

Trokosi Tradition: Navigating Through Traditional Practices, Gender, Human Rights, and
Reproductive Rights in Ghana.

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Abstract

The trokosi practice is an ancient traditional system that involves the selection of a young female by her family to serve in a shrine as a form of atonement for crimes committed by another family member. This tradition exemplifies the entrenched patriarchal control that characterizes traditional rural societies in Ghana. The trokosi practice has sparked a contentious debate between proponents of Ghana's human rights framework and those advocating for cultural rights. This study draws upon feminist perspectives to examine the gendered power dynamics, human rights violations, and patriarchal control inherent in the Trokosi tradition. It employs a narrative analysis in its methodology to amplify the voices of the young females affected by this practice and contributes to feminist scholarship by providing nuanced insights into the complexities of cultural practices, power dynamics, legal frameworks, and women's agency in the context of the Trokosi tradition.

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Chapter 1: Introduction and Problem Statement

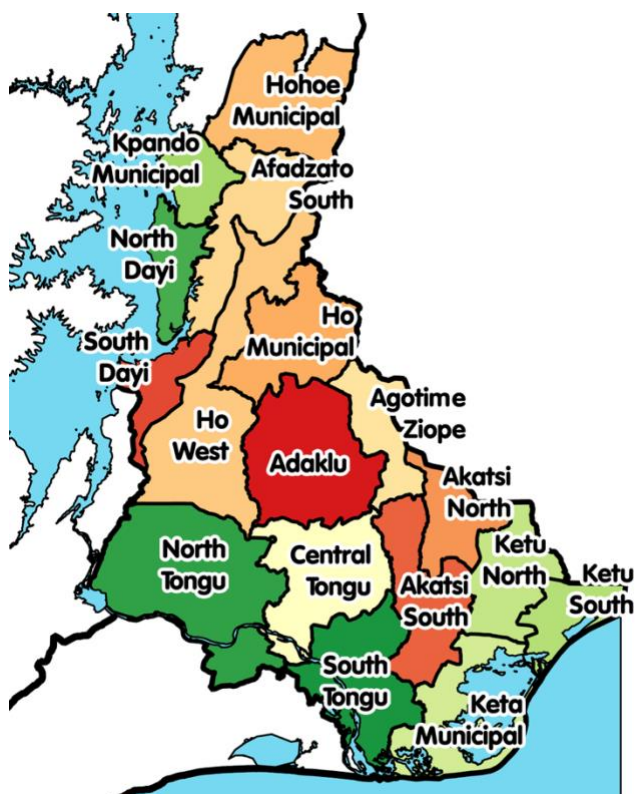
“Eunice was so young when she was taken into slavery that she doesn’t remember her exact age. When you ask her, she glances at preschool children playing outside. “About as big as that one”, she says. Very young. The trouble began for Eunice when a priest during a session of divination claimed that her grandfather had an affair with another trokosi, another slave owned by the shrine. The priest demanded that little Eunice come to the shrine to take the place of the older girl who had been defiled. Give up her daughter into slavery? Oh no! At first, Eunice’s mother refused. But soon her father’s relatives began to die. Finally, the mother gave in. In the shrine, the priest beat Eunice almost every day, sometimes, for no apparent reason at all. She was raped about twice a week, a terrible ordeal that causes her to feel ashamed and angry. Often, she was deprived of food. Eunice says she never felt a moment’s happiness while in slavery at the shrine.” (See Bastine, 2010 p.88)

The Ewe land – Study Area

The Ewe land stretches across Ghana, Togo, and Benin in West Africa. The geographical region traditionally inhabited by the Ewe people spans from the Volta River in Ghana (Volta Region) to the Togo-Benin border, encompassing the Atlantic coast (Ameka, 2001). This region encompasses the southeastern part of Ghana, the southern part of Togo, and the southwestern part of Benin. In Ghana, the region is bordered by the Volta River to the west and the Akwapim-Togo Ranges to the east. This research paper will center on Ghanaian Ewes, with a particular emphasis on Southeastern Ghanaian Ewes due to the prevalence of Trokosi tradition in the latter. The Ghanaian Ewe community has a historical origin that can be traced back to the 15th century, during which

they migrated from present-day Nigeria to the Volta region of Ghana. The Volta region covers a total area of 20,570 km² with a population of 1,649,523 representing 5.4% of Ghana (Ghana Statistical Service, 2021). The Ghanaian Ewe consists of several subgroups such as the Anlo, Tongu, Wedome, Ave, and Avenor Ewe. Though not a homogeneous group, their cultural heritage is characterized by unique and distinct languages, musical expressions, customary rituals, history, and social norms. The Southern Ewes consists mainly of the people of Anlo and Tongu. The people of Anlo are dispersed throughout various local government administrative districts, namely Keta, Ketu, Anloga, Akatsi (South and North), and Tongu (South and North).

The trokosi tradition is prevalent in the Tongu, Akatsi, and Anloga Districts. The North Tongu District covers an area of 1,117 km² with a population of 110,891 (GSS, 2021). The South Tongu District covers an area of 622.7 km² with a population of 113,114 (GSS, 2021). The Anloga District covers an area of 314 km² with a population of 94,895 (GSS, 2021). The Akatsi North District



covers an area of 316 km² with a population of 32,541 (GSS, 2021). The Akatsi South District covers an area of 518.5 km² with a population of 92,494 (GSS, 2021).

Political map of Ghana's Volta Region and its districts

Origin and History of the Trokosi Tradition

Scholars and analysts have presented varying perspectives on the genesis and origin of the trokosi tradition within the Ghanaian Ewe context. The tradition of trokosi has its origins in the seventeenth century. The historical account of the trokosi practice is predominantly derived from oral tradition hence the disparities in viewpoints. Quashigah (1998, 199) presents a compelling narrative that suggests the Trokosi tradition was originally intended to have a positive impact on the community and was conceived with the community and women's best interests in mind. The aim of the tradition was for virgin girls to receive special training within the "cult-house" of the clans to attain the status of distinguished and noble women. They will be sent to the shrines as "brides of god" to be betrothed to kings and men of esteemed status. He asserts that "these marriageable king's initiates were to become the mothers of the elite men and women of the society, the kings, the philosophers, the seers, and other men and women of virtue" (Quashigah, 1999 p. 603). However, the contemporary practice of the Trokosi tradition has been subject to corruption by certain religious leaders who prioritize their own interests in response to evolving economic and social circumstances. He claims that "the original idea (intention behind the Trokosi system) was not the creation of a slave class out of these girls but a respectable class of women who would be the pride of the society" (Quashigah, 1998, p.195). Here, Quashigah (1998)'s claim suggests an alternative perspective that implies that there may have been cultural values and expectations attached to this practice that are not immediately apparent to an outside observer. However, it is important to approach this claim critically and consider the broader historical and sociocultural context. Alternative interpretations of its purpose should be examined with caution, taking into account the experiences and voices of the affected girls and women. He further points out that "in its present abused form, it represents a system ridden with debauchery, immorality,

and resulting in the denigration of the purity of womanhood; the exact opposite of what it was designed to achieve” ((Quashigah, 1999 p. 603). Another account by Martinez (2011) claims that the Trokosi tradition originated as a war ritual. The practice involved warriors visiting religious shrines and presenting women as offerings to the war deities, with the expectation of achieving success in battle and a safe homecoming (Martinez, 2011). Furthermore, Bilyeu (1999) claims that the Trokosi tradition originated as a practice where offerings such as cattle, money, and liquor were presented to the shrine to ensure success in war and pacify angry gods who had been offended by community members. Over time, the practice changed from offering animals to killing young virgin girls as a sacrifice. This change was attributed to the belief held by the priests that the gods could only be appeased by the sacrifice of virgins. (Bilyeu, 1999). Consequently, the shrine priests agreed to keep the girls as slaves to carry out domestic duties, primarily involving tending to the shrine's property, doing the priest's housekeeping, and engaging in sexual relations with him. Bilyeu (1999) also claims that the change to virgin girls may be motivated by economic gains because the families may have viewed that a girl was cheaper than a cow and more likely to please the priest.

Translation

The institution of Trokosi is sometimes referred to as “*Troxovi*” in the Ewe language. This directly translates as “deity that receives children”. “*Tro*” (singular) or “*Trowo*” (plural) pronounced as (tron) means “deity” “*xo*” which means “receive” and “*vi*” means “child”. The “*Troxovi*” system enables the Trokosi tradition.

The “*Troxovi*” shrine consists of the Shrine owners, Elders, and Priests. The priests selected or ascended through birth are deemed to be the spokesperson of the gods. The priest is a greatly feared

and respected individual (Agyemang, n.d). He is seen as the mediator between the gods and the people.

Trokosi originates from the *Ewe* language, which translates as “Slave wife of a deity”. “Tro” (pronounced as tron) means “deity” “Ko” means “poverty” and “Si” means wife”. The plural form of Trokosi is “*Trokosio*” or “Trokosiwo”. The Trokosi (female) is sometimes referred to as “Tro si” which translates as “wife of a deity”. Among the Dangme people in Ghana, this practice is known as “*Woryokwe*” which also translates as “wife to the gods”. In the Dangme language, ‘*Won*’ means cult and ‘*Yokwe*’ means slave”.

Categories of the Trokosi

In Ghana, the Trokosi comes in various forms. In extremely unusual cases, there are individuals who choose to serve the “Tro” (deity). This category of Trokosis refers to the ‘*Fiasidis*.’ This category of Trokosis voluntarily chooses to serve in the shrine or is sometimes offered by their families to the shrine (Ameh, 2001). The major focus of this paper will be on the second category of Trokosi, which comprises those who are sent by their family members to the shrines as reparation for crimes committed by other relatives. The third category is the ‘*Dorfelviwo*’. It is believed that this third category of Trokosi was conceived and birthed through the divine intervention of the gods and hence given as an offering to the shrine as a token of gratitude for the gods’ assistance (Ameh, 2001).

Culture and Spirituality

Religion and Spirituality are inextricably linked to a community’s way of life and social order. Religion and Spirituality play an inseparable and crucial role in the way traits are acquired, embodied, and passed down in society. Culture and religion often intersect, shaping and influencing each other in a variety of ways. Religion and Spirituality can provide a sense of

belonging and purpose, shaping an individual's values and worldview. For many people, their cultural and religious identities are intertwined, and their religious beliefs and practices are informed by the cultural context in which they were raised. Spirituality is eminently embedded in the culture of the local Ewe communities who are practitioners of the Ewe Traditional Religion. Inhabitants of the Ewe local communities place eminence on peace, harmony, and living a pure life. They believe that the universe consists of the natural and supernatural as well as the coexistence of the living and the dead. Hence, their firm belief in ancestral spirits. They believe in a Higher being who is the Creator of the universe and everything that exists within it. Subordinate to the Creator, are the lesser earthly gods. For instance, “*Yewe*” is the god of thunder and lightning, and “*Afa*” is the god of divination. The Creator, “*Mawu*” is believed to operate through these lesser earthly *deities*, “*Trowo*,” who act as an intermediary between Him and humans. The “*Tro*” is also known as the god of transformation (Boaten, 2001). The “*Tro*,” plays the role of a protector, invocation of blessings for the community, healing the sick, establishing an immediate system of justice, etc. (Boaten, 2001) These earthly deities are greatly feared and revered due to their supposed immense powers (Agyemang, n.d). The Ewe communities believe that “*Mawu*” through the “*Trowo*” governs the affairs of the universe and dictates moral codes for human behavior. These moral codes often emphasize the importance of social harmony, respect for authority, and the sanctity of human life. The belief in a supernatural force that punishes individuals for deviating from these moral codes serves as a deterrent to criminal behavior. The “*Troxovi*” serves as a legal system that protects people’s properties (Boaten, 2001). An important responsibility of the gods, pertinent to the *trokosi* tradition is seeking the truth/justice and identifying offenders. The deity, “*Tro*” can be owned by individuals, families, clans, or the general community. The “*Tro*” is kept in a traditional shrine which is a sacred place of worship.

The Ewe Traditionalists believe in a social system of collective moral responsibility and punishment. This suggests that the responsibility for the outcome of a decision or action is not solely attributed to one individual but to all. The family in the Ewe communities refers to the extended family or clan which may consist of grandparents, uncles and aunties, parents, siblings, step-siblings, cousins, etc. The members of the extended family or clan function more as a social unit than as independent individuals. The members of the extended family may reside on the same compound, in a family house, or may live in compounds close to each other. In each clan, a clan head assumes leadership, serving as a mediator in conflict resolution among clan members and facilitating the equitable distribution of family property (Bilyeu, 1998). Additionally, the clan head plays a pivotal role in coordinating various clan rituals and ceremonial activities, including marriage ceremonies and funerals. Clan membership is characterized by shared totems, traditions, and taboos in addition to benefits and responsibilities. Consequently, every other member of the clan will be impacted by the action or offense of one clan member. This collective responsibility is expressed through a variety of mechanisms, such as communal punishments or fines. Bilyeu (1998) also points out that collective responsibility accounts for the reason one person's unpunished offense may cause calamity in the entire community. This collective moral responsibility attributes to the reason the gods sometimes spare wrongdoers and instead punish the innocent ones in the offender's clan.

