

INTRODUCTIONTHE LAKPA - PRINCIPAL DEITY OF LABADI

One of the sociological fields of study in Ghana which needs some serious attention is that of religion. Without apology, it appears religion or religious belief is the basis of life in this society. A little study of the arts in Adangme, Ashanti, Sefwi, Nzima and Aowin bring this home vividly and show that religion and religious beliefs need a real reappraisal. Religion cannot be dismissed as a function of primitiveness¹ or undevelopment in the Ghana context.

In Ghana too, religion could be looked at from many angles. A sociological, psychological or metaphysical view may be taken, although these views of looking at Ghana religion are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

In Fielding's novel "Tom Jones Parson Thwackum is reported to have said that "When I mention religion, I mean the christian religion, and not only christian religion but the Protestant religion, and not only the protestant religion but the Church of England". It could be guessed from this that what is meant here is a sectarian practice of a particular brand of acknowledgment and worship of God. God, of course, is variously

¹ Levy Bruhl and of course the social evolutionists suggested that religious behaviour was the mark of primitiveness. St. Simon and August Comte categorically believed and said so in their writings. Imperial evidence in sociology today disproved this assumption.

projected by various people. It may be conceived as the collective spirit of the people or the universal or ultimate power in the universe.

Many anthropologists have had to deal with various manifestations of religion and it appears there is consensus of opinion among them that the sociological field of religion may be regarded as including those emotionalized beliefs prevalent in a social group concerning the supernatural, plus the overt behaviour, material objects and symbols associated with such beliefs.²

Gilling and Gilling³ - suggest that (a) All peoples have beliefs concerning what appears to them to be supernatural. (b) These beliefs are associated with emotions and psychic states such as awe, fear, ecstasy, reverence. (c) Activities are associated with these beliefs and viewed as controls of, or as approaches to, or withdrawals from, the supernatural. (d) Material objects of many types may be involved in these activities

² See Benedict Ruth "Religion" General anthropology. F. Boas editor, D.C. Heath and Co. Boston. 1938. pp.627-665.

Wallis W.D., Religion in Primitive societies, F.S. Crofts and Co. New York 1939, pp.1-2.

Lowie Primitive Religion - Introduction, Goldenweiser, A. Anthropology. F.S. Crofts and Co. New York, 1937 pp.208-295.

Radin - Primitive religion, Vikin Press N.Y., 1937, Chapter 1.

See difference in treatment of religion in Von Wiese, Leopold and Becker Howard, Systematic sociology. John R. Wiley and Sons, N.Y., 1932.

³ Introduction to Sociology.

John Lewis Gilling, Prof. of Sociology Wisconsin.

John Philip Gillin, Prof. of Anthropology, Duke University, U.S.A. The MacMillan Company, 1947.

(altar charms, vestments etc.) (e) Symbols either material, mental, or verbal play an important part in focusing attention on and giving expression to the feelings and attitudes associated with the supernatural. (f) The foregoing complex is meaningfully related to the culture and circumstances of the group.

The assessment of religion above says nothing about good or bad, sex morality 'plural deism' or 'mono-deism.' There is nothing of heaven and hell. Ruth Benedict has said that religion in preliterate societies was a technique for success in this life and concerned primarily with adjustment of human beings rather than with the future worlds of absolute verities.

It is not easy to feature the exact societies she calls preliterate but surely this cannot be true of Ghanaian societies past and present, since belief in world hereafter is the principal basis of all religious behaviour in the society.

There is certainly very significant attention to adjustment of human beings but to preclude a concern for future worlds from the considerations of religion will be understating the Ghanaian view of religion.

Universally, the supernatural area is believed to be charged with power which transcends anything known in ordinary life. This power can be beneficent or dangerous. As a result it should be approached with circumspection for it is sacred.

The next general view is that the sacredness could be personalized and the personalized entity has power.

Belief in the Lakpa deity to be examined is not

belief in the spirits in material things. In that sense, it may not be animism⁴. The belief appears to be a belief in supernatural personalities as was in the case of classical Greek and Roman pantheons. Such things as great rivers, lagoons or even animal kinds, may be identified with aspects of nature; for example, sun, moon and rain. It will be observed that there is a graded hierachy which tapers up to one all powerful God.

It is possible for powers to be organized into opposing groups and the camps may be the good and the bad forces with God at one end and the Devil at the other end. Labadi may have this, but what is known for certain is that the spirit of Lakpa is a force for good.

In the main, patterned activities can be universal part of complex religious institutions and like religious practices everywhere, they tend to be highly patterned, ritualized and solidified. It is pertinent to realize that some religious activities are meant to (a) help control the supernatural powers to the advantage of man. (b) Some powers are supposed to promote closer contact between man and the supernatural and some are meant to avoid some undesirable connection between the supernatural and man.

⁴ Tylors minimal definition of religion which does not fully apply here.

When we talk of the control techniques we think of magic and pure religion.⁵ Talking of religion and magic brings in material objects, in that they come in for effective operation in the two fields. In hierarchical system of spirits, are visual aids like cult medicines, models, effigies and then tangible and tiny portable charms tail the list... There are a number of 'artifacts' which confront the art historian or sociologist looking at society from its material culture. A study of religious symbolism in Ghana would yield very fruitful rewards; for it should help throw light on even religious affiliations in a geographical or historical context. Religion, of course, is a socializing agency. Present day religious tendencies would be understood if the religious or quasi religious activities of communities in Ghana are understood.

The following study of the Lakpa of the people of Labadi is an attempt to find out exactly what is this 'phenomenon' which has so much hold on the community. First then an attempt is made to present what the people think the Lakpa is. Later an attempt will be made to assess the significance of the Lakpa in the life of the people with a view to understanding this cultural group.

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There is an element of magic in religion and religion in magic. The two, of course, are not mutually exclusive. Magic is power over power. It is practice of formula or set series of activities which must bring the result if gone through faultlessly. Religion has more of the attitudes of beseechment, petition, appeasement offering, sacrifice and prayer; and reverence.

The Lakpa

In the pantheon of Labadi (a section of the people of Ghana, who live three miles from the Capital (eastwards towards Tema) the 'Lakpa' is placed second after the Great, all-powerful God. This God is the same God, Yahwe of the Jews and the Allah of the Moham-medans. To the people of Labadi, this High God is both male and female. He is, therefore, called Ataa-Naa Nyɔmpɔ; that is, Father-Mother God. 'Lakpa'⁶ is the first of the gods of the earth which they call Dzemawɔdzi.⁷ In Labadi alone there are ninety-nine deities besides the tutelary ones. Later the expression "ninety-nine" was explained to mean many or uncountable. Many, however, seem to think that the expression should be taken to mean what it literally says. All the gods of Labadi recognize the supremacy of the Lakpa over them. Many of these gods of Labadi have shrines; but the principal and best kept shrine is that of the Lakpa. It is situated almost in the centre of the town. It is believed that the Lakpa, unlike quite a few of the other gods, was brought down by the forefathers of the people from their original home, Benin city, in Nigeria. It is believed today that the name Labadi must be La Bone - Bone, being a corruption of the word Benin; the city from which the inhabitants of Labadi migrated to Ghana. Labadi or La Bone means the La people of Benin.

