Possession, Ecstasy, and Law in Ewe Voodoo

JUDY ROSENTHAL

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To Sylvio, Clara, Dede, and Koko

Dume kpokpo menye dume yiyi o

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GOROVODU FAMILIES, FESTIVALS, DEITIES, AND WORSHIPERS

> We should recall that praxis, infrastructure, and the hard realities of social existence are themselves symbolic, replaceable, convertible, underdetermined. Even what appears to be sheer survival is symbolic.
>
> —James A. Boon 1982: 85

> The absolutely foreign alone can instruct us. And it is only man who could be absolutely foreign to me—refractory to every typology, to every genus, to every characterology, to every classification—and consequently the term of a "knowledge" finally penetrating beyond the object. The strangeness of the Other, his very freedom!
>
> —Emmanuel Lévinas 1969: 73

Life in Dogbeda

Much of the following data about the village of Dogbeda is also true of other Gorovodu communities and of Ewe village life in general. Some of it extends to life in towns and cities, among Ewe of greater material means.

Dogbeda is a beach village with about five-hundred teenagers and adults and as many babies and young children. Most of the inhabitants go back and forth to Ghana to visit relatives or to live for short or long periods. People marry across the Togo-Ghana border; Dogbeda is practically twinned, or perhaps "quadrupleted," in this way with several villages in the Anlo and border area. A number of inhabitants are only temporary, drawn to the village because of the fishing industry, because of friends or relatives living there, or because of the Gorovodu order. The Gorovodu attraction is especially true

for people who are ill, who come for treatment and live near the Gorovodu house for weeks or months at a time.

There are three lineages whose members have lived in Dogbeda since its beginnings in the 1880s. Some families have lived there continuously for several generations, with perhaps only half their members leaving permanently to marry into other villages or take jobs in Lome, Anecho, Tema, Aflao, Porto Novo, or other areas. Such emigrants typically return often to visit.

There is no plumbing or electricity whatsoever in the village. Villagers draw water from several wells inside Dogbeda. They relieve themselves in the low brush surrounding the village (which has decreased) and on the beach. Dwellings are mostly of palm thatch, although the few who can afford to do so have built tiny houses of concrete block or sand adobe. Most palm-thatch dwellings and all adobe and cement-block houses have cement floors. Houses consist of one or two rooms, each with a bed, a few stools, small tables for eating, and a table or trunk for storing clothing and other personal items. All cooking is done outside, in yard spaces shielded from the wind. Each little compound has an open-air space, partially fenced off, which is used for bathing and urinating, and sometimes, at the corners, for growing medicinal plants. Palm-frond fences delineate the space for each household, but most are not impermeable to outside chickens, ducks, dogs, cats, goats, and children.

Many Dogbeda women sell fish that they take on consignment or buy directly out of fishing boats from their husbands, fathers, brothers, and sons. Several women working together in small cooperatives often use large outdoor ovens and fish-smoking platforms made of red clay. On occasion women take smoked fish a hundred or more miles inland for more profitable sales. The profits that women earn from the sale of fish are their own.

Some women sun-dry *abobi* (tiny scavenger fish caught at the ocean's edge), turning them repeatedly during the day. Sometimes their children tend the little abobi patches on the beach and sell the fish once they are fully dried. Dried abobi, eaten whole, make a delicious snack; they are also good in sauces.

Another, more difficult, women's beach job is harvesting gravel from the surf. Women sift it into piles of different sized pieces and sell it to construction crews, who load their trucks at the beach.

Preparing homemade foods for sale is another major cottage industry of Dogbeda women. They carry the food from place to place in headloads, selling it in and around the village or harbor. These fast food specialties include fermented corn breakfast porridge, fried dough, fried igname (huge yams)

and plantains, and rice and black-eyed peas with pepper sauce. Frying pans and porridge pots are perched over outdoor fires atop clay platforms, rocks, or pieces of cement block. Minimal palm-frond fencing shields fires fueled by dried brush or charcoal. Several women have become serious bakers. Their large outdoor clay bread ovens supply French-style baguettes and rolls for the entire area.

A few of the women buy commodities in the Lome Grand Marché—cloth, kerosene, aspirin, candy and gum, sugar, bouillon cubes, needles and thread, the antimalarial nivaquine and the antibiotic tetracycline, beer, and Coca-Cola—and sell them at the port, in the village, or beside the road for a small profit.

Dogbeda boasts several seamstresses and tailors. Sewing machines are run by handwheels or foot treadles. Most dress clothes are made by hand from wax-dyed cloth called *pagne* or *avo*. Some cloth (*tsivi*) is manufactured locally and inexpensively. A more expensive cloth, called Java, is manufactured in Indonesia and elsewhere. *Tsiga*, an excellent wax cloth made in England and Holland, can last many years despite repeated washings. Expensive wax-cloth garments are a form of wealth for both women and men.

Most of the men in Dogbeda are fishermen. Only a few of the fourteen or so fishing pirogues with outboard motors that left the harbor manned by Dogbeda fishermen from 1990 to 1994 were owned outright by the villagers themselves. After I left Togo, a U.S. Embassy development grant funded the purchase of a pirogue and outboard motor for use by a cooperative of Gorovodu priests and other fishermen in the area. They sell the fish to their mothers, wives, and sisters.

From eight to fifteen men and boys man each boat. Boys as young as nine years old jump over the edge to clap the water when schools of fish are spotted. This herds the fish into huge nets, which are then hauled aboard. At the beach the fishermen, accompanied by older men who no longer go to sea, sit atop the nets, needles in hand, making repairs. Nets extend along the beach for hundreds of yards.

Some men work as taxi drivers or as tradesmen such as mechanics and furniture makers. They earn very little money in the village itself. Not a single villager owned a vehicle during my stay, and wood was quite costly. Most people own little handmade wooden furniture: perhaps a bedframe, a few stools and chairs, a couple of low tables, and a storage trunk.

Other men work as handymen, kitchen helpers, or night watchmen for two

tourist restaurants and campsites a mile or so up the beach toward the main road. Some watchmen work for a small shirt factory on the beach highway, which is owned and operated by an Indian businessman. (A few women operated sewing machines in this factory when I lived there.) A shrimp-freezing factory near the harbor employed several village men during the period of my stay. Most of the salaried jobs paid between 15,000 and 25,000 *cfa* per month (between $60 and $100, according to 1992 exchange rates). This is not enough money to buy even the few commodities necessary for the average household.

Some women worked as housemaids in the government-built settlement near the village, where I later lived with my family. They earned an average of 5,000 to 7,000 cfa per month ($20 to $28). Most of the tenants of these compounds, which were equipped with electricity and cold running water (modest by Western standards), were small independent businesswomen and -men, white-collar workers, and civil servants (such as schoolteachers and government office clerks). As these tenants were prosperous by village standards, the cultural divide between them and the Dogbeda villagers only four kilometres away was great. Still, any settlement tenants who lost their jobs or suffered financial crises would land back in the villages from which they had come.

Men's and women's finances are usually separate in Dogbeda families. It is impolite to ask one's spouse how much money she or he has, and spouses may or may not lend each other money. Although fathers are expected to provide for their children, mothers often provide more financial support than do fathers. Women are expected to have a money-making activity of their own in case something should happen to the fathers of their children. Mothers who are not already the sole providers for their children plan toward the possibility that they may one day have to be.

No truly prosperous individuals live in Dogbeda, but several of the pirogues manned by Dogbeda men are owned by prosperous market women (Nana Benz) living in the Lome area. A few women (and more women than men) in Dogbeda are considered rich (*ehoto*), because they earn enough to have their palm-frond dwellings rebuilt periodically, to have two-room adobe houses built, to maintain a relatively large or varied stock of commodities for sale, to send their children to school, to finance a Gorovodu *akpedada* (thanksgiving festival), to buy fuel for fishing boats (and thus have crews indebted to them), to lend money to other villagers, and the like.

Most households in Dogbeda have difficulty earning enough to buy kero-

sene, sugar, corn flour (for the staple *akple*), tomato paste, peppers, and spices on a regular basis. Gardens near Dogbeda produce plenty of vegetables and manioc for the population of the village. But households without a relative or affine working in the gardens cannot always afford to buy the produce, and not everyone is in a position to barter with fish or a service. Families struggle daily to eat well and to keep their children healthy. Even so, most people in Dogbeda do not consider themselves to be very poor. It is always possible to find some little scavenger fish and wild greens to make a sauce and to borrow a bit of corn flour from a neighbor until one's fortune improves. No one in Dogbeda has ever starved to death, and—unlike in villages to the north where food is more scarce—kwashiorkor is rare.

Everyone feeds children and the elderly when they visit at mealtime. If there is enough to go around, other visitors will be fed too. A system of generalized and balanced reciprocity is the general rule in Dogbeda, but those with the greatest means are expected to be generous without anticipating payment in return (although debtors may render them services from time to time).

Few children go to school. Even the very modest school fees and the cost of books, uniforms, and school supplies are burdensome to most Dogbeda families. Until 1994 children attending school had to walk several kilometers to another village across the beach highway, and most had no one at home who could help them with their studies. Now there is a one-room elementary school in Dogbeda, but the 10,000 cfa yearly fee (about $20) is still exorbitant to most families.

A handful of Dogbeda men were literate in the Western sense when I lived there, but even those few read and wrote French or English with difficulty. Several could write Ewe, thanks to their schooling in Ghana. Few of the women were even somewhat literate. My friend Believe read a bit of English, as did some Ghanaian wives and relatives who came to stay for short periods.

Over one-half of the women give birth at home, assisted by female family members and/or Vodu priests. The others go to clinics in nearby villages or on the outskirts of Lome or Anecho, which may be managed by midwives or physicians' assistants and are often short on supplies. (In 1986 a friend of mine bled to death in a clinic that had run out of ergot.) Consequently, some women refuse to go to clinics, believing that it is preferable to die at home.

Women take more responsibility than do men for most child care. Men and adolescent boys returning from sea do, however, watch over children in

the afternoon, as they relax together and play board games (often with the "board" drawn in the sand). The men and boys pass around and play with the toddlers and young children and comfort them when they cry. I have seen adolescent boys quarrel over who got to hold a given baby. Young men without children often become attached to one or more of the toddlers and spend hours with them every week.