The practice of hexing, which consists of employing magic or spiritual rites to curse or bring damage to another person or item, is deeply ingrained in the customs and traditions of Ewe traditional culture. The intention is to inflict harm, misfortune, or bad luck on the target, often as a form of revenge or retaliation. According to Abotchie (1997), "Hexing is employed in three instances in traditional Ewe society: (a) invoking the supernatural forces to pass judgment on

unknown offenders, (b) invoking their wrath against known wrongdoers, and (c) placing an evil "spell" or "curse" upon an object of value to protect it against trespassers" (p.79).

Crime and Crime Control

Cultural norms play a significant role in crime and crime control in African communities.

In the Ewe traditional communities, crime is viewed as an offense against the community rather than against an individual. Therefore, when a crime is committed, the entire community is responsible for addressing the issue and ensuring that justice is served. There are established institutions that serve as mechanisms for maintaining social order and resolving conflicts. An instance is the traditional courts, known as palaces of justice, which are used to resolve disputes and maintain social order. These institutions are often more accessible and affordable than formal legal systems and are more likely to be trusted by local communities. Traditional leaders, such as chiefs, elders, and chief priests play a crucial role in crime control. Traditional leaders are often seen as mediators between the people and the higher supernatural forces. They have the power to invoke the wrath of the higher supernatural force against individuals who violate moral codes, and this serves as a powerful deterrent to criminal behavior. Ewe community members, according to Rinaudo (2003), have been mentally and spiritually immersed in the belief that wrongdoings result in sickness and death. These Ewe communities through the trokosi tradition ensure that crimes are prevented, and the gods punish offenders who indulge in them (Rinaudo, 2003; Boateng, 2001). Rinaudo (2003) goes on to point out that the community members believe that wrongdoings incur the wrath of the gods so does anyone who resists the tradition. Notwithstanding these claims and beliefs regarding the efficiency of the tradition in crime control, it is crucial to recognize that there

exists no empirical evidence supporting the assertion that the Trokosi tradition genuinely and solely serves as a means of crime control.

The Trokosi practice

The trokosi practice is a traditional system where a young female is selected by her family to serve in a shrine in atonement for crimes committed by another member of the family (Ababio, 1995; Bilyeu, 1998; Boaten, 2001; Asomah, 2015). The practice is observed as a religious tenet within the context of the Ewe Traditional Religion. They believe things do not happen without a cause and hence in a search for truth and justice, they practice the trokosi system (Bilyeu, 1998). The trokosi system is seen as an agency for penalizing wrongdoers (Glover, 1993). As a result of the cultural belief in the practice of hexing, a person who has suffered mistreatment may seek redress by visiting the "Troxovi" shrine, and there they may either request specific punishments to be meted out to the perpetrator or defer to the divine judgment of the "Tro". Depending on the severity of the offense, punishments encompass a range of consequences such as sudden and mysterious deaths, blindness, the sacrifice of a virgin girl, etc. (Abotchie, 1997). Subsequently, the gods identify the perpetrator and inflict misfortunes on the family or clan rather than the individual. There is also a belief that the perpetrator could potentially be spared from death to provide a confession of their wrongdoing (Ameh 2001). The affected family begins to experience misfortune or death of its members in inexplicable circumstances. Typically, the affected family seeks guidance from the "Troxovi" shrine to ascertain the root cause of their misfortune and what could be done to make amends and appease the gods to establish peace and harmony. The price for the atonement may depend on the aggrieved party. Often, the priest's customary reaction is that a family member had secretly committed a crime like murder, theft, or rape, or had broken clan taboos and that necessitates the "sacrifice" of a virgin (Ababio, 1995; Bilyeu, 1998; Boaten, 2001;

Asomah, 2015). Bastine (2010) reports 23 Troxovi shrines that still accept Trokosis. The offending family will then have to provide a virgin girl to appease the gods. The innocent girl will be the one to carry the misfortune of the family and set the rest of the family free from the misfortune. These virgin girls could be as young as eight years old. Bilyeu (1998) postulates that the customary offerings consisted of livestock, money, and Schnapp (liquor). However, as time progressed, the trokosi practice evolved from sacrificing animals to presenting these young females as offerings (Bilyeu, 1998). This change is because the girls were deemed relatively less expensive in comparison to these offerings and more likely to please the “Tro”. The duration of time that a trokosi remains in a shrine is contingent upon the severity of the offense committed and the specific shrine in which they are serving. Typically, this duration ranges from six months to several years. However, the trokosi spends most of her productive years or even a lifetime under the practice. This is because upon being sent to the shrines, families tend to maintain minimal contact or, in some instances, sever all communication with the trokosi due to the associated stigma. The trokosi can, however, be liberated if deemed by the priest as undesirable. This usually happens after some years when the trokosi is no longer appealing in the eyes of the priest. If the trokosi passes away during her stay in the shrine, it is customary for the family to provide a replacement female virgin (Martinez, 2011; Asomah, 2015). It is believed that if the girl is not replaced, the misfortune will reoccur in the family or clan. The offending family is driven by fear of the “Tro” and belief in the system to continually replace the girls for a crime committed in the past. This can be attributed to the persistence of the Trokosi tradition across successive generations. Ababio (1995) asserts that some of these Trokosis have no knowledge of the offence they are paying for, as it occurred generations before their birth. Bilyeu (1999) reports that “*there are some women bound to shrines who "represent the fifth successive generation to pay for a single crime"* (p.472).

While in the shrine, the practice demands that the trokosi (young girls) caters to the priest's personal needs. Martinez (2011) points out that the "*Trokosis are faced with hard labor and the priest forces the trokosis to work long hours, such as fifteen-hour workdays, performing various duties that include cleaning, cooking, carrying water, and farming*" (p.26). The trokosi is not compensated for her hard labour, and any income generated is given to the priest. Due to this, the Trokosis are useful for productivity and commercial purposes. The priest is not obligated to take care of the personal needs of the trokosi. She is seen as the wife of the gods and hence not a responsibility of the priest. Her family is required to provide for her needs including her burial rites in case of her death (Bilyeu, 1999; Martinez, 2011). Unfortunately, they are unable to do so in most cases or simply ignore the obligation.

The life of the Trokosi in the shrine is also characterized by her sexual relations with the priest. Upon the onset of her menstruation, the Trokosi undergoes an initiation ceremony that grants the priest the privilege of engaging in sexual intercourse with her. She has no autonomy over her sexual life and is obligated to give in to his sexual advances without any resistance. A report by Asomah (2015) indicated that one priest fathered more than 400 children during his 37-year tenure as a priest. Morklis (1995 as cited in Asomah, 2015) revealed that a chief priest in the Tongu district of Ghana allegedly fathered 522 children with 76 wives and an unspecified number of concubines. This high number of children makes it significantly challenging for the priest to cater to the needs of all his children. Hence, the offspring that comes from the Trokosi's forced sexual relations with the priest becomes her responsibility. She is expected to provide food, medical care, and education for herself and the children. With little to no source of income, this practice restricts their access to social services such as formal education, and medical care (ante-natal, post-natal attention, and immunization of their children) (Bilyeu, 1999). It is not surprising that they are

uneducated and often look debilitated. Adding to their plight, they do not enjoy any assets, rights, or benefits in the community. As if this is not dehumanizing enough, the Trokosi is seen as an outcast by the rest of the community and is not welcomed in society (Bilyeu, 1999; Asomah, 2015). In the early efforts to quantify the number of Trokosis among the Southern Ewe communities, Kufogbe and Dovlo (1997, 1998) conducted the first census and identified a total of 4,714 Trokosis. Similarly, Akpabli-Honu (2014) conducted research and identified approximately 33 traditional shrines in a few communities, of which about 24 Troxovi shrines were still accepting Trokosis. Greene (2009) noted an estimated figure of around 3,500 girls/women across the various traditional shrines, while Kufogbe (2008) reported an estimate of approximately 5,000 women and girls involved in the practice, based on data from International Needs Ghana. It is important to note that different researchers and scholars have provided varying estimates of the number of Trokosis recorded, leading to inconsistencies in the reported figures. There are no current statistics on the number of Trokosi girls still in captivity. However, the discrepancies in the estimated numbers should not undermine the existence of the Trokosi practice itself. As will be later discussed in this thesis, International Needs Ghana is an organization that has played a central and positive role in the liberation and reintegration of the Trokosis into society.

How and why this topic is situated in Women and Gender Studies

An aspect of the trokosi tradition that is particularly relevant is the exclusive selection of females in the families or clans to the shrine to atone for the sins of others. Martinez (2011) attributes this to the notion that “girls are less likely to be as defiant and rebellious as boys may be, and therefore are less likely to escape. Female Trokosis also have a higher tendency to obey the priests’ orders, especially because most of the girls enter the shrines at such a young age that obeying the priest is

what they become accustomed to. “Young girls are especially valued by the Trokosi religion because they are easily controlled” (Martinez, 2011 p.28). Owusu (2023) highlights an unconvincing rationale provided by a traditional leader for the exclusive selection of females based on virginity. The leader's argument is that virginity is predominantly linked with girls, and the virginity of boys cannot be checked. Consequently, it would be impractical to send boys to the shrine when virgins are needed to appease the gods (Owusu, 2023).

The practicing Ewe communities are of patrilineal descent. In such patrilineal societies, men are the custodians of kinship and culture. Members of the community trace their kinship or ancestry through the patrilineal line, and the allocation of inheritance or succession is primarily exclusive to male relatives. Boaten (2001) points out that this practice also exemplifies the patrilineal system, in which males are valued and females are treated as 'objects' for childbirth. This makes females more susceptible to discrimination and ill-treatment by society. Consequently, their inability to challenge oppressive systems. However, Ameh (2001) argues that the plight of African women in matrilineal societies is still the same. Even in matrilineal societies, women continue to face discrimination regarding inheritance rights. In the Akan ethnic group of Ghana, inheritance and succession are based on matrilineal lineages. A child is considered to have a blood relationship with the mother and a spiritual connection with the father. Consequently, when the father passes away, it is customary for his extended family to inherit his properties, rather than his wife and children, regardless of their involvement in acquiring the assets. (Ameh, 2001). Hence, the patrilineal descent argument may not fully account for the exclusive selection of females for the Trokosi practice. Despite his argument, Ameh (2001) contends that African women may be more respected in matrilineal societies than in patrilineal societies. Patriarchy is a fundamental aspect of the patrilineal system, as the two are closely interconnected. Men are seen as superior and

dominant; they have absolute control over the affairs of society hence rendering these young females vulnerable. Although, patriarchy runs across all social systems where “that which is considered masculine is typically more highly valued than that which is feminine” (Curran and Renzetti, 1994, p.272). The trokosi practice is characterized by gender-based discrimination, resulting in the infringement of women’s human and reproductive rights. The historical and contemporary existence of Trokosi exemplifies the entrenched patriarchal control of traditional rural societies in Ghana.

As part of the human rights framework, the trokosi practice goes against the tenets of the Reproductive justice framework. Reproductive justice interweaves reproductive rights and social justice. The framework seeks to achieve freedom and sexual autonomy for everyone in society. However, the trokosi is unable to enjoy such freedom and sexual autonomy over her own body. Under the Trokosi system, young females are obligated to uphold the tradition without any resistance. The reproductive justice framework is also based on three primary principles; the right not to have a child, the right to have a child, and the right to parent children in safe and healthy environments (Ross & Solinger, 2017). The tradition also interferes with their negative and positive rights as put forth by Ross and Solinger (2017). Negative rights are a government’s obligation to refrain from unduly interfering with people’s mental, physical, and spiritual autonomy and Positive rights are a government’s obligation to ensure that people can exercise their freedoms and enjoy the benefits of society (Ross & Solinger, 2017). These young girls are unable to enjoy these rights due to the conditions under the trokosi practice and non-interference of the government despite existing explicit laws.

Thesis Statement

Despite the constitutional prohibitions, the practice has persisted in Ghana due to the dominant patriarchal structure in Ghana, the lack of concern for women's enslavement, and the inefficiency of the human rights framework.

Purpose of the research

The purpose of this research on the Trokosi tradition in Ghana is driven by personal experiences and a commitment to addressing the injustices faced by young girls and women affected by this practice. This paper aims to critically analyze and understand the trokosi system from a feminist perspective, shedding light on the gendered power dynamics and human rights violations embedded within the practice. This thesis aims to highlight the voices and experiences of the Trokosis and navigates through the historical, cultural, and social contexts surrounding trokosi to provide nuanced insights into the complexities of this tradition.

Furthermore, this research aims to analyze the tensions and debates that emerge between the advocates and opponents of the Trokosi tradition. It will critically examine the legal and policy frameworks in place, as well as their effectiveness in addressing the human rights concerns associated with the trokosi practice. This research intends to contribute to ongoing scholarly debates, policy discussions, and advocacy efforts aimed at promoting gender equality, human rights, and social justice in the context of the Trokosi tradition.