It appears that since Lakpa is regarded as the first of the gods of the earth, many of the attributes of the one High God are ascribed to it. For this reason

⁶ The name of the most Senior god of Labadi

⁷ Dzemawɔdzi - gods of the nations of the earth.

it is generally regarded as a god of benevolence and prosperity not wrath or punishment. The existence of the Lakpa is essential, as the great High God is not directly approachable. As the most senior of God's representatives on earth, petitions and prayers are transmitted to God through him. The Lakpa is said to be a sun, rain,⁸ war; indeed, an all-purpose god. Being a sun and war god, the priest must fast on rainy days.

Originally, the chief of Labadi was the wulom^{8b} (priest) of the god. This may account for the reverence the Lakpa enjoys generally, in Labadi. Like many of the other towns of the Ga and Adangmes some few years ago, theocracy was the rule, and the priests of the

⁸ Since it is a sun god, I was told, the priest must always make sure he sees the sun at any one time he is breaking his fast. On rainy or cloudy days, he eats nothing.

^{8b} Wulom^{8b} means a little more than a priest. It means a custodian and representative. The Lakpa has another man who gets possessed. The Lakpa wulom^{8b} himself never gets possessed in the ordinary way. He needs not be visibly possessed to receive messages from the god. One strange thing is that it is said he does not even understand the language of the god when it is speaking audibly. There is always another man who gets possessed and who understands the language of the god.

most senior deities were the leaders of 'chiefs' of the people. Chieftaincy, as it is now practised in Labadi, is an alien institution. There is much evidence that it was borrowed from the Akan.^{9a} Today it is the chief of Labadi who installs the wulomo priest of the Lakpa and this priest merely acts for the chief.

THE LAKPA SHRINE

The principal paraphernalia of the Lakpa include one very tall drum for the Lakpa; one big drum for the god Awiri; and yet another for the god Akotia.^{9b} Other things include bowls (tsesei), coconut shell cups; large water pots (gbei) for storing well or rain water; ritual brooms and hoes and many other 'things.' The god itself has never been seen, even by the Lakpa priest, who must and does sleep in the special hut for

^{9a} The Labadi court regalia, the royal drum and music, and the Akan drum language are all clear evidences of the Akan origin of the institution of chiefship.

^{9b} Awiri and Akotia are other deities of Labadi

the deity. It is always stressed that the god is a spirit and is second only to God.^{9c}

All the sacred objects of the Lakpa are kept in the Lakpa hut. This hut stands in the middle of the shrine. No one enters this particular hut save the wulomɔ. It is out of bounds even to Naa Afiye, the wife of the priest, without whom the ministration to the god cannot be complete and so not possible. The entrance of this hut faces the main way to the yard of the shrine. A few yards west of this principal hut is another, which is Naa Afiye's. Both are thatched with grass. The entrance into the hut is very low and narrow and the roof reaches low down. Since the entrance is narrow and the roof comes very low down, the inside of the hut is not visible from outside, even though the entrance is not blinded or provided with a shutter. Apart from these two huts, there are other three huts in the yard of the shrine. These other huts are used by other priests during the annual celebrations. Visitors of the priest and those who go to the shrine to be delivered of their children are also given lodging in them. This means the shrine provides some mid-wifery services to the people.

^{9c}This is the very core of the belief of the people of Labadi. To me it is a very important point. It indicates that the people recognize that all they see represents an Unseen POWER, not necessarily resident in the visible objects. This is one point the early missionaries appear not to have appreciated. My own view is that quite a few more people would have seen the point these missionaries were driving at, if they had observed this rudimentary teaching principle of teaching from the known to the unknown. I must say at once, however, that they might have considered their own approach against others before proceeding along the lines they did.

The god Lakpa has quite a few direct messengers. They include Awiri, Akwadzan and Akotia. The priest of Akotia must always be by the Lakpa priest in the shrine and go on errands for the Lakpa priest. This becomes necessary as the Lakpa priest must not travel. He must not be followed while in the paths or lanes of the town. He therefore, goes out only often at night, when he could be fairly sure this taboo may not be broken.

Dr. M.J. Field states in her "Religion and Medicine of the Ga People" that it appears the worship of some of these gods of Labadi was in the past a very bloody affair. Many of the spots regarded sacred, she reports, were believed to be the burial sites of live-men. It is difficult to say now from my investigations, whether this is only a myth to give prestige to the sacred spots. At least, such stories may help to explain why the sacred spots must not be treated lightly and why it is sacrilegious to step on any of the sacred spots. In the olden days, such offences were severely¹⁰ punished. Today the punishment for the offence includes fines either in money or in livestock.¹¹

The Lakpa is an all-purpose god. It is able to make barren women fertile. Individual or collective wants or desires could be sought from the Lakpa. One cannot, however, ask the god to do harm to one's adversary.

¹⁰ The severest punishment often administered to those who contravened the sacred rule of keeping human feet off the sacred spots was the death penalty.

¹¹ Sheep and fowls are the live-stock mostly sacrificed to many Ghanaian deities. A few prefer goats; the Lakpa is one of those that takes goats. Sheep is never sacrificed to the Lakpa.

At the annual festival of Homowo, a first fruit festival of the Ga people, special blessings are invoked for everybody by the wulomo. There are special divinations to find out whether the coming year will be good or evil. It is at this time of the year that many people see the priest. This has caused many people to think erroneously that the Lakpa is associated only with the Homowo. It is, as hinted already, the national all-purpose god.

It is very important that the spirit of the chief must always be right with the god. He must make sure he serves the god reverently and with the proper decorum. He must show that he stands in awe of him by keeping the taboos without fail. The moment his spirit goes wrong with the deity, unhappiness may result, not only among his household but also in the whole town. It is believed for example, that some of the messengers of the god feed from the right wrist of the chief. On this right wrist of the chief there is always a string of white beads known as "Afli". When the chief is not in a state of ritual purity, the gods are offended and so refuse to eat from his wrist. This brings forebodings to the people. Even now that the chief is not the direct wulomo of the Lakpa, it is believed that he is still the principal medium through whom the god ministers to the people.

The Lakpa and people seeking blessing from him

All types of blessings could be sought from the Lakpa. He could be approached for all kinds of spiritual and physical needs. This aspect of the deity's functions appears to be known by only the people of Labadi and strangers specially introduced to the shrine by the chief of Labadi.¹² There seems to be the belief

¹² Dr. Audry Richards, my wife Comfort Quarcoo and myself were introduced to the shrine by the chief, Nii Anyetei Kwakwanya II. During the libation, our names were mentioned to the Lakpa and the priest asked for blessings for us and especially for Dr. Richards.

that the privilege of seeking blessings from the god belongs principally to the indigenous people of Labadi.

Seekers of blessings could enter the yard of the Lakpa at any time of the day. Such "seekers" must be bare foot. There is a sitting place in front of the Lakpa hut, and for seats, some stones are placed in front of the hut.