Children are easily shared in a lineage, so that they may be raised by aunts or uncles, cousins or grandparents, or they may be adopted by neighbors or friends of parents. When a woman has no children, she is given children by her more fortunate kinswomen. Although sterility is considered a tragedy for a woman, sterile women can always earn respect and recognition through trading, carrying out priestly duties, or going into trance during Gorovodu ceremonies. They are mothers, in spite of not having given birth, for they participate fully in the raising of lineage children.

Village children may die of measles, cholera (from dehydration), malaria, sickle-cell disease, intestinal parasites, tetanus, and food poisoning. (A Gorovodu law in Dogbeda prohibits the eating of "yesterday's food," a taboo that has saved many lives in a hot climate where fish and tomato sauce spoil quickly.) To my knowledge, two infants and four young children in Dogbeda died of malaria, measles, and cholera from January to April 1991. I also watched helplessly as a five-year-old died from asthma. I transported another five-year-old, who was obviously near death, to a clinic, where the doctor informed me that she was suffering from measles, cholera, and malaria. She survived thanks to heavy doses of intravenous antibiotics and antimalarials (much too expensive for the average villager to afford). Clinics do not accept patients who cannot pay. If they did, they would not have the means to remain open for long.

One of the reasons that Gorovodu is so important to the village of Dogbeda and to all Gorovodu communities is that it is an *atike* or "medicine" (literally, tree root) Vodu order. When I asked them why they practiced Gorovodu, villager after villager answered, "There is sickness, and our children die easily. The vodus can heal them and keep them from dying." Even some families in the Lome area who have the means to take their children to the best clinics, employ Gorovodu as well, believing that clinic medicine treats only the physical disease, not the deep reasons that a person falls ill. Few illnesses are believed to be due merely to the presence of bacteria, viruses, or parasites. Admitting the very real existence of these disease carriers, Ewe question why one is not

strong enough to resist disease, why one gives birth to weak or diseased children, why one person becomes ill and another one does not in similar circumstances. Gorovodu treats the whole life-text of an individual, with no teasing apart of the body from the mind or from the numerous souls that make up an individual in all his or her overlapping with totemic plants, animals, deities, and ancestors.

Although there is a public ideology of male dominance, and Ewe patriliny gives fathers' families authority over children, women in Dogbeda often have as much power to make decisions about their children as their husbands have. Some women with strong personalities or with clout inherited from prestigious lineages lord it over, or at least hold their own against, husbands and fathers-in-law. If a wife is unhappy with her husband's marriage to a new cowife, she is liable to leave him and find a new, perhaps younger, husband or lover. Wives who have not been exceptionally well treated may leave their men when the men grow old and ill.

Women who have done well for themselves financially may not feel the need for a husband when their childbearing years are over. They may return to their natal village to live near their family. Or they may move into compounds with other women in larger villages or towns or in the capitals where the markets can support numerous women and their children. If they are from Dogbeda, they already have their own little house and designated piece of the village. Thus they tend to settle down to carry out the duties of elders, including advising younger lineage members and neighbors and taking part in dispute hearings. As long as they are capable of carrying head loads and walking long distances, they keep up their trading activities.

Most of the young people who set up housekeeping in Dogbeda were born there, in neighboring communities, or in the Ghanaian villages that were home to the original Dogbeda founders. Young women seldom marry men chosen for them by their parents against their own wishes. Many unmarried adolescent girls have babies, often to the delight of the girls' mothers. As long as a family can support an additional child, having a baby outside of wedlock is rarely a serious problem for Ewe and Mina women, except in urban upper-class and Christian families, or for those (often in larger towns or in the capital) who anticipate a university education.

In the Gorovodu order many women enjoy the prestige that comes from hosting the spirits. Those who are easily possessed by vodus may go to ceremonies every other weekend in one village or neighborhood after another,

accompanied by their children and friends. A few women become priests; that is, they acquire the god-objects themselves and then take care of the spirits and host ceremonies. Priests do not often go into trance, as their managerial roles rule out possession during large gatherings. Other women and men must host the spirits in their mind-bodies.

Children as young as ten may become possessed by a gorovodu, although possession is more common from about the age of fifteen. Girls are more frequently possessed than are boys.

A Gorovodu worshiper (*gorovoduvi* or *troduvi*) who never goes into trance has the option of becoming a guide (*senterua*), a caretaker of the spirit hosts while they are in trance. One may also become a song leader (*ehadzito*), a drummer (*ehufofoto*, nearly always a man), a praying priest (kpedziga), or a caretaker (*kpomega*) of the shrine and Vodu yard. A young man may become a priestly butcher assistant (*bosomfo*), one who slaughters animals for ceremonies in the sacred manner indicated by Gorovodu rules, empties some blood on the god-objects, and oversees the cooking of the meat for the visitors and the community. Acquiring the office of bosomfo requires costly ceremonies for initiation and training. According to Gorovodu law: "Not just anyone can kill animals. A hunter or butcher must carry out ceremonies to pacify the spirit of the animals killed or he will become very ill." The wife of a priest or the sister of a woman priest who assists in managerial duties during large festivals is called Etro Mother (*etrono*).[1]

In Dogbeda the largest and most communal Gorovodu shrine, which is owned by Fo Idi, is situated at one corner of the village on the beach. The square cement-block room that houses the god-objects is about thirty-five square meters in area. Some of the material vodus are placed in separate grottos in one of the walls; others are placed on low cement mounds on the floor. Costumes for spirit hosts in trance hang on other walls, as do Hausa drums (*adodo*) and brekete drums (oil drums with goat skins stretched over one end). This Vodu house (*trohome*) has two doors, one open to a yard on the beach and the other open to a large ceremonial space, which is not fenced off from neighboring palm-thatch dwellings and yards. In the beach yard goats, sheep, and chickens are sometimes kept for short periods; various plants are tended; and certain healing rituals are carried out, including washing sick persons with *amasi* (medicinal plants in water). The space on the other side of the trohome has benches and a palm-frond shade. This is where major Gorovodu ceremonies are held, with drumming, dancing, and trance. It is

also the space where men and boys relax in the afternoons after fishing, women gather to talk, and children play.

Two other Gorovodu sofos, each with his own shrine, live in Dogbeda. They hold more private ceremonies, although they always have a number of guests from the village and from Gorovodu communities in nearby villages or outlying neighborhoods of Lome. These two priests and their families also attend Fo Idi's large Gorovodu festivals. Fo Idi, however, does not attend theirs. In this case it is the guest who does honor to the host.

On the other side of the village is a large Yewe enclosure and shrine, where Heviesso, Avlekete, and Vodudan are worshiped. Elder women are in charge of Yewe ceremonies. Some of them also come to Gorovodu celebrations. One of the younger woman elders is also a Gorovodu spirit host. At least three lineages, including Fo Idi's, have Aholu, the earth deity, in their compounds and hold large annual festivals for h/er, with half of the village or more in attendance. Mami Wata has her place in Dogbeda as well; the young secular chief of the village "sleeps with Mami Wata," as he himself puts it. Other vodus, such as Densu, the river spirit from Ghana, are worshiped behind compound walls, and a rather large Hungbato shrine exists practically next door to Fo Idi's Vodu house.

Gorovodu Structures and Enjoyment

The Gorovodu order honors northerners, specifically northern slaves, according to some priests. Although Gorovodu as such is all but unknown to ethnic groups of the north, its vodus, or divinities, are said to come from the north. Such spirits of the north, are said to be Hausa, Kabye, Mossi, and Tchamba.[2] Among Ewe and Guin-Mina worshipers, both Gorovodu and Mama Tchamba are southern texts and behaviors about who and what southerners think northerners are and about the relationship they (southerners) wish to have with them (northerners). It is not an exclusive cult; anyone wishing to respect Gorovodu law can become a troduvi (a simple adept, without special responsibilities). Individuals as well as entire families may become part of a Gorovodu community, all the while worshiping other vodus or even going to church. Different family members may favor different vodus.

Gorovodu does not necessarily cement Ewe social structures, systematically function to bring harmony to villages, or fundamentally reconcile—even temporarily—the irreconcilable. Although it may do some of these

things from time to time, it also exists resolutely for itself. It is in itself the meaning of existence for numerous adherents.

Gorovodu has many elements in common with more well-known Vodu orders along the West African coast. Writing in the 1930s, the French colonial administrator Bernard Maupoil understood well the mutual dependence uniting Vodu deities and their worshipers: "A link of solidarity unites the Vodu and men; they complete each other and could not do without each other. By their prayers and their sacrifices, men 'give strength' to the Vodus. The more numerous and magnificent the offerings, the stronger are the Vodus, the better are their intentions; if they decrease in number, the Vodus become weak" (1961: 57). As Gorovodu priest Fo Idi explained it, "We Ewe are not like the Christians, who are created by their god. We Ewe create our gods, and we create only the gods that we want to possess us, not any others." This statement reveals an element of play in Vodu worship that is not discernible in Maupoil's, Rivière's (1981), or Surgy's (1988a) evocations. The mystery in such words derives from West African concepts of power and the sacred—forces and domains that are invented by humans as surely as humans are shaped by them. That is to say, these Ewe and other Vodu people are conscious of the fact that they have a hand in the creation of divinities and the sacred. This does not render the gods any less potent or beautiful or capable of enforcing laws. Just as human offspring can surpass their parents in talents and strengths, so do the divinities rise above their creators and lord it over them, the controls perpetually a matter of *rapports de force* (balance of power)—seducing, turning to rules, bargaining, feasting the beloved, and demanding payment of debt. Thus the conventions of hierarchy between mortals and their gods are not rigid, but rather malleable aspects of a sacred market through which servants or seconds (such as Legba) and even slaves may have the upper hand over bosses, chiefs, kings, and other masters.

Ewe culture in general is not known for its hierarchies or for the stability of its structures. In 1991, I was involved in an off-the-cuff discussion with several French anthropologists and sociologists. These were Togo specialists making irritated or ironic nonacademic asides not intended for publication. This is a composite of the discussion:

> In the north it all makes sense. If you ask someone to explain things, what that person says will be verified by the next person you ask. The hierarchy is serious. You can write a monograph and not be afraid that the next time you come your data will seem off center. It is unfortunately the opposite in the south. Here no two persons will tell you the same thing about the same cult. Hierarchy is askew. A woman

> can march into the center of a village and tell off a chief or a priest. You don't know what to write, and you can't make a synthesis of your material, because the culture is not unified. The south is a nightmare for an ethnographer.

