



**Ghana – Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on 3 July 2015**

**Fetish Priests and tradition of the priests oldest son taking over the position once the priest has passed away. Any evidence of violence/persecution of the son if he refuses to take up the position of Fetish priest. Any evidence, generally, of violence/persecution within this Fetish Priest tradition in Ghana towards Christians or non believers.**

A report published by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), in a section titled “Ritual servitude” (paragraph 61), states:

“The practice of trokosi is a form of ritual or religious servitude, which has existed for centuries in some areas of the country, whereby a family gives one of their children, usually a young girl between 6 and 10 years of age, to a traditional fetish shrine in atonement for their family members' sins. According to interlocutors with whom the Special Rapporteur met, the practice continues to exist in some parts of the country, despite legislation and awareness-raising efforts which have succeeded in diminishing the prevalence of the practice.” (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) (1 October 2014) *Report of the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, including its causes and consequences: Mission to Ghana (22-29 November 2013)*)

Referring to information provided by an Associate Professor of anthropology at York University in Toronto an Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada response to a request for information on the consequences of refusing a position as a fetish priest states:

“It's a major honour and duty to become such a personage: because you are embodying, for good or for ill, depending on how you carry out your duties, the well-being and reputation of your group, including affecting their spiritual well-being too. The ‘consequences’ of refusing/misbehaving, then, increase with the greater level of chiefship concerned. On the personal level, a person refusing/turning-down such a position ... may be socially ostracised (they are putting their kin group and community at disadvantage and risk, and may also be costing them economic benefits, so life thereafter for that person may be quite unpleasant), perhaps driven away.” (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (16 August 2012) *GHA104154.E – Ghana: Consequences of refusing a fetish priest or chieftancy position, and whether there is state protection available*)

This response also states:

“In 14 August 2012 correspondence with the Research Directorate, the Associate Professor further explained the socio-economic consequences that

may result from someone's refusal to accept a chief or priest position. According to the Associate Professor, chiefs or priests and their 'kin group' are seen by the community as "owners" of a god, fetish, and/or shrine, and as such they receive money and gifts from pilgrims. If a designated person refuses to take on a chief or priest position, members of the community 'may question the legitimacy' of the shrine, the god or the fetish in question. As a result of this loss of 'credibility,' the pilgrims may turn to 'competing' shrines, depriving the 'kin group seen as owner of the god/shrine' from the money and gifts usually received from pilgrims (ibid.). The Associate Professor stated that therefore, someone's refusal to accept a chief or priest position has an impact on the whole community. (ibid)

The Associate Professor is also quoted as follows:

"Furthermore, even if they themselves are ... Christian or ... Muslim, from cultural belief, they can reasonably expect to be subject to spiritual/health 'punishment' for not doing their duty. For example, they can be 'worried'/anxious/stressed-out in the likely fact that their clan's ancestors will seek to punish them, and/or that certain shamans/gods may seek their downfall, and/or that 'witchcraft' may be worked against them ... and preying on their mind, even should they travel far away, to 'get away from' their group and duty. Their action may also cause family splits, that are not easily repaired. Any such individual 'decision' has serious community effects and implications, in this world and in the realm of spiritual powers. Such a person may in fact be 'scared to death' of the consequences." (ibid)

Regarding the risks to a traditional priest who has converted to Christianity the Professor states:

"I am not personally aware of any actual case in which a traditional priest has been subjected to mistreatment or violence because he/she has converted to Christianity. However, I do think there is a risk of that because the negligence of ritual observances and the destruction of shrine objects are considered a violation of customary norms. Then again, I assume the degree of risk would vary from case to case, depending on how committed the members of a given community are to the deity served by the priest." (ibid)

A report from the Ghana News Agency states:

"Mr. Isaac Suglow, a maize farmer from Nadowli in the Upper West Region but resident in Techiman, is being sought by the elders of his family not only to inherit his late grandfather's 'Nyamakolo' shrine but also to marry all the nine wives the old man left behind. Mr Suglow disappeared from Nadowli immediately after the funeral of his grandfather when the family elders made known to him the collective decision to install him as the successor. He was alleged to have commented: 'I am a Christian and cannot worship any idol apart from God.' His comment appeared not to have gone down well with the elders so they hatched a plot to kidnap him and forcefully install him as the 'Nyamaklo' priest. Mr. Peter Rowland, younger brother of Mr Suglow, who made the disclosure to reporters in Techiman, said on May 23, 2006 their grandfather who was the high priest of the 'Nyamakolo' shrine in Oulo, a town in the Nadowli District, passed away. He said messengers were sent all the way from Nadowli to Techiman to invite Suglow home for the necessary customary rites and procedures for the installation but the 'heir apparent'

(Suglow) declared that he could not step in the shoes of his late grandfather as he was a Christian.” (Ghana News Agency (28 February 2012) *Man absconds to escape from inheriting grandfather's shrine and widows*)

See also Ghana News Agency report which states:

“Nana Kwadwo Amoako, a 32-year-old farmer at Ayeman in the Northern Region has escaped from home for fear of being forced to inherit his late father's deity and marry his three widows. Some family elders kidnapped him in Techiman and sent him to Ayeman to inherit his late father, Opanin Akwasi Amoako, High Priest of Kinadwo deity shrine. His whereabouts is not known. Papa Kwame, uncle of Nana Amoako explained to newsmen in Techiman that the late high priest died on October 6, 2006 and tradition demanded that his only son should inherit the deity and also marry his widows. He said Nana Kwadwo rejected this with the explanation that as a Christian he could not do what was being demanded from him. Papa Kwame said Nana Amoako escaped after he had been confined for seven days in preparation for his installation. He told the journalists that the elders of the area are of the view that it is a taboo for Nana Amoako not to worship his father's deity as the spirit could curse the whole community. Papa Kwame says he is afraid to go back home because the mantle could fall on him to take Nana Amoako's place since he is also a family member. There is the belief that whoever inherits the Kinadwo deity is obligated to perform a number of customary rites including female genital mutilation and the sprinkling of human blood on the shrine to appease it.” (Ghana News Agency (14 May 2012) *Farmer rejects father's deity and wives*)

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research and Information Unit within time constraints. This response is not and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

#### **References:**

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