When people go to shrine the priest comes out and sits before the hut. He then exchanges greetings with the strangers or clients. The mission of the visitors is then demanded through the Akotia priest. Usually, such visitors go to the shrine with the customary "drink" of a bottle of schnapps.¹³ The priest receives this drink and uses it to pour libation to the god and his many subordinates. The strangers or seekers after any particular blessings make their petitions through the Akotia priest. The Lakpa wulomo listens intently nodding continually. After the petitioners have stated their case, the priest responds "Odzogbann, sane kpakpa sɔnn". "All right, this is all good talk." He gets up, bows and enters the hut. There he invokes a number of deities besides the Lakpa and pours libation to them. He tells them what the petitioners have come for, and mentions their names to the gods.

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This is often a bottle of schnapps. It is the custom of the Ga people as well as many other tribes in Ghana not to go to a "superior person" without the respect paying "rum". It is not to bribe him to do what you desire for you, even if that which you ask, must, and could not be done. Unfortunately, this gift of respect has been exploited by some people in recent times. The Twi say, "Womfa wonsa pan nko panyin nkyen". You don't go to an elder with empty hands. So that this offer of drink is different from "bribe". It is not a gift with a string attached.

This is part of the following formal prayer for the libation in the hut.

The Akotia priest and all the others in the Court yard chime in "yao.....Yao"

"Yao".....means Amen or let that be done. Some of the words of the prayer are Twi ¹⁴ but others are meaningless words. Ei, Atta Nyomabadzɔ noni wobaafee nee no Yao¹⁵
 Aboade Awiri eei! (Three times) .. Yao
 Okwankyerefo amanani .. Yao
 Ohi kplan .. Yao
 Aduo Pasako .. Yao
 Obe Adu ni otseɔ Adu .. Yao
 Klolo Abutrufi, Awokowokɔ¹⁶ .. Yao

¹⁴ Twi. This is used here broadly to mean the language of the Akan people (Ghana).

¹⁵ The prayer is interesting. Prayer for all things, even things the petitioners have not asked for; prayer for almost everybody. This is very comparable to some Christian prayers. The one significant difference is the prayer for evil for those who wish evil to the people praying. That is Mosaic, of course, but not Christian. The way Amen is chimed at the end of every line of the prayer is interesting. It is one thing the early missionaries could have used to advantage. Some denominations use this form and I myself think the effect is not unsatisfactory.

¹⁶ Onomatopoeic word representing a seasoned stump or trunk etc.

LEADING ARTICLE

15.

| | | |
|--|----|-----|
| Osu Boni Abaa | .. | Yao |
| Aglama Anye, Englesi <u>wiel</u> ¹⁷ | .. | Yao |
| Wara Beba, Obi nhia wo | .. | Yao |
| Note Osabu, Note Osan, Note Nyomo | | |
| Tsawe Note Blodu | .. | Yao |
| Ogidigidi Aplelee! | .. | Yao |
| Odze Ngaman ni mgman sa bo | .. | Yao |
| Obleku, tuu...tuu...tuu | .. | Yao |
| Ei Gbubu, Okonno Ohima ke enya Afieye | .. | Yao |
| Asiwe Odame, Asiwe Kpesi | .. | Yao |
| Ei Nii sei ke Nii Kumi | .. | Yao |
| Ei Sakumo A-mantease | .. | Yao |
| Wonya Wo a wofre | .. | Yao |
| Ei Nii Klan | .. | Yao |
| Ei Akwadzan eii, Bledu Sika, Bledu mpon | .. | Yao |
| Ei Akonodi | .. | Yao |
| Ei Kantankani Bofo (Lakpa) | .. | Yao |
| Enyinaa be hyia me | .. | Yao |
| Bahe eko onu Aku..ni okedzomo dzre | .. | Yao |
| adzoo wo | | |
| Milee ngmaa kuli bii ayibo ni | | |
| na le nye yibo | .. | Yao |
| KedzeLamagma keyasi Obutu | .. | Yao |
| Kedze Woyi keyasi ngmamli | .. | Yao |
| Bibii ke ewudzi fee abanu eko | .. | Yao |
| Mei ni banu abanu; Mei ni enuu le atsi | | |
| amehe kaya see | .. | Yao |
| Ble mitsee nye efon ko he | .. | Yao |

Then the priest enumerates all that is being asked for and mentions the names of the petitioners again and again to the deities. If any promises are made by the petitioners, these are communicated to the gods.

¹⁷Wie. An African climbing plant of the Capsium family. It has a burning sensation when chewed or smeared on the skin.

Translation of the prayer (literal)

| | |
|--|------|
| O God Almighty, come and bless what we are | |
| going to do | Amen |
| Great Awiri (ee!) Shouting for him | Amen |
| Oh Adu (Name of a god) Adu Pasako | Amen |
| If you have no Adu, You do not call (invoke) Adu | Amen |
| Klolo Abutrufi, Awokwoko (Probably name of a | |
| god) ¹⁶ Awokwoko | |
| indicated the flexi- | |
| bility of the god | Amen |
| Osi Boni's club | Amen |
| Mother of Aglama, English 17 | Amen |
| You will come by yourself, you need no helping | |
| hand | Amen |
| Note Sabu, Note Osan, Note Nyomo Tsawe, Note | |
| Bleku | Amen |
| (Names of deities being invoked) | |
| Ogidigidi Aplēlee (Untranslatable) (Probably | Amen |
| strong name | |
| suggesting | |
| might) | |
| You come from the plains and nowhere else can | |
| be a better abode for you | Amen |
| Obleku...Tuu Tuu Tuu... Suggests softness and | |
| peace | Amen |
| Gbōbu, Okonno Ahima and his wife Afieye | |
| the King's Stool and the King's sword of | |
| Office | Amen |
| Sakumō, the ancestral city | Amen |
| When we obtain you (get you) we desire nothing | |
| else | Amen |
| King tiger | Amen |
| Akonodi | Amen |
| The god Lakpa | Amen |

| | |
|---|------|
| All of you should come and meet me (listen to me or help me) | Amen |
| All of you should come and drink this wine and bless us | Amen |
| I cannot count even maize and I cannot there- fore possibly know how many you are! | Amen |
| You spread all over from Lanma to Obutu | Amen |
| From the North to the South | Amen |
| Come and have some drink, one and all, both big and small | Amen |
| Those who wish to drink, come by all means and have your share | Amen |
| But those who should not have been called, please keep clear away | Amen |
| I have not called you for evil | Amen |