These comments represent a sort of conspiratorial popular knowledge about differences between the north and the south in Togo, which is also generally true of Vodu cultures relative to monotheistic religions in southern Ghana.

In his ethnography on sacrifice, Surgy wrote separate chapters on Moba-Gurma (a group in northern Togo) and Ewe. He introduced Ewe sacrifice with these words: "The religious practices of the Ewe turn out to be much more complex than those of the Moba-Gurma. With . . . [the Ewe] we come up against an extreme proliferation of divinities and other invisible entities to whom are consecrated grounds, objects and persons, and also a confusing diversification of rites placing men in relationship with them" (1988b: 55).

Surgy was still frustrated in his efforts to write a synthesis of Ewe religious structures after twelve years of effort: "Having myself frequented . . . [the Ewe] for a dozen years, from 1963 to 1974, without having succeeded in untangling what appeared each time more inextricable, I was stricken with discouragement to the point of preferring to change 'sites'" (1988a: 10).

Even after he decided he could finally write about Ewe religion, upon his return to Eweland in 1983 and 1985, Surgy felt he should leave out any Christian or Moslem ritual, "as well as all eccentric or sectarian novelties unknown to the usual diviners or that refuse their control in order to put themselves under the absolute authority of their inventors" (1988a:11). Thus he consecrated only four pages specifically to Gorovodu (1988a: 186–90). (It turns out that Gorovodu is not neglected by traditional diviners; it shares power with them rather than submitting entirely to them.)

In quite a different vein, an Ewe writer bemoans the ambivalence of his forebears with regard to centralization and consolidation of power:

> A peculiarity about our gallant forebears which beats all imagination, today, is that they fought bravely, they won battles and great victories, but they always forgot to settle on conquered territory. Maybe they were not covetous of the possession of other states. We of the present generation will never forgive them for their failure to carve out a very large empire for our inheritance. . . . It is amusing to reflect in modern times that after each coup d'etat in Ghana's contemporary history, capable Eve leaders had always fallen back to second and third in command; they always prefer to play the weaker role of second fiddles to squatting on power indefinitely. (Mamattah 1976: 233)

Surpassing the imaginations of ethnographers from different shores, as well as the imaginations of its own intellectuals, Ewe culture has gone farther yet, turning out new Vodu cults that are collages, self-(de)constructing with movable parts. A case in point, Gorovodu is not of a piece, but rather piecemeal—in constant de- and reconstruction—and not always faithful to any original. The material vodus themselves are made, fabricated over and over again, with ingredients taken from other tentative wholes, such as animals, trees, gongs, and packages of gun powder.

In Gorovodu there is no beginning or end to anything. Instead, there is redistribution of power, identity, and the bits and pieces of matter that go with (sometimes compose, represent or symbolize) various nexuses of being. (The next chapter discusses the prodigiously reconstructive nature of Atikevodu orders during the colonial period.) Even nonvisible (not necessarily invisible) entities are separated into parts that may be redistributed, parsed out in different directions, for the formation of new, and just as temporary, entities. The fragmenting potency of Gorovodu is dazzling, even for the adept. The world in all its guises never stays put. There is no doubt that its characteristic flavor is Dionysian. Yet it has its contemplative moments, private conversations with the gorovodus, and early-morning plant gathering, silent sacred baths under the stars, libations and soft prayers, and gentle pleadings with the gods. Even during the public celebrations there may be a kind of freeze in the midst of carnival, like a still shot or a close-up of someone—or of an entire assembly—looking inward.

Gorovodu is an exoticist mix of aesthetics and ethics. The southerners believe that the northerners, some of whom were once their domestic slaves, were (and are) especially strong, powerful, and consummately beautiful.[3] Adepts are moved to tears by the beauty of their northern gods, manifest when they (the divinities) possess their hosts (the worshipers), who are then dressed in costumes designed to render the north. The spirits of these northerners have thus become the gods of the descendants of their southern masters and neighbors.

Although gorovodus are spirits and thus cannot be seen at all times, they are also the material god-objects that are constructed with sacred recipes, secret and protected from the hands of the uninstructed. Sometimes these god-objects are called the vodus or tros; sometimes they are said to be the skin, the body, or the house of the vodus. They are, in any case, a nexus of matter that incorporates the presence and power of the slave spirits. Some adepts say that

they are a fusion of spirits with the plants that call them forth. The plant ingredients in the manufacture of the god-object are said to be the most active of all the elements. While in trance, the wives or hosts of the vodus (trosis) are also called vodus or tros. They live in temporary corporal and psychic fusion with the northern spirits.

The gorovodus create law (ese) that adepts must live by. There are lists of straightforward commandments with threats of divine punishment for infractions. But the ethical framework of Gorovodu is a complex matter, linked to personhood itself (to which considerable space is devoted in this ethnography).

Gorovodu may be categorized as heterodox among Vodu cults, because it is relatively new in West Africa (if we judge by Bernard Maupoil's 1961 ethnographic work, which mentions certain vodus repeatedly—the same ones that Verger 1957 includes—but mentions Gorovodu only once, in a disgruntled footnote). Gorovodus are thereby distinguished from the centuries-old lightning deity, Heviesso (Shango, for Yoruba), earth deity, Aholu, or Sakpata (Tsampana, for Fon and Nago), and Togbui Nyigble (Sacred Forest) cults. These older, perhaps more orthodox, orders give attention to nature divinities (thunder, water, rainbow, snake, earth, trees, and so on) who, in some cases, are also called ancestors. Gorovodus, however, are spirits of categorically nonancestral human beings (given that they are not Ewe), with some of the trappings and powers of animal and nature spirits incorporated into their personalities.

So gorovodus are gods, yet they are still like *amefeflewo* (bought people) to their present owners, because they take care of them, protect and heal them. But their owners, who are still human, still non-bought-people, still house mothers and fathers (there is no precise word in Ewe to translate "masters" in the sense of slave owners), are worshipers and also caretakers or slaves of their gods, supplicants and obeyers in turn. The modern vodu owners are attentive to the eternal debt that they owe the slave spirits, not only for services rendered in generations past, when the slaves were alive as humans, but also for the services they perform now as gods for those who remember them and recreate them. The gorovodus are, by definition, foreign, yet biological ancestry is not out of the question, for women bore children for their owners, and some male slaves also procreated with Ewe women.[4]

Given that gorovodus as spirits and god-objects are not principally ancestors or family deities, the god-objects are bought and sold, re-created in an

infinite number of copies, with money and goods today, just as the slaves, before they died as humans, were purchased by anyone who had the means to acquire them. Acquiring material vodus means having access to the spirits, but the means for acquiring them involve more than money. A prospective fetish owner must desire to adhere to Gorovodu law, which includes a strict moral code; that is, not only simple adherents (troduviwo) but also priests must obey the law. And the gorovodus' godship, power, and rank as lawmakers and enforcers of social order do not remove these divinities from their work contract with the humans who build their shrines and feed them animal sacrifices. The tasks they now perform are of a superhuman nature, heroic and magical deeds beyond the strength of even the most powerful human beings.

In keeping with its ethical system, Gorovodu is a religion of confession—both private and public—of endless talk, and of explaining in advance any actions that might otherwise be misunderstood. It promotes the practice of telling "all that is in the stomach" to anyone who might have done something offensive, or to anyone who might have been offended, so that the bad feelings, death wishes, or jealousies (*n'bia*) will not cause any harm. Confession can be a poetic affair. Adepts confess admiration and contempt alike; they tell stories and reveal desires as they confess their secret feelings. They have intimate audiences with the gods. One speaks to the vodus in secret or in grand public trials or judgments (*kodzowo*). The gorovodus are gods of conversation and narration.

Gorovodu is a dancing religion, with gods of musical performance. Its ceremonies employ the Ewe *agbadza* rhythm to some extent, but the distinguishing feature is *brekete*. Brekete has come to be identified as the music of Gorovodu, even though it is also used in the rituals of other kinds of Vodu and may actually have come from the north.

Ceremonies may be nearly public in southern Togo, attended by hundreds of people, including visitors from neighboring Ghana and Benin and occasionally (although Gorovodu is not actually widespread there) from Côte d'Ivoire and Nigeria. Turning-of-the-year (*fetatotro*) festivals include numerous animal sacrifices. Bulls, rams, goats, cats, dogs, and many fowl are killed to feed the gorovodus and are also eaten by the Vodu worshipers. This butchering of animals does not differ practically from the kosher butchering of animals for meat. It does not differ technically from the Ewe secular butchering of animals for meat. Even so, both flesh and blood are sacrifices

in the sense of being made sacred; when one eats meat already eaten by the vodus, one is blessed.

Three-day festivals include all-night drumming, singing, and dancing, with many adherents going into trance. The vodus speak to the crowd, and sometimes to individuals, concerning illnesses, conduct, projects, and promises. The drumming and dancing are both sacred and secular. (There is not always a difference between sacred and secular modes in Ewe culture.) Ceremonies sometimes turn burlesque and parodic. Gods make fun of their worshipers and of themselves; they dance and mimic, shout and laugh, with hands on hips, mouths open to the sky.[5] Adepts and onlookers alternately break into laughter at the comedy and become awestruck by the uncanny power unleashed during these performances.

I attended and participated in twenty-five major Gorovodu festivals in Togo between 1990 and 1992, five in 1994 in Ghana and Togo, and five in 1996. I was also involved in festivals for other Vodu orders, including five for Yewe, four for Aholu (or Sakpata), five for Mama Tchamba, two for Mami Wata, one for Kpesu, one for Hungbato, and several *dzoka* (*bovodu*) celebrations. I took part in innumerable smaller rituals for Gorovodu, Aholu, Egu (the Iron god), Mami Wata, and Mama Tchamba and countless Afa divination sessions. I did not always take notes or record the happenings, since I was often entirely mobilized by participation.