Structure of the paper

This research paper will be structured into five chapters. Chapter One serves as an introduction to the topic, providing a contextual framework for the Trokosi practice in Southern Ewe Ghana. It includes a historical overview and background of the practice, while also establishing the

interconnectedness of my topic to women and gender studies, human rights, and the reproductive justice framework. Chapter Two encompasses the literature review, examining the existing scholarly publications relevant to the topic at hand. The third chapter focuses on the theory and methodology employed in this study, acknowledging its limitations, and discussing the researcher's positionality. In Chapter Four, the analysis of the research findings will be presented. Finally, Chapter Five serves as the conclusion, offering recommendations for various stakeholders to adopt an analytical approach that encourages culturally sensitive engagement with the practicing communities.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will be composed of three sections. The first section will present the told experiences of former Trokosis during interviews. These statements by the Trokosis will better reveal the level of exploitation, human rights violations, and discrimination against women.

The second section will present examples of existing Ghanaian laws and movements against the Trokosi tradition. Inclusively, I will explore relevant literature on the Human Rights and Reproductive Justice framework. Also, I will articulate the viewpoints of advocates of this practice, particularly the Afrikania Mission and some of the leaders of the practicing Southern Ewe communities. The laws and viewpoints I will examine here will provide grounds for the cultural versus human rights debate.

Experiences of the Trokosi

The predicament faced by the young females at the “Troxovi” shrines has been extensively captured in various empirical works of literature and documentaries. These findings indicate that the young females under the Trokosi system experience adverse physical, mental, moral, and socio-economic conditions (Owusu, 2023). As articulated by Ohrt (2011) *“Life in the shrine consisted of hard labor, little food, and sexual advances made by the priests. The girls made reference to their enslavement as mental and not physical...”* (p.36). Bilyeu (1999) confirms this as he describes the experiences of most Trokosi as *“condemned to a lifetime of hard labour, sexual servitude, and perpetual childbearing at the service of the village priest. The girls work domestically for the priest by cooking, cleaning, and working the fields* (p.472). Ameh (2017) provides a summary of the experiences recounted by the Trokosis, characterizing them as a form of unjust and inhumane treatment that no individual should be subjected to. According to Ameh

(2001, 2017), the Trokosis' daily routine is marked by restricted movement within the shrine premises, unless authorized by the priest.

A documentary by Messy Moment Media (2014) tells the story of Christine, a young girl who had been a trokosi for five years. She voiced her intent of escaping if she got the chance. Christine had lost both parents and was replacing her sister who had died while being a trokosi. In a translated version, Christine said: *“When my father died, I stopped going to school even though I had wanted to become a doctor. I feel very sad because staying here I had lost my chance at education”* (Messy Moment Media, 2014) She had been forced to trade her education for forced labour. The future that awaited her was to work on the farm, driving away birds that destroy the priest's harvest and bear the priest's children. Even if she runs away, the world outside the shrine is not any better. Once branded a Trokosi, they are rejected by their families and communities (Messy Moment Media, 2014).

Another story is told of Mercy Sanahee who had run away after being a trokosi for fifteen years. She was sent to the shrine because her great-grandmother stole a pair of gold earrings. At the time of the documentary, she had three children. The priest first forced himself on her when she was just eleven years old. She was still seen as an outcast. Mercy said *“When I ran away from the priest, life was so hard. People ran away from me. Even my relatives turned their backs.’ The first night he wanted to sleep with me, and I refused, and he beat me so hard my cries woke up all the other slave girls and I finally gave in”*. When asked to talk about the priest, she said, *“The priest is not very big, but he is very wicked”* (Messy Moment Media, 2014). Mercy further expressed that *“I can't trust anyone in my family now. Of course, I blame them for sending me to be punished for a crime I did not commit and for destroying my life. Maybe I could have been a doctor or teacher,*

but instead, I am a single parent of four children from a wicked priest in a wicked system . . . I believe I can recover, but it is going to be a long and painful road” (Messy Moment Media, 2014).

When the said priest was interviewed, he showed pride in his son who was among his sixty children. The priest was a government official and a husband to ten Trokosi women. He, however, denied allegations of maltreatment and rape (Messy Moment Media, 2014). Though not common, the involvement of government officials in this capacity presents a significant challenge to intervention efforts. This complicates the process of addressing and eradicating the Trokosi practice, as it blurs the lines between cultural tradition and governmental authority. The combination of religious and governmental influence held by the priest further perpetuates the system, making it difficult to effectively challenge and reform.

Botchway (2008 as cited in Ben-Ari, 2001) tells the story of Dora Galley who spent seven years in the Troxovi shrine before she was liberated by International Needs NGO. Dora expressed that during her time in the shrine, she was obligated to work on the shrine’s farmland from dawn till dusk without any remuneration. In her words, Dora explains that *“I had to cut down trees and uproot tree stumps to burn into charcoal to sell and make some money to take care of myself. I did not have the right to take crops from the farm unless the priest allowed me to. Occasionally my parents sent me some food, but that was kept in the priest’s room, and I had to request it any time I needed some. I was forced to have sex with the priest as one of the rituals in the shrine, but luckily, I did not get pregnant”* (cited in Botchway, 2008, p. 377).

Brooker (1996) tells the story of 23-years old Julie Dorbadzi who was sent to the Troxovi shrine when she was only six years old. Julie was atoning for a theft committed by her great-grandfather. Julie expressed that *“By the time I was seven, the priest wanted to have sex with me, but I resisted until I was 12. I gave in because if you didn't sleep with him, the priest would beat you.”* Julie had

her first child at the age of 18 and decided to run away when she was pregnant with her second child. In the interview, she cried out that "*I was pregnant, and the priest beat me up. The other women joined in. I had to run away*" (Brooker,1996 p.12). However, when she did run away to a neighboring town recently, Brooker (1996) pointed out that the scar on her left cheek marked her out as a Trokosi. In her words, Julie exclaimed that "*People notice it and, if they're from round here, they know what it means. I can tell that some of them are afraid of me*" (Brooker,1996 p.12). Brooker (1996) also reports on Meworni Kokou, a ten-year-old girl who was in the Troxovi shrine to atone for a crime that was committed so long ago that no one remembers the crime or the person who committed the crime. In his defense, the shrine priest proclaimed that "*human memory may be frail, but the gods do not forget*" and further explains that "*the fetish demands it, if the family withheld her, they would be cursed and die*" (Brooker,1996 p.12).

In another interview by Boaten (2001), a liberated trokosi revealed: "*We were living like slaves. We were made to suffer hunger. We had no soap for our own bath. We did farm work under severe pressure. In the nights, the priest just ordered any one of us to sleep and have sexual intercourse with him. If you felt sick, it was the responsibility of your people to give you medication. In fact, it was terrible for a human being to live in such a condition*" (p.95).

In a documentary by British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) News Africa in 2018, Brigitte Sossou Perenyi tells her story twenty years after she was adopted, moved to the US, and freed from the Trokosi practice. Brigitte was on a journey to Ghana to understand the practice and why her family gave her away to the practice when she was only seven years old. She recalls that there were about 5,000 Trokosi women and girls in Ghana alone when she left the shrine in 1997. She revealed that the trokosi system "*robbed her of her childhood*" and was made to believe that she would live with her uncle but was sent to the shrine. Recalling her plight as a Trokosi in the shrine,

Brigitte expressed that *“For me, life in the shrine meant no life at all. They took away my clothes and wrapped me in a purple cloth, they even took away my name. Each day I was woken at 5 am and sent to fetch water. I had to carry a heavy bucket on my head, it was hard physical work for a child. I was made to sweep the compound and worked long hours on the farm. I was not allowed to play or even go to school; I was in total isolation”* (BBC News Africa, 2018)

French (1997) gives an account of the experience of 12 years Abla Kotor who began her life as a Trokosi for a rape committed by her father just four months ago at the time of the interview. Initially, Abla had little idea of why she was at the shrine and said, *“My father brought me here, but he never explained why,”* she said in halting English and her native Ewe. *“I was told that someone had done something bad in my family, but I was not told what it was”* (p.16) French (1997) contends that Abla’s duties involved sweeping the compound of the priest, but her responsibilities will include providing sexual favours to the priest. Abla was one of the seven Trokosi wives of the priest. The priest Abla was serving explained that Abla’s father sexually forced himself on his young niece which resulted in Abla’s birth (French, 1997). Commenting on the practice, the priest further explained that *“To you this may seem like a miscarriage of justice, but the girl will have to atone. It is the spirit, our fetish, who has made things work this way, and only he can explain”* (French, 1997 p.16).

Existing Ghanaian laws and movements against the Trokosi system.

The trokosi system, as it currently exists, infringes on women's and female teenagers’ human rights and freedoms, as provided under Ghana's 1992 Constitution and other International human rights agreements (Boaten, 2001). The fundamental human rights section of the Ghanaian 1992

Constitution seeks to protect every Ghanaian especially to protect vulnerable people including women and children against human rights abuses.

Articles 12 (2), 16(1) and 16(2), Article 26(2), and Article 28(4) of the Ghanaian Constitution prohibits the discrimination of children and women. Article 12 (2) of the 1992 Constitution of Ghana guarantees the fundamental human rights and freedoms of every person regardless of gender, religion, place of origin, race, political opinion, colour, or creed. It also makes provisions that every person respects the rights and freedoms of others and for the public interest. Hence, the constitution advocates for the equal rights of all persons which include the Trokosis, their parents, and the shrine priests. However, from the experiences recounted by former Trokosis and researchers, it is evident that practitioners and advocates of this tradition have no respect for the fundamental human rights of the Trokosi as articulated by the 1992 Constitution of Ghana. Article (14)¹ mandates that no person shall be deprived of his personal liberty.

According to Article 16(1) of the 1992 Constitution of Ghana, no person shall be held in slavery or servitude. Article 16(2) of the constitution ascertains that no person shall be required to perform forced labour. From the experiences recounted by the Trokosis, it can be said that the daily routine of the Trokosi which involves hard labour without any remuneration is comparable to servitude and forced labour. Similarly, the Trokosi system violates Article 15 of the 1992 Constitution of Ghana. According to this article, the dignity of every person is inviolable, and no person shall, whether he is arrested, restricted, or detained, be subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment or any other condition that detracts or is likely to detract from his dignity and worth as a human being. Article 19 (1) and (2) of the 1992 Constitution of Ghana seeks to prohibit all these activities which appear rather normal in the Troxovi shrines. The Article states that any person who is charged with a criminal offence must be given a fair hearing within

a reasonable time by a law court. Additionally, any person charged with a criminal offence must also be given the chance to defend themselves.

The 1998 Children's Act of Ghana seeks to reform and consolidate the law relating to children to include the rights of children and regulation of child labour and apprenticeship. Sections 3, 6, and 8 of the 1998 Children's Act mandate non-discrimination towards children on any basis (such as gender, race, age, religion, disability, health status, custom, ethnic origin, rural or urban background, birth or other status, socio-economic status or because the child is a refugee) and entreats parental duty and responsibility to provide good guidance, care, and assistance and protect the child from neglect, discrimination, violence, abuse, exposure to physical and moral hazards, and oppression. The Children's Act of Ghana also entreats parents to ensure a child's access to education, immunization, adequate diet, clothing, shelter, medical attention, or any other thing required for development. However, due to the fear of the "Tro" and belief in the system, the family of the Trokosi continually offer to replace the girls contributing to the persistence of the practice. As part of the Trokosi practice, young females are deprived of educational opportunities and compelled to work long hours on the farm. Additionally, the economic circumstances of the Trokosi and the Priest's refusal to cater to their children may impede their children from accessing education and other essential social services for their overall welfare. Similarly, Article 25 (1) of the 1992 Constitution of Ghana mandates the right to equal educational opportunities and facilities for all individuals. This is also reiterated in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child which also mandates provision for the right of the child to education (Boaten, 2001).

According to Bilyeu (1998), 'The Ghanaian Constitution has established a Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ) whose main function is to investigate complaints of violations of fundamental rights and freedoms (p.497).' The CHRAJ's primary responsibilities are

to receive and investigate complaints of human rights violations and other acts of administrative injustice to investigate allegations of corruption by public officials and to educate the public on human rights issues (Bilyeu, 1998). Also, as part of its international obligation, Ghana ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in February 1986 to create awareness and protect women on gender-related issues.

In addition to these laws, the Criminal Code (Amendment) Act, of 1998 (Act 544) also known as the *Trokosi law* was passed in 1998 to purposely address the issues surrounding the Trokosi practice after decades of unabating anti-trokosi campaigns by human rights activists (Bastine, 2010; Owusu, 2023). By virtue of section 314A of the Criminal Code (Amendment) Act No. 554, the law abolishes ritual servitude and mandates whoever sends to or receives at any place any person; or whoever subjects a person to any form of ritual or customary servitude or any form of forced labour related to a customary ritual commits an offence and shall be liable on conviction to imprisonment for a term not less than three years.