Then the story and purpose of the visit of the visitors or petitioners is communicated to the deity. The wulo-mo then comes out of the hut to the front of the hut and there invokes blessings on the people thus:-

| | | |
|-------------------------------------|------|-----|
| Tswa, tswa, tswa, omanyaba! | .. | Yao |
| Wossei yi ati | .. | Yao |
| Wobioi yi ati | .. | Yao |
| Wodze bu, wodze nu no | .. | Yao |
| Woye wodzu wokodzi ano adzo wo | | Yao |
| Nyomo ke dzomo adzoor aha wo | .. | |
| Mawu adzo wo | .. | Yao |
| Adzoo man | .. | Yao |
| Adzoo agban | .. | Yao |
| Adzoo wulumei | .. | Yao |
| Adzoo wulumai | .. | Yao |
| Ni woya abon ni woba abon | .. | Yao |
| Wotakodzron akpa aba-mne wo dudonaa | .. | Yao |
| Yeifoeyei atsomo toi | .. | Yao |
| Ni ameho ametra si | .. | Yao |
| Osra atekewo | .. | Yao |

| | | |
|---------------------------------------|----|-----|
| Mani ni ngmene ni wɔkpe ye bie ni eko | | |
| tso loo te kemiishi wo le | .. | Yao |
| Wondzɔle loo? | .. | Yao |
| Shɔ agbe le | .. | Yao |
| Tswa, tswa, tswa omanyɛ aba! | .. | Yao |
| Tswa omanyɛ aba | .. | Yao |
| Dzee wo gbee kome? | .. | Yao |
| Tswa omanyɛ aba | .. | Yao |

| | |
|---|------------------|
| Hail hail, hail let there be happiness) | We should |
| We should have many seats) | multiply |
| We should have many sticks in our brooms) | and be many Amen |
| When we dig a well we should alight on water | Amen |
| May such waters from the wells be blessed | Amen |
| The Lord bless us | Amen |
| Mawu give us blessing | Amen |
| May the town be blessed | Amen |
| May priests be blessed | Amen |
| May we be filled with robust life | Amen |
| May all be well with us | Amen |
| May our women turn into gourds and multiply (to fertile) | Amen |
| May we be spared from misfortune | Amen |
| If one should wish us evil as we seek these blessings | Amen |
| Do we bless him? | No |
| Wednesday kill him! | Huu(Hooting) |
| Hail happiness and blessings come on us | Amen |
| Are we not united in our prayers? | We are! |
| Hail let blessings be our lot | Amen |

After this blessing the wulame steps forward from the entrance of his hut with the schnapps in his hand, and performs another assignment. Sticking out from the low end of the roof of the hut directly above

the entrance are three sticks which look like slender horns of an animal. On each of these sticks,¹⁸ a few drops of schnapps are sprinkled. Before this is done, the bottle of schnapps is shown to God in the Heavens. After this 'pouring of libation' to the sticks in the roof, some special spots in the yard are given drops of schnapps.

The wife of the priest Naa Afieye, who all this time must be sitting before her hut, takes over from her husband and pours traces of the schnapps from a coconut cup at other special spots in the yard. No ceremony is perfect without Naa Afieye.¹⁹ And so, her

¹⁸ Just a few traces of schnapps are sprinkled on the "horns" sticking out of the low end of the roof above the entrance of the hut. The medicine pad is also shown to all the three before it is placed in the centre of the wooden bowl. The pad is shown first to the middle stick, then to the right stick and finally to the left one.

¹⁹ Naa Afieye is specially chosen and specially wedded for the priest. The ministrations at the shrine is incomplete or even impossible without her.

assignment makes full the rites. The wulomo enters the hut again and brings out a wooden bowl (tsese) and water²⁰. Water is poured into the bowl and a pad of medicine leaves is placed in it. The medicine pad is first shown to God and then to the sticks in the roof of the wulomo's hut before it is placed in the bowl. A few drops of the 'rum' are poured into the water, and stirred into it by the priest with both hands. With both hands he takes some of the water into his mouth and it is blown back into the bowl in vapour. This is done three times.

Then the wulomo stands astride with his back to the shrine. He bends down and places both hands into the bowl. He gently lifts the left hand, which according to many tribes in Ghana is unclean, and sprinkles forward away from himself some of the water. That is said to be for the dead. Then he sprinkles towards himself, and therefore, towards the shrine, some of the water with his right hand. This is said to be for the living. It is a petition for long life. Next he sprinkles the water to his left and right and then on himself. The water so treated by the priest becomes holy. He drinks some of this water from the cup of his palms and then sits down. The Akotia priest, follows the wulomo and goes through the same process. At the annual festivals and on occasions when general blessings

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The Lakpa would have nothing to do with pipe borne water. The water used at the shrine should either be rain water or well water. Only a few years ago there were no public stand pipes. One or two people, though, had private ones. Indeed, it appears that Teshie began to enjoy the use of stand pipes before Labadi. It was the La dignitaries who did not allow the Accra Town Council to give the people of Labadi the stand pipes. Their explanation was that the Lakpa did not like that type of water. This is confirmed by a number of people. Today, however, there are many stand pipes in Labadi and pipe borne water is used in almost every household. However, pipe borne water is still not used at the shrine.

are sought for the whole town, all the priests associated with the Lakpa, and the Mantse (chief) must go through the operation before the people are treated with the holy water. It appears that the implication is that the water becomes more potent for administration to the people or the town as a whole. During private visitations to the shrine by clients, however, the water is holy enough after the wulomɔ has treated it alone.

The client is invited to the bowl and the wife of the wulomɔ dishes out the water from the wooden bowl into his or her hands. The client then sprinkles the water so received at the hands of the wife of the priest on his or her body; then retires to his or her 'seat' in front of the priest's hut.

One of the coconut-shell cups is filled with schnapps by one of the attendants at the shrine for the wulomɔ. This is how he does it. The attendant taps the open end of the cup three times with the neck of the bottle. On the third tap, he pours some of the liquor into the cup. This first 'filling' is for the priest. The wife of the priest, Naa Afieye, is next served. The client is thereafter invited to kneel before the wulomɔ and to drink some schnapps from the same coconut cup used by the priest, his wife and other priestly dignitaries who may happen to be there at the shrine. Invariably, clients leave the shrine confident that all will be well. If anything goes wrong, it must be because the client was faithless or not diligent and therefore blameworthy.

It will be observed from this account that the priest demands nothing from the clients. The clients, however, have the obligation to make promises to the deity. They may vow that if their prayer is propitious they will give an offering of thanksgiving. Women who

ask for children promise to present the children to the shrine for blessing, when they are born. Besides, they promise to offer them for service at the shrine. Such children who serve at the shrine are called Nii Webii or mgwetsemei. The promises are not forced out of the clients; they are voluntarily made.

The Lakpa and the first fruit ceremony

The Lakpa is associated with many ceremonies in Labadi. Many of those who have heard of the Lakpa, however, know it only in connection with the Homowo. To many, therefore, the Lakpa is the Homowo god (or the god of ceremonies connected with the Homowo). On the occasion of the Homowo, the wulomo engages in several purification rites and the administration of blessing to the town. The ancestors of the people are fed in a special manner and also 'worshipped during the Homowo'. In this paper, we mention only the "Alengengmee".²¹ This is a special divination at the shrine to find out, and have an idea, at least, of what type of year the coming one promises to be. By the divination it is always, they say, possible to tell whether or not the coming year will be propitious'. There are several other ceremonies connected with the Homowo festival, however, apart from this Alengengmee and the dancing at the shrine on the Wednesday morning. There is general communal feasting on this day too. Old quarrels are settled and new life is begun.