Thanking the Gods (An Akpedada Manqué)

Bakhtin's description of carnival might well have been written about an akpedada: "All the symbols of the carnival idiom are filled with this pathos of change and renewal, with the sense of the gay relativity of prevailing truths and authorities. We find here a characteristic logic, the peculiar logic of the 'inside out' . . . of the 'turnabout,' of a continual shifting from top to bottom, from front to rear, of numerous parodies and travesties, humiliations, profanations, comic crownings and uncrownings" (1984: 11).

My husband and children and I sacrificed a bull, two goats, a dog, a cat, and various fowl to the gorovodus on 7 and 8 March 1992. In the village of Dogbeda the sacrificing of a bull is usually reserved for a fetatotro (a turning-of-the-year ceremony, which, because of the expense, is generally performed only every two or three years). During the two-day festivities visitors came

from many coastal villages; from neighborhoods of Lome, the capital; and even from Ghana. We had not advertised the ceremony, but others in the village had. The sacrifices were to thank the gorovodus for granting us our requests: that a friend's work contract be signed, that our children be well, and that I receive a dissertation write-up stipend. The akpedada cost us about $500, an enormous amount for us, as for any Dogbeda inhabitant.

Everyone in the village ate meat that weekend. Every morsel of the dog was eaten, in spite of the reiterated doctrine that southerners do not eat dog; only northerners do.[6] Everyone had a portion of *dzekume*, ground corn boiled with salt, the way it is prepared to feed the gods. And all drummers, singers, and spirit hosts had beverages, either *sodabi* (local palm spirits) or soft drinks. The gorovodus themselves—as god-objects and the spirits of northerners—and the numerous priests who came drank schnapps. There was also a large supply of kola nuts (goro), both red and light green, the characteristic food of the gorovodus. (There was no *ataku*, guinea pepper, for that was the food of other vodus.) Onions, tomato paste, and bouillon cubes went into the meat sauce, along with a handful of fresh tomatoes, many hot peppers, anise, coriander, and other herbs.

Many people went into trance, some several times during the forty-eight-hour period. Djama the Wangosi (wife of the crocodile goddess Wango) honored us with his presence, and his tall sinewy frame hosted the grandmother spirits more than once. Marie, still not entirely respectable since her illicit relationship with her young cousin had become public knowledge, became Nana Ablewa, fierce and gentle mother deity of market women and fishermen. Da Yawa became Banguele, the warrior and hunter vodu, a composite of the slave spirits of the north who had died violent deaths. Other women and men welcomed the gorovodus into their hearts and minds and bodies, giving them limbs to dance in ecstasy and tongues to speak "all that was on their stomachs."

Now in spite of our efforts to get it all right, to buy enough food and drink, to sacrifice enough animals, to respect Gorovodu law, everything went wrong. At least it did to hear the complaining and shouting and arguing that went on. Early on Saturday morning when priests and sacrificers were in the Vodu house, praying and amassing protection so that the animals could be butchered, Fo Cudjo's sister came running into his compound applying a switch to the backside of Fo Cudjo's wife's daughter (by a former marriage). The young girl was her assailant's niece—she called her assailant Tasi (father's sister)

even though they were not actually related by blood—so this was a serious scuffle. As the child screamed, her mother came outside and began to bellow insults at her husband's sister. Then another (grown) daughter came out, and the two of them took to pummeling Tasi, who was roundly pregnant. The priests in the Vodu house pretended not to hear, including Fo Cudjo. After all, it was not his place to intervene; his wife's and his sister's business was not his. When it seemed that Tasi was in danger of being hurt by her sister-in-law, a large woman who had come to watch the sacrificing strutted over and separated them with the help of a half dozen other women, all neighbors. There would be a judgment about this later if one of the women complained.

The priests from Baguida who had killed the bull in the prescribed sacred manner insisted that an entire hind quarter belonged to them. But the host priest did not agree: "That is true for a fetatotro but not for an akpedada," he said quietly. The Baguida priests replied that the killing of a bull was a dangerous thing, that only a bona fide bosomfo, who had gone to the Sacred Bush[7] for expensive ceremonies, could kill a bull; the soul of the bull might return to bother a sacrificer who had not taken full ritual precaution. That is why they deserved a whole hind quarter; the risks were not small. But the meat had already been distributed elsewhere.

The meat sacrifice was not the only event that went awry. The sodabi (palm spirits) for the drummers was not given to them on time, so that an unplanned silent rest period occurred during what should have been a joyous and uninterrupted performance on Saturday night. Some trosis and sofos said that I must hover at the edges of the ceremonial ground, since it was my time of the month; others said that I would offend the gods if I did not sit with the priests.

A priest from an inland village came to me for our biweekly ritual argument about my progress on a document about the installation of the gorovodus in his father's village to the north. He still had not corrected what had to be a careful phrasing of the Gorovodu commandments to avoid giving the wrong impression to outsiders. Although I understood that "not taking another's belongings by force" did not refer to a simple law against stealing, but rather to a prohibition of the magic practice of "neutralizing another's life force in his very presence," I still did not know how to express this to the priest's satisfaction. This particular exchange about the document ended in an even more frustrating standoff than usual. The priest's wife, an imposing trosi, wife of the gorovodu Sacra, pawed at the ground with undisguised

impatience—in the manner of the sacred horse who had possessed her a couple of hours earlier—and finally struck her husband on the arm, sputtering, "*Midjo*" (Let's go).

Kpodzen, the priest from Afutakope, came to get her meat, taking much of what should have gone to Fo Idi as well. Off she went, carrying it in an enormous enamel loading bowl on her head, which was almost as impressive as her midsection, swollen with nine months of pregnancy. Other priests were furious with her at first, but eventually decided that she had committed no grievous wrong.

During the climax of the possession ceremony, a visiting male Wangosi (wife of the water spirit) who was virtually unknown in Dogbeda went into trance and danced into the Vodu house, crying to the senterua to dress him in Wango's costume. Da Aku gave h/er a black cloth, but s/he clamored for other accoutrements. The senterua impatiently replied that there were not enough Wango costumes to go around. Fo Idi, hearing the exchange, looked inside the house and stated firmly that there were enough costumes for Wango and all h/er wives. Da Aku, imbued with maternal and managerial power, retorted that some people did not know what they were talking about. She refused to provide the Wangosi with a costume. The next day the senterua suffered a paralysis of the right leg and foot and had to be carried to the Sacred Bush for Gorovodu healing. She confessed to having momentarily forgotten the sacred power of Nana Wango, to having transgressed the principle of hospitality to visiting trosis, and to having shown lack of respect toward her community priest in his role of parent (and special child) of the gorovodus. Weeks later she was still hobbling along, virtually living in the front courtyard of the gorovodus, awaiting a more thorough healing.

Several days after the thanksgiving feast I ranted to Amouzou that the more people tried to make others happy in the village, the worse they were treated; that no one was ever satisfied; that the more people gave, the more they were accused of not having given enough; that the whole thing was a mess; and that I was tired of it all. Amouzou looked at me with consummate amusement and let out a long stream of laughter. "Madame Judy," he began, "you are not a child [ironically]. What you have given is for the gorovodus, not for the people. Everyone knows the difference [ironically?]. If they are speaking ill, they are doing wrong, and what they do wrong remains with them, not with you. That is the law of Gorovodu. Why should you be angry? Let all that alone, for if you are unhappy, then the vodus also will be un-

happy." My responsibility to keep depression at bay for the sake of the vodus' serenity relieved me of an unhappier (more judgmental) burden that I had mistakenly thought was mine.

The next day Believe, our self-appointed classificatory kinswoman, who had managed the cooking and the food stores for the event (and therefore had not been available to host her husband spirit), came to our compound also ranting and raving. "They say that I prevented you from buying a larger bull, that I did not give you the right advice about how much corn to provide, that I did everything wrong. I'm fed up with this village; people here are hopeless." Only recently imprinted with Amouzou's lesson, I allowed a slow smile to spread across my face, laughed as throatily as possible, and said, "Believe, you are not a child. What you have done is for the gods, not for the people. What they do wrong remains with them and is not your business. You have done well. Be happy." She gave me a curious look and said, "Thank you, Judy. You are right."

The following evening Amouzou and another young priest came to see us. I told them that the village of Dogbeda was full of maso-maso, (conflict), *tukara* (trouble), and *edzere* (quarreling), a rather annoying state of affairs. The young priest answered that maso-maso was natural, that it was everywhere, and that the gorovodus also lived with it. He laughed about the arguments that the priests including him, had indulged in. His older brother, a highly respected sofo, had been particularly drunk, and although he had kept exemplary composure gesturally, everyone had heard him utter some seriously igniting phrases. This was remembered with affection and pleasure now, although recalling the breaking of rules produced much head shaking. I myself had been extremely angry and had snarled more than once, even shouted a few times, but people did not seem to mind. Sylvio had long had the reputation of being a shouter (people blamed it on his grandfather's reincarnation soul that he had inherited), so his moods and volume of speech during this event were accepted as they were customarily, with some sighs and some bemused respect.

As usual, as in every other large Gorovodu celebration I have ever seen, the carnivalesque had taken over the religious festival, with the ceremonial ground swollen with milling visitors; a makeshift market of drinks and edibles laced around the edges; trosis swooning and slumping over other people's laps and shoulders; song leaders dashing madly back and forth with their directing whips, dancing in frenzied unorthodox fashions; and the throng of

dancers who were not in trance barely respecting the tradition of linear dancing (a convention that trosis in trance do not keep). The drummers, beside themselves with fatigue and with much too much palm spirits, really let their hair down. The din alone was thoroughly intoxicating. Trosis in trance took over the inside yard of the Vodu house and had their own shrill deity disputes. They read the riot act in the ceremonial square outside, shrieking, squawking, yelping, crying out, laughing harshly and grotesquely, smiling seductively. Occasionally they took care of people who they suddenly decided were under the weather, especially children, pulling them inside the Vodu courtyard to attend to them by washing them with sacred leaves and water. The many conflicts, disagreements over methods, glitches in techniques, and mistakes in measures could never have reached the volume (aural or material) of the carnival itself. They were simply part of it, if not essential to it, central in their maso-maso power. Such chaotic energy was expressed through music (extraordinarily intense drumming requiring that drummers replace each other often) and healing (long sessions with some patients). Virtually everyone present took part in the full-out dancing, singing, and shouting with immense pleasure. Energy also went back into spirit possession as a sacrifice, a gift of excess to the slave spirits.

