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Dipo and Other Rites of Passage in Odumase Krobo

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Dipo and Other Rites of Passage in Odumase Krobo

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Abstract

Title: *Dipo* and Other Rites of Passage in Odumase Krobo

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- Objectives:
- i. To understand the *dipo* process in its traditional form
 - ii. To learn how the *dipo* process has changed over time and what this tells us about modern conceptions of womanhood in Krobo
 - iii. To understand what traditional rites of passage existed in the past for males in Krobo
 - iv. To learn how these rites of passage have changed over time and what this tells us about modern conceptions of manhood in Krobo
 - v. To determine whether or not I think these rites are empowering for boys and girls

Methodology: I was based in Odumase Krobo for about three weeks. There, I completed over twenty interviews with people ranging from young boys and girls, elders, parents, Queen Mothers, priests and priestesses, devout Christians, and many others I met around town. I also lived with a family who had one boy and one girl and was able to observe how their upbringing differed according to their genders.

Findings: I was able to discover the *dipo* process mostly in its entirety, save for the parts which are considered sacred and which I was therefore unable to hear about. I also discovered that *dipo* has changed in many ways due to formal education and Christianity. I also learned that the traditional rites of passage for boys were circumcision, learning to raise a lamb, learning to cultivate land, and receiving a gun for farming. I learned that of these rites, only circumcision remains today, and that the other practices have gone away as the Krobos have shifted away from their agricultural economy. Finally, I found that rites of passage for both boys and girls in Krobo reveal that both manhood and womanhood are defined primarily by one's relationship to the family as well as one's relationship to Krobo itself. Hence, womanhood is about being a good wife and mother, while manhood is about being a good father and husband. For both genders, taking pride in being from Krobo is an essential facet of the transition into adulthood.

Conclusion: I concluded that despite certain limitations, ultimately these rites of passage are empowering for both boys and girls. They are empowering because achieving full personhood in Ghana meaning being a part of a community, and so the Krobo rites of passage, which provide boys and girls with access to the family community as well as to the greater Krobo community, allow the young people to become fulfilled adults.

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Mom and Dad: Thanks for paying for me to come here... I literally couldn't have done it without you. Tell Emily and Stew not to touch my stuff while I'm not home.

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Kwame: Even when you sneak up on me in the dark and make me think I'm being attacked by a giant village monster, and even when you pour water sachets on me when I'm not looking, and even when you make me walk for three hours because you have no idea how to navigate Odumase... you still somehow manage to make me have fun all the time. Thanks for being ridiculous and allowing me to make fun of you constantly.

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Everyone in Odumase Krobo: Thank you for always taking me to bars and not judging when I drank a Star at all hours of the day. More importantly (I guess), thanks for being open to me and allowing me to learn about your traditions!

Introduction

Roughly sometime between the fourteenth and eighteenth centuries, a woman named Nana Klow□ki appeared on Krobo Mountain, located in the Eastern region of Ghana. When asked where she came from, Klow□ki gave no answer, saying only that she was a Priestess who was in constant communication with the spirits around her. Because these were times of sporadic warfare, the Krobos quickly allowed Nana Klow□ki to take shelter with them, and soon enough she became an important part of the Krobo community as one of the most esteemed deities on the mountain.

But Nana Klow□ki had a problem with the Krobos: she understood that all Krobo men were circumcised, but she feared that the Krobo women had no way to distinguish themselves from the Akans, the Ewes, or any other peoples in Ghana. Klow□ki felt it unfair that boys had an essential process through which they were able to transition into adulthood and into the Krobo community, but that the similar process for girls, named *dipo*, had little significance attached to it. Seeing this problem, Klow□ki developed the *dipo* ceremony into one which she planned to use more fully as a tool for ushering girls into womanhood. She hoped to make *dipo* more ceremonial and to fashion it into a process through which she could teach girls the ways of femininity and beg the spirits to protect them and bring them success. Soon enough, all parents were requesting that Klow□ki perform *dipo* for their daughters; and even after Klow□ki mysteriously vanished, *dipo* remained an enormously important facet of Krobo girls' transformations into true *Kloyo* (Krobo women).

However, in the 1800s, the arrival of the Basel Missionaries posed a great threat to the *dipo* ceremony. The missionaries stated that, “[*dipo*] is incompatible with Christianity and has to end because of its horrible influence, customs, and rules” (Steegstra 2005: 102). The Christians therefore attempted to abolish *dipo* by convincing the Krobo people that the practice was

inherently un-Christian and therefore entirely heathen. However, the missionaries quickly discovered that, “The *dipo* ceremony... made the conversion of girls and women extremely difficult” (Wilson 1995: 150), because the Krobo people had such a strong belief in its necessity. The missionaries’ hope was to replace the *dipo* ceremony with formal education in order to eradicate the process and instill Christian practices within the Krobo people. Slowly, the missionaries’ plan seemed to succeed, with more and more Christian converts promising to forgo the *dipo* rites for their daughters. However, “by the late 1880s, an increasing number of converts were returning to their old religious practices. It was not that they rejected Christianity completely; they wanted to be part of both worlds” (Wilson 1995: 151).

And today, this is mostly how *dipo* continues to exist: there are some Christians who reject the process outright, but the vast majority of people in Krobo practice Christianity while also attaching great importance to the *dipo* ceremony. Though the specifics of *dipo* have changed as a result of both education and Christianity, the general idea of *dipo* as a way for girls to move into womanhood continues to flourish among people in the community; and it is a widely accepted notion that a young girl can only be considered a *Kloyo* once she has had the rites performed for her.

When I first heard about *dipo*, I was fascinated by the ideals behind it. As a Women’s and Gender Studies major, I dedicate much of my academic time in the US to studying how American girls transition from girlhood into womanhood, and how this transition fits into our societal definitions of “womanhood.” *Dipo* was a unique concept to me because, despite so much informal education for American girls, the idea that there is one, unifying rite of passage which can solidify the transition into womanhood, is virtually unheard of in the United States.

