

The Resilience of Ancestral Practices Among the Kpele from the XIXth Century

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Abstract-

Traditional religion is based on the organization of worship and the observance of prohibitions. This cult strengthens the bonds of trust between the invisible and the living. The Kpélé feel safe renewing the bonds of trust with the ancestors through the rites to the various tutelary deities. The introduction of Christianity to Kpélé in 1895 affected the frequency of sacrifices to the tutelary deities without, however, leading to their abandonment as desired by the missionaries. From a methodological approach based on documentary research and field surveys, this article aims to show the resilience of traditional cults in the face of the introduction of Christianity among the Kpélé. The results of the work showed that in 1914, a record year during the German period when the number of baptized at the Catholic mission of Adéta amounted to 1,228 or 37% of the population, $\frac{1}{4}$ of the rites was maintained.

Key Words: Kpélé (Togo), cult, tutelary deities, Christianity, resilience.

INTRODUCTION

The Kpélé are Ewé who stayed in Notsè between the 15th and 16th centuries in the Agbogbo wall, built by King Agokoli. For political, geographical and economic reasons, three groups, the Kpélé, the Tutu and the Elé, who left Notsè, occupied in successive waves the area that will bear the toponym kpélé, the name of the dominant group. These waves of settlement took place between the 17th and 19th centuries. In the process of occupying the space for the foundation of a village, the deities should mark their consensus with the ancestor driving the migration (N. Dandonougbo, 2015, p.132). This conception of the descendants of the first occupants obliges them to strengthen the links with the invisible. This is how tutelary deities such as Novive, the dulégba and the apeli, are maintained to respectively protect the entire village and each family unit. Periodical sacrifices are addressed to them in order to perpetuate the bonds of trust between the two parties. Over time, the heads of families who had, during their lifetime, validly defended the cause of the members were, after their death, immortalized by ancestral seats to which periodic rites were performed.

This religious conception of the Kpélé was to experience upheavals with the arrival of the first German, Dr. Henrici on September 4, 1887 in Adéta (H. Klose, 1992, p. 206), followed

by pastors Freiburger and Fish from the mission of Bremen then the priests Patrilt, Wullem, Heise Lauer and Sternal of the Society of the Divine Word (N. Dandonougbo, 2014, p. 400). From this time, missionaries from Bremen and the Society of the Divine Word began social work through evangelism and education. What is the impact of Christian actions on rites to deities? From this main question, the following secondary questions emerge: How do the Kpélé conceive of novivé, dulégba, apeli and then togbuikoukpo? Has the proliferation of Christian sacraments led to the abandonment of the cults so desired by the missionaries? This article aims to analyze the repercussions of Christianity on ancestral practices. It is important to identify the lineage deities and to explain the fate of these deities after the expansion of Christianity.

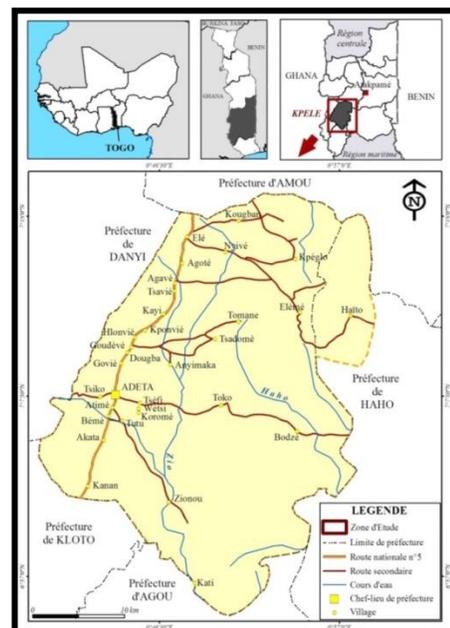
1. Materials and methods

The methodological approach adopted in the context of this study focuses on information collection materials and a study method.

