that the girl is being made a pure or ideal Krobo woman.

Informants constantly made mention of the fact that no woman can be regarded as a true Krobo woman if she has not been initiated. The initiation therefore ascribes this important status on the female members of the society. As ideal Krobo women, they become worthy of Krobo men and prominent positions in the society. They thereby reproduce also, the Krobo people as distinct and in contrast to other people.

5.4.3 “A priceless heritage”

“We cannot throw away culture. Dipo can be modified till its purity is lost but it would still be practiced. It is a priceless heritage being protected. It is an ethnic hallmark. The completion of Dipo is a show of racial or ethnic pride” (Mr. Bediako).

These are the words of an informant who was not a Krobo. There is no doubt that the Krobos are identified with the practice of Dipo. Any girl who attests to the fact that she is from Kroboland would immediately be asked if she has been initiated even by people from other tribes in Ghana. Despite the critique and calls for its abolishment, it is widely acknowledged that the practice has withstood the test of time and would not cease any time soon. Several girls – thousands, are initiated every year. They are brought from all over, within and outside the country thus ensuring its continuity.

While some informants from other tribes were of the view that the Krobos still practiced Dipo because it was their culture and a part of tradition, others were of the opinion that it would eventually fade away. An informant who was not a Krobo stated that it was mainly the indigenous people²⁸ who adhered to it but people who lived in the cities did not come home. To buttress this point, she made mention of a Krobo man who lived in Accra²⁹, never visits Kroboland and has not initiated his daughters because he believes it is fetish. Some Christians, even Krobos were also of the view that the Christian confirmation was a substitute for Dipo and if the church inculcated the ideology of Dipo into it, the practice would eventually fade out. Others also believed that it was mostly people who were not formally educated who still believed in the things associated with Dipo. They however did not doubt how much the practice is cherished by the Krobos. This may be their viewpoints but the Krobos prove otherwise. Those who initiate their daughters do so irrespective of Christianity, education and the fact that they lived in a modern society. They clearly demonstrate this when they bring their daughters from the cities for initiation and initiate some of them at a very young age because they wish to have them baptized. It is an understanding of what the

²⁸ By this, she meant the locals, people who lived in the Krobo towns and villages

²⁹ The capital city of Ghana

practice means to them that makes the difference – it their culture and the means by which they are identified as Krobos.

Some non-Krobo informants despite pointing out that initiating girls at a very young age makes Dipo lose its significance, were also of the opinion that it is culture and should not be done away with. One of them pointed out that *“You have to be culturally resilient. You can enjoy modern things but it should not take undue advantage of who you are.”* Another also passionately expressed how Africans lose their identity because of Christianity, education, democracy and generally, the adoption of *“alien”* cultures. *“We cannot call ourselves Europeans, yet we do not want to stick to our African culture – who we are”*. He felt the need to recognize identity through culture and accept the rational behind cultural practices. He further stated that people who insisted on morals of the past were rather regarded as outmoded and stressed that *“Europeans set their standards and we live by them. Missionaries started the transformation and it has been followed by modern gadgets.”* These informants recognized the role Dipo played in establishing Krobo ethnic identity – who they were and what they valued. They were advocates of *sankofa* – a return to tradition.

For the Krobos themselves, Dipo is something which will never come to an end. The women in one of the focus group discussions were very much convinced that Dipo would never die out in Kroboland. It is possible that the days may be reduced further but even if it had to be performed within a day, it would still be observed. The initiates were also of the view that Dipo can never end else, it would have a long time ago. One elder pointed out that Christianity has been very vigorous in decrying the Krobo custom but,

“practices that don’t have any root soon die away but when people hold on to cultural... affinities, then you must know that there is something they cherish within these cultures. Cultures die hard, you don’t just, because somebody says so, deny your child a cultural value.”

He also stressed that Dipo has not been uprooted despite the advent of Christianity and Western education. All over Ghana, communities were identified by their cultural practices and he was sad that the Krobo Dipo is a target of modernity and Christianity. Another elder also mentioned that *“if a woman has not done it and gets pregnant, she becomes a living dead. That is how they see you – a living dead.”* This is a strong statement showing how strongly attached Krobos are to the custom. It is not just linked with identity but life itself. This informant further pointed out that Dipo and the other ethnic markers earlier mentioned were used as the foundation of the town and so it should not be done away with.