That said, I first became interested in *dipo* for its contrast to practices in America; but as I delved deeper into the Krobo's traditions, I realized that because so many customs and practices have been lost in the Krobo tradition, Krobo may not be so vastly far off from the Western World after all. And despite this fact, I found that *dipo* continues to persist, and it seems as if it is not going anywhere. Even though less people follow the traditional religion and a decreasing number of children value the traditional spiritual values, the *dipo* rites continue to have great significance among the Krobo people. This led me to wonder: how is it, despite all the pressing forces of Christianity, westernization, and modernization, that *dipo* continues to survive and flourish?

I became interested in learning not only the reasons behind the persistence of the *dipo* process, but also in all of its many intricacies and spiritual meanings. I wanted to learn why *dipo* was deemed necessary by so many people and what it meant for young girls in terms of womanhood in Krobo and in Ghana. And as I wondered about the *dipo* process and the transition from girlhood into womanhood, I began to form the same questions in my mind surrounding the male experience in Krobo. If girls were being taught how to be women through *dipo*, how were boys being taught to be men? I understood that circumcision was considered the parallel to *dipo* in the Krobo tradition, but I was confused as to why this was. Furthermore, circumcision didn't actually teach boys anything tangible about being men; so how was it that they learned how to behave themselves in the properly Krobo masculine manner?

Even more than discovering the details of the rites of passage for males and females in Krobo, I wanted to uncover the reasoning behind these customs. I hoped that by discovering the origins and philosophies behind each practice, I could gain insights into the ideas of "manhood" and "womanhood" for the Krobo people in both a traditional and modern-day context.

With this, I began my journey into the world of Kroboland, a place so beautiful and rich in custom it is difficult not to become enamored with it. I decided that in order to even begin to understand the beliefs and traditions of Krobo, I would need to immerse myself as much as possible in the society, which is why I chose to spend the entirety of my fieldwork in Odumase Krobo. Although I could not watch the actual rites being performed since they take place in April, and although I did struggle with adjusting to a new location where I did not speak the language, I found that my research was ultimately rewarding and that I was able to achieve my objectives. My methodology, findings, and conclusion are all included in my paper... enjoy!

Methodology

To complete my research I spent about three weeks in Odumase Krobo, the capitol city of the Manya Krobo district in the Eastern region. There, I lived with a family that had two children, one of whom was a boy, Babbitte, and the other a girl, Diana. The boy was about eight years old, while the girl was ten. Although Diana was adopted from the North, her parents raised her using their own Krobo values, and so by observing the upbringing of both Babbitte and Diana in everyday life, I was able to gather knowledge surrounding how informal education at home differs according to gender, and to then make inferences about this in terms of “manhood” and “womanhood” in Krobo.

Additionally, I conducted twenty four interviews with various people. I interviewed five school-aged girls, all of whom had undergone the *dipo* rites. From them I gathered a general overview of the *dipo* process, and since the girls were the first people I interviewed, this overview proved extremely helpful. I was also able to get perspectives from the girls on *dipo* that differed greatly from those I would encounter in older people from the community. The girls were able to describe to me their feelings surrounding *dipo* in general, as well as their feelings surrounding their own passage through the *dipo* rites. Another interesting part of my interview with the girls was that two of them were devout Christians, and said they would not want the rites performed for their children; while the other three were more traditional, and said that they felt it was extremely important for the rites to be performed for their daughters. This contrast offered me many unique insights into how *dipo* is changing, but also how it is persisting.

Similarly, I interviewed five school-aged boys in order to get a feel for the current male rites of passage. The boys I spoke to were extremely helpful both in what they said about the *dipo* rites as well as in what they told me about male upbringing in Krobo. The boys were

unaware of what the rites of passage for boys would have been in the olden days, but the information they gave me on their own upbringing provided me with valuable information about the transition from boyhood to manhood for Krobo males. Additionally, four of the five boys I spoke to were devout Christians who said they would not want *dipo* performed on their children, and yet none of that majority spoke with as much passion as the one boy who explained to me the vast importance of *dipo*. The interview I had with the boy who was pro-*dipo* was probably one of my favorite interviews, since he told me much about Krobo manhood as well as womanhood.

In addition to the young Christians I spoke to, I spoke to one adult male who was training to be a pastor and was strongly opposed to the *dipo* rites. This interview was interesting because it provided me with a different perspective from the other adults I spoke to in Krobo; and yet I think I was most struck by how similar his opinions were to even the most traditional elders I spoke to. It seemed that he had varying beliefs regarding religion, of course, and he did believe that *dipo* itself was pagan; yet at the same time, his belief in the value of “womanhood” and “manhood” was almost identical to the other adults I spoke to in favor of *dipo*. In this way, this interview was helpful in that it caused me to reconsider the actual differences between Christian Krobos and the traditionalists in Odumase.

I also spoke to four elders, three men and one woman. The elders gave me interesting information because they spoke both of their feelings on the importance of preserving the Krobo tradition for the younger generations, and were also able to tell me of their experiences as young people. They told me of the original rites for boys and how those have changed, as well as why those rites have changed, information which was extremely helpful to the side of my project dealing with male rites of passage. I heard stories of girls who had been banished for being

pregnant before *dipo* and of women living with the priestess for an entire three months before being considered *Kloyos*. They told me of how things have changed on a concrete level, since they were actually around before some of the changes were in place. I think one of my best interviews was with the elderly man who described what happened when there was a girl in town who was banished for being pregnant before her *dipo* rites had been finished: he explained to me exactly what happened, and spoke on it in a way I had never considered. Hence, because the elders had both valuable information and often more traditional opinions, the interviews they gave me were extremely helpful to my project.

I formally interviewed two of the Queen Mothers, who gave me lots of information on their roles in Krobo as well as their views on the youth moving into adulthood. As respected and informed members of the community, they were able to give me a unique perspective on the transition from childhood into adulthood in Krobo. The women gave me information on both the traditional rites for boys and for girls. I heard both the positives and negatives of the changes that have taken place in these rites over the years, and the Queen Mothers were particularly helpful in offering me both sides of every story. The women were extremely intelligent, and it was amazing to speak to women who had thought critically about the benefits of *dipo* and traditional rites, as well as about the benefits of modernization.