1.1. Presentation of the study environment

The Kpélé are located in the south of Togo, particularly to the west of the Plateaux region, as shown on the map below.

Map n° 1: The geographical location of the Kpélé region



Source: N. Dandonougbo (2012); based on card processing taken from A. Kpantala (2010) and Fieldwork.

Map 1 shows the kpélé zone limited to the north by the prefecture of Amou, to the west by the prefecture of Danyi, to the east by the prefecture of Haho and to the south by the prefectures of Kloto and Agou (N. Dandonougbo, 2014, p. 10). The kpélé zone is located between 0°38 and 0° 58 East longitudes, 6°97 and 7°18 North latitude. After the foundation of the pearly first generation villages along the national road n° 2, the agricultural farms were very quickly transformed into second generation village taking into account the increase in the population and the Guinean tropical climate, favorable to the exercise of the agricultural activities enjoyed by the area.

1.2. Data and methods

This data collection was done in two phases, namely:

1.2.1. Literature search

These are written documents from historians, anthropologists, sociologists, Germanists, etc. devoted to all the Ewe communities of southwestern Togo. Dissertations, theses and articles relating to Kpélé communities were consulted in the central and Félix Couchoro libraries of the University of Lomé. At the National Archives of Togo (ANT) in Lomé, files n° 268 and 285 provided information relating to the number of baptized persons and the creation of the first parish in Adéta. File no. 205 indicates the process of construction of the parish of Bémé and Elé. The Archives of the parish of Saint Raphaël d'Adéta provided the list of the various priests who served in the parish from 1911, the names of the first baptized and then the list of the first couples who celebrated their union.

1.2.2. Field surveys

They are made from field observations, interviews and actual surveys.

Various information relating to the importance of the cults before the installation of the missionaries was collected from the religious leaders, duto or their representatives in the villages of Bémé, Koromé, Wetsi, Tséfi, Tsiko, Atimé, Govié, Dougba, Goudévé, Hlonvié, Kponvié, Kayi, Tsavié, Agavé, Tutu and Elé, i.e. sixteen people in all. Exchanges took place with eight heads of deities (vodunowo) and twenty-seven lineage heads in order to have information relating to the various deities worshiped and the meaning of the sacrifices made to these deities. It is also a question of having an idea of the reasons which lead Christians to still be interested in rites despite the baptismal seal. Church leaders (hamedada and hamefofo) and members of Catholic and Protestant churches (hameviwo) were also interviewed. Twenty-four Catholics, including fourteen women and ten men, then sixteen Protestants, including nine women and seven men, were interviewed in order to study the changes brought about by the Christian religion in their daily lives. Two priests and two pastors were interviewed in order to obtain information relating to the reasons which push the faithful to want to be administered the sacraments such as baptism, confirmation and marriage. A total of ninety-five people were affected.

1.3. Material

The QGIS 2.14 software allowed the creation of the location map. Word software was used for text entry and the digital camera took images of the deities and sacrificial priests.

2. Results

The results we have reached in relation to the objective of the research revolve around three points. The first point deals with the place of lineage deities. The second addresses the future of rites to tutelary deities following the expansion of Christianity while the third discusses the results presented.

2.1. The essential deities in a kpélé environment

In the kpélé religious conception, there are deities to worship and practices to perform in order to feel safe. As soon as the majority Kpélé group settled in Novivé, the desire to have more cultivable space led some group leaders to occupy the neighboring fertile lands, abandoning part of the first group led by N'dogbéto on the spot.

At the entrance to each village, a titular deity called dulégba is represented by each migration driver, founder of the village. For security within each family unit, the head of the household erects a representation of the protector of the house, apeli, at the entrance to his compound. At the home of the lineage heads, in a small hut built for the cause, the ancestral seats, the togbuikoukpo, representing the ancestors devoted to the cause of the lineage, are kept. These main deities are worshipped in all Kpélé villages.