On the Wednesday morning after the Homowo Tuesday, the Chief of Labadi and all the sub-chiefs, priests and priestesses, the servers at the shrine called the dzranoyei

²¹ Alengengmee - Balancing of the drums of Lakpa to find out what sort of year lies before the nation.

and Ngmetsemei meet at the shrine. After their private meeting, there is a public meeting which all may attend. Libations are poured and several invocations made. The sacred drums of the Lakpa, Awiri and Akotia (gods) are brought out. It is believed that the huge Lakpa drum can balance only when it is held by more than two strong men. After many prayers, the drum is asked to indicate what sort of year the coming one is likely to be. This is the Kpaatsoo or Alengengmee ceremony. If the coming year will be a good one, this drum and other drums that may so be tested, balance. On the other hand, if the year unfortunately threatens to be a bad one or not particularly good, the drums do not balance. Special prayers will then have to be said from time to time to mitigate the evils of the particular year.

After the divination, there are several ceremonies in front of the Lakpa yard. Featuring prominently among these are the dances by the wulomo Naa Afieye, the wife of (the Lakpa wulomo) the La Mantse, the Mankralo and other state dignitaries. As they dance, they are hailed by all, but especially by their own kismen, followers and admirers.

At the 1963 dance, there were some special high lights. Special invitations were sent out to people to witness the ceremony. Naa Afieye Okropong, (the wife of the wulomo) who was with the wulomo when I first visited the shrine with Dr. Audrey Richards was dismissed from office before the Homowo. It became doubtful whether the ceremony of Kpaatsoo was going to come on at all. Fortunately, a young girl was secured and married to the wulomo just before the time. This was great luck and news to all Labadi. Many people, therefore, came to see the new "queen" and her maiden dance at the shrine.

The afternoon of this day is the occasion for the popular Kpaashimo²² of the people of Labadi. Special prayers are said for barren women in the morning. Barrenness, incidentally, is regarded as one of the greatest afflictions that could befall a woman. The deity is said to have wedded every female on the soil of Labadi that day. This is demonstrated in indiscriminate embracing of women by men in Labadi. This is symbolic of the desire of Lakpa that all women should be blessed with children during the year.

22.

The Kpaashimo is very popular. It gives opportunity to many people to let out some "steam". People dress in all sorts of funny ways and dance the traditional Kpaa for hours on end. One interesting feature is that people do disguise themselves with all kinds of old and torn clothes. They may also disfigure their faces by smearing clay of all colours. The point of the dance principally is that they have been spared another year of blessing and so they should "hoot at hunger." In other words they eat of the fruits of their labours in commemoration of the past suffering of the original settlers, of Labadi who arrived from (many say) Nigeria and faced initial starvation. Many people come to see this dance from many parts of the vicinity of Accra. This activity is a "much looked forward to activity." Its integrative significance is very readily seen and its entertainment value today is real. I tried to find out whether the popularity of the dance is waning in any particular quarter. My impression is that, as far as people do not take too many liberties, under the present circumstances - law of the land - both the old and the young will like to see the continuation of the La Kpaashimo every year.

In the afternoon the Kpaashimo begins and goes on till late in the evening. Men are free to embrace any women they come across. This is called "Shakamə". Women who show some reluctance in allowing themselves to be embraced are over-powered. Indeed, treatment of women that will normally be regarded as "indecent assault" or adultery is on this day condoned. The embraces, I was told, are meant to be gentle symbolic acts, and should never deteriorate into 'hooliganism or manhandling.'

The Lakpa wulomə - His appointment and induction

The word 'wulomə' has been loosely translated as priest in this paper. The wulomə is, however, not a fetish priest. The people stress that the idea of fetish worship is foreign to the people of Labadi. The wulomə is a servant of the deity and he interpretes the will of the deity to the people. The Lakpa, they say, is a dzemawon. Dzemawon is not a fetish. They say it is anything that can work, but cannot be seen. The dzemawon have some of the special attributes of God. They are therefore 'mediums' for God. The Lakpa priest is not that type of priest who gets possessed as do many priests common in some parts of Africa. There is, however, one person who usually gets into trance. Then he hears and passes on messages from the deity to the Lakpa priest or the chief of Labadi. It is possible for a message to come for a particular citizen through this man. The message so received, however, is not to be directly sent to that person. It must be passed through the Lakpa wulomə or the chief. The wulomə's position is essentially that of a custodian of the Lakpa. His existence reminds the people of the existence and power of the deity, and so of God.

The position of the Lakpa priest is today fairly complicated. Originally the chief of the town was the wulomɔ . Now the Lakpa priest acts for the chief. Although he does not get possessed, he is the one who officiates at public worships and pours the periodic libations to the god. He also interpretes the will of the deity to the people. The Lakpa priest is the "father" of all the people of Labadi. He does not take sides. Since according to the people, the Lakpa cherishes only peace all the time in the town, the wulomɔ has to refrain from anything which is likely to forment ill feeling, and strife in the town. One of his main duties is to advise the people in time of trouble. His advice is essential in times of plague, sectional strife, and general unrest. It is believed that the deity is not the punitive type that destroys people reported to him. He cherishes conciliation and peace more than strife punishment and schisms.

The Lakpa wulomɔ is always chosen from the Leshi quarter of Labadi. The quarter is made up of three principal lineages. They are Ofoli, Osrɔwe, Patapaawe, and Yemowe. The post of wulomɔ must be filled immediately it becomes vacant, or else the chief of Labadi, for whom the wulomɔ acts today, must assume the post of wulomɔ . This is necessary because the shrine must never be vacant.

The wulomɔship becomes vacant on the death of any of the pair, that is, either the wulomɔ or his ritual wife. Both of them are regarded as one. Hence the death of one means the spiritual death of the other. When the priest dies, the wife is naturally removed from the shrine, since the new priest must step into office with a new virgin wife ritually wedded for him.

Again every new priest must have a virgin wife, and so a new priest does not inherit the wife of the dead priest. Should the wife of the priest get involved in any sexual immorality, both the woman and the priest are removed from office.²³

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While writing the draft of this paper in the first and second weeks of July, 1963 a message came to me that the Lakpa priest had been expelled from the shrine. I went to find out what was happening and learnt that the beautiful young wife of the priest had been involved in a case of sexual immorality. Indeed, when I went to the shrine with Dr. Audrey Richards, she expressed the fear that such a thing was not unlikely to happen. In some parts of East Africa, such important priestesses are women who have passed their menopause, she observed. As a result of the expulsion of the priest (following the sexual misbehaviour of his wife) the chief had to go to the shrine to stay there for a greater part of the day. As a rule, as I have said elsewhere, a mistake on the part of any one of the two people, the Lakpa Wulomo and the wife Naa Afieye, necessitates the removal of both of them. In 1963, when Naa Afieye, the "priestess" I met at the shrine during my investigations, was engaged in a sexual immorality affair, the Lakpa priest was injured by a man. This man was a lover of Naa Afieye. The Lakpa priest had to cross the Korle Lagoon to Korle Bu for his injury to be stitched. This he did contrary to the dictates of the deity. He must not cross the Korle Lagoon for any reason. Somehow, this time, instead of dismissing both the wulomo and Naa Afieye it was only Naa Afieye who was dismissed. This constituted a departure from the established norm.