I spoke to two traditional priests and three traditional priestesses. This was helpful because two of the people I spoke to were actually from the Klow□ki shrine. These people explained to me in greater detail the history of Klow□ki and how she contributed to *dipo*, which provided me with a more thorough background on the subject. All of the priestesses I spoke to were women who had performed the rites for girls in the past and would presumably continue to perform the rites this upcoming April and in years to come. They explained to me how one

becomes certified to perform the rites as well as what precautions and actions the woman performing the rites must take. All of these religious figures spoke on the spiritual importance of the rites of passage for both males and females, and more specifically, they were able to break down the meanings behind the steps in the *dipo* process. These interviews provided me with a more complete knowledge of the process and its spiritual and historical significance.

I interviewed two Krobo women in town, one of whom was the Kodjonya Presby School Mother and the other of whom distributed beads. Both of these women were extremely helpful not only because of their credentials, but also because of their insights as typical citizens of Krobo. The School Mother used her close relationship to the school in order to provide me with a comprehensive account of how formal education contributes to girls' and boys' upbringing. In addition, she explained to me her beliefs on how formal education, Christianity, and *dipo* can work together to raise girls rather than clash with one another. The woman who distributes beads told me the significance of beads, which form an important facet of the *dipo* process. She also told me about her beliefs on the differences between the upbringing of boys and girls, which contributed to my understanding of boyhood and girlhood in Krobo.

Finally, I conducted many informal interviews with people I met around town. Sometimes I would meet people at bars or just on the street who would be eager to speak to me, and whenever I questioned them about their beliefs in *dipo*, circumcision, or any other rites of passage, they offered me interesting perspectives that contributed to my research as a whole. In this way, although I conducted only twenty four formal interviews, I actually spoke to many more people and was therefore able to gain more thoughtful insights on rites of passage and perceptions of gender in Krobo.

Section 1: Rites of Passage for Girls in Odumase Krobo

1.1: The Traditional *dipo* Process

In its traditional form, preparation for the *dipo* process could begin any time before the actual ceremony were to take place, because the girl's parents had to visit the shrine so that the priest could inquire to the spirits as to whether or not the girl was allowed to have *dipo* performed for her. The spirit that answered was called the girl's *susuma*, which is "often translated as 'soul,' [the] spiritual part of one's individuality" (Steegstra 2005: 329). Sometimes the *susuma* might require something extra from the girl in order for her to have the rites performed for her. For example, a girl may be required to wear a veil during her rites, which signified that her spirit was from the north (Priestess Malaja, 7 NOV 2011). One Queen Mother I spoke to told me that once, a *susuma* required that a girl be taken to her house after her rites to be decorated with beads (Djase Manye Namo, 17 NOV 2005). This process of inquiring to the *susuma* further indicates that a girl cannot be considered a *Kloyo* until after the *dipo* rites have been performed for her, since her soul may be from another part of Ghana. That the *susuma* allows the girls to have the rites performed for her indicates that the spirits are understanding of the importance of girls joining the Krobo community, even if that means a sort of break with their original souls.

Once permission had been granted by the *susuma*, the girl had to wait until she was around twenty years old before she could begin going through *dipo* process. Contrary to popular belief outside of Krobo, the female's menstrual cycle does not have any bearing on when she begins having *dipo* performed for her; however, if a girl happens to have her period during her *dipo* rites, it is an honor and she is considered a more pure and true Krobo woman. First, the girl and her parents had to select which priestess they would like to have perform the rites. This

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selection was normally made merely based on location, but still, it was most desirable to have the rites performed by a member of the Klow□ki shrine.

Before the *dipo* rites had been performed for girls, it was absolutely forbidden for the girls to get pregnant, which meant that most girls were abstinent. In fact, *dipo* is said to have been retained partially as a means to reduce teenage pregnancy. The elders in the community told me that in its traditional form, *dipo* was an extremely successful deterrent from under-aged sex, since even if the girl got an abortion, the priestess during her *dipo* rites would be able to sense that she had once been pregnant and she would be banished. One elder told me that he saw this happen once when he was young: about sixty years ago, it was discovered that a girl was pregnant before her *dipo* rites, and so she was whipped in front of the entire community and then permanently banished. To this day, he believes that no one from Odumase, including her family, has ever seen her again (Dede Jebke, 9 NOV 2011).

The actual rites began around Easter time, usually at the beginning of April. The first day of the ceremony was on a Friday, when the girls would go to the shrine to have the *soni* placed on them. The *soni* is a part of a palm tree leaf that is tied around the girl's neck, and which signified that she has begun the *dipo* process, meaning she would now be called a *dipo-yi* (See figure 1 in appendix). The *soni* would be placed on and removed from the girl's neck three times before it was finally tied. They would repeat the action three times because the number three was thought to solidify all actions (which is why many of the actions in *dipo* are repeated three times). Once the *soni* had been tied, the *dipo-yi* would drink only pure water and eat only traditional Krobo food until her rites were finished. This diet signified that the girl would be pure before her actual ceremony began and that she was honoring her Krobo identity (Tetteh Leticia, 2 NOV 2011).

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After this, the *dipo-yi* would live together at the shrine for at least a year, sometimes even longer. Some elders in the community told me that parents might require their daughters to stay up to three years, because having your daughter stay longer at the shrine signified that you were wealthy enough to pay the priestess. During this time, the girls were taught to do all of the things which were believed to be necessary for Krobo women to learn. This included housework such as cooking, cleaning, and sweeping. It also included learning about having a successful family by being taught about motherhood and wifhood. Specifically, the girls would learn things like how to care for a baby, how to manage economic expenses, how to nurture a husband, and how to raise a proper son or daughter. Also during this time, when girls reached certain stages they would be marked with a razor blade to signify that they had completed their training. After a girl passed through the “sweeping test,” she would receive three marks on her hand in between her thumb and index finger (see figure 2 in appendix) to signify that she had learned to keep up a house properly (Adjase Koyo, 18 NOV 2011). Towards the end of their training, the girls would receive marks on their stomach that represented fertility, and signified that because they had been passed through the *dipo* rites, they were ready to have children and begin a family. Finally, the girls would receive marks on the backs of their waists, which signified love for their future husbands. I was unable to get pictures of either of these two markings because the elderly women told me that only their husbands were permitted to see their marks. These marks were then both representative of the female’s love for her family and husband, but also of her promised abstinence and loyalty to him. (Manye Koko, 19 NOV 2011).