Human rights framework and the Trokosi practice

Ghana's participation and membership in other international organizations has meant its subjection to international laws, treaties, and conventions. Hence, the anti-trokosi campaign in Ghana has been recognized as an international human rights issue (Ameh, 2001). This creates tension in the enforcement of these international laws in the local contexts where the Trokosi tradition is practiced. Despite the robust existing laws, movements, and organizations, law enforcement has been quite challenging. As a member state of the United Nations, Ghana is purposed to *achieve international cooperation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural, or humanitarian character, and in promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion* according

to the United Nations Charter Article 1(3). Botchway (2008) contends that the 1992 Constitution of Ghana is to a great extent not discriminatory towards women. Evidence of this is Article 36 (6) which states that “*The State shall afford equality of economic opportunity to all citizens; and, in particular, the State shall take all necessary steps to ensure the full integration of women into the mainstream of the economic development of Ghana.*” However, Agyei (1999) argues that the legal rights of African women continue to be violated, and “in practice, Ghanaian women, like women all over the world, have been denied equal opportunity with men in every aspect of life for centuries” (p.122). Botchway (2008) is also quick to note that the Trokosi tradition violates numerous treaties Ghana has either signed or ratified. The Trokosi tradition has persisted due to the lack of the Ghana government’s agency to enforce these laws coupled with other factors such as culture, economic status, and sexism (Botchway, 2008). Congruent to this, Bilyeu (1999) articulates that nations and states use traditional practices as a justification for noncompliance with human rights conventions. Bilyeu (1999) further points out that States and governments tend to defend traditional practices and typically refrain from sanctioning or bringing legal action against people whose actions contravene human rights conventions. Hence, it is unsurprising that there has not been a report of a single shrine priest who has been prosecuted for the Trokosi practice (Bilyeu 1999; Martinez, 2011). Furthermore, Bilyeu (1999) attributes the State’s non-compliance to human rights conventions regarding traditional practices because they “do not expressly recognize such practices as “discriminatory or biased” because they have been instilled within these cultures as the “natural” order of things” (p. 459). Ameh (2004, 2017) posits that human rights and traditional practices are different systems of hegemony and compete against each other for the loyalty of citizens. Hence, adherence to human rights conventions may not be effective in effecting behavioral and attitudinal changes regarding traditional practices (Ameh, 2004).

The Trokosi tradition has faced strong condemnation from human rights activists in Ghana who argue that it perpetuates violence against women and must be completely eliminated. According to the United Nations, violence against women is "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life." The trokosi practice is seen as a form of modern slavery that violates the human rights of female teenagers. Modern slavery is the severe exploitation of other people for personal or commercial gain (Anti-Slavery International, n.d.). International Needs has been a pivotal movement in the anti-trokosi campaign (Ameh, 2004; Asomah, 2015). International Needs Ghana (INGH) is a Christian development organization that began operations in Ghana in 1984. The objectives of this organization are to help Christians serve God and to contribute to the development of society through the alleviation of poverty, hunger, disease, illiteracy, idolatry, and primitive beliefs and practices. It is important to note that the language used by International Needs Ghana, referring to the alleviation of "primitive beliefs and practices," is problematic and can be seen as perpetuating a colonialist and racist perspective. Such language carries implicit biases and assumptions that undermine the cultural richness and diversity of the communities they aim to serve.

The anti-trokosi campaign of International Needs Ghana was met with objection from the practicing communities with accusations of orchestrating and misrepresenting the practice to replace traditionalism with Christianity (Ameh 2004; Dovlo, 2005). This Christian organization employed a human rights advocacy approach. The first workshop on Trokosi was held in 1995 to draw attention to the human rights violations of the practice and to emphasize cultural sensitivity and continued dialogue with the various stakeholders (including the traditional rulers and

leadership of International Needs Ghana (Jenkins, 2012). In collaboration with the Ghana Commission for Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ), International Needs Ghana visited various villages to create awareness and educate shrine owners and priests on the human rights violations of the Trokosi practice. Most of the liberated Trokosi girls credited their freedom to this organization. International Needs Ghana reported the first mass of liberated Trokosis in 1996 after six years of negotiating with the religious leaders in the Dangme Troxovi shrines (Ameh, 2004). 40 Trokosis were set free during the first mass liberation. Ameh (2004) reports that International Needs Ghana, in a joint effort with other NGOs, had liberated 2800 of the 4,714 known Trokosis as of 2001. In an interview, Rev. Walter Pimpong a leader in the anti-trokosi campaign revealed that he succeeded in liberating the Trokosis with cows, goats, and money (Bilyeu, 1999; Messy Media, 2014). Currently, International Needs Ghana in collaboration with Free the Slaves is involved in a Growing Up Free Project to address child trafficking and other forms of modern-day slavery in Ghana.

Reproductive justice framework and the Trokosi practice

According to Ross and Solinger (2017), “Reproductive Justice is a movement-building and organizing framework that identifies how reproductive oppression is the result of the intersection of multiple oppressions and is inherently connected to the struggle for social justice and human rights” (p.69). The Reproductive Justice framework focuses on non-biological factors that influences the reproductive experiences of women in relation to the government and other bodies of authority. Bilyeu (1999) argues that the Trokosi practice like other religious rituals interferes with the general well-being of women and “perpetuates women’s second-class status” in the practicing societies. Bilyeu makes an interesting claim and argues that “because these traditional

practices are based on gender, they seem more easily justified by society than if they were rooted in another category, such as race” (p. 461-462). The Reproductive Justice Framework contends that access to health care services including reproductive health care is a human right that should apply to all individuals (Ross & Solinger, 2017). This framework demands that States and governments create and enforce conditions for every woman to freely exercise their reproductive rights without any form of coercive power, oppression, or duress and with social supports. The tenets of the Reproductive Justice framework are articulated in the Beijing Declaration, adopted by the United Nations in 1995. The Beijing Declaration in 1995 is very explicit about women's rights and stipulates that women should have the right to decide on matters relating to their sexuality, including sexual and reproductive health, free of coercion, discrimination, and violence (Boaten, 2001). It further states that there should be an equal relationship between women and men in matters of sexual relations and reproduction (Boaten, 2001). Applicable to the Trokosi tradition, the Reproductive Justice Framework is based on the principle of parenting children in a safe and healthy environment. This goal can be achieved when there is “access” to community-based resources including education, housing, healthcare, a living wage, etc.

Cultural rights framework and the Trokosi practice

The Trokosi practice is an ancient old justice system embedded in traditional beliefs (Abotchie, 1997). Article 26 (1) of the 1992 Constitution of Ghana mandates that Every person is entitled to enjoy, practice, profess, maintain, and promote any culture, language, tradition, or religion. Similarly, Article 21 (1) of the 1992 Ghanaian Constitution ensures the freedom to practice any religious practice and to preserve and manifest such traditions in accordance with one’s beliefs and values. of their ancestors. These provisions illustrate the commitment of Ghana’s Constitution

to ensure the free practice of religious and customary practices (Ameh, 2011; Owusu, 2023). The right to freely exercise one's religion of choice in private or public is inalienable and must be enjoyed by all (Bilyeu, 1999). Hence, advocates of the practice maintain that the anti-trokosi campaign is against their cultural freedom as guaranteed by the Constitution of Ghana (Abotchie, 1997; Bastine, 2010). The Constitution of Ghana ensures that every person is fully entitled to their fundamental human rights including their rights to religion but subject to respect of the rights and freedoms of others. This is also demonstrated in Article 26(2) of the Constitution of Ghana, "All customary practices which dehumanize or are injurious to the physical and mental well-being of a person are prohibited". These provisions illustrate that religion should not be used to excuse practices that are incompatible with basic human rights (Owusu, 2023). Additionally, Bilyeu (1999) articulates that religion or culture should not be used as "a shield to protect practices that violate the rights of women" (p.460).

Afrikania Mission also known as African Renaissance Movement is a Neo-Traditional Movement in Ghana established by a former Catholic Priest named Kwabena Damuah (who later assumed the traditional priesthood title, Osofo Okomfo). The Mission of this group is to reform and update African traditional religion, and to promote nationalism and Pan-Africanism. This movement has been very active in the fight for the retention of the Trokosi practice and opposing the liberation of the Trokosis (Ameh, 2004; Bastine, 2010). In their defense, the Trokosi practice is a part of the African culture and heritage, and practitioners should exercise their freedom of religion (Ameh, 2004; Bastine, 2010; Botchway, 2008). This group also argues that the claims made by the anti-trokosi campaigns are false and denies that the practice is discriminatory against females (Bastine,

2010). In an interview conducted by Nicholas Bastine in 2009, the Head Priest of the Afrikania Mission revealed that “*The Trokosi system controls crime by training and teaching young women how to be good role models in their families and communities. It is an honour bestowed on the girls and should be considered as such*”. He further revealed that “*the Troxovi shrines serve as hospitals, healing centers, pharmacies, courts of last resort and justice, places of worship and devotion...*” (Bastine, 2010 p.85)

THE DEBATE – HUMAN RIGHTS VERSUS CULTURAL RIGHTS

Despite the opposing views on the tradition, both the human rights and cultural rights camps acknowledge the existence of the Trokosi tradition (Bastine, 2010). Advocates and practitioners of this practice, particularly the Afrikania Mission and the practicing Southern Ewe communities argue that the Trokosi tradition is necessary for the effective functioning of the Southern Ewe society (Ameh, 2004; Bilyeu, 1999; Bastine, 2010 Owusu,2023; Botchway, 2008). They consider this system of crime control as fair, uncorrupted, and an effective mechanism of social and crime control (Abotchie, 1997; Botchway, 2008; Bilyeu 1999). For these advocates, this practice is much more effective than the modern imported Western system of crime control. In this context, the Trokosi tradition serves as a system of crime control by warning people that they stand the risk of sacrificing their virgins (Asomah, 2015). However, as articulated by Botchway (2008), the Trokosi system may not be as effective because the actual wrongdoers are not punished for their wrongdoings (Bilyeu,1999; Asomah, 2015). Hence, criminals may not be deterred when they can have a proxy to serve their sentence (Botchway, 2008). The opponents of the Trokosi tradition maintain that the practice is cruel and constitutes enslavement, sexual exploitation, and labour and needs to be totally abolished in Ghana (Bastine, 2010; Botchway, 2008; Asomah, 2015). However,

the advocates of the practice argue that the practice is not oppressive to women as the anti-trokosi camp contends but rather a moral training school for the females (Bastine, 2010). Adherents and advocates of the practice have shown resistance towards the existing laws, viewing them as biased and accusing Christian NGOs of orchestrating and misrepresenting the practice to replace traditionalism with Christianity (Ameh 2004; Dovlo 2005).

CHAPTER 3: THEORY AND METHODOLOGY

Theoretical Framework

This section provides a comprehensive discussion of the theoretical frameworks by highlighting their key concepts, theoretical underpinnings, and relevance to the Trokosi Tradition. The section begins with Makua Mutua's Savage-Victim-Savior framework to navigate the flaws of the human rights framework approach to the Trokosi tradition. It then explores Feminism in Ghana, Postcolonial Feminism, African feminism, particularly Nego-feminism, Transnational Feminism, and the work of Vrushali Patil (2013), "From patriarchy to Intersectionality: A Transnational Feminist Assessment of How Far We've Really Come" in *the Feminist Theory Reader: Local and Global Perspectives*.

Makua Mutua's Savage-Victim-Savior framework

Makua Mutua's Savage-Victim-Savior framework depicts the flaws that exist in the human rights framework (Mutua, 2001). He argues that the savage is on the one hand and the victim and savior is on the other hand of the human rights framework. Mutua (2001) defines the reality of the first dimension of the prism as complex as it does not imply that the state is barbaric but rather, the cultural foundation. The good state is one that cleanses itself and internalizes human rights while the savage one does not submit to the human rights framework (Mutua, 2001). He cites Female Genital Mutilation, which is also another cultural practice in Ghana as an example (Mutua, 2001). In this regard, the trokosi tradition is the savage according to his articulation of the perception of the human rights framework, and the chief priest and authorities in the practicing communities are the instrument through which this 'savage' tradition continues to exist. Hence, a good chief priest

will desist from the inhumane and evil practice and embrace the human rights framework. The second dimension of the prism is the powerless and innocent victim, who in this case is the *trokosi*. The victim is the one whose dignity and worth have been violated by the savage and needs saving (Mutua 2001). Finally, the third dimension is the savior who rescues, protects, civilizes, and safeguards. In this case, the image of the savior has been a depiction of the United Nations, Western governments, International NGOs, and Western charities as the redeemers (Mutua, 2001). He argues that the human rights framework is Eurocentric and suffers many flaws which are also captured in the *Savage-Victim-Savior* metaphor. Firstly, Mutua (2001) presents a compelling argument challenging the claim of universality within the human rights movement, as it primarily originates from European culture and history. Secondly, there is a rejection of a multicultural mosaic in the narrative. Mutua (2001) argues that the human rights discourse informs a transformation by Western cultures of non-Western cultures into a Eurocentric prototype with superior and subordinate positions. Here, the process of “othering” is taking place, coinciding with the “imagination of the creation of inferior clones, in effect, dumb copies of the original” (Mutua 2001, p. 205). Hence, there exist unequal power relations in the human rights framework which needs “cultural, national, gender, religious and ethnic inclusivity” (Mutua 2001, p. 207). Mutua insists that such a movement cannot treat Eurocentrism as the starting point and other cultures as peripheral. Instead, the point of departure for the movement must be “basic assumptions about the moral equivalency of all cultures” (Mutua, 2001, p. 207). (Ohrt, 2011). This framework is necessary for understanding the way the language of human rights is framed understood and embraced by the practicing communities. This metaphor as articulated by Mutua (2001) conveys the sentiments of the advocates of the *trokosi* practice primarily that of the Afrikania Mission and shrine priests in view of the human rights approach undertaken by the Ghanaian government and

NGOs to address Trokosi. They articulate that the human rights framework is insensitive to their cultural practice and undermines the whole practice, not just its negative aspect. To these advocates, the passing of a law to target their system of social control indirectly insinuates that the Western judicial and police system is a better way of crime deterrence (Ohr, 2011).