2.1.1. Novive for all kpélé

The novive divinity is implored by all Kpélé natives. She is, for all the Kpélé communities led from Notsè by the hunter N'dogbeto, a first deity to whom sacrifices were made until the arrival of the missionaries in Adéta in 1895. This deity is symbolized by a termite mound covered with a clump of grass in a forest located between the villages Tsiko and Koromé¹. Its protection was implored at the beginning of each agricultural season and in the event of social dysfunction. From the initially bushy area according to traditionists, only a few trees remain, supposed to be the refuge of the deity Novive.

Photo n°1: The entrance of the deity Novive



Source: N. Dandonougbo, February 5, 2019 in Koromé
Novive is the consecrated place where all the chiefs of the land of the original villages go if necessary for entreaties. This square, today damaged by major works, was, according to tradition, the place of renewal of links with the area of departure and for the deceased, the transit point towards Notsè, for the last judgment. During the Ashanti invasion in 1869, rites would have been addressed to Novive to request the presence of the ancestors

¹ There remains only a portion of this forest from the French period with the program of the construction of the national road n°2.

alongside the kpélé² fighters in front of whom was the warrior Adjéssoklou. Three elements explain the importance of this deity installed in the area that bears his name.

First in the process of occupying space, Novive is the first point of installation of the first group from Notsè. This is the place first chosen by the N'dogbéto ancestor once the area was discovered (N. Dandonougbo, 2014, p. 65). This means that this area favorable to human settlement was available thanks to the endorsement of the ancestors who would have protected them throughout this journey from Notsè. Then, this area symbolizes the presence of all the ancestors who left Notsè following the decision of the leader of the migration, N'dogbéto to bury under a clod of earth, the relics of all the elderly people who did not survive the adventures. of migration.

As Eklou Kossieya³ said:

Some elderly people, not wanting to be a burden for the young people throughout the migration, allowed the young people to abandon them along the way and instead take care of the fragile women and children. This desire to sacrifice themselves to allow the group to move forward made them heroes. To feel them at their side, the migration leader took care of cutting the hair and nails which will be brought to safety as soon as a settlement point is discovered.

The rites performed at this level put all the ancestors of the kpélé group in relation with the living. In the Kpélé conception, Notsè is the origin of man, Amedzopé just like Oyo is for the Adja and Kétu for the Ewé (R. Pazzi, 1979, p. 145). All the deceased in Kpélé are supposed to return to Notsè before crossing the pond to join the ancestors in the afterlife. Novive is considered a compulsory passage for any kpélé soul before arriving in Notsè. Like the Avéto, high priest-king among the Bè-Togo who, once secretly chosen by the religious dignitaries of Togoville, Bè and Abobo is required to live in total and definitive seclusion in a converted portion of the primitive forest where he was initiated into geomancy (K. Etou 2006, p. 322), Novive was finally the place of resurfacing for the new land chiefs. Once a land chief is chosen by his peers to succeed another who has disappeared, the latter should spend seven days in Novive in order to obtain the strength necessary for the exercise of his function and the protection of the deities before returning. in the box of the ancestral seats of his lineage for three days with the intention of taking the oath there on the last day. The end of these different phases of contact with the invisible in complete peace of mind marks the agreement of the ancestors of the Kpélé milieu and confirms the support of the ancestors for the accomplishment of the new mission. Novive is the place of meditation for the heads of lineages before rites at the ancestral seats.

The deity Novive also marks the endurance of the migration leader from Notsè and the good will of the ancestors who were able to guide the group towards this peaceful, fertile and game-rich area. The deity called novive is considered to be the one who favored the discovery of the place deemed conducive to human settlement after the exodus from Notsè. The rites were periodically performed there by the land chiefs of the Avouvo de

Koromé and Eklou de Tsiko lineages in the presence of the other lineage chiefs in order to ensure the protection of the first ancestors over the entire community. Apart from the rites performed in the forest at Novive, considered by each lineage chief as the place indicated by the ancestors to the Kpélé, the sacrifices were made in each village at the *dulegba*.