When the 'priesthood' becomes vacant, the chief finds out from his 'elders' which lineage must provide the next priest. Candidates for the priesthood are selected from the three lineages in turn. The chief sends a bottle of schnapps (it used to be a pot of corn-beer) to the head of the lineage named by his elders and requests him to provide a priest-elect. The chief's delegation is headed by the Osabu priest. Custom requires that the Osabu priest must be given a bottle of schnapps to galvanise him on to his work. This is called "Osabu wulomo nane mli momo" (literally meaning the holding of the foot of the Osabu priest.) On receiving this customary drink, the Osabu priest "lucks the town" Engmeo man le mli. That is, he informs all the deities in the town about what is going to take place by pouring libation to them. By this act, some sort of curfew is imposed on the whole town.

As in the case of a 'chief-elect' of Labadi, the chosen Lakpa wulomo candidate must not be informed of his choice.²⁴ The consent of the head of the lineage is all that necessary. This head is informed because he should, in the first instance, nominate the candidate, and his assistance is necessary for the successful selection and induction of the priest. On an appointed day, kept secret by the Osabu priest, he and his followers enter the house of the prospective candidate. They carry with them a garland of some special herbs. This garland is flung round the neck of the candidate as soon as he is reached. If the selected candidate is away from home, he is sought. Sometimes it even becomes necessary to look for him in one of the several villages of the people of Labadi. It is said that sometimes prospective candidates often stay away from the town or these villages to escape the responsibility. Once the

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The present chief was snatched from his college while he was still a student.

prospective priest is decorated with the garland, he is bound to go with the Osabu priest to the palace of the chief. The chief welcomes them on their arrival to the palace and sends messages to the parents and relatives of the priest-elect saying that their scion has thus been honoured and shall thenceforth remain the priest of the Lakpa. Libation is poured and the priest is ritually confined for twenty-one days. The term for this 'confinement' is 'Tsu mli woo!'

During this confinement all the hair on the priest-elect is shaved. Thereafter, it is a forbidden thing for the priest to shave any hair from any part of his body. Contravention of this taboo necessitates his immediate removal from the shrine. During the Alengengmee and other ceremonies, the hair of the priest is done in a special way, that looks feminine in style. It is during the confinement that he tunes himself finally for the work ahead of him. Meanwhile, the amlakuiats (the head of the servants of the deity), the Osabu priest, and the chief, school him for his work. Inventory of the equipment in the hut of Lakpa shrine is, as a rule, taken and then priest duly installed, is led to the shrine. Since he must go into the yard a ritually pure man, it is essential that no one should bear any grudge against him. He must not be a debtor. All his debts, if he has any at the time of his induction, must be paid for him by the chief of Labadi. In essence, it is the "town" or people of the town who pay this debt. On becoming the wulomo, he automatically separates^{24b} from his previous wife or wives. He goes to the shrine with a virgin wife specially

^{24b}

He may regard them as his secondary wives not. This is the current concession.

selected, and wedded for him. All cooked food that the priest ever eats after entering the yard must be from the hands of this ritual wife.

This priest abandons the name by which he has been known until the day of decoration with the medicine garland, and adopts a priest name. If he hails from Ofoli Osrowe, he becomes Yemo Broni. If he belongs to any of the other two remaining houses, he is styled Yemote Odoi.

Like the Lakpa wulomo, his wife, Naa Afieye Okropong, with whom he goes to the service of the god at the shrine, is specially chosen. The wife must also come from one of the following lineages. Apaintsewe in the Leshi quarter, Tunmawe in Abese, Klannaa and also from Sakumowe in Ga Mashi. In addition to this lineage qualification, the chosen girl must be a virgin. Other considerations, like beauty, poise, weight and character also weigh in the choice of the wife.

As in the case of the priest, the Osabu priest is the one who takes the leading part in the induction of the wife. Either he or people deputising for him enter the house of the girl and fling round her neck a garland made of some special herbs. This ring is called "komi" in Ga. The expression for the act of flinging the garland around a candidate's neck is "komingmae." As soon as the garland is around the neck of the girl the job of the Osabu company is over, and the members hoot and shout for joy. The girl has then no choice. If she escapes before the ring is put around her neck, she is free. If however, she escapes after the ring has been flung around her neck, it is believed that she will either become mad or suffer from all sorts

of maladjustments.²⁵ The girl thus secured is escorted to the chief's house. Messages from the chief reach her people who are informed of the new status of the girl. She is then taken to her own father's house for her ritual confinement. This lasts for twenty-one days. While in confinement she is instructed by the Dranoyei (servants of Naa Afieye at the shrine) in the art in which she is to be engaged.

The new "priestess" is not just taken to the shrine after her ritual confinement. She is grandly wedded with funds provided by the chief or town (nation). Her bride-wealth is always double that of the ordinary woman or girl in Labadi. This is an indication of her importance

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I remember when I was an acting assistant Headmaster in Secondary school in Labadi in 1958, the brothers and some other relatives of a girl in her second year came to ask permission for their sister to stay away from school for a couple of weeks. It was the turn of their lineage and particular house to supply a wife for the new Lakpa priest. This particular girl happened to be the most suitable in the house at the time. The relatives thought she was a girl with some bright future. She was therefore taken away to a village to escape the fate of being decorated and inducted as wife of the priest. Somebody else was secured and this girl was free and she came back to continue her education.

for she is actually the first lady of Labadi. Her maiden name is changed and she becomes Naa Afieye Okropong. She is taken to the shrine amid drumming and dancing. This is a special ceremony at which the drumming is provided by a special group from Gbese quarter in Ga Mashi (Accra). The drummers first perform on the ceremonial grounds at Labadi, known as Mandzaano. The ceremony is called "Kplokotodzoo", (Kplokoto dance). From the ceremonial grounds the drummers repair Lakpanaa (the Lakpa shrine area.) Later they go to Teshi and drum at the Ayiku shrine. They return finally to round off the drumming and merry making at Labadi when the new "priestess" is led to the shrine.

The Lakpa and change

There are now several modifications in the ceremonies and taboos connected with the Lakpa. Pipe borne water, which even in the early thirties was hardly used in Labadi, is now freely used. There are now public and private water taps everywhere in Labadi. In spite of the many changes, however, the people of Labadi seem to be still very much attached to the Lakpa. It is difficult to say whether or not, for many, it is not just something to see at the annual festivals, that keeps them attracted to the Lakpa. Labadi has always been known as one of the Ga towns which has many deities. It is difficult to predict when the many gods will disappear. Whether their disappearance will be advantageous to the people is not very certain. One thing is certain, and that is Labadi could have progressed, at least, a little more than it has done now, without the very many taboos of the many gods. Now many things have, however, changed, and many of their institutions are undergoing some change. However, the belief system appears to be somehow resistant and would not submit to total abandonment.

Although the belief system appears to be steadfast, some of the people now often question quite a few of the doctrines of the system. There are a number of views and some of the elders today feel it is wrong to allow the 'Lakpa' to check modern development in the way it did in the days past. Some people are feeling that the dictates of the deity were not properly interpreted in the days past.

The Lakpa worship - Fetishism or what?

This is a question which has been raised by some of the elders of Labadi.