Once the marks had been given to the girls and the training time had passed, the ceremony could begin. The girls would be taken on Saturday to bathe in the sacred stream, clothed only in a white loin cloth, which signified purity. The girls would take a calabash, soap,

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and a stick to hold them up in the water. They would hold the stick while they bathed and use the calabash to pour water over themselves. This bath signified a rebirth, since they would be cleansed of their former selves by the sacred water and from there they would move into womanhood. In addition, as the girls bathed they would be taught to properly wash their clothing, a further way in which they were being prepared for their future role as home-makers. Then, the girls would be given a brown drink made of millet, which was representative of the millet pounding tradition which Nana Klow□ki created, and was meant to cleanse the insides of the body with a purely Krobo substance (Priest Okumo, 7 NOV 2011).

After the ritual bathing, the girls would be taken back to the shrine where they would prepare plantain fufu with palm nut soup and goat meat. This specific type of food was important to the process because it had been eaten by the Krobos since their arrival on Krobo Mountain. After the girls had eaten, they would prepare for the slaughtering of a goat or a sheep, a process called *menobotom*. The girls would be covered with a white cloth, signifying purity, before the animal was slaughtered as a sacrifice to the spirits. The *dipo-yi* would touch their heads to the goat or sheep three times while the priestess would beg the spirits to bring the girls protection and success in their future marriages. After the priestess finished the slaughter, she would pour the animal blood on the girls' feet in order to cleanse them (Terkper Sarah, 2 NOV 2011).

The next morning, which is a Sunday, is called *bua sia mi*. At this time, each girl's head would be shaved, save for a small circle on the very top of her head towards the back. The shaving of the head represented the girl's rebirth; she was shedding away her former self in order to become a new woman who was grown and a full part of the Krobo tradition. The circle left in

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back signified that this rebirth was not yet complete, and it would be shaved off completely only once the rites had been finished (Bedu Linda, 2 NOV 2011).

After shaving the girls' heads, the priestess would sacrifice a white fowl in order to further purify the girls and to protect them from harm (Priest Okumo, 7 NOV 2011). After this, the girls would once again go to the stream to bathe. There, they would collect water in a calabash, pouring it in and out again three times, and then put leaves in the calabash to signify natural purity. After this, they would wear beads around their waists along with necklaces made from the innards and intestines of the previously slaughtered goat or sheep to signify that they were being protected by the spirits. They would also wear a red loin cloth hanging from their waists that would cover their private parts (See figure 3 in appendix), which represented their menstrual cycles and femininity (Amoko Nyako, 9 NOV 2011).

After this, the girls would be sent to the site of their initiation. There, they would sit on a dried elephant skin mat. This mat signified that the girls were ready to be initiated. When I asked why it was elephant skin in particular, everyone told me the same thing: that it was "simply the tradition" (Priest Okumo, 7 NOV 2011). After that, the girls would line up by height to go and sit on what is called the *tɔgbɔtɔ* stone. Sitting on the *tɔgbɔtɔ* was the climax of the *dipo* process and was considered the most important part of the rite. No men or non-Krobo women were allowed to witness this part of the process since it is considered very sacred. The *tɔgbɔtɔ* is a large stone, which is believed to be surrounded by sacred spirits. It consists of a very large stone with a smaller stone in the middle, and the priestess performing the rite had to choose the most virginal girl from *dipo-yi* to sit on the small stone in the middle. If even a slightly impure girl sat on the middle, it was believed that something terrible would happen to the priestess who had sat her there (Djase Manye Namo, 17 NOV 2011). Each girl would go sit

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and then rise from the stone three times, and it was believed that if a girl was pregnant, the spirits of the stone would not allow her to rise and she would be stuck there. Similarly, if a girl was not pregnant but was impure, she would stumble or trip when it was her turn to sit on the stone (Priestess Malaja 17 NOV 2011). This was said to be the way by which the priestess could ensure that all of the girls were pure; however, it was very rare that a girl's pregnancy would not be discovered and caused her to have been banished earlier than this stage.

Once each girl had sat on the stone, she would be carried back to town on the back or shoulders of a man. The girls were not permitted to speak or to look back since this was a sacred time when they were making the transition into womanhood. Each girl would hold a white cloth over the patch of hair on her head and would put leaves in between her lips as a representation of her future marriage when she would listen to her husband rather than always be speaking (Ernestina Anafu, 3 NOV 2011). Additionally, if a girl was on her period, the priestess would put powder over her to signify that she was a true Krobo woman (Tetty Dora, 2 NOVEMBER 2011).

Once they had returned to town, the boys would place each girl back on the elephant skin mat for the rest of her hair to be shaved, signifying that she had been reborn and passed completely through the rites. The girls would then tie many beads around their wrists, waists, and necks (Bedu Linda, 2 NOV 2011). The beads were very important because they signified the pride of Krobo and on a more personal level, having many beads signified being wealthy. The *Poa beads* are red, white, and blue, and are very expensive; these are the beads most often associated with the *dipo* rites. The *Zaba* are the large white beads; the *Otaka* are the large yellow beads; the *Bajibenote* have a black almost splatter effect; the *Peniua* are yellow circular beads covered in painted designs; and the *Omichomete* are the smaller yellow beads (See figure 4 in

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appendix). I describe these beads in such detail because they were extremely important to the traditional *dipo* custom, since they were gems made specifically by Krobos (Amoko Nyako, 9 NOV 2011). The girls would then be given a tall, cylindrical hat that they would place on their heads and remove three times before wearing. This hat represented priestly spirituality and was another way to honor the gods (See figure 5 in appendix).

After this, the girls would be given the meat of the previously slaughtered goat or sheep which they had to chew and spit out three times before eating. The *dipo-yi* would then dance and sing with the other women, who included the priestesses, mothers, and sometimes elder female sisters and relatives. The girls would then be confined to the shrine for whatever amount of time their parents wished, usually up to three months. As I mentioned earlier, it was a status symbol to stay longer, since it meant that the parents could afford to pay the priest enough money to house their daughter. There, they would be taught more songs, dances, and stories. During this time, the girls' hair was not washed or cut, and only once the hair had grown back were the girls permitted to work again (Steegstra 2005: 273). Once the girls' parents wished for her to finish her confinement, her hair was washed to signify a complete rebirth and that she would now be known as a *Kloyo*.