These all go to show why Dipo still exists among the Krobos. It is not just a practice that has to be observed merely for its sake. It has a lot to do with a woman taking her place in the community which happens to be a patrilineal society. It also has a lot to do with identity – a definition of who the Krobos are and what they value. The silences associated with the practice as discussed in chapter four are also linked to this identity. A priest stressed this fact when he said “*we do not reveal everything - that makes us Krobos*”. This is might also account for the reason why no explanation of the ritual is given to tourists. It may be not be possible to fully interpret the custom and get meanings into everything that pertains to it but even the hidden meanings serve to preserve Krobo identity. They continue to be a mystery and subjects of interest. Dipo therefore remains “a priceless heritage” which the Krobos are not ready to let go. Its future is by no means bleak.

CHAPTER SIX

Summary and conclusion

Cultures are made of continuities and changes, and the identity of a society can survive through these changes. Societies without change aren't authentic; they're just dead.

Kwame Anthony Appiah, 2006

I have attempted to give some insight into a society and a custom that has many twists to it. I did start by saying that culture is not static but dynamic and as the discussions in the previous chapters have shown, though change appears inevitable in the Dipo custom, it still gives off a very strong message, perhaps the strongest message of Krobo ethnic identity.

6.1 The ideal Krobo woman

The Krobos may not be a dominant group in Ghana but they make a strong statement with their cultural practice of Dipo. The rationale behind the cultural activity of Dipo is said to address a particular issue concerning them. This was the desire to bring the girl-child to the forefront, to make her a priceless object of admiration in a patrilineal society and that has been the case ever since. Some form of training was required in achieving this goal, hence the long period of seclusion. This training was given based on the understanding of the roles and responsibilities of women and the definition of an ideal Krobo woman. It is therefore through this form of education that the idea of a Krobo woman was constructed. Older female informants mentioned how this training sharpened their house-keeping skills and how invaluable the knowledge gained was in their marriage.

This value in endowing the Krobo girl with vocational skills, which was in the confines of informal education, is now depicted in the Krobo value for formal education. All initiates claimed they would not like to be married after initiation but would like to finish

school and get a carrier first. Parents also admitted that they would not permit their daughters to marry until they were through with schooling. The Queen mothers likewise encourage girls to go back to school after initiation. This is an expression of how formal education, specifically, girl-child education has become of high value in the Krobo society. It is therefore not surprising that the major Senior High School in the community is for girls. This value of educating girls was also expressed in the past when the girls were informally trained during the period of seclusion. It was in this form the discipline of Domestic Science was taught. It appears that the Krobos identify all it takes to bring girls into the limelight and take advantage of it. When schools were first established in Kroboland, it was mainly the boys who were sent to school while the girls were kept away mainly because of the Dipo custom. The situation is now different as Dipo has been adjusted to enable girls take advantage of formal education just like their male counterparts. There seems to be a strong value in educating girls.

In achieving the objective of educating girls however, Dipo became more than a means to an end. It increasingly became a thing of value, something to be cherished and carried out at all costs. It is now readily associated with them and serves as a strengthening of the sense of who they are and what they value. To emphasize this point, an informant, who happened to be from another tribe, referred to Dipo as “*an ethnic hallmark*” which the Krobos readily confirmed by the responses they gave about its continuity. What is worthy of note is why the Krobos would need an ethnic emblem and such a prominent one at that. A possible explanation for this could be due to the early tribal conflicts with their neighbouring Akans (Huber 1963; Steegstra 2004). Such conflicts probably encouraged the Krobos to distinguish themselves from their neighbours especially as it was used as a criteria to admit female foreigners into the tribe (Steedstra 2002). This is similar to Beidelman’s (1997) experience with the Kagurus who stressed that rites of initiation contributed to the maintenance of their tradition and therefore ethnicity. This is particularly emphasized when activities in the Dipo custom are meant to illustrate typical traditional Krobo way of life.

The performance of Dipo even in secret during its ban, as mentioned in chapter four, is an expression of the value it holds for the Krobos and hence, the vacuum created in its absence. How would they define their women outside of Dipo? The beliefs associated with Dipo such as not being able to marry or maintain a good marriage, not being accepted in the family home, not prospering in life and the like are strong motivations for people to engage in the practice. While other issues concerning the practice such as the bodily exposure of initiates is a major cause of concern and sometimes a hindrance to those who may participate, it serves symbolic purposes as discussed in the previous chapter. Beidelman (1997:251)

informs that “the body provides a powerful and ready tool for introducing imaginative thought. It is both an object of cultural attention and a means of cultural communication.” The main message the bodily exposure of Dipo initiates was intended to give is that of beauty, physical maturity and readiness for reproduction. Though the initiates are much younger now and not ready for marriage, the theme of beauty still holds. Informants readily pointed out that “*Krobo women are beautiful women*”. This notwithstanding, there is an increasing attempt to encourage the girls to cover up a lot more during initiation.