Several months later I was at a fetatotro (attended by about a thousand people) the likes of which occurs only every five years or so.

Fetatotro at Tula

We arrived at Tula, a full hour's drive from the coast, at about ten o'clock in the evening. The ceremonial yard in front of the fetish house was packed, with trosis in trance swarming the interior space and visitors milling throughout the surrounding area. It was a huge feast, given by illustrious sofos, sons of a major Gorovodu figure who had died a couple of years before. We were well received by Kodjo, one of the host priests, even though he had to be awakened and was still exhausted from the all-night ceremony that had expanded into an all-day affair and was about to continue into the second night. We were given schnapps to drink, as are customarily all honored guests, especially priests, well-known trosis, and invited foreigners.

Anna, a visiting development sociologist, and I were seated inside the ceremonial yard, where many trosis in trance were singing, dancing, and greet-

ing priests and newcomers. We stayed there, sumptuously entertained, until about two o'clock in the morning. Sylvio and Amouzou still had not succeeded in obtaining the key to a house that had supposedly been reserved for us. By 3 A.M. an assistant sofo from Lone Ranger Bar had finally found us a place to sleep on the other side of the village. We made our way there, through backyard shortcuts and narrow alleyways, sometimes coming upon groups of singers and dancers who could not manage to stop celebrating. We slept nervously for two or three hours, sweating profusely, periodically awakened by the arrival of other visitors who had no place to sleep. Sylvio was angry with the host priest for not having provided us with the promised sleeping quarters. Amouzou and his best friend, also a sofo, were angry too. When we had told the hosts three weeks earlier that a priest from Be would travel to Tula to secure sleeping quarters for us, they had said no, everything was already in order. But clearly it was not.

At six o'clock in the morning Sylvio sent Kodjo the message that he had words on his stomach that needed to be spoken. A sofo from the village of Baguida came in Kodjo's stead, explaining that Kodjo was already involved in another daybreak meeting. (That is the appropriate time for expressing difficult interpersonal problems or for asking others for help.) So Sylvio proceded to speak with the Baguida priest as though he, Kodjo's messenger, were Kodjo himself. First he asked the Baguida priest to pray: "Lahade Kunde, adro kum adro," he said, pouring schnapps three times on the left and then four times on the right. Then Sylvio chose a *tsiami*, or spokesman (always called a "linguist" in Ghanaian English), and he began complaining: Kodjo had invited us to his turning-of-the-year feast, refused to allow us to make our own sleeping arrangements in advance, protested that he had already provided for us, and only a few hours before was still telling us that he had our key. But we were never given the key, and in the middle of the night we had to make other arrangements with the help of a visiting sofo. To make matters worse, we had a visitor from Europe with us who was not even a Gorovodu adept. This was no way to treat brother and sister fetish children, no way to treat visitors, no way to treat a foreigner. The tsiami asked the priest whether he had heard all that Sylvio had said. The Baguida sofo said that he had indeed heard all of it. He apologized elegantly in Kodjo's name, directing his words to the tsiami. The tsiami asked Sylvio whether he had heard and accepted the apology. Sylvio said yes, but that more was needed. The Baguida priest broke into song

and was joined by several other men. Then he bought a measure of sodabi (palm spirits), drank some, and offered drinks to the rest of us, who had become rather numerous as the little hearing gathered momentum. (As was customary, neighbors and visitors walking by entered the house and joined in.) Other people began voicing their opinions, their complaints about the fetatotro and other matters, from time to time breaking very suddenly into Gorovodu songs, with others joining in. Everyone drank sodabi and ate breakfast together—rice porridge and fermented corn paste with pepper and both red and black oil, with tiny dried fish on the side. Sylvio, Amouzou, the Baguida sofo, and the priest from Lone Ranger Bar went over everything again, and everybody present judged and judged. Then Sylvio ordered beer for everyone, including the women who had slept next door. One by one, Anna, Amouzou, Sylvio, and I got up and bathed with pails of well water in a backyard enclosure. When we came back dressed in fresh pagne (African cloth), people greeted us anew, and we drank again. By the time we were ready to leave, the whole attendance was feeling merry, and the disgruntled maso-maso of daybreak had been turned into a minifestival ready to join the larger one on the other side of the village.

Several women who had come during the night expecting to sleep in the beds we were occupying had insulted us at the time, so they came to apologize, and they sang and danced for us. Anna and I followed them outside to an adjoining yard, where a group of women were imitating the male-centered meeting inside. One was playing the role of a very self-important priest. The rest of us bowed before her and fanned her with our pagne as she danced.[8] There was much laughter, singing, and talk about who we all were and what we were doing. Some of the women were trosis and would go into trance a few hours later, hosting the gorovodus with the greatest hospitality of all.

We finally crossed back through the village to the ceremonial yard, where there was already a crowd gathering. We came upon Fo Idi from Dogbeda, who told us that he had not eaten since he had arrived at the fetatotro and had been obliged to sleep on a tombstone in the graveyard in order to keep his *boubou* (a costume from the north) clean (his only alternative being the red dirt). We alternately laughed and clucked our tongues at the less than adequate hospitality that Tula had offered us all. Many were the visitors who had fared worse than we had. There had simply been too few beds, too little foresight, inadequate organization—in short too many visitors for the Tula

infrastructure. Perhaps this disorder was, after all, an alternate order of things. Yet fetish children from all over the coast would remember and laugh about the Tula fetatotro for years to come.

That morning the Vodu house, the largest I have ever seen, was overflowing with some fifty priests from the coast of Benin, from Togo, and from Ghana, as well as several from Nigeria and Côte d'Ivoire. There were a few older women priests. All had brought their own vodus for the turning-of-the-year celebration. Every god-object was bathed in the blood of the appropriate sacrificed animals—bulls, goats, sheep, dogs, cats, turkeys, guinea hens, ducks, geese, chickens. These legion copies of the gorovodus drank the blood and schnapps, and all the spirits came upon the trosis dancing and singing. It was an immensely successful event.

Gorovodu ceremonies, with a tendency toward excessive sacred carnival, make us remember Bakhtin. Rules and conventions, powers and identities, all sorts of hierarchies are put in question during such ritual, and the taking apart does not always take place along prescribed lines or through rehearsed acts. On the contrary, it is often accidental, by whim, incidental, and by way of individual talent and/or ineptness, as well as by way of unconscious social desire. It is these unrehearsed and unpredictable details of carnival that make it carnival, that make carnival desirable and fabulous, and that bring tears to the eyes of many of the Gorovodu people when they recall it. Gorovodu ritual is also capable of shaking up the status quo, placing rifts in structures, and rocking established powerboats.

The story of Gorovodu is one of opposites, contradictions, and concepts of distinctions under constant interpretations among peoples, genders, regions, foods, gods, and clothing. Opposites employed to arrange life into thinkable categories include north and south, goro (kola nut) and ataku (guinea pepper), cool and hot, house death and violent death, wife-master-human and husband-slave-god. None of these pairs is rigid or absolute. Each is dallied with in ritual life as well as in the secular workaday (to the extent that the ritual and the workaday are separable).

Inventing and maintaining these distinctions, often more unconscious than conscious but always full of knowing, have perhaps been more pleasurable than painful. Here I propose that the construction of a rhetoric for making sense of life and the world—accomplished over time by a group in contrast to other groups, in spite of itself as well as willfully—is not only a culturally necessary process and activity but also a pleasure-seeking and ecstasy-

providing one. That is, creating meaning—while utterly serious (and our lives, all of them, depend on it)—is also often hilarious and burlesque, and in its thickening, surplus to survival, *de trop*. The good times can be in the bawdy and parodic mode, or they can be sublimely contemplative; the enjoyment inflicted may be tinged with romance or solitude or with demonic lasciviousness. But in all cases the categories, meanings, and pleasures are *more* than what is necessary, or, rather, they disturb the categories of the necessary, the functional and the fundamental. They serve an aesthetics of ecstatic excess, giving rise to an ethics of expenditure and sacrifice, the first leg of the law.

A Gorovodu Family of Gods

The words in the stomach
Are like a gun
Something is in the Bofra's stomach
Kunde will know what it is
The split kola cannot be eaten
    and then vomited out
You yourself entered into it
You yourself put your head inside
Be quiet
No one can do evil here
Father, I know that you are the knife
On the way, coming
Tro is on the way, coming
Wild animal never scatters fire
Kunde is on the way, coming
My lonely children
The dog catches the lion
My lonely children
My lonely children
Oh Grandfather, Ablewa,
Sunia, Banguele, Wango
My life is in your hands
    —Fragments of Gorovodu songs

Albert de Surgy paraphrases Jacob Spieth's description of tro: "According to the unanimous explanation of the natives, writes Spieth . . . the word *tro* (meaning to change, modify, turn) which one uses to designate the fetishes,

should indicate the changing, inconstant character of these gods of the earth who demand from their worshipers this today and that tomorrow" (Surgy 1988a: 299). And Amouzou describes tro as follows:

> Tro—it changes: one day it does good; one day it hurts. It's life and death. The tro helps us, and it kills us. Your word also changes like the chameleon, exactly like the gorovodu. When the vodu comes upon someone [in trance], the person is transformed into a lion, a dog, a horse. Tro is chameleon; Gorovodu is chameleon: it changes. The behavior of the gorovodus reflects our own—when we do good, they do good for us. The trosi becomes the tro itself; then s/he turns back into a woman or a man. With the tro a man can become a woman; a woman can become a man, a domestic or wild animal. "Etro na afemelan, gbemelan, tro zona agbeto, etro na ame enuyi ame ameyibo, ameyidzenna, ame enu amamo." [It turns into a house animal, a wild animal; it becomes a human being; it turns into a white person, a black person, or a red person.]