2.1.2. The protection of the lineage by the *dulegba*

The *dulegba* is the deity of each lineage who founds a district. The *dulegba* is always represented by a clay idol surmounted by a human head. The use of clay would be induced by the experience of the transformation undergone by the corpse (J. Bouffartigue, 1996, p. 204). The clay in the design of the lineage heads of Koromé and Tsiko represents the final nature of man after his earthly stay while the human head marks the concern of the invisible to watch, to listen to reflect on the different needs of the members. from the community⁴. Any Kpélé village, whatever its period of foundation, has a tutelary deity who is the *dulegba*⁵. This representation is the god of crossroads, markets and merchants, waters, mountains, limits and frontiers (I. Delatorre, 1991, p.84).

The *dulégba* is generally found at the crossroads, at the entrance to the villages, in the public square and not far from the house of the chief of land considered as the cradle of the village. In Tutu, the *dulégba* is at the crossroads of the paths that lead to the original neighborhoods of Anyigbé, Djigbé, Globomé and Yéfé. In Govié-Hoémé, it is at the entrance to the concessions of the Zo lineage, whose ancestor is the first occupant of the land on which the village of Govié-Hoémé is founded. In Tsiko, the tutelary deity is at the entrance to the Eklou concession, the founder of the original domedome district. In Bémé, it is erected in the original Anyigbé district. In Atimé, he lives at the entrance to the first djigbé district (N. Dandonougbo 2014, p. 318). The position of the *dulégba* is a benchmark in understanding the process of occupation of space in each village. It indicates the first place occupied by the chief of the lands and makes it clear the place of choice occupied by the lineage of the first occupant for the protective spirits of the village.

The *dulegba's* mission is to defend the interests of his community, to attack critics and those who do not respect prohibitions. It is called upon at the start of the agricultural season, during a drought, an epidemic or any other natural calamity (Y. D. Awumey, 1984, p. 131). It is also called upon as soon as an external attack hovers. For A. Womitso⁶

*The driver of the tutu migration was the hunter Banitsi. He chose the hill called Tututodji as the first stopover point. The difficult living conditions pushed the Tutu to split into three subgroups: the Tutu, the Gbledi and the Battor. The last two subgroups are currently in Ghana. For the rituals of strengthening the bonds of fraternity which take place at the end of the agricultural season, a visit to the house of the duto of Tutu is necessary and donations as thanks to the *dulégba* before the start of the festivities.*

The *dulégba* are always invoked and contacted for any action to be taken concerning the different lineages. The fa, a divinatory

² Gota Ahiany Kodjo, youth leader, Goudévé-Agoté, 05/02/2019.

³ *Duto* of Tsiko, Tsiko, 11/05/17.

⁴ The lack of maintenance and the action of erosion have led to the deterioration of the state of this representation.

⁵ A. Womitso, 86, duto from Tutu, interview on 08/03/2017 in Tutu, Kpélé prefecture, plateau region.

⁶ A. Womitso, *duto* of Tutu, Tutu, on 08/03/2017.

system used by the Kpélé, the fon and the yoruba to predict the future and find solutions to certain difficulties of everyday life (Y. D. Awumey 1984, p. 131), is the means of communication between the living and the deities. Apart from the dulegba which protects the whole village, each householder erects the apeli for his family unit.

2.1.3. The guard of each house by apeli

In the African conception, God exists. However, he is too distant to intervene spontaneously with his family. It is for this reason that intermediate deities are erected to intercede constantly and constitute a bulwark against any attack.

Apeli is found at the entrance of the houses, specifically near the common family house. She is the protector of the family concession. In the kpélé conception, there is a permanent struggle between evil and protective spirits. The former tend to supplant the latter. The success of a family member's income-generating activities bears the mark of the agreement of the protective deities, while illness, the failure of a project and misfortunes are attributed to evil spirits (N. Dandonougbo 2014, p. 312). Seemingly more active, these evil spirits keep prowling the wilds, seeking to supplant the protective spirits. To do this, each head of the family erects an altar to attract the action of the protective spirits.