Though the main purpose of the Dipo initiation is the successful passage of initiates into adulthood, the majority are still young and nowhere near adulthood. Adjaye (1999:25) describes them as being at a “dangerous crossroad” because the “contradictions of youthhood have not been resolved and nor has the state of adulthood been fully attained. True as this may be, I would like to point out that the entrance to adulthood is merely symbolical. They are dressed as Krobo women and celebrated as such, yet when the initiation is over, it is acknowledged that they are still children for whom parents still have a responsibility for. This accounts for parents’ admitting that they would not permit their daughters to marry simply because they have been initiated. The initiation therefore becomes simply symbolic of their entrance into adulthood and a projection into their future roles as Krobo women when they finally come of age. This purpose of making girls into women also accounts for its continuity as Adjaye (1999:9) rightly acknowledges “Dipo initiation rituals are complex cultural performances, compelling and evocative. Their perpetuation rests on the conviction that they transform girls into women.”

6.2 “Grandpa, can I come home now?”³⁰

This was a question an initiate asked her maternal grandfather after her initiation, just before leaving for the city. She had been previously told that she would not be allowed in the family home if she was not initiated. It was claimed that they were part of the royal family and so had to observe the practice at all costs. Her grandfather responded in the affirmative and even encouraged her to come home with her husband in the future. It is this desire to ‘come home’ that draws people to the custom. It is common to hear people in Ghana say that ‘nobody comes from Accra’ implying that everyone has a hometown or a village where they hail from.

³⁰ Translated for me by my interpreter

People may thus dwell in cities but should acknowledge their roots. This sense of place encourages people to adhere to the customary requirements of the land.

Along with this sense of place come communal values and the idea of mutual existence. The extended family system may be giving way to the nuclear family but its potency has not waned. Its importance becomes even more crucial in events such as marriage, birth and funerals. Based on this background, it is difficult for people to detach themselves from their local communities. As such, no matter where they are, they comply with the requirements of the society. It is this sense of belonging that motivates Krobos to come from all over and get their daughters initiated. Some women married to men of other tribes even initiate their daughters without the knowledge of their husbands in cases where they are opposed to the custom. It is simply because they want them to have a place in their family home.

There are some Krobos who however exhibit a different sense of belonging. These are Krobos who have a parent from another tribe for example, the informant who claimed that she goes to her mother's hometown instead of Kroboland. She was only there at the time of my fieldwork because she was in the Senior High School located there. Her mother was from another tribe and she preferred to regard her mother's town as home instead of going through initiation so she could be accepted in Kroboland. There are a number of Krobos who have chosen to form niches elsewhere rather than partake in the Dipo custom and be accepted in the family home. They do regard themselves as Krobos but for them, being a Krobo has nothing to do with Dipo. This is indicative of the fact that Krobo identity can be constructed in different ways and as demonstrated earlier, Dipo has lost its significance as far as some families are concerned.

6.3 Influences on Dipo

The study shows that the likelihood of facing ridicule from the friends of initiates, who are probably from other tribes, is one of the factors that have made it possible to avoid being shaved. It also accounts for why the scars are only symbolically given. The scars and shaving of the hair can be regarded as ethnic markers which initiates no longer have to carry because of the reasons discussed in the previous chapter. A lack of understanding and appreciation for certain aspects of the Dipo custom especially in light of it being practiced in modern Ghana could also influence the likelihood of ridicule from people of other tribes. It is similar to tribal marks given on the faces and other parts of the body which served as a form of identification.

It appears that it is now no longer fashionable to have those marks especially in light of it serving as a means of discrimination because of ethnic stereotyping. Photography therefore becomes a more convenient means of providing evidence for initiation. However, as mentioned earlier, an initiate tore up her pictures. This action is not just the result of embarrassment as a result of being exposed but the possibility of having others view the pictures in future. The advocacy for initiates to cover up a lot more during initiation might help address this issue.

The influence of Christianity in Kroboland cannot be overemphasized. There are Krobo Christians who do not practice Dipo and yet see themselves as true Krobos. They belong to a family of Christians who have decided to abstain from the practice. It is common knowledge that these people do not engage in Dipo. Some members of the community do not regard them as true Krobos and may not even encourage marriage into those families. There are also instances where family members become pastors and take a stand against the Dipo custom. In such cases, there is no pressure on them to get their daughters initiated. The use of the cross and an informant's comparison of the goat's blood to the blood of Jesus Christ which washes away sin further illustrate the strong influence Christianity has had on the Krobo society.