The subject of this section is the personalities of these possessing spirits, their masks, qualities, and specialties according to a sacred division of labor, all of which are transferred to the hosts, or spirit wives. I wish to do some sort of literary justice to the poetics of Ewe Gorovodu worshipers' awe toward their gods, which (like J's awe in Bloom and Rosenberg's *The Book of J* 1990) is not always a prostrated worshipful stance but often a breathtaking recognition of the incommensurability in life. Irony is central to Gorovodu; songs and prayers bespeak a tragi-comic reading of divinity and mortality and the truck and traveling between the two.

Most of what follows in this section has been taken from multiple interviews with Amouzou. His descriptions of the gorovodus are nearly the same as those of Fo Idi, Priest Dzodzi, Priest Kpodzen, and others, but in greater detail. Much of what he says I have observed during Gorovodu ceremonies, but his wording is as significant as the data itself, for it reveals Gorovodu poetics. I have edited the field notes—putting like themes together and adding phrases here and there for the sake of coherence—but I have left descriptions as close to Amouzou's own words as I could manage in translation.

Amouzou speaks of tro, vodu, and fetish. These three terms are usually interchangeable, although tro appears to be used more often among western Ewe, and vodu is heard more often among eastern Ewe, Adja, Oatchi, and Guin. As I explained in the first chapter, *fetish* (*fétiche* in Togo)—the word that was used by the first European explorers who saw and described the god-objects and the word of preference among colonial administrators—has been

fully recuperated by Vodu people. Tro, vodu, and fetish refer to the spirit and host during possession ceremonies as well as to god-objects. They can mean deity, nature spirit, divinized ancestor or slave spirit, or guardian divinities of other kinds, and each term includes the god-object that is never entirely separable from the spirits themselves, the "made thing" without which the spirits are not divinized.

Mawu may also be used to refer to gorovodus (for example, Atikemawu, below) although it is the name that missionaries gave to the Christian God and has come to be the name of a sort of High God in Eweland. Otherwise, Mawu and Lisa are a vodu couple among Fon and Adja-Ewe. Mawu is a generic term for god or vodu in Gorovodu communities and may refer to any god anywhere (whereas vodu or tro would seldom refer to the Christian or Moslem God or to gods in cultures other than Adja-Ewe and Fon).

The personality of each vodu is of great significance, for divinities are divided into different categories and do not all do the same work. They are as individualized as humans are. It is no secret in Gorovodu that the gods are like us, only more so (more powerful and knowledgeable but just as human, even in spirit form). Uniqueness of personhood and division of labor make for seductive deities whose desires must be met, and ensure their efficacy in meeting the desires of their worshipers.

As far as the usual human needs for gods go, the Gorovodu pantheon covers all the god bases. But other deities in other systems also keep covering the same ground and the same concerns from one place to another. Among the gorovodus, Banguele is doing the same work as Egu (the iron god), Nana Wango is covering for Mami Wata (the coastal mermaid deity) and Yemanja (the Yoruba water *orisha*), Sacra is another form of Sakpata, or Aholu (the earth deity), Kunde is *adela* (a hunter spirit), and Sunia Compo is Lisa (the Adja and Fon sun vodu, companion twin or husband to a female Mawu, the moon god). The gorovodus address the same concerns as other gods and have similar personalities. There is additional meaning, though, for they are now considered to be foreign and northern spirits, and the Mama Tchamba pantheon is openly one of slave spirits. Even so, Gorovodu adepts may also take care of fetishes that are not gorovodus but that do the same work, because they like them, because they inherited them from their parents, because these spirits demanded something of them through illness or possession trance, or because they are simply already there, in the village or compound, and therefore merit attention and respect. Thus worshipers often ask for the same things

from different divinities belonging to separate Vodu systems. "It never hurts to pray to more than one tro."[9]

Amouzou begins his description of the gorovodus with Kunde and Ablewa, a married couple very unlike each other. They are slave spirits, but they are also animals. Kunde is both lion and hunter of lions, dog and eater of dogs. He is a grandfather healing divinity, a medicine god. Ablewa is, on one hand, a panther who eats sheep and, on the other hand, the very image of the civilized, vain, and successful market woman. According to Amouzou,

> In Gorovodu there is the man and the woman, Kunde and Ablewa. Kunde is an old Hausa man, both a lion—*dzanta*—and a rider of lions. He is a dog eater and a wearer of animal skins. (Or, animal skins lacking, his wives may wear red cloth when in trance.) Kunde is chief or king of gorovodus. He may also act like a very old man who can hardly walk. "Lahade Kunde, adro kum adro" in Hausa-Arabic and Twi or "Lahade Kunde, atike kple atike" in Ewe. (Great Kunde, sacred medicine upon sacred medicine)—this is the beginning of the usual prayer to Kunde. Atikevodu is what Kunde was called a long time ago. "I'm going to the *atikefe* [medicine house] or *trofeme* [Vodu house]," people said. Atikemawu [medicine god] is another name of Kunde. Kunde's wife Ablewa is a panther—*ekpo*—beautiful like Mami Wata. She eats white sheep and dresses in white. Ablewa is a seller of kola nut, perfume, and powders [exotic to the south]. Sometimes Ablewa clowns like a very old woman, and this makes people laugh.

Essential to the nature of the foreign gorovodus is their extreme transformability, the divine ability to change into animals, Ewe persons, or clowns, or to be suddenly old or young. When the vodus come upon their hosts or wives, so that they turn into human forms, they also literally turn about, whirl, suddenly change directions. Their dance does not begin with a stately, studied perfection of form, but rather a dashing and darting of abrupt starts and stops and unannounced reversals of direction, all of which bespeak the unstudied, state-of-grace perfection of animal and godly changeability. The tros also change tongues; they "enter into" different languages. Amouzou says, "Kunde and Ablewa change from spirits of Hausa[10] slaves into Ewe people like us; grandfather and grandmother, they have already entered into the Ewe language. But if they are in Asanteland, they enter into the Twi language. That is why we call them tro, because they change like the chameleon. We are their children. But they can also change into animals. Kunde may also turn into a dog. If you go into a house with bad intentions on your stomach toward the people of the house and the dog bites you, it is Kunde who has bitten you."

Although Kunde may bite and punish, he is also a kind and protective father who "sees in the night," recognizing his children's enemies more surely than they do. Kunde's and Ablewa's preferred food is kola nut, or goro.[11] All prayers are accompanied by gifts of kola or the eating of kola nut, which has already been offered to the vodus (placed upon the god-objects) and so has already been eaten by them and turned into gorovodu. Upon eating such kola the adept has eaten tro itself.

Prayers to Kunde usually begin thus: "Papa Kunde, metso bishia le nawo be na dzie agbe nami. Nye me nya ketowo o yee wonto le nyawo. Ne me dze ago le dziwo le a tsoe keme." (Papa Kunde, I take kola nut to you so that you will give us life. I don't know who my enemies are. You know who they are. If I have offended you, forgive me.)

While adepts pray to Kunde to protect the family and the village and to heal diseases, Ablewa receives requests for help in finding jobs, doing business, taking care of money matters, signing contracts, saying the right words, and making and keeping proper promises. She is also asked to intercede when a person has angered, and thus might be punished by, Kunde or any of the hot vodus, (those of the Banguele group, described below). She may spoil her wives, letting them get away with less than exemplary behavior, but on occasion she too becomes angry and punishes those who do not respect Gorovodu law.

Some Gorovodu communities, including the one in Dogbeda, also have Togbui Kadzanka and Allah, a couple of grandfather-grandmother gods (Allah being the grandmother) who are said to come from northern and Islamic peoples. They are described as identical to Kunde and Ablewa, except that Kadzanka is more exacting and unforgiving than Kunde. (Fo Idi has been heard to say that he would never again make Kadzanka for Togolese Ewe villagers, for they are not sufficiently capable of keeping the law. Kadzanka punishes them harshly, and they die. Kunde is more forgiving and thus better for the so-called weak-willed coastal Ewe.) According to Amouzou, "In Gorovodu ceremonies when the drums are played, you can be sleepy and slump forward on your bench and stay that way for half an hour. No one will know that it is the fetish. If it is Kunde or Kadzanka you will eventually stand up on the bench and stretch out your left hand to greet people. Then everyone will know which vodu came upon you. If it is one of the other vodus, you will reach forward with your right hand. If the Hausa see the person offering his left hand, they will know that it is Kunde or Kadzanka."[12]

Sunia Compo, the youngest of Kunde's and Ablewa's children, is often found, in h/er form as god-object, next to Ablewa in the Vodu houses. S/he is the Gorovodu of reasoned intelligence and restraint, cool (*fa*) like the chameleon and therefore powerful, able to pass unnoticed, capable of changing colors or becoming invisible to enemies. Sunia often receives requests for the ability to move quietly among those who might want to cause harm, the ability to discipline one's tongue and one's anger, or the mental acuity needed to work out strategies. Sunia's ambiguous gender and h/er mask of vanity are the works of h/er intelligent body. She is the keeper of secrets, never giving away all of who s/he is in a world of possibilities. Amouzou elaborates:

> Sunia Compo is the chameleon, queen or king of flies, changer of colors. A Suniasi [spirit host of Sunia] wears blue or green (the only Gorovodu host who wears these colors). Sunia is Ablewa's favorite. The last born, spoiled and demanding—*edunavi*—Sunia always stays close to the mother. We never know whether this one is a boy or a girl. S/he eats pigeons roasted whole; s/he is a solitary eater who cannot tolerate eating in the presence of others.
>
> Sunia possesses beautiful women and men of red hues. S/he is a little like Mami Wata,[13] as h/er mother, Ablewa, is. S/he moves slowly, preciously, not as flamboyantly as, for example, Banguele. As Sunia is the chameleon, s/he is always changing and does not even have a real job to do. S/he just does things for the mother, who does not want her last born to go far away from her. S/he never goes hunting. S/he is a cool vodu, but s/he is dangerous anyway. S/he behaves like Ablewa, interceding if Banguele or Kunde wants to punish someone.

The Banguele pantheon, brothers and sisters of Sunia Compo, begins with Sacra Bode, the eldest, who is often called a horse. Amouzou explains: "Sacra is the first-born of Kunde and Ablewa, a horse, carrier of his brother Banguele in war and in the hunt. He is the big brother of all of Kunde's and Ablewa's children, the bearer of burdens. Sacra eats cat and goat by preference. His wives wear black, white, and red stripes like Banguele, or white and red mixed, when he possesses them."