The Monday after confinement was called *Blemi*, meaning the closing of *dipo*, and it is when the girls would come to town and remove the hat from their heads, taking care not to look inside the hat. Not looking inside the hat represented not looking back to the time before the girls were *Kloyo* and instead looking ahead to a future of marriage and happiness (Betu Linda, 2 NOV 2011). The girls would now wear dresses that puffed out at the stomach to signify fertility, along with many beads to signify their Krobo identity (Priest Okumo, 7 NOV 2011). The girls would then go around thanking everyone involved in their *dipo* ceremony and sometimes

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receiving gifts from elders. The girls would then go to town to dance the *Klama* dance, which is the feminine dance associated most closely with *dipo*, for everyone to see. The *Klama* dance, known as *hangme*, is a soft and graceful dance, which I was shown by the four young girls I interviewed, in which the girls slightly bend their wrists and move to the beat of the drum, two very subtle steps forward with each foot. In his study of *Klama*, David Coplan describes the dance by saying, “through its identification with *dipo*, ‘hangme’ is a symbol of Krobo womanhood and an artistic expression of their concept of true femininity” (Coplan 1972: 130).

Immediately following *Blemi*, the *dipo* ceremony was over and the girls were permitted to eat and drink any food or water they wished and wear whatever clothes they wanted to. The girls were now considered true *Kloyo* and were therefore eligible for marriage. Krobo men could now begin to court them and after *dipo* rites, it was expected that all Krobo females would get married and begin a family.

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1.2: Changes in *dipo* and Current Conceptions of Womanhood

Overtime, there have been many changes made to the *dipo* process, most of which I was told could be attributed to either formal education, Christianity, or both. The most noted of these changes is the age of the girls: while *dipo* used to be for grown girls who would be eligible for marriage immediately after the ceremony; today, the *dipo-yi* can be as young as four years old. Many of the people I spoke to attribute this change primarily to Christianity. One man I spoke to told me that because Christianity preaches that Christ is forgiving, girls begin sinning early (i.e.; having sex young). Because of this, parents want to ensure that *dipo* is done while their daughters are still virgins so that the spirits are not angered and the priestesses will not deny them access to the *tɔgbɔtɔ* (Ochiami George Boatey, 8 NOV 2011). The man I spoke to who was in training to become a reverend told me that the shift is a result of parents wanting to baptize their daughters after they have had *dipo* performed for them (Stephen Amanor Tetteh, 15 NOV 2011). Either way, both traditionalists and Christians alike agreed that the shift in ages of the *dipo-yi* can be attributed to the rise of Christianity in Krobo.

What struck me most about what people told me about this change was its perceived effect on the youth in Krobo: everyone agreed that more girls were getting pregnant as teenagers because they were having the rites performed for them earlier. All of the elders in town told me that this increase in teenage pregnancy was because *dipo* had been impacted by Christianity, causing the ages of the *dipo-yi* to decrease, and also because Christianity preached that Christ was forgiving. In this way, they said that it was impossible to instill enough fear of sex in girls and therefore, abstinence was diminishing. Conversely, the devout Christians I spoke to said that in fact, the reason for teenage pregnancy was because of *dipo* itself. While the elders and Queen Mothers said that, “in the olden days, there was no teenage pregnancy because there was such a

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fear of being banished before your *dipo* rites” (Manye Koko, 19 NOV 2011); the devout Christians told me that *dipo* encouraged girls to have sex immediately after their rites rather than to wait for marriage (Stephen Amanor Tetteh, 15 NOV 2011). My perception of these contrasting views is that teenage pregnancy and in particular, abstinence-only education, is one area where Christianity and *dipo* cannot coexist. As long as abstinence is the goal for young girls, there has to be a more clear set of rules: either they must be taught that there is no forgiveness for teenage pregnancy and therefore they absolutely must wait until they are of age, or they must be taught that they cannot have sex until marriage. Trying to place singular blame on either tradition or Christianity for the increase in teenage pregnancy is almost impossible, for the truth seems to be to me, that as long as these two doctrines are trying to coexist, it is impossible to preach abstinence rather than safe sex.

Another significant change in the *dipo* rites is its length. In between the time when the girls are given the *soni* and when the rites began slowly decreased over time to six months, three months, one month, one week, and up until now when it is just one day. The Queen Mothers I spoke to said that they spent one week at the shrine before their ceremonies began (Djase Manye Namu, 17 NOV 2011), and that their mothers spent three months (Manye Koko, 19 NOV 2011). Today, this has been reduced to just one night because the things that used to be taught during that time are now taught in schools during home economics courses (Dede Jabake, 9 NOV 2011). Additionally, because the girls are not taught these things during the year period at the time and for fear of infections, the *dipo-yi* are no longer marked with razor blades on their hands, stomachs, and waists. Instead, the priestess will feign making the markings with her fingers to symbolize that the girls have passed through the rites (Djase Manye Namu, 17 NOV 2011). In the same vein, girls are no longer confined to the shrine for any amount of time after they go the

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t□gb□t□, and instead, *Blemi* happens the Monday after. This is again, a result of education, because girls cannot be taken out of school for such an extended period of time (Ernestina Anafu, 3 NOV 2011).

Additionally, a smaller practice which has been removed is the goat-intestine necklaces which were worn to the *t□gb□t□*. I was not told directly why this practice had changed, but I gathered that it has been removed as a result of more modernized/Westernized thinking. One man called the practice “the primitive way of thinking” (Stephen Amanor Tetteh, 15 NOV 2011), while the school girls I spoke to simply giggled and made faces of disgust. It seemed to me that the result of this type of thinking is a result of Christianity, since the Christians I spoke to who had problems with *dipo* all said, in some way, that *dipo* was an out-dated process. One girl stated, “I’ve realized that there is nothing about [*dipo*] in the Bible so it is not good and I will not do it for my children” (Dzorkpe Janet, 2 NOV 2011). Another said, “I don’t want it for my girls because they show the breasts and this is very bad” (Tetteh Leticia, 2 NOV 2011); however, when I asked Leticia if she, herself, was embarrassed or ashamed when her breasts were shown during her rites, she continued, “No, I was not embarrassed but now I have a new way of thinking with the Bible that shows me I should have been ashamed to show myself,” implying that her thinking has somehow improved or modernized due to reading the Bible.