The impact of modernity and modernization on the Dipo custom reminds me of a saying:

“When the missionaries came to Africa, they had the Bible and we had the land. They said "let us close our eyes and pray." When we opened them, we had the Bible, and they had the land.”³¹

The ‘missionaries’ in this saying also imply the West, the entrance of a culture that was once alien. This is similar to missionary entry into Kroboland which brought along with it a culture that was foreign to the Krobos. The ‘land’ not only implies the physical land and nature but the activities associated with the land like cultural practices such as Dipo. The Bible represents another form of religion, in this case Christianity, which is different from the traditional forms of beliefs. The saying “let us close our eyes and pray” implies an acceptance of the new religion and hence the adherence to it. The final sentence in the saying depicts an appropriation or integration of outside cultures and ideologies. For some people, this has meant leaving certain aspects of African culture for Western ideologies while others seek a

³¹ Desmond Tutu. Retrieved from Quotes and excerpts; <http://homelands.org/worlds/quotes.html> on Wednesday, March 24 2010

balance and still see themselves as typical Africans even though they live in the modern world. They want the best of both worlds and it appears that is now modern to be traditional.

To buttress this point, I refer to Salm and Falola (2002:13) who state that “Ghanaian cities offer a unique kaleidoscope of modern life” in the sense that some parts depict a traditional way of living while others show the more modern form of life. They further state that “the many influences have been absorbed into a strong, dynamic culture that is firmly rooted in the past, but one that is also vibrant and able to adapt to present conditions” (Ibid:29). The Dipo custom is a typical example of this ‘strong and dynamic culture’ which though rooted in the past is still vibrant and resilient.

It is therefore this encounter and integration that brings about all the issues associated with cultural practices like Dipo. Prior to this, there was no questioning of the Dipo custom. The acceptance of a different way of life and thought pattern now leaves us with the question of whether previous practices are still suitable hence the changes observed in them. This is not to imply that Dipo would not have undergone changes anyway. I have earlier stated that culture is best viewed as a dynamic fact and Teyegaga (1985) also indicates that some changes were made to the practice after the disappearance of *Nana Kloweki*. The practice did encounter some changes even before the introduction of modernization and missionization which brought along with it formal education. It is the extent to which these outside factors have influenced modifications in the practice that is worthy of note. An informant however rightly pointed out that absence of these practices creates a void which the new way of life cannot fill. It is a loss of identity, a sense of “*who we are*” and “*what makes us who we are*”. This implies that the discontinuation of the Dipo practice would lead to a loss of Krobo ethnic identity, that is, in the eyes of the Krobos. Beidelman (1997:250-251) in reference to the Kaguru states that “the primary means by which they remember who they are, the means by which they celebrate their language, customs, and beliefs, is the initiation of young people.” I see this to be true of the Krobos as well. The Dipo custom helps to illustrate the traditional life of Krobos and a means to express their customs and beliefs. It also helps emphasize their understanding of gender and gender roles and responsibilities. It is a reminder of what women in the past experienced and what future generations of Krobo women are destined to encounter. Beidelman (1997:252) expresses it this way in relation to the Kagurus; “...young people are reminded that their own experience replicates those of generations who preceded them and future generations to follow.” It is in this light that initiates readily admitted that others have been through the initiation process; they were not the first and definitely would not be the last set of girls to get that experience.

Appiah (2006:73) however makes an important point about how cultural practices are perceived when he states “if you’ve grown up taking it for granted as the normal thing to do, you will probably respond at first with surprise to someone who thinks it is wrong” and he further points out the fact that “a large part of what we do we do because it *is* just what we do”. From my discussions in this thesis, it can also be inferred that in addition to practicing Dipo just because it is part of the Krobo culture, it is also a means of preserving an identity. The Krobos do try to depict traditional Krobo life or probably an authentic Krobo culture but in this modern day and age, is there any such thing? Appiah (2006:107) mentions that even with the traditional *Kente* cloth, “the silk was always imported, traded by Europeans, produced in Asia. This tradition was once an innovation”. What is therefore regarded as a traditional Ghanaian attire apparently has its roots from places outside Ghana. I mentioned earlier how the initiates during the outdoorings are sprayed perfumes and carry modern ladies purses which are obviously not part of the authentic Krobo tradition. It is however in light of this that Appiah (2006:107) states that “cultures are made of continuities *and* changes, and the identity of a society can survive through these changes,…”

Agencies in Ghana such as the Centre for National Culture and National Commission on Culture encourage cultural practices like Dipo in their bid to promote Ghanaian culture, hence it being listed on the cultural calendar. For now, it is not a Krobo festival but listed as such on the calendar and tourists are increasingly encouraged to witness the event.