But it is Sacra's younger brother, Banguele, who gives his name to the collectivity of hot gorovodus, those who are fed in the Sacred Bush as well as in the Vodu house and who, as mortals, died violent deaths. Amouzou says, "When you have many children, one of them may become stronger than the others and become violent. In the Gorovodu family it is Banguele who has this personality. Banguele is a hunter, soldier, and policeman. He is a wearer of guns and knives, a weapons master. He receives his strength from the spirits of those who have died violent deaths. A captain, a guarantor of justice, he

is the gorovodu who carries out the most difficult or dangerous tasks, who goes where neither mother nor father wishes to go. He [his host] often wears red, black, and white in broad stripes.

Except for Sacra, who, as a horse, is very civilized, the hot vodus tend to behave wildly, sometimes unreasonably. Banguele is like a wild animal of the forest, or an owl (*azehevi*; literally, witch bird). The Banguele spirits are, by definition, the opposite of house death spirits, given that as mortals they did not see death coming, but perished suddenly, violently, perhaps far from home. Banguele is often said to be a hunter or warrior. His wives resemble him in his intense vitality when in trance, and sometimes even when not in trance. Magical weapons are included in the Banguele costume, and worn during trance (these weapons are vodus in their own right). According to Amouzou, "The Banguelesi—wife of Banguele—moves flamboyantly, with arm gestures that resemble the wide wing movements of the vulture. She dances with knives or with the short spear. Banguele is the real *amedzagle*—crazy person. He carries an *apia* [a trident with little balls made of softened sanka wood mixed with kaolin and distributed along the handle, with plants inside each ball, the whole embellished with cowries]. This apia is what Banguele uses to catch people, even to kill them."

The Banguele fetish is made of certain objects, plants, and animals that the vodu is said to eat in addition to other bird and animal parts with specific meanings and powers. Among the many ingredients used are owl claws (so that this vodu may protect its worshipers against evil power) and the wings of the Kpalime vulture (so that this tro of the Sacred Bush may fly high and eat anything, yet never be eaten). He does the same work as Egu, the iron god (Ogun in Yorubaland; Ogou in Haiti). He also covers for Heviesso, deity of thunder and lightning (Shango in Yorubaland, Brazil, and the Caribbean).[14] Amouzou says

> Banguele is *cocosatsi*—hawk or vulture—and azehevi. The Banguele fetish includes claws and feathers of cocosatsi and azehevi and a porcupine quill. He has a knife inside him and a gong for a mouth (the clapper is his tongue). The owl claw is included in case *azetowo* [those with evil power] want to attack. Cocosatsi is never eaten but eats all. The plants inside Banguele are the same as the ones used for Egu and Heviesso. Banguele does the work of Egu. He is the angry one, the one who, if bound, will do difficult labor in order to be freed, as will any slave spirit.[15] Banguele can perform the gestures of wild animals and domestic ones too. He can act like a monkey or a horse or even a dog (although he is not any of these animals and especially not a dog). He is the most changeable of all the gorovodus and can

act the clown, in spite of the fact that he is made of the spirits of violent death. Banguele also can scare people when he suddenly changes his act.

Banguele may be the most popular of all the gorovodus; or rather, as trosis are liable to say, it is he who appears to love humans the most, for he takes many wives, especially beautiful women. According to Amouzou, "The Banguele group of spirits includes Sacra (the firstborn), Banguele himself, Tsengue, Surugu, Gueria, M'bangazou, Mossi, and Kangba. They are all hunters and warriors who died in the forest or at war, hot vodus. Women can be hunters and warriors, although you don't find it in normal life. Female vodus do what men do as well as what women do. Some people consider Banguele to be female."

These other members of the Banguele group are said to be his tools or weapons—knives, arrow shafts, spears, skin scrapers, and the like. Yet they possess personhood. Each has traits of specific birds or animals, and they are characters in narratives. Amouzou explains:

> Surugu is like a certain bird—*avalifo*—always on the road, for he is deaf. He does not know that you are coming until you are upon him. It would be bad if all the gorovodus were strong and aggressive. We would all be dead. The softer ones obtain mercy for us when we have offended the laws. Surugu speaks slowly. He dances well and sees everything, but he says little. He waits by the road to accompany the others to judgments. He judges with the other gorovodus. He always remains alone, does not like to be touched, and holds his head in his hand. He thinks more than the others, but he does not show what he thinks. When he says no, he means it. When the fetish catches someone for wrongdoing, he does not judge the matter alone. Like us, the gorovodus meet together first and decide the case; then they choose one fetish to go get the wrongdoer. But Surugu can be even more dangerous than the vodus who are violent. It is not always the one who shouts a lot who is the most dangerous. The man who speaks little can be highly dangerous. Surugu knows by watching lips everything that everyone is saying, even though he is deaf. He can change into the bird—avalifo—when he wants and wait in the road to hear what people are saying to their children. He wants to know what they are saying in order to collect information. In fact, avalifo itself never manages to learn, whereas Surugu, in the form of the bird, does learn, by watching peoples' lips. A Surugusi wears white and black mixed, in broad stripes. He is a hot vodu, but he does not show it. He acts like Sunia, although Sunia is a cool vodu.

Each of Banguele's other siblings and companions has his or her own special profile, as complex as Surugu's. For example, says Amouzou, "Mossi is like a young Hausa woman who controls fires: *ezotsito* [literally, fire-water person or father of putting out fires]. If you go hunting and the brush is burning, she will put out the fire. But she herself is a hot vodu. Fire puts out fire. Desire can quench desire. Gueria is a virgin wearing white Hausa garments, who behaves elegantly rather than burlesquely, although she is with the Banguele group. She is a very hot tro. This one is often said to be male, although the songs to her indicate clearly that she is a woman." And there are yet other spirit-tools that help Banguele in his work, says Amouzou: "Tsengue is the knife man, and the Tsengue vodu is always made with seven knives. Kangba is a trickster who always mixes everyone up."

Nana Wango, or Grandmother Crocodile, is another deity who is a house spirit and a nature spirit, and the only gorovodu (other than Abiba and Sadzifo, the guardians of the Sacred Bush) whose form as god-object is a somewhat anthropomorphic wood carving. She also loves humans very much, for she takes numerous wives, perhaps as many men as women. She is always placed on the far right in the lineup of vodus inside a Vodu house (Kadzanka, Allah, Kunde, and Ablewa are to her left). Amouzou explains:

> Wango is a crocodile. When she takes her wives in trance, she [in her wives' bodies] moves on the ground with the leg movements of the crocodile. She is a cool vodu, like Kunde, Ablewa, and Sunia Compo. To live in the water and yet not drown is very difficult, so Wango is exceedingly powerful. She eats duck. She [her host] wears black pagne and cowries sewn together to resemble crocodile skin. She employs a wand during trance and wears a gourd as a head covering. The wand is used as an oar during her dance, or as a canoe pole, placed first on one side and then the other.
>
> When a Wangosi first goes into trance she must have water poured on her body while bending low or crouching on the ground like the crocodile [female pronouns here include male hosts]. Wango sometimes acts like a crocodile monster, frightening people or making them laugh. Wango is like Ablewa in certain respects, but Ablewa never frightens anyone. Wango can come upon a host during a ceremony to thank her for having helped a person, often a woman. Then she sits on the Wango stool and sometimes goes for the plants that are necessary for the ceremony.
>
> To make Nana Wango, cowries representing crocodile skin need to be placed on the statue. Plants are placed inside Wango's head. Wango replaces (is) the person. She must be treated with respect; one must never point and call her "wood." We must go to the riverside to call the crocodiles; pray; and sacrifice a red rooster, eggs, and kola. We leave them beside the river for a time and then take some water and put it on the *Wangotsina* [an oval object or cowry ball around Wango's neck, sometimes said to be her baby].

When someone begins to be taken by Wango [in trance] she must have rituals performed not only in the Sacred Bush but also at the river, where she enters the water with drums playing and people singing and dancing. Eggs must be thrown to her while she is in the river. She eats the eggs thrown to her from the banks. She takes a sacrificed cock in her mouth and dives deep enough to leave it on the river bed. She is the crocodile. This is called *woyito ne Wango* (Wango to the river). Without this ritual, a Wangosi becomes ill.

We take Wango's *tsina* to the riverside to tell it what we want, so that the crocodile spirits can hear. Some say that Wango is also the *piroguier* or ferryman, the one who takes us across the river on a raft that is in fact a crocodile. In this form we think of Wango as a man. [And in either case Wango is a northern slave spirit or god brought by slaves from the north.]

Prayers to Nana Wango often ask her to take the worshiper across with confidence—across rivers, deserts, trials, harvests, marriages, childbirths, deaths, tribulations. She specializes in fertility, conception, and childbirth, but these are also metaphors of other types of crossings, events, and projects that are conceptualized in terms of traveling over a difficult ground or traversing a dangerous body.

Alafia, the original Hausa gorovodu, according to Amouzou, was only one god, a collectivity of spirits (perhaps amalgamated from the different northern spirits outlined in chapter 3). Alafia was teased into about a dozen different gods to form the gorovodus as we now know them, each one said to be the spirit of a specific slave, except for Banguele, who remains collective in the way that Alafia was. Even after having his weapons, tools, and other trappings separated out of him to become gods in their own right, Banguele remains an amalgam of slave spirits from the north.

The Ewe spirits of family members who died house deaths and those who died violent deaths remain separate from each other for all time, and they remember their life histories as humans, just as the vodus do. As the differentiation between house-death spirits and violent-death spirits (for both vodus and family spirits) remains significant, so does the difference between family spirits who must be respected and feasted and foreign ones who become or join Gorovodus. Amouzou remarks, "The spirits of violent death are *gbogbowo* [breath souls]; they all remember what they lived as human beings and how they died. If they didn't remember, they would get mixed up with the *afemekutowo* [house-death spirits], and that wouldn't work. People might become ill. But that is for Ewe spirits, not for others. Except for the gorovodus, we don't know what happens to other kinds of (non-Ewe) spirits, but for all Africans it might be nearly the same."