Apeli watches over all the residents of the huts built under the jurisdiction of a head of a family. This means that the young households of the descendants of the head of the family are under the protection of the Apéli divinity until the latter move away from this concession which saw them born to settle further away from the others in the level of the fields which will gradually be transformed into a residence specific to the new heads of families that they are. This deity protects all the houses that exist in a recognized space specific to a small group.

To found a village it is necessary to have received the approval of the spirits of the place before the erection of the houses. The presence of apeli in a point supposes the agreement of the geniuses of the place. In order to remain in permanent contact with the ancestors, the ancestral seats are venerated.

2.1.4. The ancestral seats: an immortalization of the deceased

Cosmology establishes a close proximity between the dwellings of the dead and the living. The death of a lineage member does not remove him from his group. There is not a distant distance between the living and the dead. Death is rather a passage from the visible to the invisible in a total connection with the living. The dead continue to be present within the lineage and are its true leaders. The dead protect the members of their lineage against the attacks of wizards. It is moreover for this reason that the appearances of the dead in situations of joy and misfortune constitute a central fact in the system of representation of life after death. The dead are part of the sacred and are the object of a cult whose stages are well known to the head of the lineage. They do not directly punish breaches of prohibitions or breaches of the order of the world; they content themselves with withdrawing their protection, thus delivering the culprit to the sorcerers (F. Lafargue, 1994, p.19).

In the African conception, as in the Ewe environment, when someone dies and his works have favored the consolidation of the family unit and the emergence of members of the lineage, his soul is established through the seats. He becomes a deity and periodically deserves sacrifices. The notion of representation of a

deceased by a seat is an Akan influence following successive wars between the Ewe of the west and the Akwamou then Ashanti, Akan groups, between the 18th and 19th centuries. The Ewe communities were largely influenced by these Akan politically, linguistically and religiously. The ancestral seats, or vodoun assin in Benin or togbuikoukpo among the Kpélé, represent the dead in the eyes of the living and constitute a means of communicating with them. This ideology, transmitted from generation to generation, is the object of veneration and great care. The spirits of ancestors who have lived with dignity watch over their descendants on the condition that they are well cared for. The notion of seat translates to the idea of seated position, which is a characteristic of the permanent presence of the members represented within their group. Not all the deceased benefit from this representation. Only the elderly who made the defence of the group a priority, like those who, during the migration from Notsè to Novive, sacrificed themselves to promote the growth of the group, were represented. This conception leads to the idea that a deceased from a cruel death, a young person, a bachelor, has made a pact with the dark and harmful world. This is why he will not benefit from representation and cannot, to do this, have the power of decision in the hereafter. (N. Dandonougbo 2014, p. 350). Each lineage has its seats. Through rites at seats, the head of the lineage seeks the presence of the good spirits of the deceased among the living. The arrival of the Germans in the area disrupted the pre-existing structures and affected the frequency of the rites.

2.2 The value of the divinities in the face of the introduction of christianity

The Kpélé came into contact with the German missionaries following the expedition led by Dr. Henrici⁷ to Adéta on September 4, 1887 (H. Klose, 1992, p. 206). Of all the missions that came into contact with the Ewe communities, the Kpélé only knew the missions of Bremen and the Divine Word. The process of evangelization was concretized by the multiplication of the sacraments.

2.2.1. The multiplication of the sacraments by the missionaries

The objective of the missionaries was to lead the Kpélé to lose confidence in their many deities and to embrace the new ideology which confesses the presence of a single God instead of resorting to a multitude of intermediary deities.