Other tribes in which puberty rites have faded out are now calling for their reinstitution to serve as a check on teenage pregnancy and sexual promiscuity. The Brong Ahafo Region is one such place in which a Queen mother pledged to introduce a modernized form of puberty rites in which girls would not have to expose their breasts to avoid the embarrassment that it involves. She also promised giving them money and clothing to cater for their needs and also the establishment of a fund to support the practice. This is mainly in a bid to address the high incidences of teenage pregnancy³².

As mentioned earlier in chapter one, there have been debates about Dipo being a possible factor for the spread of HIV/AIDS in the Krobo areas. Writers such as Opong (1973) and Sackey (2001) however suggest the adoption of puberty rites in a bid to combat the HIV/AIDS pandemic in Ghanaian societies. From their studies, there would be increased participation in such rites if changes are made such as not having the breasts exposed and carrying it out during the long vacation instead. This is just an indication that traditional

³² http://indigenoupeoplesissues.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1623:puberty-rites-to-be-modernized-ghana&catid=55:africa-indigenous-peoples&Itemid=77

practices could still play significant roles in modern societies if they continue to serve the purpose for which they were instituted. Rites of passage obviously do not occur in a vacuum, they relate to the social, political, economic and religious issues of a society.

6.4 Further studies

For further studies related to this topic, I would recommend a comparative study of the Dipo custom among the Yilo and Manya Krobos and reasons for any marked differences between the two. It would also be interesting to investigate the acclaimed high promiscuity rate in the Krobo areas and its supposed relation to Dipo. Is it really the case the Krobo girls are more promiscuous than others in Ghana and how many teenage pregnancies are recorded post-initiation? An in-depth study could also be done on how effective ethnic emblems like Dipo are in modern day Ghana. It would also be interesting to find out how willing Krobo girls are to participate in Dipo.

6.5 Final remarks

I end with a reference to Chinua Achebe's classic novel, *Things Fall Apart*. The novel derives its title from William B. Yeats's poem, *The Second Coming*. *Things Fall Apart* is a description of a traditional Igbo³³ society of Umuofia before the entrance of the British and colonialism. The people of Umuofia were tied to their traditional customs and practices. The main character Okwonkwo is shown to love his land and customs. The entrance of the British and their attempt to civilize the people leaves the society in turmoil. They give up their values and customs in a bid to embrace this new ideology and religion. People who resist the change like Okwonkwo are caught in a web which leads to his downfall. In a sense, Things fall apart when people give up their beliefs and customs yet there is the need to be flexible and adjust to change. People can change to the tides of life but they should not lose a sense of who they are and what makes them who they are.

The numerous changes made to the Dipo custom, though problematic in expressing the significance of Dipo, still shows how flexible the Krobos are. They express the willingness to further adjust the practice to suit modern demands and ensure its continuity but

³³ A tribe in Nigeria.

refuse to abandon the practice all together. It is in change that continuity is ensured. The changes in the Dipo practice are in response to internal and external factors but they help to maintain the custom, to ensure that it is suitable for a changing society. This was expressed in the past when it was performed in a different form, 'bobum' during its ban. The changed manner in which it was carried out ensured its continuity. Even the Krobos who do not encourage the practice, acknowledge it as a rich custom which was established on good grounds. Some Christians suggest that it be incorporated into the church so that aspects of it which are contrary to Christianity such as pouring of libation, calling of initiates souls and the like are eliminated. This would encourage Christians to participate.

What may have fallen apart in the Dipo custom is the aim of preparing girls for marriage when it is performed for girls who are not ready for it. As such, the symbolic aspect of marketing initiates to prospective suitors becomes irrelevant. Yet the other aspects of the Krobo society which Dipo depicts also ensure its continuity. It is a brilliant way of expressing the Krobo pride in beads and the symbolic meanings beads express. The most abundant of the beads are placed on initiates' waists – highlighting feminine contours and reinforcing the theme of fecundity.