It is imperative to acknowledge that the human rights framework, originating from a Western context, has primarily concentrated on the conceptualization of human beings as individuals, often overlooking the interplay between individuals and their collective identities within certain communities. This narrow emphasis on individual rights as the fundamental basis of the framework gives rise to tensions when interacting with societies that prioritize communal rights over the rights of individuals.

Feminism in Ghana

The use of the term feminism in Ghanaian women's rights organizing discourses signifies a commitment to dismantling patriarchal structures and norms that perpetuate gender inequalities (Bawa, 2018). The feminist movement in Ghana not only challenges and disrupts dominant Western feminist ideologies but also serves as a platform for the emergence of counter-narrative. It challenges traditional gender norms and expectations by highlighting the agency, resilience, and contributions of Ghanaian women throughout history and in contemporary society. Notable among these Ghanaian feminists is Ama Ata Aidoo. Through her literary works, Ama Ata Aidoo explores the experiences of African women, challenging cultural norms and advocating for gender equality. Her writings have been influential in shaping feminist discourse and raising awareness about the struggles and triumphs of African women. Her book, *“No Sweetness Here: And Other Stories”* is a collection of short stories that portray the lives of women in Ghana, addressing themes of marriage, motherhood, and the challenges faced by women within patriarchal societies. By delving

into these topics, the book offers insights into the complexities and realities of women's lives, shedding light on their struggles, aspirations, and resilience in the face of societal expectations and gender inequalities (Aidoo, 2015).

However, in the context of women's rights advocacy in African countries, including Ghana, feminism carries potential risks due to its perceived association with Western cultural imperialism (Bawa, 2018). The adoption of the term can be seen as importing Western ideologies and imposing them on African societies, potentially undermining local cultures and traditions (Bawa, 2018). In the Ghanaian context, feminism is often seen as a disruptive force that challenges the established socio-cultural and political norms (Bawa, 2018). Feminism is associated with aggression, man-hating, or the rejection of family values. Hence, the term “feminism” or the label “feminist” is not embraced by all women activists and groups working with grassroots organizations on “feminist agendas.” This rejection of the feminist label in Ghana does not inherently signify a dismissal or disregard of the principles of gender equality or women's rights. This signifies a nuanced perspective where individuals and organizations do not align themselves with a specific label while supporting the overarching principles of gender equality. Notable among such groups are AFAWI (Alliance for African Women Initiative) and Society Aid Ghana. However, there are others who choose to deliberately take on the tag and label their work/advocacy/activism as feminist and examples are the Pepper Dem Movement and Let’s Talk Consent Movement by Nana Akosua Hanson. As Bawa (2018) explains, “In relation to development, women leading and working with grassroots organizations may not be as interested in the politics of naming in their work as much as getting the work done” (p.13). These non-feminist women activists with “feminist agendas” strive to address the unique challenges and experiences of women within their respective cultural

contexts, acknowledging the need to challenge both gender inequalities and the influence of Western cultural hegemony (Bawa, 2018).

Postcolonial Feminism

O'Connell et.al (1995) asserts that the “post” in the term “postcolonial” “should not be understood as meaning the end or death of colonizations. On the contrary, this time of struggle for peoples all over the world, a moment that the academic world is attempting to define, is a process in the decolonizing space of the millennium rather than a conclusive event” (p.788). In situating black and postcolonial feminisms, Mirza. (2009) explains, “Collectively, we are engaged in the process of quilting a genealogical narrative of ‘other ways of knowing” (p.2). Similarly, in their work, “Postcolonial, Emergent, and Indigenous Feminisms, O'Connell et.al (1995) add “We have attempted to include the perspectives of multiple feminisms that help to represent dynamic and constructive ways of thinking, being, and acting for women caught in the tensions of this postcolonial era.” Postcolonial Feminism as articulated by Quayson (2000 as cited in Al-wazedi, 2020) dismantles “the discursive representation” – the “metaphors, tropes, and concepts” used to “project an image of some person or persons” (p. 104). Postcolonial Feminism extends beyond the lens of patriarchy as the only source of oppression but critically analyzes how colonialism and imperialism have shaped and continue to influence gender relations, power dynamics, and the experiences of women in postcolonial societies (Al-wazedi, 2020). The Postcolonial feminist work in the Global South focuses on issues pertaining to the intersections of religion, development, and critical engagements with Western feminism and postmodernism (Rajan, & Park). The voices of postcolonial feminists in the Global South are to reject the notion of “otherness, tokenism, stereotyping, exceptionalism, and the role of “native informant” (Rajan, & Park, 2000 p.54).

Borrowing the words of O'Connell et.al (1995), “The point is not to divide up feminisms according to geography – ‘the West and the rest of us’” (p.789), but rather promoting inclusivity, cultural diversity, and the recognition of multiple forms of oppression and resistance.

African Feminism

In view of the flaw in the application of the human rights framework, which sometimes overlooks or dismisses cultural differences and local contexts, there is a need for cross-cultural dialogue and overall cultural relevance in the way interventions are framed and implemented in these communities. This draws my paper to African feminism which “counters patriarchal systems of racialized, classed and globalized oppression” (Kuumba, 2003 p.8). Kuumba further contends that African Feminism highlights the importance of intersectionality and recognizes that the experiences of African women are shaped by multiple oppressions and anti-oppression struggles. These struggles encompass postcolonial challenges, economic inequality, political instability, and cultural traditions. As articulated by Awinpoka Akurugu (2021), the shift toward African feminism emerged from an effort to give voice to African women whose concerns were unheard in Western-centric discourses. African feminism is a non-monotonic and evolving movement that has been influenced by global feminist thought while maintaining its distinct African perspectives and priorities (Nkealah, 2016; Awinpoka Akurugu, 2021). The primary focus of African feminism in the global South revolves around the development of theoretical frameworks that exhibit sensitivity to the specific socio-political contexts, histories, cultural nuances, and the challenges African women face in terms of poverty and deprivation (Awinpoka Akurugu, 2021; Nkealah, 2016). It seeks to challenge and transform patriarchal norms in all its forms, promote gender equality, address economic and social justice issues, and advocate for the rights and well-being of African women. African feminism shares solidarity with African men and acknowledges that

Western feminist ideals are incompatible with African women's demands (Awinpoka Akurugu 2021). Reiterating this as necessary for specific concerns and priorities of African women in relation to social and cultural systems.

African feminism is particularly relevant to this study because it recognizes the need for context specificity. It takes into account the diversity and heterogeneity present in African communities and cultures. It underscores the importance of approaching feminist discourse within Africa with sensitivity to these variations, as they influence the perceptions, experiences, and expressions of gender and power dynamics. This nuanced understanding within the framework appreciates that what may hold true in one African context might differ significantly in another, highlighting the necessity for context-specific analyses and interventions.

Womanism

Furthermore, the concept of womanism has been influential in African feminist discourse. This concept was introduced by Alice Walker, an African American writer and activist. Womanism is articulated by Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi in the context of African and African diasporic literature and feminist thought (Ogunyemi, 1985). She articulates that “since feminism and African American womanism overlook African peculiarities, there is a need to define African womanism” (Ogunyemi 1996, p.114). Ogunyemi’s analysis emphasizes the significance of African women's voices, perspectives, and narratives. She seeks to challenge and disrupt existing patriarchal and Eurocentric frameworks, offering alternative ways of understanding and interpreting African literature and the experiences of African women (Ogunyemi, 1985). Her work emphasizes the unique experiences and struggles of African women and their distinct cultural, historical, and social contexts and further situates the feminist vision within black women’s confrontation with

culture, colonialism, and many other forms of domination that condition African women's lives (Ogunyemi, 1985). Significantly, African womanism as articulated by Ogunyemi's work highlights the importance of recognizing the agency, resilience, and contributions of African women in shaping their own liberation (Ogunyemi, 1985).

Nego-feminism

Obioma Nnaemeka (2015) proposes Nego-feminism, a framework that is culturally specific and sensitive to the realities of the local African girl and in this case, the Trokosi. In her work, *Captured in Translation Africa, and Feminisms in the Age of Globalization In The Feminist Theory Reader: Local and Global Perspectives* (Nnaemeka, 2015), she seeks to bridge the gap between Western feminist theories and African women's experiences.

Nnaemeka (2015) provides a criticism of globalization as it relates to feminism and dismisses the universalism of Western notions and values. She tackles the 'othering' of the human that is not European and whose practices and movements are "regulated and managed by the immigration policies of many Western nations" (p.242). Nnaemeka (2015) challenges the idea that feminism is a monolithic concept that can be universally applied across different cultural contexts and asserts that "in seeking to remake the world by demanding an end to all forms of gender-based discrimination, feminism, as ideology and struggle, has taken location-specific and culturally defined forms across time and space" (p. 243). Nnaemeka (2015) proposes "Nego feminism" to better understand the lived experiences of African women and argues that African women have their unique perspectives, histories, and struggles that must be acknowledged and centered in feminist discourse. Negofeminism represents "feminism of negotiation and "no ego" feminism" "grounded in African cultural reality" (p.244). Negotiation and compromise are very critical in Nnaemeka (2015)'s analysis of addressing patriarchal rule in African communities. Here,

Nnaemeka (2015) maintains that negotiation “means both to give and take or exchange and to cope with successfully or go around” (p.244). Feminism practiced in Africa actively negotiates with different patriarchal cultural, social, and political contexts to shape their own feminist agendas (Nnaemeka, 2015). Rejecting the notion of monolithic feminism and sexual politics, Nnaemeka (2015) argues that “feminism without men is a challenge at least and an impossibility” (p.244) in the African context where female statuses as mothers, wives, and daughters are linked to men. Negofeminism is grounded in compromise and suggests an approach that does not completely eradicate but instead modifies old systems and structures. This emphasizes the importance of dialogue and collaboration within local contexts to address gender inequalities. Nnaemeka’s Negofeminism is necessary to understand and situate the struggles of African women in the African context and contributes to a more inclusive and intersectional understanding of feminism. Negofeminism incorporates African women's perspectives, histories, and cultural contexts and creates a space for African women's voices, experiences, and ways of doing to be heard and valued within feminist discourse. And as better put by Nnaemeka (2015), “It knows when, where, and how to confront patriarchal challenges... It knows when, where, and how to negotiate with or negotiate around patriarchy in different contexts” (p.244). Nnaemeka (2015) goes ahead to highlight the possibility of translating feminism and border thinking. Here, she argues that the zones of interactions in feminism are very important as it depicts alternative ways of knowledge due to different positionalities.

Both Womanism and Negofeminism are feminist frameworks that recognize the significance of African cultural contexts and the need to engage with African traditions and values in feminist discourse. They acknowledge the importance of cultural relevance and seek to challenge oppressive gender norms within African societies. They further challenge Eurocentric standards

of femininity and advocate for the empowerment and self-determination of African women within their cultural contexts.

Transnational feminism

At this stage, my paper engages with transnational feminist perspectives or frameworks which largely examine the experiences of women across national boundaries. And as better put by Zerbe Enns, et al. (2021), a transnational feminist perspective “transcends nation-state boundaries and speaks to a wide range of interacting forces that have an impact on gendered relationships and experiences in a geopolitical context” (p.11). My thesis relies on transnational feminism, which recognizes the nuances of women's lives across boundaries, draws attention to their interconnections, and mobilizes for international solidarity. It highlights how gender inequalities intersect with other forms of oppression, such as race, class, sexuality, and nationality. This approach encompasses collaboration, justice, intersectionality, and social activism (Zerbe Enns et al., 2021). Transnational feminism goes beyond the boundaries of individual nations or cultures and acknowledges that women's experiences and struggles are shaped by global processes, power dynamics, and systems of inequality. It seeks to understand and challenge the ways in which gender norms, economic systems, political structures, and cultural practices operate at both local and global levels. The concerns and priorities of women in the African context are intertwined with issues of culture, poverty, kinship, and family necessitating an approach that resonates with the African context. To ensure effective activism, it is imperative to situate feminism in these local contexts and examine the experiences of women in a context-sensitive approach by making women in that context their own best experts (Zerbe Enns et al., 2021).