And these two girls were not alone in their thinking that *dipo* would not be performed on their children. I spoke to another four young boys who were against *dipo* and told me things like, “when I believe in Jesus, I will not do [*dipo*] no matter what” (Djabatey Stephen Teye, 15 NOV 2011), and, “I see they have been doing some voodoo which goes with the traditional superstitions” (Ayertey Elijah, 15 NOV 2011). But despite these ways in which some young people were against *dipo*, I found that everyone in Krobo, including the future-reverend I spoke

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to, believed that the non-spiritual side of *dipo* was still conducive to the idea of womanhood. This future-reverend told me, “In theory it’s good, because you need to prepare the girls for marriage” (Stephen Amanor Tetteh, 15 NOV 2011). Similarly, both traditionalists and Christians alike agreed that *dipo* was a positive thing at least on the level that it prepares girls for Krobo womanhood.

Krobo womanhood is then about more than simply learning to sweep and cook, but instead; it’s about learning to become the head of a family. In Krobo, family is extremely important, and the woman is thought to contribute to this family through her role as a loving mother who rears her children, and a nurturing wife who keeps up the house and provides care for her husband. Additionally, the fact that *dipo* continues to survive despite the increase in Christianity tells me that a huge part of being a Krobo woman is keeping the Krobo identity intact. Although the majority of the young people I spoke to were against the *dipo* rites, those who favored *dipo* spoke with far more fervor and gusto than the Christians spoke about their dedication to the Bible. One of the first young boys I spoke to said, “Yes, I will do it for my daughters because I am a Krobo and so they will be Krobos. My daughter will not marry without having the rites for her because that is not the way we do it and she must show respect to her parents and I to my parents. I am a Christian, but I am also a Krobo, and being a Krobo means that I am proud of being a Krobo” (Tetteh Richmond, 3 NOV 2011).

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2.1: Traditional Rites of Passage for Males

Traditionally, the Krobos did not have one distinct ceremony which marked the shift from boyhood to Krobo manhood (like *dipo* for girls), but instead there were many rituals which helped usher boys into both the Krobo community and their future roles as men.

Firstly, if the boy had a twin sister, he could have the *dipo* rites performed for him at the same time as his sister went through her rites. There were specific parts of the process which the boy was left out of, most notably the visit to the *t□gb□t□* stone, but nevertheless, he was allowed to participate in the ceremony in order to both honor his sister and to embrace their Krobo identities together. When Marijke Steegstra observed *dipo* being performed for a twin boy, she noted that the priest said to him, “As a man behold your *soni*, we add it to [your sister’s]. All that needs be done for you, [your sister] takes up” (Steegstra 2005: 253). From this, it is clear that the rites were performed for males mostly to add to the female process, but still, including males in the ceremony served as a way for these boys to honor their Krobo identities as well.

Aside from the *dipo* rites, which were performed exclusively for boys who were twins, young boys could only be considered Krobo men once they were circumcised. I received much varying information as to when circumcision took place: the book I read said it was “from the second to sixth year” (Steegstra 2005: 204), but many elders in the community told me that circumcision happened between the ages of ten and twenty because this was when boys were truly ready to enter manhood. These elders also told me that the circumcision ritual could be traced back to the Krobo’s Hebrew ancestry. However, I found this curious because in the Jewish tradition, circumcision happens eight days after birth, is associated strongly with the Bible, and includes a *bris*, none of which are true for traditional Krobo circumcision. Instead,

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before circumcision, the boy's entire family would be bathed as a sign of purification. Then, the boy would be circumcised by a priest, who would also bury his foreskin and slaughter a fowl as a sacrifice to the spirits in order to bring the boy protection and success. Often times, people would bring gifts to the boy after he had been circumcised to honor his transition into Krobo manhood (Stephen Nano Matekoli, 19 NOV 2011).

Circumcision was important because it signified that the boy had been initiated into the Krobo community, and could now be considered separate from other tribes. Steegstra describes circumcision as “an old institution that distinguished... the ritually ‘clean’ from the ‘unclean’” (Steegstra 2005: 204). In particular, many of the people I spoke to consider the Akans “unclean people” because traditionally the Akans were uncircumcised. Additionally, only circumcised men were allowed to speak to Krobo priests or priestesses, and men had to be circumcised in order to even enter Krobo Mountain. Hence, any Krobo who wanted to reside on the mountain had to have themselves and their children circumcised (Wilson 1995: 31).

Although circumcision was thought essential in order for boys to be considered true Krobos, circumcision alone had no hand in actually teaching boys how to behave as Krobo men. Instead, because the Krobos were traditionally farmers, there were many rituals related to farming which were meant to prepare the boy for manhood. When the boy was about twelve years old, his father would give him a small lamb. It was then the boy's job to rear this lamb until it was about three or four years old; however, there were certain requirements of the lamb that had to be met before the boy could move on. First, the lamb had to be well-behaved and obedient, but the boy was not permitted to achieve this through any sort of violence. Instead, he had to learn to keep a calm temper with the lamb and admonish it without losing control or becoming overly angry at the lamb. This portion of the “lamb test” was essential because a large

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part of Krobo manhood was learning how to control one's temper, especially in terms of raising children and nurturing a wife. Therefore, the boy had to learn to bring up a good lamb without being overbearing, the same way he would need to learn to raise his children and care for his wife (Ochiami George Boatey, 8 NOV 2011). Additionally, it was compulsory that the boy's lamb love him; the lamb had to be able to pick the boy out of a crowd of people and choose to go to him above anyone else. This was representative of finding a wife to love you and raising children who loved and respected you as well. In the same vein, if the lamb left, it had to have the love in it to return home, or else the boy needed to have the patience to follow the lamb and coax it back home. This again was representative of a wife; for if a man's wife left him, he had to ensure that she would return home (Mensa Sakite Emmanuel, 16 NOV 2011). Once the lamb had grown to three or four years and the boy's father decided that he had raised the lamb well enough, he would be given another to rear again. Once this second lamb was three or four years and had again reached the requirements, he would then be given another. Only once this third lamb was raised would the father deem the boy ready for marriage. The purpose of doing this test three times was very similar to the reason for why many acts in the Dipo ceremony were done three times: the number three was seen as a solidifying number. The Krobos believed that important things, especially in terms of learning, had to be done three times in order for them to really settle in (Ochiami George Boatey, 8 NOV 2011). In this way, doing the "lamb test" three times ensured that once the boy had finished, he would be ready for marriage.