The practice continues in spite of the issues confronted with it because the Krobos have not given up their customs and beliefs as a result of embracing modernization, Christianity and all that comes along with it. This is simply because the centre still holds – the expression of an identity, especially the sense of who true Krobo women are supposed to be. In addition, the Krobos remain a distinct entity from any other tribe in Ghana mainly because of this practice. The Dipo custom is one of the means by which the Krobos define themselves. It appears that for now, it is difficult to imagine the Krobos without the Dipo custom; it would be tantamount to a loss of cultural identity, a stripping of their cultural pride and ethnic hallmark.

The study further illustrates how the understanding of ethnic identity could mean different things for men and women. While for a Krobo man, the major criteria is his circumcision, it is done when he is just a few days old, is unconscious of it and definitely, no pictures are taken. The woman, however, goes through Dipo mostly as a teenager. Even in cases where it is performed when she is very young, the pictures serve as a reminder. For a Krobo woman therefore, the idea of ascribing to this ethnic identity is mainly tied to her initiation with all that comes along with it, which is not the case for a man.

At the beginning of this thesis, I was in the field about to witness, once again, the Dipo custom, a group of Krobo girls becoming women. Memories from my previous experiences

have been stirred up. One thing however remains certain, no matter my position, whenever I find myself in Kroboland, I would always be accepted as a Krobo woman. I identify with the practice and now in more ways than one.