The work of the Bremen mission is identified with the level of evangelization and the opening of the missions. The conversion materializes with the multiplication of the sacrament of baptism to the followers of the Protestant church. Following the kick-off given by the named Dounya who became Abraham and his wife baptized Sara, then Afiademanyon Ameganvi now David in Bémé, baptisms multiplied. Pastor Diehl baptized Johanness Koudzo, Joseph Afiademanyo, Mathilde Tafame, Franz Dagadu, Charlotte Dagadu, Samuel Kumondzi, David Womse, Martin Gbegnanawo, Frida Amemavo, Andréas Kpetsu, Hélène Kpetsu, Lydia Mezowonou and Silla Amegavi (M. Hemou, 2007, p. 29). The increase in the number of faithful in Bémé led the missionaries to build a temple in the Atchati district in 1907 (Centenaire Bémé, 2003, p.30).

⁷ German emissary.

The black pastor Binder created the parish of Goudévé in 1901. The names Ignas Apédo of the Godjopé district, Daketsé Constantin⁸ of the Awuipé district, Déglé of the Agblo district, Nyamédi of Hassoupé, Adibolo of Awuipé who are the members of the political council of the village were baptized. This conversion of political leaders motivated many in the villages to attach particular importance to the actions of the missionaries who came from Agou, Kpalimé and Danyi.

The mission of the Divine Word was also manifested by the multiplication of the sacraments by the priests Patrilt, Wullem, Philippes, Heise Lauer, Fildman, Korkuum and Sternel, who are the first missionaries who resided there from 1911 to 1914. The works for the construction of the parish of St Raphaël in Adéta, which began on July 7, 1907, ended in 1911 and the inauguration took place the same year in the presence of Monsignor Shöning. The presence of missionaries in Kpélé increased the number of converts to the Catholic religion. Newborn babies of Christian families automatically benefit from baptism. This is the case of Josephus Eklu, Andréas Amekpoto, Stefanus Amedjro and Micheal Kumarja. Efforts were made by the missionaries in favor of the diffusion of the sacrament of baptism to the elderly. They should be instructed in the fundamental notions of the Catholic religion before obtaining the sacrament. Natives of other villages were baptized in the parish of Adéta. They are Emmanuel Komi and Elisabeth Massi, from Tsiko (N. Dandonougbo 2014, p. 397). The day of January 7, 1912 was the most remarkable with 26 faithful baptized. Couples seduced by the messages of the missionaries decided to concretize their matrimonial alliance. The first Catholic marriage in Kpélé took place on March 19, 1904 between Petrus Kluyibor and Lankove Sovononu. Faced with this enthusiasm of district leaders, notables and the wives of the guarantors of the deities in the admission of the sacraments, the question arises of the attachment to the deities and the frequency of the rites.

2.2.2. The future of deities and rites

Starting from the definition of a rite as being a set of visible gestures by which a group remains in communion and regains its unity, E. De Rosny showing the need for the preservation of rites in Senegal, raises the following question: "if one perceives oneself as a body and that the relation to other bodies is for oneself a vital element, how could one live without rites? (E. De Rosny, 1996, p.71). Traditional African religion does not deny the existence of a God. She recognizes an original rupture that distanced God from humans. It is opposed from this moment to the Judeo-Christian revelation which expresses the possibility of reconciliation simply after the recognition of sins (F. Lafargue, 1994, p.20). This great distance that exists between God and humans prevents any separation from the deities who play the role of intermediaries and who are also divine creations. If any baptism of an African is indeed an increase in the number of Christians, this rite does not mean that there is one less African. The baptism of an African does not cause the entire culture that constitutes him and in which he remains strongly imbued to disappear in holy water (R. Tabard, 2008, p. 328).

⁸ He was a catechist at Goudévé from 1905 to 1935, the year of his death.

The Kpélé worship a God, judged supreme and designated Mawu. In the conception of the environment, to obtain graces from this Mawu, sacrifices to the numerous intermediate deities are essential. This is why recourse is made to the deities if necessary. The missionaries enabled the Kpélé to acquire approximate notions of the Christian faith. However, they failed in the mission of diverting them from their ancestral practices because nearly 80% of the baptized remained in communion with the lineage deities like the ancestral seats and the dulegba then family like the *apeli*.