In addition to the "lamb test," the boy would also have to learn many practical farming skills so that he could later make money and have resources for his family. First, he was taught how to cultivate palm trees and to climb a palm tree using a rope, which would tie around the tree while the boy held on to the two ends and scaled the trunk. Next, the boy's father would

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teach him how to set traps for game so that he could eventually know how to provide food for his family. When the boy was considered “of age” both physically and emotionally, his father would buy him a gun and teach him to hunt so that he would be able to kill animals both for self-sufficiency as well as for profit. Finally, when the boy seemed almost ready for marriage, around the age of sixteen or eighteen, his father would give him a plot of land to cultivate, and once he had effectively cultivated it, the boy would be given the land permanently and allowed to start his future family with it (Ochiami George Boatey, 8 NOV 2011).

In terms of sex, it was desirable for a man to abstain from sex until he was deemed “of age,” but because there was no ceremony such as *dipo* which specifically made him “of age,” males were generally allowed more leeway in their sexual lives. For example, the man I spoke to about seeing the woman publicly whipped and then banished for her early pregnancy, said that no harm came to the boy who got her pregnant. Even gossip in the town did not slander his name, since the girl had already been named “provocative” due to her pregnancy and was thought to have slept with many men who could have been the father. Because of this, the father was allowed to walk free while the girl had to be exiled from her home (Dede Jebake, 9 NOV 2011).

These rites of passage, although seemingly less official and ceremonial than the *dipo* process, were nevertheless considered essential for males growing up in Krobo. And like *dipo*, only once a boy had passed through all of them could he be considered a true Krobo man.

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2.2: Changes in Male Rites and Current Conceptions of Manhood

Through my interviews, I found that much like my findings for female rites of passage, the male rites of passage have undergone many changes in terms of the specific processes; but that conceptions of proper manhood have generally stayed the same.

First of all, twin boys are still allowed to have the *dipo* rites performed for them along with their sisters and the limitations on their participation in the ceremony has stayed the same.

The most noted rite of passage for males, circumcision, has undergone many changes in terms of the ceremony, but ultimately the idea behind the practice has not changed. Today, circumcision occurs seven to eight days after birth, rather than when the boy is grown. This change has taken place largely because of growing health concerns, as well as because circumcision becomes increasingly painful as boys age. Additionally, many parents worry about infection for their children and therefore want circumcision to be done by a doctor or midwife. Because circumcision usually happens in the hospital, the rituals which went along with it in the Krobo tradition have also gone away, and instead parents will sometimes offer the doctor or midwife who performs circumcision a small refreshment as a token of thanks, but nothing more occurs. However, despite these omissions in modern-day circumcision, the idea that a boy cannot be considered a Krobo man without being circumcised is still widely accepted throughout Krobo. Whenever I asked what the male equivalent for *dipo* was, I was always answered with male circumcision, because it is the defining step by which boys are accepted into the Krobo community. Additionally, uncircumcised males are still not allowed in certain fetish shrines and still, uncircumcised males are regarded as extremely “unclean.” Although I was told that today, almost all men in Ghana are circumcised, the Krobos still feel that having the process performed

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for boys marks them as truly “Krobo” because it is a way to honor their ancestors and is therefore necessary for the boy to be considered part of the Krobo tradition.

The other traditional rite of passage I mentioned, the “lamb test,” along with the teaching of farming skills and the presentation of land and a gun, has completely disappeared from mainstream society, although the Queen Mothers told me they thought that some farmers still do these practices for their sons (Manye Koko, 19 NOV 2011). Instead, most boys are taught that in order to gain economic success, they must do well in school. Formal education is seen as the gateway for young boys towards making enough money to support the family. This change has then occurred because of a shift in the Krobo economy: whereas on Krobo Mountain, the Krobos engaged in a largely agricultural trading economy, today, the Krobos have access to a wider range of jobs and therefore to a wider range of economic opportunities. One of the boys I spoke to at school told me, “We must get a good education so that we will become someone in the future and provide for our families” (Djabate Stephen Teye, 15 NOV 2011). In this way, the shift is in the means by which to acquire money, but still, the objective for making money is to provide for the family. Hence, although the specifics of economic gains have changed, the idea that a man’s primary concern is his family has stayed the same.

In terms of learning how to have a family, the “lamb test” has been replaced largely by informal education at home. One woman told me that boys were educated by both their mothers and fathers, but that the fathers served as more of the role model figure, while the mother was more of a disciplinary (Ernestina Anafu, 3 NOV 2011). This was corroborated by a mother in town who told me that she kept a very close eye on her sons because she “needs to make sure that the boys will not go wayward.” This same woman also told me that it was essential for her sons to learn right from wrong, and that they would learn this from her own teaching, as well as

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by following their father's example (Amokwo Nyako, 9 NOV 2011). Similarly, one boy at school told me, "I want my sons to learn to replace me when I am gone" (Tetteh Richmond, 3 NOV 2011). From what I observed in my home stay, the mother of the children would mostly scold the boy when he did something wrong, while the father figure would not take part in much of the disciplining. Instead, the boy was expected to model his behavior after his father while also taking heed of his mother's admonishments.

When I asked people in town what it meant for young boys to learn "right from wrong" and more specifically, what it meant to be a Krobo man, I got many similar answers. Both the elder and younger males I spoke to in the community said it was extremely important for Krobo men to keep a sane temper, and that they were taught this at home by their mothers, who punished them if their rage ever got out of hand. After describing the "lamb test" to me in great detail, one elderly man said, "Still, in these times, the boy is taught respect and calmness so that he doesn't lose his temper and because he must be kind to his wife and children when he grows and marries" (Ochiami George Boatey, 8 NOV 2011). In this way, even though the boys are taught to keep calm in a different way, the idea that a Krobo man has a sane temper continues to have relevance even as the "lamb test" has faded away.