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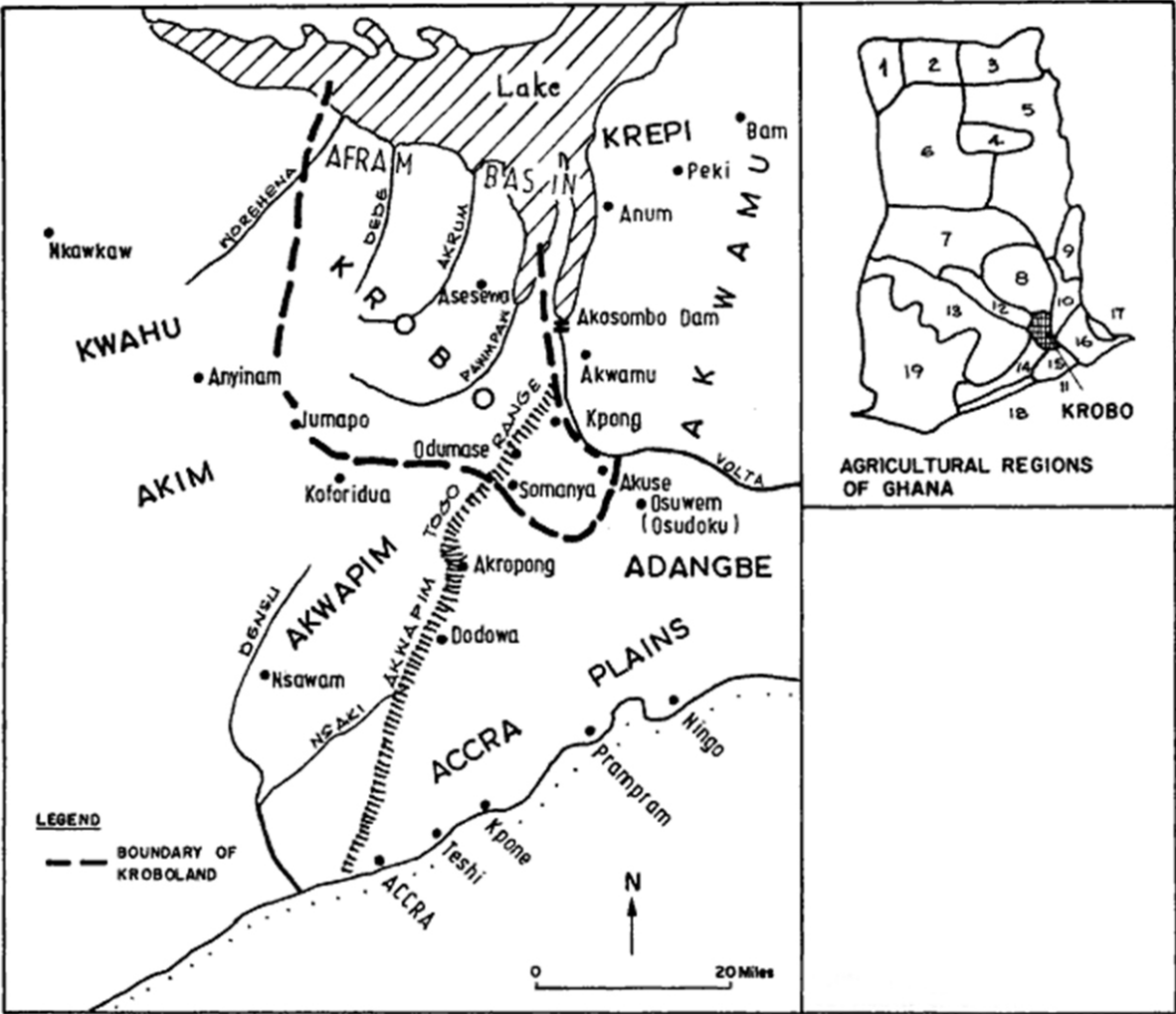
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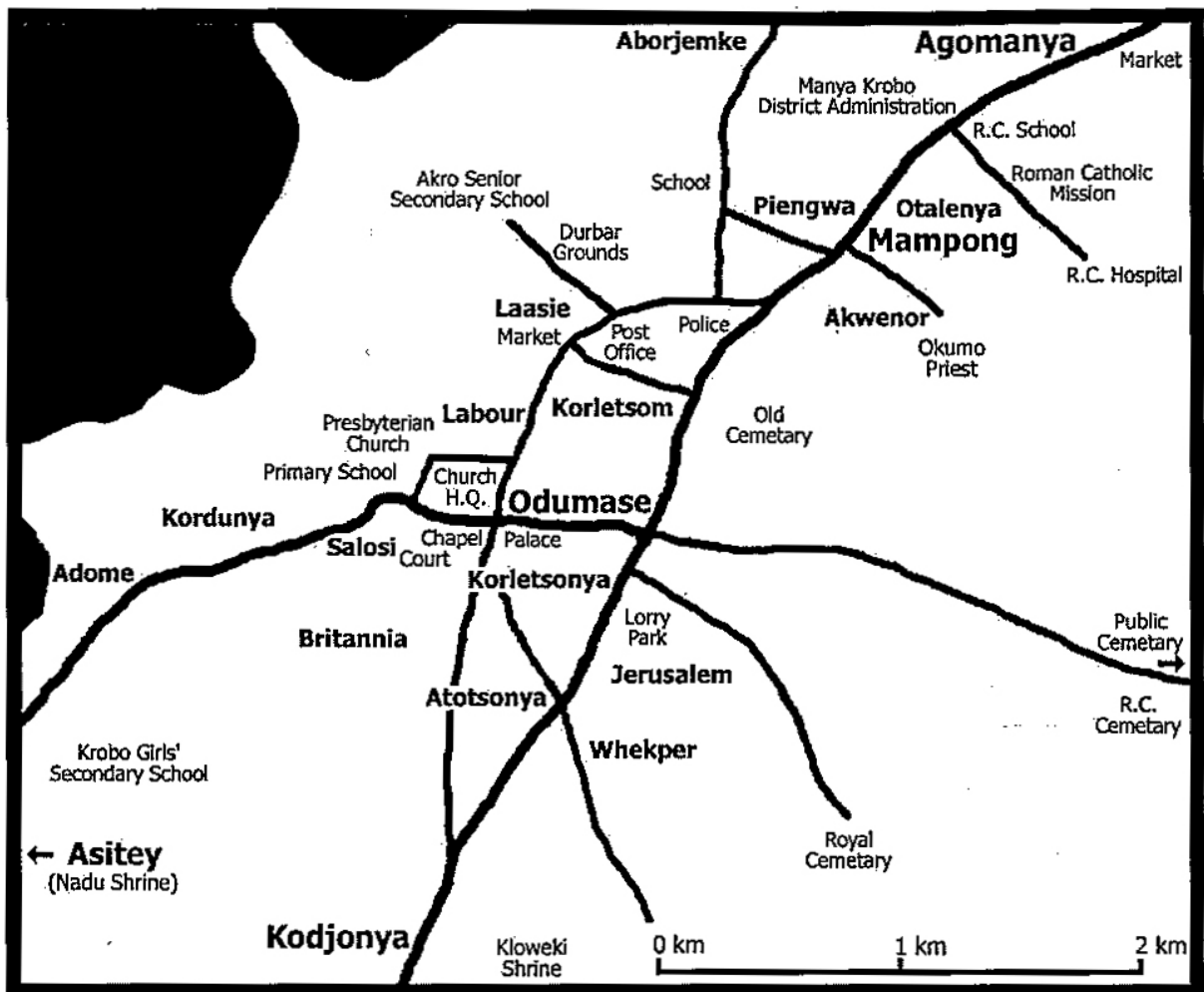
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Appendix 1: Maps



Map 1: Map of Kroboland
 (Source: Bedele, D. 1988)