I engage with the work of Vrushali Patil (2013), "From patriarchy to Intersectionality: A Transnational Feminist Assessment of How Far We've Really Come" In *the Feminist Theory Reader: Local and Global Perspectives*. In her work, Patil (2013) criticizes the one-dimensional nature of the concept of patriarchy and its universal applicability. Patil (2013)'s reference to patriarchy encompasses not only the specific concept of patriarchy itself but also encompasses a more comprehensive understanding of other monolithic accounts of gender oppression. Patil (2013) argues that there is a need for a critical acknowledgment and examination of the complex transnational histories that exist within local Patriarchies and criticizes the concept of intersectionality as a response to Patriarchy, arguing that "unrecognized issues with the former continue to haunt how we conceptualize and talk about gendered dynamics and power relations within the latter" (p.124). According to Patil (2013), it is insufficient to attribute women's experiences of gender inequalities solely to patriarchy, without considering the contextual factors that have contributed to the establishment of these patriarchal systems, particularly in the Global South. Additionally, a very critical aspect of Patil's criticism of patriarchy is "the presumption of women as sexual- political subjects prior to and external to social relationships" (p.126) which requires a shift to recognizing existing gender realities and relations. A transnational feminist assessment of the patriarchal society and human rights framework would require a shift from universalization, and renegotiation of the existing patriarchal system that restricts the human rights of the trokosis (Patil, 2013). As posited by Patil (2013), in enforcing the international human rights framework, it is essential to consider cross-border dynamics and approach patriarchy as stemming from multiple histories of local-global processes that exist in relation to each other.

Research Methodology

Data Set

My thesis primarily relies on secondary data sources, specifically YouTube documentaries and interviews conducted by reputable media organizations. These sources provide valuable insights into the experiences, perspectives, and arguments put forth by various stakeholders involved in the Trokosi tradition. These stakeholders include former Trokosi individuals, proponents of the practice such as shrine priests, and the Afrikania Missionary organization, which is dedicated to promoting African Traditional Religion, as well as representatives from non-governmental organizations (NGOs) actively working in the field. Complementing the audiovisual materials, my secondary research encompasses a wide range of scholarly articles, dissertations, websites, and books. These sources offer a comprehensive understanding of the historical context, background information, and the utilization of conceptual frameworks by fellow researchers who have explored this subject. Also, these sources help me unpack the tension between cultural and human rights debates regarding the Trokosi tradition. By engaging with existing scholarship, I situate my study within the broader academic discourse and draw upon established theoretical frameworks to guide my analysis.

This paper employs a comprehensive review of literature dating from 1995 to 2023 to capture the historical background and evolution of the Trokosi practice. This extended timeframe was deemed necessary to encompass the historical trajectory of the practice and provide a comprehensive understanding of its development over time. Most of the literature employed in this study is concentrated between 1995 and 2015 because this period witnessed increased attention and scrutiny of the Trokosi practice locally and internationally, resulting in greater availability of

scholarly works and media coverage. However, it is worth noting that there has been limited media coverage of the practice and recent literature after 2015. To ensure a balanced analysis, this thesis also incorporates the most up-to-date literature available in 2023, thus providing a wide range of perspectives, arguments, and knowledge on the topic.

For data collection, this paper employed a snowballing technique by following references cited in the works of other scholars to identify additional relevant sources. The research process involved the use of specific keywords such as "Trokosi tradition" and "Ghana," "Trokosi Tradition," "Traditional practices," "women's rights," and "Ghana" to refine the search and identify pertinent literature. The relevant works were saved in a dedicated desktop folder for further analysis and review.

For the audiovisual materials, searches were conducted on YouTube to gather relevant documentaries on the Trokosi practice. These sources include reputable media organizations such as BBC News Africa, Messy Moment Media, TV3 (a local broadcasting television station in Ghana), and Al Jazeera English. These audiovisual materials were carefully selected to provide additional insights and perspectives from various stakeholders involved in or impacted by the Trokosi tradition. Furthermore, to gain a comprehensive understanding of the Trokosi practice and its associated debates, this study explored the websites of International Needs Ghana and Afrikania Mission, two key stakeholders involved in the discourse surrounding the practice. These websites were consulted as valuable sources to gather background information on the activities, mission, strategies adopted, and their potential impact on the discourse surrounding the Trokosi tradition.

To capture the feminist voices, this thesis used some feminist works in the "Feminist Theory Reader: Local and Global Perspectives" which brings together a rich collection of writings that

reflect diverse feminist thought and the ways in which it engages with local and global issues across different contexts and cultures.

Limitations

It is important to acknowledge that this paper is bounded by certain limitations inherent in the method of data collection used. First, rather than direct engagement with the actors involved, the findings presented in this thesis are exclusively from an extensive review of secondary materials. Consequently, the voices and experiences of the women directly affected by the practice may not have been fully captured or comprehensively represented to cover their experiences as well as their agency.

The secondary materials used in this thesis mostly provide a general overview of the Trokosi practice and its impact on women and children. While these sources offer valuable insights, they do not explicitly stem from a feminist perspective. Moreover, most of the media coverage and documentary materials used in this study were produced by international bodies. This raises concerns about potential biases or a skewed perspective on traditional practices. They may not necessarily reflect the local nuances and complexities inherent to the practice. It is important to acknowledge the potential for a Western-centric lens in the portrayal of these traditional practices, which may impact the interpretation of their findings. Lastly, this paper faces challenges in accessing comprehensive and up-to-date secondary sources particularly if the trokosi tradition has undergone recent changes or adaptations. As a result, existing secondary sources may not adequately reflect these developments.

Despite these limitations, this paper provides valuable insights and serves as a foundation for further research on the trokosi tradition. Future research could consider incorporating additional

methods, such as semi-structured interviews conducted in the field, to collect primary data and gain a more nuanced understanding of the topic. This approach would allow for direct engagement with the relevant actors and the exploration of more delicate aspects of the Trokosi tradition, ensuring that the research is guided by pertinent questions and prioritizes the voices of those directly affected by the practice.

Positionality

As a young woman who has spent most of my life in the capital city of Ghana, Accra, I first heard of the Trokosi practice in the classroom. It was during our Religious and Moral Education class that our teacher casually explained the practice, often grouping it under the category of "outdated cultural practices" in Ghana. It was also mentioned with other controversial practices like Female Genital Mutilation. I remember the outright disdain the class shared when we first learned of this practice. This left a lasting impact on me, and I became deeply interested in understanding its origins, consequences, and broader implications for gender equality and human rights in our Ghanaian society.

I situate myself as an outsider recognizing that I do not have direct personal ties with the distinct actors of this practice. These actors include former and present Trokosi, proponents of the practice (shrine priests and the Afrikania Missionary, an organization devoted to the promotion of African Traditional Religion), and representatives of NGOs. My position as a Ghanaian woman allows me to empathize with the experiences of those affected by the Trokosi system and amplify their voices. Having grown up in the city, I am aware of the privileges and opportunities that my urban upbringing has afforded me. My urban environment offers access to better education, healthcare facilities, infrastructure, and economic opportunities. It has allowed me to engage with diverse cultures, ideas, and experiences that have broadened my horizons. However, I am also cognizant

of the inherent power dynamics and inequalities that persist within our Ghanaian society, particularly in relation to cultural practices that disproportionately affect women. My feminist background acknowledges the inherent power imbalances and injustices embedded in the Trokosi tradition. I approach this research with a critical lens, to better understand the Trokosi tradition using a feminist lens and to shed light on the intersecting issues of gender, culture, and human rights within the context of the Trokosi practice. Drawing inspiration from African feminist perspectives, I navigate the complex terrain of cultural practices with a sense of solidarity and shared experiences. I am committed to amplifying the voices of those marginalized by the Trokosi tradition, recognizing the importance of centering their narratives and advocating for their rights and well-being.

CHAPTER FOUR: DATA ANALYSIS

The qualitative method of data analysis is used to uncover the themes, patterns, and meanings within this paper. To examine the experiences of the Trokosis, my thesis uses a qualitative narrative analysis, “an approach that takes stories as the unit of analysis” (Esin, 2011 p.92). This approach considers realities and individual experiences as rooted in “specific historical contexts” (Esin, 2011 p.93). Esin (2011) maintains that this method of analysis “perceives narratives as a means that explores and describes realities which are arranged and bound in time” (p.94). The use of narratives is also very critical in unpacking the varying viewpoints of tradition as a “justice system of crime deterrence” or a “system of modern slavery and sexual exploitation.” The narrative method of analysis functions as a way of enabling my thesis to answer, “what is being told and by whom” as well as examine the “multiple and sometimes contradictory layers of meanings (Esin, 2011 p.95).

Language/ Word Usage in the Trokosi Discourse

Language plays a pivotal role in shaping the discourse surrounding the Trokosi practice and influences how the practice is understood and addressed. The use of language and words is very crucial and central in unraveling the multifaceted dimensions of the Trokosi practice in terms of identity, power relations, and cultural and religious dimensions of the Trokosi practice. An example is the usage of terms such as "mutilation" or "circumcision" in relation to the practices of female genital cutting practices in the Global South. Abusharaf (2001) argues that the differences in the use of terminology for the practices of female genital cutting reveal some limitations of the feminist focus on the universal nature of women's oppression and experiences across diverse social and cultural locations. It is imperative to emphasize that the inclusion of this example on female genital cutting holds no significance or bearing on the focus and scope of my study.

It is worth noting that language holds great significance in identifying the Trokosi practice. The terminology used to describe this practice carries implicit connotations and meanings that shape how others perceive and understand it. A plethora of literature consulted for this paper has used words such as "ritual servitude," "religious bondage," "child bondage" or "traditional/modern slavery" to describe the practice. These phrases evoke powerful emotions about the practice and highlight the use of religion/tradition/culture to exploit the women involved. The use of descriptions for the practice can be said to draw attention to the practice and seek empathy and interventions. These descriptions further influence social change initiatives and policies. For instance, in Ameh (2001)'s research, he revealed that the first discussion of the practice in the media space was attributed to the article "Abolition of Outmoded Customs." This article employed derogatory language such as "primitive cultural practice", "practices of barbarism," "primitive custom," "savage state" etc. in reference to this cultural practice (Ameh 2001, p.185). The use of

such terms sparked strong reactions from both proponents and certain critics, who perceived these terms as offensive and disrespectful (Ameh, 2001). The first print media report on the tradition was on the front page of *The Mirror*, in 1993, with the title, “*1000 Girls Kept as Slave Wives Under Trokosi System*” which expectedly generated public attention in Ghana (Ameh, 2001).

The use of words as a lens through which the power relations within the Trokosi practice can be examined is of utmost importance to this paper and the broader feminist discourse. The use of the phrases “Trokosi slaves”, “Slave wife” and “Slaves” or “Enslaved girls” in discussions surrounding Trokosi can either reinforce or challenge existing power structures. While both terms express the notion of oppression and control, the term “slave girls” labels the condition as a trait only drawing attention to present moments of oppression and the subjugation of individuals involved, while “enslaved girls” draws attention to the present circumstance or condition of the individual involved and recognizes the histories that pre-date the ongoing dehumanization as a person (Norward, 2020). This is used to vocalize the “person first” narrative (Norward, 2020). This is important because the use of empowering language can shed light on the agency and resilience of the girls affected by the practice and further emphasize their capacity for resistance and change. However, the use of language that perpetuates victimization and disempowerment can further marginalize the individuals involved in the Trokosi system and reinforce power imbalances. It is essential to approach these linguistic nuances with sensitivity and cultural understanding, recognizing that different cultures may have diverse interpretations and expressions. It is necessary to give careful attention to the language used to ensure that it does not perpetuate stereotypes.

Voices of the Trokosis

The second chapter of this thesis gave an account of the experiences of the Trokosis. It is important to examine and understand the way the Trokosis construct and convey their lived experiences as well as the meaning they attribute to their own experiences. Feminist scholars have employed alternative research methods, including storytelling, narrative theory, experiential learning, and various other techniques. These approaches are employed to delve into and amplify the voices of those who have been historically silenced and marginalized. (Harel-Shalev, & Daphna-Tekoah, 2016). According to Ameh (2001), during the first wave of the debate surrounding the Trokosi tradition, the voices of the Trokosis were not given a platform to be heard. Instead, their voices were co-opted and represented by both proponents and opponents of the practice. When examining the narratives of the Trokosi individuals themselves, it is crucial to acknowledge their own interpretations of the practice. By closely analyzing their narratives, it becomes evident that the Trokosi perceive the practice as encompassing various forms of abuse, including physical and sexual mistreatment. Their narratives reveal the use of phrases such as “hard labour,” “he beat me,” “I was forced to have sex with the priest”, “the priest beat me up,” “the priest wanted to have sex with me but I resisted,” “I was in total isolation” among others.

These accounts provide valuable insights into the lived experiences of the Trokosi individuals and highlight the presence of discrimination and oppressive dynamics within the practice.

The role of the family holds significant importance in understanding the Trokosi tradition. The narratives shared by the Trokosis shed light on this aspect, revealing the dynamic relationship between the family and the tradition. The accounts given by the Trokosis emphasize the family's involvement as enablers of the practice. However, they highlight the little support they received from the family. Additionally, some Trokosis mention running away to seek refuge with their

families, implying a sense of trust or hope from their families. During the narrations of their experiences, the Trokosis made certain remarks such as “My father brought me here,” “Occasionally, my parents sent me some food,” “My family gave me away,” and “I run away to my family.” These highlight the complex influence of the family, and their involvement can also be seen as a manifestation of cultural and religious beliefs, communal obligations, and a desire to maintain spiritual harmony (Boaten, 2001; Ameh, 2001).