The missionaries of Bremen and the SVD by the multiplication of baptisms and marriages increased the number of faithful. In 1914, out of a population of 5,825 inhabitants, the number of baptized people at the Catholic mission of Adéta was 1,228, or about 37% of the population. According to the Catholic religious register from 1904 to 1936 of the parish of Adéta, marriages reached 192 or 3.29% of people of marriageable age. This was a record during the German period. In all the villages, there is a beginning of religious syncretism because the Kpélé could not eradicate from their minds this constant reference to the deities as shown in the photo below.

Photo n°2: The imploration of the presence of the ancestors



Source: N. Dandonougbo, February 12, 2015 in Tutu.

This ritual requests the presence of the ancestors before the sacrifice to the tutelary deity of the village of Tutu. The presence of the descendants of the first occupants as well as the lineages welcomed is essential before the announcement of the sound of invitation by the dean of the village.

Photo n° 3: The invitation of the ancestors



Source: N. Dandonougbo, February 12, 2015 in Tutu

The sound of the tam-tam allows contact with these ancestors before the sacrifices. The animals that will be slaughtered according to the fa are the rooster and the ram. The drinks to take are: palm wine, distilled alcohol and schnapps. Whenever the need arises, rites are needed for the protective deities to request the strengthening of their watchful role as shown in the photos below.

Photo n° 4: Dulegba libation in Tutu



Source: N. Dandonougbo, April 4, 2012 in Tutu.

Photo 4 shows one of the sacrificers, Kokou Langlovi, making libations at the Tutu dulegba. This cult is given to the dulegba in order to invoke the protection of the invisible on the Tutu village. In Govié, the dulégba is well protected and sacrifices are made to him by the Zo lineage.

Photo n° 5: The dulegba in Govié-Hoémé



Source: N. Dandonougbo, April 4, 2018 in Govié-Hoémé.

The presentation of the deity shows the traces of the sacrifices made a few days ago.

Despite the apostolic work undertaken by German Pietist missionaries and those of the Society of the Divine Word (SVD) in the Kpélé zone, it is clear that a section of the Christian population has not completely turned its back on ancestral practices. This means that the increase in the number of Christians and the creation of new parishes in no way signify the rooting of a firm Christian life. Missionaries who thought that Christianity would have overcome these traditional cults have realized that they are still present. Like the Bè Christians who take part in the rites at the Togbuizikpuiza, Motaza or Zotidaza by relegating the biblical teachings to second place, the Kpélé turn when the time comes to the ancestral seats which are always protected.

Photo n° 6: The ancestral seats of the Edra lineage



Source: N. Dandonougbo, April 4, 2012 in Atimé.

There is interference between traditional religious practices and Christianity. The rites are addressed to the ancestral seats before any cultural activity to ensure their presence. As soon as the tom-tom sounds, it is the sign of the exhortation of the deceased of the lineage for the ritual at the seats which represent them. When faced with difficulties of a member requiring their intervention, a reminder of the protection is made by the head of the lineage. Through a ritual, the latter asks for their protection and intervention with a view to resolving a problem. The members of the first and second generation villages, far from the village, resort to practices or ask the relatives who remain in the village to make sacrifices to ward off bad luck. When the situation is rosy, the Christian religion stands out and the faith stands out clearly. The deities are, during these periods, abandoned by certain lineages, as was the case of this tutelary deity of Atimé to whom libations were no longer made.

Photo n° 7: The tutelary deity of Atime



Source: N. Dandonougbo, February 12, 2015 in Atimé.

This photo shows a deity that is not protected from the weather. It is certain that recourse will be made to him as soon as the need arises. The impact of traditional religions on the daily existence of populations remains very strong. The 1,228 baptized in Adéta in 1914 did not, in the baptismal rite, suppress any connection with what is conveyed by their traditional culture.