In terms of sexual relations, things have not changed much either. Most people said that young boys should ideally abstain from sex, but that there is not much punishment for those who do not. The teenage boys I spoke to said that their parents have always told them to abstain from sex until marriage, but that most boys will begin having sex between the ages of fifteen and eighteen regardless. All of the young boys I spoke to stressed to me that it was important for them to not just follow girls, but instead to focus on their school work until they were ready to find wives. However, the boys also admitted to me that most boys did not follow this model and

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were either engaging in sex or fantasizing about engaging in sex before marriage. In this way, perceptions of Krobo males and sex have not changed: it is still considered honorable for a young man to abstain until marriage, but there is not much punishment if he does not. One woman I spoke to on the subject followed a statement about boys getting away with under-aged sex while women are brutally outcast and punished by sighing and saying, “But isn’t it this way all over the world?” (Ernestina Anafu, 3 NOV 2011).

In looking at these similarities and differences between rites of passage for males in a traditional and modern day context, I found that conceptions of manhood in Krobo are extremely similar to conceptions of womanhood. All the things that the Krobo male passes through are essentially steps towards his final goal to be a part of the Krobo community and the family community. His role in the family is as both an earner of money, as well as a level-headed role model for his children. The changes which have occurred in rites of passage seem to just be ways in which the Krobos have adapted their emphasis on family to more modern times: because the way to earn money for one’s family is no longer through farming, boys are now taught other ways in which to make economic gains. Similarly, the idea of fostering and maintaining the Krobo identity has continued relevance, as seen through the Krobo’s dedication to male circumcision. Males have to be circumcised because even though it has no actual bearing on their behaviors or future actions, it’s a symbolic practice which allows them to honor the Krobo tradition and become a part of the Krobo community.

Conclusion

Throughout my findings, I struggled to decide whether or not I found that the rites of passage for both males and females were empowering for young girls and boys. I think what most inhibited and confused my perception of empowerment in Krobo was my preconceived notions of what “empowerment,” and in particular what “female empowerment” meant. This, I found, was due largely to my background in Women’s and Gender Studies in the United States, where I study feminism in a Western context. Steegstra addresses this difficulty when she writes, “Many [Western feminist] interpretations [of female initiation rites] still seem to be inspired by the assumption that non-Western women must be more oppressed than European women” (Steegstra 2005: 9). That said, before I could make any informed conclusions, I had to let go of my pre-conceived notions regarding women outside of the first-world.

Furthermore, the problem I had with trying to think about female empowerment in Krobo within the context of Western feminism is that the entire idea of personhood takes on a different meaning in many Ghanaian communities than it does in the United States. In the majority of the Western world, “personhood” in general is about individuality. In order to achieve full personhood, one has to live their life as an individual; which means making choices as an individual, finding success as an individual, and positioning oneself in the world as an independent force who is affected by others, but ultimately lives to attain full humanity as a single, independent being. However, in Krobo, and from what I perceived from speaking to people around Odumase, in most of Ghana, personhood is not defined by individuality. Rather, achieving full personhood and living one’s life to the fullest, means being a part of a community. Charles Piot argues that, “To abstract out the individual, and his or her ‘interests’ and property, would seem, then, to be an inappropriate starting (or ending) point for theoretical analysis [of

culture in Ghana]. Further, the divide between individual and society is not part of the construction of the sociality in many African societies” (Piot 1999: 17). When applied to Krobo, Piot’s statement here is useful in reminding us that because the Krobos do not emphasize individuality in their definition of full personhood, trying to look at either manhood or womanhood through a Westernized perspective can be difficult.

Steegstra tries to explain her perception of Krobo “personhood” when she writes, “A person should be seen as composed of, or constituted by, relationships, rather than situated in them” (Steegstra 2005: 236). By this she means to say that in order to achieve full personhood in Krobo and essentially, in order to live one’s life to the fullest, it is crucial to be a part of a community and to define oneself through allegiance to said community. Hence, both *dipo* and, arguably male circumcision, which seem to deny individuality by forcing children to join communities they have not freely chosen themselves, could be perceived as disempowering in the United States. However, these processes are actually sources of empowerment in Krobo for the very reasons that they might be considered disempowering in the Western world: because they allow children to become part of a community and therefore to relinquish their sense of independence by defining themselves through their allegiance to the Krobo community and to the family.

For these reasons, I decided that within the Krobo context, *dipo* is empowering for young girls because it aids them in achieving what the Krobos consider full humanity by initiating them into important Krobo communities. Although the rites have strong implications for the biological aspects of femininity, such as that all women are nurturing, pure, and inherently maternal, which are widely disputed among Western feminists; the overarching ideas of the rites

are empowering for young girls because they allow females to embrace their Krobo identities and to prepare them for one of the most important Krobo communities: the family.

When I then applied my theory to the male rites of passage, I found that again, the traditional rites are empowering for boys because they allow them to become part of significant Krobo communities. Circumcision is a process by which boys are able to define themselves by their relationship to the Krobo identity, thereby aiding them in achieving full personhood, as outlined by Steegstra in the quote I cited above. Similarly, both the more traditional “lamb test” and modern-day informal education at home, despite their implications for the biological factors of masculinity, such as that males are inherently angry and dominant, are empowering because they, like *dipo*, aid in preparing boys for the family, which is seen as the primary community in Krobo society.

Because of this, the fact that more traditional customs, such as *dipo*, seem to be losing support, is disheartening because it means that young people may become disempowered as they lose ties with their Krobo identities. To close, I go back to a quote from the fourteen year old boy I spoke to on my second day in Krobo who told me, “You see, me and my brothers and my sisters, we are not like you because we are Krobos. This is just the way we do things and it is a fact so we must continue doing it... This is who we are, how can we just forget that?” (Tetteh Richmond, 3 NOV 2011).

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Appendix

Figure 1: Photo of the *soni* wrap



Figure 2: Photo of the priestess Adjase Koyo's sweeping marks



Figure 3: Photo of red loin cloth work to the *t□gb□t□*



Figure 4: Photo of beads most commonly worn during *dipo*



Figure 5: Photo of the priestly hat worn after the t□gb□t□