The narratives of former Trokosis shed light on their remarkable resilience and agency within the context of the Trokosi tradition. Despite the prevailing belief that girls are more compliant and less likely to resist the practice compared to boys (Martinez, 2011), the accounts of these former Trokosis challenge this notion and reveal their efforts to adopt coping strategies, and strategically navigate relationships, responsibilities, and power dynamics within the system. The Trokosi system imposes significant victimization on the girls and women involved, stemming from both the systemic practices deeply ingrained within the Trokosi tradition and the actions of individuals who perpetuate and benefit from its existence. It is crucial to acknowledge that even amidst the constraints imposed by their oppressive circumstances, these young females and women exhibit agency in diverse and multifaceted forms that may not be easily recognizable. Their agency is demonstrated through their resilience, their ability to make choices and exert influence within the limited scope available to them, and their capacity to shape and share their own narratives within the Trokosi system. Their narratives provide compelling evidence of their unwavering spirit and determination to reclaim their autonomy and challenge the oppressive forces that seek to confine them. They provide accounts where they assume their roles as caretakers and providers to ensure survival. In extreme cases, they recount instances where they attempted to run away from the shrine or denied the priest access to engage in sexual activities. These actions also reflect their

agency and determination to challenge the oppressive nature of the practice. In the face of potential repercussions, such acts of defiance demonstrate the strength and resilience of these former Trokosis. This is exemplified in the account of Julie Dorbadzi, a 23-year-old former Trokosi. As documented by Brooker (1996), Julie's narrative reveals her decision to escape from the Trokosi system when she became pregnant with her second child. Despite facing obstacles, Julie's determination to regain her freedom persisted. After being unsuccessful in the second attempt, Julie was finally liberated on the third attempt in another account by Ameh (2001). These instances challenge the perception that Trokosi girls are passive victims without the capacity to resist their circumstances. Instead, they provide evidence of their agency and strength in navigating their lives within the constraints of the Trokosi tradition.

Ameh (2001) presents a thought-provoking argument regarding the account of one of the Trokosis, emphasizing that this account should not be seen as discrediting the experiences of other Trokosis or undermining the oppression they have endured. *“It is important to comment on the several versions of Juliana's account of her life as a trokosi. to some of the numerous contradictions in her account to different people and organizations which have interviewed her. The most contested discrepancy in her story is the assertion in the quote on this page that she slept with the priest and that he (the priest) was the father of her second child. The priest vehemently deny this. My investigations have revealed that the Priest has never had sexual intercourse with Juliana and that he did not father any of her children. This revelation and the contradictions in her story have become a source of serious concern and embarrassment to people within the anti-trokosi movement and other stakeholders”* (p.264).

Narratives offer a valuable lens through which to gain insight into the experiences of Trokosis.

However, it is essential to acknowledge that narratives may inadvertently propagate confirmation

bias within this discourse. This pertains to the human tendency to selectively endorse or provide information that aligns with pre-existing beliefs or stereotypes, as illustrated by the example of Julie in the Trokosi context. Moreover, the use of narratives may expose Trokosis to the potential of re-experiencing their traumatic encounters, potentially resulting in emotional distress and harm. This unintended consequence can inadvertently reinforce their identity as victims, potentially contributing to feelings of powerlessness and vulnerability.

Given the detailed narratives presented by Trokosis and the cogent arguments posited by scholars, it becomes paramount to ascertain whether the Trokosi system serves as a mechanism for deterring crime, as asserted by its proponents, or if it indeed constitutes a system of sexual exploitation, as delineated by critics.

Trokosi - Justice System of Crime Deterrence or System of Sexual Exploitation

In the Southern Ewe communities where the Trokosi tradition is practiced, a criminal act is not solely defined by its social harm and moral condemnation. It extends to encompass acts that are perceived as transgressions against the entire community and Supernatural forces that keep the entire community in balance (Abotchie 1997; Ameh 2001). Therefore, criminal acts carry significant repercussions. However, it is also believed that certain criminal acts are committed under some evil influence. Hence, punishment and atonement of crime are deemed necessary to appease Supernatural forces and restore the community's balance and cohesion (Abotchie 1997; Ameh 2001). Within the religious beliefs and worship of the Southern Ewe communities, seeking forgiveness and reconciliation is achieved through prayer and sacrifice. The belief is that forgiveness is not a passive state but an active process that necessitates sacrifice. These sacrifices

take various forms and are offered as part of their religious worship (Abotchie 1997; Ameh 2001). They include offerings of different types of beverages, food, livestock, and other valuable items, with the nature of the sacrifice being determined by the severity of the offense and the specific shrine involved. Notably, certain shrines accept humans as sacrifices. This is what has been established as the *Troxovi* shrine and where the Trokosi tradition emerged. This traditional approach to crime control is believed to be more efficient than the modern imported Western system leading individuals to prefer resolving their grievances through traditional mechanisms rather than relying on the modern criminal justice system. This also accounts for why the Trokosi tradition has persisted over the years. The community's unwavering adherence to this practice stems from their perception of it as an instant and efficient system of justice, contrasting with their lack of trust in the modern criminal justice system (Abotchie 1997; Ameh 2001). Nevertheless, this rationale does not justify the continued existence of the Trokosi practice in the twenty-first century.

Is Trokosi then a System of Modern Slavery and Sexual Exploitation?

Scholars and researchers have portrayed the sentiments of the opponents of the Trokosi practice in numerous publications as a system that involves the enslavement of the young girls involved. According to United Nations, Modern Slavery refers to “*situations of exploitation that a person cannot refuse or leave because of threats, violence, coercion, deception, and/or abuse of power*”. When comparing this definition to the Trokosi Tradition, it becomes apparent that the practice aligns with the core characteristics of modern slavery. The Trokosis are sent to the shrine without their consent (Ababio, 1995; Bilyeu, 1998; Boateng, 2000; Ameh, 2001) and in some instances without any knowledge of the reasons behind their transfer to the shrine (Ababio, 1995). Some Trokosis report that they were abandoned at the shrine by their parents after being made to believe

they were accompanying them somewhere (Ameh, 2001). Once the girl is in the shrine, her movements are restricted and she is not allowed to leave the premises of the shrine without permission from the priest (Bilyeu 1998; Ameh, 2001; Martinez 2011; Asomah, 2015). Once branded as the “wife of the gods” hence “the wife of the priest”, the Trokosis are subjected to physical labour and as explained by Martinez (2011), “the trokosis work long hours, such as fifteen-hour workdays, performing various duties that include cleaning, cooking, carrying water, and farming” (p.26). In addition to this, the Trokosis are expected to fulfill their wifely duties, which include engaging in sexual relationships with the shrine priests and bearing their children. (Bilyeu 1998; Asomah, 2015; Martinez 2011). To worsen their plight, the Trokosis do not own any property (Ameh, 2001). The Trokosi tradition embodies key elements of modern slavery such as the deprivation of freedom, forced labor, and the ownership of individuals by others. Through this lens, it becomes evident that the Trokosi Tradition can be regarded as a system of modern slavery, as it involves the coercion, exploitation, and control of young girls, depriving them of their basic rights and subjecting them to labor and sexual exploitation.

Why has the Trokosi tradition persisted?

The Trokosi tradition has persisted due to various interconnected cultural, religious, socioeconomic, and gender-related factors. It is imperative to understand that these factors are crucial for developing effective strategies to address and tackle the Trokosi tradition.

In an interview conducted by Owusu (2023), a Queen-mother (a female counterpart of a traditional chief or king) highlighted three factors that contribute to the persistence of the Trokosi tradition:

“(1) many of the people in the practicing communities are uneducated or less educated and therefore are easily influenced; (2) people believe and fear that the gods will punish them if they

oppose the practice or challenge the priests; and (3) the local folks do not have confidence in the contemporary western imported justice system—in other words, the Ghanaian criminal justice system is inefficient and ineffective; so people are compelled to believe that the trokosi system is a better alternative” (Owusu 2023, p.18).

Based on previous relevant existing literature, in this section, I argue that the Trokosi tradition has persisted due to the factors discussed below:

Power Dynamics and Patriarchy

In Ghana, as in many societies, power is often unequally distributed along gender lines, with men occupying positions of authority and women being subjected to subordinate roles. The political organization of these Southern Ewe communities is situated in a system of chieftaincy. The Chief, who is the constitutional head is surrounded by a council of male elders who provide advisory support (Bilyeu, 1998; Ameh 2001). As articulated by Ameh (2001), the Chief occupies the highest position within the political hierarchy and assumes the responsibility of the custodian of the culture and traditions of the community, serving as a representative of the ancestors. The Council of Elders, consisting of clan heads representing their respective clans or families, assists the Chief in fulfilling his duties and offer guidance. While the Chief possesses absolute authority within his domain, he is obligated to consider the advice provided by the council, which represents the collective interests of his subjects (Bilyeu, 1998; Ameh, 2001). Another influential figure in the community is the Shrine Priest, who commands both reverence and fear in the community (Bilyeu, 1998). It is noteworthy that shrines are exclusively owned by men in these traditional communities (Akpabli-Honu & Agbanu, 2014). These practicing communities did not possess an established institution of female chieftaincy for a Queen-Mother. Addressing the term, “queen mother” within one of the towns, Jenkins (2012) asserted, “Klikor, historically did

not have an institution of female chieftaincy that the term Queen- Mother usually refers to and like one would find in other communities in Ghana” (p.206). These patriarchal power structures grant authority to male traditional leaders who oversee the Trokosi system and reinforce the subjugation of women and limit their decision-making power. The power dynamics inherent in patriarchal structures create a climate where challenging or dismantling the Trokosi tradition becomes extremely difficult. These male figures hold significant influence and control over the lives of Trokosi women, further entrenching the practice. Women tend to have no say in these traditional communities (Akpabli-Honu & Agbanu, 2014; Asomah, 2015). Furthermore, within these practicing communities, patriarchal norms and societal expectations regarding gender roles also play a significant role in contributing to the persistence of the practice. The patriarchal belief that women are inherently submissive and should be under male control strengthens the acceptance and perpetuation of the Trokosi practice (Boaten, 2011). Botchway (2008) argues that *“Perhaps the reason that the plight of these Ghanaian girls is not at the forefront of debate in Ghana is because Ghanaian women, like women in many nations, are economically disadvantaged. Indeed, women in Ghana, and similar countries facing structural development, continue to have economically invisible functions, such as “providing food, fetching water and fuel, and taking care of children, the sick, and the aged”* (p.383). Women in Africa are expected to adhere to traditional gender norms, which often prioritize their roles as wives, mothers, daughters, and caretakers hence treated as 'objects' for childbirth. (Boaten, 2011). Hence, positioning women as sacrificial figures who are obligated to uphold the tradition without any resistance.

Persistent Fear in the Community

The fear of incurring the wrath of the gods plays a significant role in perpetuating the persistence of the Trokosi tradition (Owusu, 2023). Trokosi is a deeply sensitive issue in the practicing areas. Ameh (2001) highlights that the fear of incurring the wrath of the gods was so ingrained in the communities that Trokosi was regarded as an issue people could not publicly discuss with strangers. It is imperative to inquire about the motivations that drive families, who are presumed to have good intentions, to send their own children into the harsh conditions in the Trokosi shrines. It has earlier been established that the family plays a very critical role in the Trokosi tradition. Fear drives the families into offering their daughters as Trokosis to fulfill religious obligations or to appease deities. As Botchway (2008) notes, “*Many parents do not want to send their children into the Trokosi but feel they have no option, as they believe that their family will be cursed if they do not send a virgin girl*” (p.390). Despite the awareness of the detrimental consequences of the tradition, the fear of divine punishment drives families to comply with the tradition. Also, the fear of disrupting the community's peace, and harmony or being socially stigmatized prevents families from challenging or abandoning the practice (Rinaudo, 2003). Some families are reluctant to accept their daughters after their liberation from the practice due to their fear of the gods' wrath (Ameh, 2001). This poses a major challenge to the anti-trokosi campaign.

Similarly, some Trokosis themselves are driven by fear due to their deep-rooted belief in the tradition and the perceived divine authority of the gods. As a result, they may not consider the liberation efforts of human rights activists as sufficient to genuinely emancipate them (Ameh, 2001). Consequently, they harbor apprehension about the prospect of leaving the shrine.