3. Discussion

The deities watch over families, ward off or punish enemies and promote procreation in a period when there is no wealth except for men. They preserve misfortunes and ensure the abundance of harvests, an essential condition to avoid any idea of seeking other opportunities that could cause depopulation. Despite the influence of Christianity, the personality of the Kpélé remains

deeply marked by the presence of the ancestors and the permanent consultation of the latter through the fa. These comings and goings are permanent in Kpélé as in Dahomey. This prompted some missionaries, who did not understand the depth of the actions taken, to speak of a return to “pagan” worship (J. Alladaye 2003, p. 297).

This study has revealed the persistence of rites in the face of the action of Christianity. The results of the work are similar to those of R. Tabard (2008, p. 335), who analyzing the persistence of traditional African practices among Christians in Senegal, confirms the religious conception of Africans:

The world is a living being, populated by various forces, visible and invisible, of which a transcendent Being is the creator. If this God has moved away from the world of men, they remain in constant contact with the invisible. Ancestors and the Dead, spiritual forces, fundamentally participate in the success or failure of human endeavors. Not to refer to this continual and active presence of invisible, auspicious and harmful beings is to refrain from understanding the functioning of the world.

The Kpélé did not stop protecting their house with the apeli. Some use a forked wood to which are hung gongs supposed to chase away evil spirits by their noise. Under this wood are buried all the iron tools that can be used by the members of the lineage. Others who cannot do without wish to render the divinity invisible by digging holes outright in which they bury everything necessary for the presence of the divinity. The iron tools from which a house can be maintained are mobilized. It can be the machete which is used to cut shrubs and tall grass, the sickle to harvest rice, knives which are used to break up hunted animals. He may also have a small hoe for weeding, traps for hunting, hooks for fishing. There may also be kitchen utensils such as a wooden spatula which is used to make maize flour dough. Sacrifices are made to the deity as needed in order to have the assurance of his protection. In this sense, N. Dandonougbo (2015, p. 132) affirms that sacrifices to deities make it possible to multiply opportunities for social growth. The apeli plays the role of vigilante at home that *hebiesso* plays among the Yoruba (S. Michka 1996, p.107). These different deities, which cannot be set aside, contribute to the economic and social balance of the lineages concerned.

Conclusion

The Kpélé communities, during the pre-colonial period, had total confidence in the multiplicity of deities they worshipped. Contact with Catholic and Protestant missionaries affected the initial religious conception by reducing the degree of trust placed in these deities. The frequency of cults to deities has decreased. However, in times of anxiety and misunderstanding within families, an immediate return was felt. God is at work, of course, but the resolution of serious problems requires the cooperation of the tutelary deities. It emerges the observation that moments of peace are conducive to the interpellation of the God of the missionaries and the periods of imbalance push to the return to the divinities. This work shows that the evangelizing action carried out by the missionaries is far from distancing the Kpélé from their multiple deities and leading them to put an end to the cults against them. The evangelization started by the missionaries was relayed by the priests and pastors, sometimes sons of the middle. The latter, although natives of the environment, faced the same situation. All in all, this coming and going between

Christianity and animism has repercussions on the quality of the rites. The different stages are no longer well known to lineage or land chiefs, who are skilled in keeping them in mind, hence a serious problem in knowing the deep history of lineages.

Sources and bibliographical references

Oral sources: Selected list of some informants

N°	Surname and first names	Age	Social status	Place of interview	Date of interview
1	Dovi Désiré	57 years old	Traditional chief	Govié-Hoémé	08/03/21
2	Eklou Kossieya	98 years old	Land Chief	Tsiko	11/05/17
3	Gota Ahiany Kodjo	84 years old	Youth leader	Goudév é-Agoté	05/02/2019
4	Mawuko Koumi	73 years old	fold black-smiths	Govié-Hoémé	05/02/2019
5	Womitso Abotsi	86 years old	Land chief	Tutu	08/03/2017

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