A large number of people wish to be loosely connected with the Lakpa while they remain Christians or Mohammedans or hold other beliefs. For example, the present chief of Labadi, Nii Anyetei Kwakwanya II, thinks it is wrong to regard the performances and observances connected with the Lakpa as fetishism. The Lakpa, they say, embodies the spirit of the people. What is meant exactly by this needs some further investigation. Nii Anyetei thinks the Lakpa is comparable to the Golden Stool of Ashanti. In the case of Ashanti, however, there is something physical which is supposed to contain the spirit of the people. The point to note here is that, the Golden Stool is a symbol. In the case of the Lakpa, it is said, though there is nothing physical to see, the spirit of the deity or rather of the people, is collectively represented in the Lakpa. This is not easy to comprehend.

Fetishism as a description for the Lakpa may not be regarded as very appropriate. The term itself is still in use only because some missionaries continue to cling on to the term to cover a whole range of things.

African charms and cult objects "feitico" - meaning magic-like talismans worn by the Portuguese during the days they were first in Africa, were first called fetishes by the Portuguese. Factitius, as explained by Parrinder²⁶ means something made for art. In the light of this, anything could be fetish; but the Lakpa is not the worship of a "thing" at all. Even if fetishism is regarded as the worship of "sticks and stones"²⁷, Lakpa does not fall within that category. Indeed, analysis of the belief system and the behaviour in the situation which has been erroneously referred to in the literature as ancestor worship clearly shows that no one bows down to wood and stone in Ghanaian religious behaviour.²⁸ The Lakpa does not again fall into the class of fetishes, if the term is to apply to limited class of magical objects in West Africa as agreed upon by an anthropological committee.²⁹

Parrinder has made another point which is relevant to this discussion, when he says 'in view of the French and English speaking countries the term fetish is differently used'. The French fetish, it appears is the English juju. What Rattray calls fetishes, the French term 'grisgris'. Jou-jou of course comes from French and means a toy. For purposes of documentation and intelligible discussion on the Lakpa, the general Ga term under which it comes namely Adebowom, God created god, will always be more meaningful. Ceremonies connected with the Lakpa have never been the worship of

²⁶ West African Religion 1961 page 8.

²⁷ Primitive Culture 4th Ed. II 143-4, Parrinder.

²⁸ See a note on ancestor worship and the Ancestors and Ghanaian social behaviour - Research Review Vol.3 Nos.1 and 2, Michaelmas and Lent, 1966 and 1967.

²⁹ Geoffrey Parrinder, West African Religion page.9.

an inanimate object. The Lakpa is and has always been only just a medium for God. The Lakpa is, as hinted, nothing visible. The drums and the paraphernalia of the Lakpa are mere symbols. They are comparable to the other objects of reverence in other religious observances.

This leads on to another big claim that the people of Labadi often make. They realise that they have many mediums through which they reach the one God but they claim that the people of Labadi are essentially monotheistic.³⁰ The validity of this claim would be easy to accept only when a new interpretation is put on the theological term monotheism. It is nonetheless correct to think that the ultimate thing aimed at, in any 'religious' act connected with the Lakpa is, reaching God with the capital "G". My impression is that there is a strong resentment on the part of the Labadi people against being regarded as worshippers of stones and trees. Certainly, different theologies will view this claim differently. The orthodox Christian reaction is one of intolerance. Many people, especially

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I myself do not understand what is meant by the claim that the rites and other observances connected with the Lakpa are merely "customary". I do not know whether customary here means just "established usage" or practice that has become habitual. In this case customary may mean "learnt behaviour". If this is what is envisaged, then the desired impression is that the Lakpa practices form part of the culture of the people. Culture, being, according to Hoebel, the sum total of learnt behaviour trait characteristics of the members of a society. The classical definition of Tylor suggests that culture is a complex whole - "that complex whole that includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities acquired by man as a member of society."

a few years ago, were regarded in Labadi as not with the "Christian flock" when they merely watched the Lakpa dances.³¹ The Lakpa and the practices related to it form part of the system of belief of the people. It is then undeniably part of their culture. Would the claim of the Lakpa, following this line of argument, therefore, entitle the exponents of the deity to acceptability by all and by all religions? If on the other hand what is meant is that it is 'only fashion', then further questions are raised. Need everyone take to a particular fashion?³²

Probably, it is in this light that many of those who claim the Lakpa observances as 'only customary' view the whole affair. This may have to be looked at more closely before any categorical statement is made. One thing which is clear, is that the people of Labadi do realise that the Lakpa has been a very strong force of social solidarity. They also realise that but for some changes brought about by acculturation and the forces of social change, it could have been, as it surely was, a force to hinder or impair progress.

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I personally think of such festivals as the Ngmayen Homowo and the like of Ghana as social functions and when freed of the religious content, will be effective functions that will foster modern social solidarity. Indeed, it may be argued that it is the religious content that actually makes them such useful functions. However, it is today, not the religious but the social aspect of some of these functions that the people cherish so much. Homowo is heartily enjoyed by many serious minded ministers of Christian gospel and heads of Mohammedan groups. It is regarded as a social activity which helps the renewal of social relations and acquaintances.

The Spirit of the People (A claim for the Lakpa)

Hitherto we have been looking mainly at the deity and how blessings are sought at the shrine, the appointment and induction of both the Lakpa Wulom - the chief priest - and his wife Naa Afieye. An attempt has been made to examine very briefly the effects of social or cultural change on the Lakpa and the people, and the last section raised the question of 'ought the functionaries of the Lakpa deity be refused admission into other religious denominations as it is the case now'?

The fact of change in the operations of the Lakpa is important, since, it seems, cultural change has raised many questions and apparently reshaped people's ideas about the nature and function of the 'god'. Some people of the older generation appear to be still wedded to the idea that the Lakpa is god in its own right, except however, that it is and has always been subordinate to God. Their conception of God, as far as has been noted, is a God who after creating the earth, delegated some of his power to His subordinates. To Labadi, the principal subordinate is the Lakpa, supposed to be the eldest son of God.³³

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Lakpa then is a deity in a pantheon. This is the suggestion made. Like some African cosmologies, that of Labadi includes many gods, at the peak of which is the almighty God. This particular claim that this or that God is the first of the gods of the earth is not unique. See African Worlds, edited by Daryll Forde. A council of elders I met during the investigations at Labadi claimed that their conception of God is in consonance with the line of thought of both Hebrew and Christian thoughts. They claimed that they are essentially monotheistic. They cited the case of Angels, Arc Angels and Saints of the Christian faith as being in the same category. If this is accepted as valid argument then many people in West Africa are monotheistic.

The people of Labadi say the Lakpa is not any of the solid structures or paraphernalia in the yard of the Lakpa. It is regarded as the corporate spirit of the people. Some of them we have seen quote the Golden Stool of Ashanti,³⁴ Ghana, as a parallel of the Lakpa. The difference, however, being that the Lakpa was not commanded down by a man and it is not a solid or visible 'thing'. What the stool embodies and what it stands for is that which is parallel to the Lakpa for the Lakpa is a 'natural' deity³⁵, God created, not man made god.