Insufficient Commitment and Enforcement Mechanisms

Despite the existence of robust existing laws, movements, and organizations that explicitly prohibit the practice, enforcement of the law has been quite a challenge. The lack of adequate enforcement of these laws undermines efforts to eradicate the tradition and protect the rights of these Trokosis. First, law enforcement agencies and judicial systems are very passive and fail to prioritize cases related to the Trokosi practice hence, it is unsurprising that there has not been a report of a single shrine priest who has been prosecuted for the Trokosi practice (Bilyeu 1999; Martinez, 2011). Owusu (2023) highlights an intriguing observation regarding the inaction of law enforcement agencies. According to Owusu, this inaction can be attributed to the apprehension surrounding the practice and the fear of incurring potential adversities from the gods. Also, most of the laws prohibiting the Trokosi tradition exist at the national level. Hence, enforcement can be affected by factors such as the lack of adequate resources, limited institutional capacity, or corruption, among others. Owusu (2023) also argues that many governments in Africa have not made a conscious commitment to speak directly against certain controversial cultural and religious practices for purely political reasons. The governing political party may refrain from involvement with the Trokosi tradition to avoid triggering or upsetting community members, as there is a potential threat of losing electoral support during general elections (Owusu,2023).

Navigating in the right direction

Cultural Relativism and the Trokosi Tradition

The relationship between universal human rights and cultural relativism in the context of the Trokosi tradition is a complex and contentious issue. Cultural relativism argues that cultural practices should be understood and respected within their cultural context and the need for cultural plurality (Ameh, 2004; Asomah, 2015). The principles of Universal human rights assert that all

individuals, regardless of their cultural background, possess inherent rights and dignity that should be protected and upheld. These rights ensure the protection of lives, liberties, freedoms, and security of people (Asomah, 2015). However, the community-based identities in certain societies challenge the universal application of the human rights framework. In some societies, individuals' rights are perceived to be inseparable from the rights of the collective. The human rights framework can be adapted to encompass these diverse perspectives and address the complex relationship between individuals and their communities. The cultural relativism camp argues that adherence to the universal human rights standards is intrusive and disruptive to the deep-rooted traditional practices and beliefs that have existed for centuries to protect community members (Asomah, 2015). Hence, it is important to appreciate the historical and socio-cultural factors that have shaped and sustained the Trokosi tradition over time. This perspective argues for a culturally-based human rights approach that respects the cultural expressions of community members. However, the application of cultural relativism to the Trokosi tradition does not mean that human rights concerns can be disregarded. It has been established the human rights violations that exist within the Trokosi practice. From a critical perspective, granting culturally-based human rights demands without sufficient scrutiny and accountability can lead to the legitimization of the human rights abuses that exist within the Trokosi practice. And as Asomah (2015) explains, "As long as there must be a space for the expression of cultural uniqueness and identity, there must equally be a space for a minimum standard of guarantees to avoid the exercise of arbitrary discretionary powers, which tends to create room for abuse as a result of limited commonly-enforceable standards" (p.132).

Modification as a Strategy to Combat the Trokosi Tradition?

Advocates of the anti-trokosi campaign argue for a complete and immediate eradication of the Trokosi practice. They contend that the tradition is inherently abusive and violates fundamental human rights. Hence, a complete abolition is necessary to ensure the freedom and dignity of the women and girls involved. Despite the argument that any form of modification may legitimize the harmful aspects of the tradition and perpetuate its existence, I argue in this section that a modification of the practice which takes a more gradual and culturally sensitive approach is necessary to address this tradition. The modification approach requires patience, persistence, and a long-term commitment because the Trokosi tradition involves a complex interplay between culture, religion, and tradition. Hence, advocating for the complete eradication of the Trokosi tradition may lead to social upheaval and resistance considering the deep-rooted cultural and religious complexities involved. This approach involves working with communities, religious leaders, and stakeholders to raise awareness and develop alternative approaches that respect human rights and gender equality. Community engagement and fostering dialogue can lead to long-lasting change while respecting local customs and traditions. Through open and respectful exchanges, community members can be empowered to critically reflect on the Trokosi tradition, its implications, and potential alternatives. This collaborative modification approach seeks to create a more inclusive and equitable society while preserving cultural heritage and promoting human rights.

The modification approach adopted by the anti-trokosi movement to ensure the success of their campaign.

Despite the existence of international conventions and the Ghana Constitution, the elimination of the Trokosi tradition has been challenging. While these documents provide a foundation for

addressing human rights violations, a more nuanced approach is required to navigate the cultural sensitivities surrounding the Trokosi tradition. The success of the anti-trokosi movement in liberating some of the Trokosi women can be attributed to:

Cultural Sensitivity: The Traditional leaders demonstrated a strong resistance to any attempts aimed at eradicating their cultural practice, as they believed it was integral to the development of their community. However, the anti-trokosi campaigners maintained that their intention was to address the specific aspects of the practice that infringed upon the rights of the affected girls and women, rather than completely abolishing it (Ameh, 2001). In this regard, engaging in dialogue and negotiation becomes crucial, as it cultivates a sense of cultural sensitivity and paves the way for forming alliances within the practicing community.

Dialogue with community members: The grassroots work of dialogue and education employed by International Needs Ghana, which is a branch of an international network was done by Ghanaians. Particularly, most of the International Needs Ghana staff assigned to embark on the anti-trokosi movement are Ewes, who speak the language and know the customs of the people (Asomah, 2015; Ameh, 2001). This promoted local activism in a respectful and inclusive manner and fosters negotiation and critical self-reflection. Employing internal dialogue recognizes that change is most effective when it comes from within and seeks to engage community members in a meaningful and transformative dialogue about the Trokosi tradition. The International Needs Ghana staff had several discussions with the Chiefs, Shrine Priests, Owners and Elders, and the local people in their palaces, shrines, and at several seminars and workshops. Also, the involvement of these stakeholders ensures a strong networking capacity whose ideas, power, and influence can bring about change (Asomah, 2015).

In addition to employing these modification strategies, the anti-trokosi movement offered economic incentives, including financial support, livestock, etc. to the traditional leaders to encourage them to liberate the Trokosis (Jenkins, 2012). This rationale was grounded in the perception that the Trokosis played a pivotal role in the economic sustenance of the priests (Jenkins, 2012).

The anti-trokosi campaign faced a significant obstacle in convincing local practitioners to embrace and uphold human rights principles (Ameh, 2001, 2004). Cross-cultural dialogue serves as a strategy to foster mutual respect, empathy, and appreciation for cultural diversity while promoting effective communication and collaboration. In the case of the Ewe community, which is rooted in communal values and places a strong emphasis on collective responsibility, it becomes crucial to strike a balance between community values and individual rights. Drawing upon certain cultural values, particularly the recognition, and respect for individuality, can contribute to addressing the oppression experienced by women and children in traditional practices within African societies (Ameh, 2001, 2004). There is a need to adapt to the changing needs of society as culture is not static. The local cultures need to acknowledge and grant African women their individual rights and autonomy by incorporating other cultural values that prioritize gender equality, respect for personal choices and decisions, and empowerment through education and opportunities for personal growth and development.

CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Trokosi tradition remains a complex and deeply entrenched cultural practice among the Ewe-speaking coastal Ghanaians living in the Tongu, Akatsi, and Anloga Districts of the Volta region. This paper has explored various aspects of the Trokosi tradition, including its historical origins, the experiences of the individuals involved, and the debates and theoretical frameworks. It is evident that the Trokosi tradition reflects the enduring patriarchal control within traditional rural societies in Ghana, perpetuating gender-based sexual violence and violating the human rights and reproductive rights of the young females involved.

Over the years, the trokosi practice has gained public and international attention and has led to the rescuing of several Trokosis. This tradition, although rooted in historical beliefs and community cohesion, raises significant human rights concerns that are at odds with international human rights standards and principles. The trokosi tradition contradicts the 1992 constitution of Ghana and other international bodies and tramples on the trokosis' human and reproductive rights. Practitioners of this practice assert this practice to be a better justice system and hence refute allegations of human rights abuse. The controversial debate on the human rights framework creates tension in the enforcement of the human rights framework. The struggle between cultural rights and universal human rights presents a complex ethical dilemma. Hence, it is necessary to critically examine the Declaration of human rights and consider a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between individuals and their communities. By doing so, we can move away from an exclusively individualistic approach and adopt a framework that recognizes and respects the intricate dynamics between individuals and their communities. It is therefore essential to critically examine the intersectionality of culture, gender, and human rights while prioritizing the protection of the rights and well-being of the young girls involved.

The universal approach of the human rights framework will remain ineffectual to address the trokosi tradition until it adopts an analysis that explores a culturally sensitive engagement with the practicing communities. In the long term, what needs to happen is a bold commitment on the part of the Ghanaian government, organizations, and the leaders of the practicing communities to put in place measures that will deal with the struggles of the rights of the trokosis. Efforts to address the Trokosi tradition require a multifaceted approach that involves legal reforms, community engagement, and education. This would have to be accompanied by sustained public education, dialogue, and sensitization targeted at the communities where the practice is prevalent. It is necessary to collaborate with local communities, religious leaders, NGOs, and government agencies to promote awareness and understanding of human rights principles, challenge controversial beliefs, and provide support for the liberated Trokosis.

Dialogue and active engagement with the local people: A first step to addressing the Trokosi tradition is facilitating dialogue and engagement with the key actors in the practice. This includes fostering conversations with Shrine priests, the Council of Elders, and influential community leaders. By providing a platform for open and respectful discussions, it becomes possible to address the concerns and perspectives of all parties involved. Cultural sensitivity can be exemplified through symbolic gestures such as the offering of gifts and drinking water from the calabash as per customary traditions. These symbolic gestures serve to establish a strong connection, foster mutual trust, and cultivate a sense of respect, thereby creating a conducive environment for engaging in meaningful and constructive dialogues (Asomah, 2015).

This approach acknowledges religious freedom while also prioritizing the rights and well-being of the Trokosis involved. While legal provisions are necessary, they alone are insufficient to

effectively tackle the deeply ingrained nature of this traditional practice. Thus, it is essential to engage with relevant stakeholders within the community to address the various human rights violations associated with the Trokosi tradition, including issues related to education, healthcare, labor, and the overall welfare of the women involved (Ameh, 2001). By involving the community in these discussions, a more nuanced and context-specific approach can be developed to effectively address the challenges posed by the Trokosi tradition.

Education and Awareness: Engagement with community members involves promoting education and raising awareness about the negative impacts of the Trokosi tradition is crucial. This necessitates the dissemination of knowledge and information about human rights, gender equality, and the detrimental effects associated with this practice. These educational programs and initiatives are targeted toward communities, religious leaders, and individuals to foster a deeper understanding of the inherent human rights violations and the negative consequences of the Trokosi tradition. Botchway (2008) contends that by providing education to families and pointing out to them that the current practice is a corrupted version of a sacred practice, they may be willing to depart from the current practice. Education and awareness-raising can help community members critically examine their beliefs and traditions, leading to a more informed decision-making process about the Trokosi practice (Asomah, 2015; Ameh, 2001). According to Asomah (2015), employing local individuals as leaders in educational efforts is essential in leveraging their intimate understanding of the context and culture, thereby facilitating the localization of educational efforts. This perspective also emphasizes the notion that the local community possesses valuable insights and solutions to their own challenges. It implies that a grassroots approach is typically more successful than a top-down approach (Asomah, 2015).

Provision of support for these women: Creating viable alternatives to the Trokosi tradition is essential for its long-term eradication. This involves promoting economic development, skills training, and income-generating opportunities within affected communities to reduce their dependence on the practice (Botchway, 2008; Asomah, 2015). It is also essential to provide comprehensive support services for the Trokosis who have been liberated. This includes access to counseling, healthcare, education, and economic empowerment programs. This is particularly necessary to facilitate the successful integration of the liberated Trokosi victims into society and enable them to live independently (Botchway, 2008; Asomah, 2015). This can be done by putting in place practical measures including the provision of startup capital and training in employable skills. Botchway (2008) also notes that it is important to help the liberated Trokosis establish sustainable businesses as skills without jobs hold limited value.

In addition to the strategies outlined above, it is important to acknowledge the underlying problem inherent in the Trokosi tradition. While the intent may be to address crimes committed by family members, the mechanisms employed, such as the lifelong imprisonment of innocent virgin girls, are highly problematic. It is unjust to hold these young girls accountable for crimes they did not commit, especially when the actual perpetrators could be held directly responsible for their actions. Efforts should also be directed towards holding the actual perpetrators accountable for their actions and providing alternative means of addressing crimes within the community.

CONTRIBUTION TO FEMINIST DISCOURSE

The Trokosi tradition underscores how gender intersects with religion, culture, and socio-economic factors, contributing to a deeper understanding of intersectional dynamics in African societies. The Trokosi tradition plays a significant role in feminist discourse by offering a real-

world case study that encompasses issues of gender-based violence, women's agency, cultural sensitivity, legal frameworks, intersectionality, solidarity, and debates on traditions and modernity. The tradition serves as an illustration of how deeply entrenched gender hierarchies and violence against women can be within cultural contexts. The Trokosi tradition contributes to this discourse by showcasing how women subjected to this practice often display resilience, resistance, and agency in navigating their circumstances. Their efforts to negotiate and challenge the tradition offer valuable insights into women's agency within oppressive systems. It prompts discussions about how to critique harmful practices while respecting cultural diversity. By employing African feminist theories, it recognizes the need to address harmful traditions while avoiding cultural imperialism. It emphasizes the importance of engaging with cultural contexts in ways that empower women and promote gender equality, respecting the nuances and specificities of each community.

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