Map 2: Odumase and its environment

(Source: Steegstra, 2004)

Appendix 2: Picture Gallery



1. Twins under initiation



2. An initiate grinding millet



3. Initiate getting part of her hair shaved



4. The traditional hair-do



5. Initiates eating the water yam



6. Initiates on their way to perform the ritual bath



7. The venue for the ritual bath



8. The *ho-fufui* being prepared



9. The goat which was slaughtered



10. Roan antelope skins



11. Dede being outdoored



12. Initiates ready to visit the sacred stone



13. Very young initiates asleep on their mothers' backs on the way to the sacred stone



15. Initiates heading to the shrine

14. An initiate at Whekper, dressed to visit the shrine with her breasts covered



16. The shrine that houses the sacred stone



17. Initiates being carried back to the Dipo house



18. Initiates getting the rest of their hair shaved



19. Marks being made symbolically on an initiates hand



20. Paulina dancing the Klama during her outdooring



21. Initiates dancing at the durbar



22. An initiate dances as the priestesses join in the singing



23. Ritual items on sale at the Dipo house



24. An initiate wearing a bead mould. Her father is a bead-maker.



25. A woman in the Dipo fest t-shirt.



24. The Dipo house at Kodjonya



25. A church just beside
the Dipo house

Appendix 3: Interview guide

Interviews:

With organizers of the rite:

1. What is the significance of the rite today?
2. Why are young girls (3 year olds) allowed to participate in the rite?
3. How has the rite changed? What in your view has caused these changes?
4. Do tourists come to observe the rite? If so, how are they received?
5. Do the older girls get married immediately after going through the rite?
 - b. If no, what is the guarantee the girls would not engage in sexual activity until they are married since girls do not get married immediately after the rite?
6. How do you see the rite in the years to come? Would it be stopped, continued or go through further changes?
7. If it should be changed further, what aspects of the Dipo would change?
8. What is the role of women in the Krobo society?

With mothers of young girls (2 – 4 year olds) going through the rite

1. Why do you let your daughter participate in this rite at such a young age?
2. Do you consult anyone before deciding on your daughter(s) participation? If so, who do you consult?
3. Don't you think the rite loses its significance when girls below the puberty age participate?
4. What does your husband think about this rite?
5. If your daughter was older, would you let her decide if she wanted to participate in the rite or not?
6. How do you see the rite in the years to come? Would it be stopped, continued or go through further changes?
7. Did it cost you a lot of money to let your daughter participate?
8. Did you go through the rite yourself when you were younger?
9. What is the role of women in the Krobo society?

With people from other ethnic groups living in the community (e.g. teachers, national service personnel)

1. What do you think of the rite of passage performed by the Krobos?
2. Do you usually watch the rite?
3. Why do you think the Krobos keep up this rite?
4. What do you like/dislike about the rite? Which aspect of the rite would you have eliminated completely or simply modified?
5. Do you think it should be continued or should it be stopped? What are your reasons?
6. Would you encourage other tribes to practice something similar?
7. (If a man), would you like to marry a woman from this tribe and who has gone through the rite?

With church groups and clergy

1. What do you think about the Dipo rite?
2. Would you encourage the females in your family to participate? What are the reasons for your answer?
3. Do you know of members of the church who have gone through the rite or allowed their daughters to go through it?
4. Does the church accept such members?
5. Would you like the rite to be modified? If so, in what areas?
6. What do you think is the future of the rite?

Focus group discussion

With older girls participating in the rite

1. What do you think about this rite?
2. Are you enjoying yourself or would you rather be doing something else?
3. Have you been taught any housekeeping skills?
4. Did you have a chance to decide for yourself if you wanted to participate in the rite or not?
5. Would you encourage the ritual to be continued or would rather have it stopped?

6. How do you feel about the exposure of the body? Do you feel confident or is it embarrassing?
7. Do you believe that you would not get a husband if you did not participate in the rite?
8. Do you plan to get married immediately after the rite if a man shows interest in you?
9. Have all the women in your family been through this rite?
10. Would you like your future daughters to do the Dipo? Why?

3 Generations of women – girls, mothers (or aunts), and grandmothers

1. Did you all go through Dipo?
2. Did it have any influence on your marriage?
3. How was it significant for you and the society at that time?
4. Did you establish any special relationship/fellowship with the other girls/women you went through Dipo with?
5. Is that what you want (or would want) your daughters to experience?
6. Do you look out for husbands for your daughters? If so, why?
7. What, in your opinion, is the future of Dipo? Would it go through further changes, if so in what ways?