³⁴ To indicate the real essence or position of the Lakpa today, the substantive holder of the Woloship referred to the Golden Stool of Ashanti as a parallel of the Lakpa. The Golden Stool was, according to tradition, brought down from the heavens through the magical prowess of Okomfo Anokye. This Okomfo, that is, priest, was the high priest of Osei Tutu, the then king of Ashanti. The priest told the Ashantis that the stool was to be the symbol of their unity and solidarity. A new sanction was provided by the concept of national unity which was focussed in the stool.

³⁵ Adebowon - The implication is that the Lakpa is a deity. Adebowon are Natural deities. They are not charms or fetishes or man devised in any way. If a shrine is built for an Adebowon or a model is made to represent it, the real thing - that is, the spirit is always believed to be external to it. The spirit may dwell in the physical things periodically but remains always a spirit. Some of the things that come under the category of Adebowon deities may be rivers, certain perennial trees, the wind etc.

It has been observed that the chief of Labadi was originally the Wulom of the 'deity' and that he is still virtually the substantive holder of the post. The present 'chief priest' only acts for the chief. This arrangement became necessary because of the demands of modern chiefship, since the chief of today has to go from place to place, attend various council meetings of chiefs, speak on telephones and engage in various modern ways of life which desecrate the Lakpa. As a modern political functionary, therefore, it is difficult for him to live the life of a pure Lakpa priest. It was this problem posed by cultural change that necessitated some type of division of labour resulting in the post of chief priest being held by a separate person.

In view of the fact that the people of Labadi believed that the most senior man of the state was the high priest, they still regard or like to look upon the new position of chiefship as being closely associated with the Wulomeship of the state.

As the Golden Stool is considered to be a symbol of national unity, solidarity and continuity, so the Lakpa is held to be a spiritual force making for unity and continuity. So that it is an integrative force.³⁶ This appears in part to be in admission of the proposition that the Lakpa is a god in its own right. Indeed, the many ceremonies connected with the Lakpa bring the people together. The constant coming together for the festivities of the Lakpa foster national solidarity.

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This is true of every society. Every society has an integrative force. It may be myth or legend or law. If it is argued that anything that aids or brings about effective integration of a people is the spirit of the people then many religions or ideologies would be to them what the Lakpa is supposed to be to the people of Labadi.

Among these ceremonies, the first fruit festival of Homowo is the most popular. All native Labadians celebrate the Homowo. All the people eat the traditional food Kpokpoi or Kpekple (steamed maize flour) and sprinkle it on the day of Homowo. Some claim to do it only for the fun of it. Deep down in the minds, however, they are given food to the ancestors of households and so, those of the nation.

This raises a further problem and the problem is whether the people are concerned, in the fruit festival, with the ancestors as such, or the Lakpa, which is regarded as the national 'spirit'? According to informants, the principal concern is with the ancestors, but at the same time they are engaged in remembering and honouring the spirit which led them from their Nigerian home to Ghana.

It is difficult under the circumstances for students of culture and society to answer the question of whether the functionaries of the Lakpa should not be denied admittance into societies like the Christian religious bodies.³⁷ Social scientists do not arrogate

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Some religions are very uncompromising and will definitely regard the rites and rituals connected with the Lakpa as false and therefore incompatible with the demands of their dogmas. It is therefore difficult to give a scientific answer to the question raised by the elders of Labadi. The Christian belief, for example, is a belief in "The One Lord, the one Faith, and the One Baptism". There is a "Creed" accepted by the whole Christian Church. This may account for the uncompromising attitude of the Church in this matter. I suspect, however, that their idea of the Lakpa being the son of God could be exploited by the Christian Evangelists. By the principle of 'elimination by substitution' the Christ they preach could be substituted for the Lakpa. Christian research scholars may be useful in this field. They may be able to give a 'good' answer to the question which worry the minds of the elders of Labadi which is hinted here.

to themselves the mandate to rank religious beliefs, although they cannot pass all religious practices as sociologically significant. This question which so much bothers some elders of Lakpa, therefore, cannot be answered by an analytical study of the Lakpa, in spite of the contention that the 'adherents' of the Lakpa are worshippers of one God.³⁸

My analysis is that the Lakpa was regarded no less than a national god of the people of Labadi. The accident of history, social contact and cultural change generally, is changing the views of many, as to the real significance of the 'deity'. To a number of people, the spiritual aspect of the Lakpa festivities have given place to the social significance of the festivities. It is correct that the spiritual aspect of the Lakpa is now being underplayed but it would be wrong to suppose that all the people of Labadi do not think of it as a god.

Remarkably, many of the taboos of the Lakpa are now not observed. One of the most notable was the avoidance of processed water for drinking. As late as the 1930's the 'nation' of Labadi was opposed to the introduction of pipe borne water in Labadi. It is realised today that a lot of those taboos were 'obnoxious' and they kept the town 'backward', and so they have been scrapped. There are then the positive signs that many of the festivities connected with the Lakpa and also

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Almighty God. Therefore the people are monotheistic. The implication is that the Lakpa is a god in its own right - with a definite place in the hierarchy of gods in Labadi. The whole system of beliefs and the rituals concerned with the Lakpa makes it a cult. The object of the cult being the spirit, called the Kpa of Labadi.

the rites may continue to be 'modernized'.³⁹

What then is meant by 'the spirit of the people' claimed for the Lakpa? Is it the 'moving ideology' for the people? Is it an integrative force, a symbol of unity, deified founder of the nation, or objectified, idea 'body' or spirit of the people?

The crucial point is the place and function of Lakpa today. Some have begun to look upon it as a great ancestor and therefore their attitude to it is no less than reverence to it, and all this stands for in their view. Others still think of it as a really potential force⁴⁰ which is still the spiritual mainstay

³⁹This word is meaningless except looked at in the light I use it here. It means lagging behind, as far as accepted modern ways of life are concerned. Examples being good roads, good sanitation, good housing, good drainage, modern formal education - and its benefits. These are some of the things the people woefully lacked.

⁴⁰As far as we know about the Lakpa of today, there are a few things about the rituals and rites which cut across "Universal Ethical standards". There are no longer bloody practices. The yard of the shrine is always in acceptable sanitary conditions, although we cannot say what the huts which are closed to all people save the high priest contain. Today, printed invitations are issued out for the Lakpa dance on the Wednesday following the Homowo Tuesday. Processed water is freely used in Labadi although in the yard of the Lakpa such water is still tabooed. Streets have now been permitted where they were forbidden some time ago. There is now a definite proposal to recondition many parts of Labadi. Formerly this would have been vehemently opposed.

of Labadi. Others yet think of it as a medium of Homowo festivities which they enjoy.

It is bewildering to be told that the festivities, for example of the Lakpa, are 'customary' or 'cultural'. This definitely denies the the Lakpa the status of a deity in its own right; but many other things point to the fact that it is regarded as a deity. There are, however, many people in Labadi whose lives are not touched even in a very little way by the Lakpa. Other tutelary deities to them are more important. All Labadians, anyway, firmly believe that their ancestors matter a good deal and that these ancestors intercede for them - the living.

Ideas about the Lakpa are today then amorphous. Many of its change resisting aspects have disappeared or are relaxing, but it is still a formidable social, psychological and spiritual force in Labadi and its significance needs to be studied periodically.

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