Amouzou distinguishes particularly between spirits of northern hunters who did and did not die violent deaths and spirits of Ewe lineage hunters who saw death coming (and thus did not die while hunting): "*Adelawo* [Ewe hunters] do not come from violent-death spirits; they come from the house. In Gorovodu it is Kunde who is adela. But if your own grandfather was a hunter and killed animals and ate them, the skulls of these animals are planted in the ground inside a special fence. This is called *adekpo*. This is for the family, not for gorovodus. But lineage hunters that did die violent deaths may join Banguele. During rituals held in the Sacred Bush, when priests call on the violent-death spirits that compose Banguele, they also call forth the violent-death spirits of the village and the family to come and eat and feast with the slave spirits from the north. It is said that all the slave spirits go inside the god-object called Banguele, while the local violent-death spirits hover near the Banguele fetish. Vodus that are a single spirit and those composed of a collectivity of spirits are all alimented by Ewe family spirits in the Sacred Bush. In spite of (perhaps because of) Banguele's amalgamated or composite nature, he is treated as a highly individuated divinity.

Plants are essential to the making of both hot and cool vodus; we might even say that plant agency is at work, just as human, animal, and slave spirit agency go into the creation of the gods. According to Amouzou, "The grasses of all the Banguele vodus are hot-death plants (from the Sacred Bush or the part of the cemetery where violent-death corpses are buried). The plants that grow on the graves of violent-death people are the ones used to make the Banguele vodus. You go at night and tell the plants what you want. Afterward you take them, but not usually the roots. On occasion you can take the roots too for special reasons."

Which plants are used to fabricate which vodus and where these plants are pulled from the ground, what kind of death the slaves died, where the different categories of vodus may eat—all these distinctions are related. Amouzou says "Kunde and Ablewa are afemekutowo [spirits of those who died house deaths or who saw death coming]. Kadzanka and Allah are also house people, like Kunde and Ablewa, but many of the plants used to make them are the same as for Banguele. However, they are not taken from hot graves, as those graves are for the hot vodus, but rather from the house or nearby. Some of the plants are entirely different. There are some plants that belong to only one vodu."

Although Nana Wango and Sunia Compo are, by definition, house spirits rather than violent-death spirits, they may go to the Sacred Bush to eat with

the Banguele group. They travel between the house and the bush, between those who have seen death coming and those who have died sudden and violent death. (Kunde and Ablewa seldom go to the Sacred Bush.) Banguele must eat often in the Sacred Bush. It is necessary for the maintenance of his kind of power, for he is the creator of the Sacred Bush and is strengthened there by the spirits of others who died violent deaths. Amouzou says, "It is Banguele who brought the Sacred Bush to the village. Kunde and Ablewa are from the house (afemetowo); their plants are not from the Sacred Bush. Wango and Sunia are not made of plants from the hot-death spirits, but they may go to the Sacred Bush to eat with Banguele. They 'steal' food from the Sacred Bush."

Gorovodus are fed the ingredients that compose them. Kunde eats dog; Banguele eats cat; Sacra eats goat. The Gorovodu adept is called a troduvi, literally a child of vodu eating or a little vodu eater. The troduvi eats goro (*bisi* in Ewe) during an initiation ceremony in the Sacred Bush, and regularly from then on, whether in the Sacred Bush or in the Vodu house (thus sharing food with the spirits of both house death and violent death). Such god food is placed upon the vodus in their god-object form and therefore has already been eaten by the gods before the troduvi eats it. This is eating vodu (*etro-dudu*). In other words, what the vodu has eaten is also vodu and is eaten again, or in turn, by the worshiper.

As Papa Kunde, the father of the gorovodus, eats dog and *is* dog, he is what he eats, and so is the troduvi who eats Kunde. The Kundesi, or wife of Kunde (whether a man or a woman), who becomes Kunde while in trance, is also an eater of Kunde and of the food that Kunde has already eaten. And, given that in Ewe a husband is said to eat his wife sexually, Kunde eats all his Kundesis (whether men or women) when he comes upon, or possesses, them. They, incidentally, are also said to come upon, or to strike, Kunde. And a Kundesi, or any other trosi, is both the same as his or her vodu husband and not the same. The Kundesi is the same because she or he is that gorovodu while in trance, and even at other times, for the Kundesi's personality overlaps that of the divinity. The Kundesi is not the same, because she or he is the wife, and because while not in trance, the Kundesi is marked female and is Ewe, southern, and a worshiper, while the gorovodu is marked male and is northern, foreign, and divine. The Kundesi also eats his or her spiritual husband. (These rules on like eating like are a reversal of Afa totemic rules, discussed in chapter 6.)

The Kumagbeafide History of Gorovodu Origins

In 1994 I asked the son of the late Kumagbeafide to tell me exactly how the gorovodus came to Ewe villages in Ghana and Togo. Here is his "naming history," very like Biblical "begetting narrative" (translated from French and Ewe):

> Kodzo Kuma got Gorovodu from Mama Seydou through Komla Dzedeke. Kodzo Kuma was a taxi driver. He had an accident involving the village chief of Kpando and was going to be imprisoned because of it. His uncle, Dzedeke, had a Goro talisman that he put in Kodzo Kuma's pocket. Thanks to that, Kodzo Kuma didn't have to go to prison. So he asked his uncle what that talisman was. (At that time Kodzo Kuma didn't know that the fetish had already gone to Togo and Benin.) Kodzo Kuma also wanted to work with Gorovodu. Dzedeke didn't know how to read or write but Kodzo Kuma did. So his uncle gave him Kunde.
>
> Kodzo Kuma then went to Aflao to see Kossi Dziga (who was the first to get the fetish from Mama Seydou). He asked Kossi Dziga to go to Togo with him to see those who had the fetish there. They went to Gumekpe at Nyekonakpoe. He said that he had made the fetish for several people in Togo. Kodzo Kuma went to see everyone who had been to Mama Seydou; he went to see Agbodogbo at Avepozzo, Atideke at Baguida, Tabac at Bobokpoguede, Mikpoanyigba at Amedehoeve, and Homenu at Lebe. It was Tabac who gave Kunde and Ablewa to Kumagbeafide in Bobokpoguede. Gumekpe was the one who gave the fetish to Toguna from Agbata. Kunde and Tcherya [Ablewa] were the only ones; there was no Banguele yet. They had all been to Mama Seydou.
>
> Kodzo Kuma left to go back to Kpando. There his uncle (Dzedeke) made Banguele for him. (Dzedeke is a little like Fo Seydou, the Gorovodu sofo in Accra, but very powerful.) Banguele is Asante, for we call him Ketetsi, Kokomesatsi, Hwemisu. In Lome people wanted Banguele too. Before then Kunde and Ablewa ate pig as well as goat roasted in the hide, but when Banguele came, he outlawed [the eating of] pig and goat with the skin on. Banguele had to be made for Toguna and Kumagbeafide. But the first was made at Kpoga for Azamedji from Kokoterre. For those three men, Banguele was made the same day. Others decided not to take Banguele, for they ate pig and unskinned goat meat. Banguele was first worn around the neck; that protected the wearer from bullets. His power could be seen. Kumagbeafide and Toguna took Banguele to Benin and elsewhere. Even today Agbodogbo refuses Banguele.
>
> Kumagbeafide is the one who made Wango for everyone in Togo. But Wango came from Bluma, where she was acquired by the son of Azamedji. So Wango is a Bluto (Fante). Azamedji refused to take Wango. But his son said to him that Wango ate kola and duck. (So Wango was not evil in any way.) Thus he left his father's

house and went to Kumagbeafide in Bobokpoguede. He then made Wango for Kumagbeafide.

Sunia was brought by Senade, Kumagbeafide's brother. He got it in Ghana. Senade got Sunia without learning which leaves were used [to make it]. Kumagbeafide was lying in bed one day when Sunia itself came and showed him the plants in a dream. Then he found the plants in a field. He took them to the house and made Sunia. Sunia eats pigeon roasted with no salt or pepper; the meat should be eaten outside, never sitting at a table. Today, even if you see Sunia in Benin, you see that's the way it is.

One day Kumagbeafide put Sunia in his pocket—Godome is where this happened, at the compound of Sofo Molonudowu. A child was ill and Afa divination was performed; it showed that Sunia was in Kumagbeafide's pocket. The child was to eat Sunia in order to be healed; that is what happened. Kodzo Kuma was there. He asked Kumagbeafide whether there were any other fetishes in his pocket. He asked Kumagbeafide to make Sunia for him. Molonu also asked for it.

So Sunia and Wango both came from Kumagbeafide. Before Kumagbeafide, Banguele was round; he was the one who decided to make Banguele with an *awudza* [a cow or horse's tail], a *ganga* [iron bell, or musical instrument], and the vulture of Kpalime. Kumagbeafide, Toguna (the narrator's maternal grandfather), and Amadzi were together in those days.

The son of Kumagbeafide was visibly proud of this story, proud of this chain of names and makings, proud of his place in this list of signifiers. His story is a creation myth writ small. There is a marked cultural naturalness about taking gods and practices to other villages, preparing fetishes for one new priest after another. It is just as natural to take gods from neighboring peoples like "Blutowo" and Asante, as well as from more northern *amedzrowo* (strangers or guests) such as Mama Seydou. As in most myths of origin, we find names all the way down. No one reaches any farther back than to Mama Seydou in telling the story of Gorovodu in the south. Farther back than Mama Seydou means farther north, and that remains in a time and place of imaginary proportions.[16]

3

ATIKEVODU VERSUS COLONIAL ORDERS

The vodus are slave spirits. Hundreds of years ago people of the north —Haussa, Mossi, Tchamba, and Kabye—passed through Eweland. Some of them suffered hardships and had to sell their children to our ancestors. These children did everything for us. They worked their whole lives and made their masters rich. When they grew old and died, the objects we had taken from them upon their arrival—cloths, bracelets, fetishes, sandals—these things became the vodu, and the slave spirits came and settled in them and became our gods. If we do not serve them, generation after generation, we become ill and die. It is beautiful when the vodu comes to possess you. It is good.

—Kpodzen

My experience is that there is no phase of native life that lends itself to such unreasoning criticism as these spasmodic fetishes—facts become so distorted, rumors so exaggerated, that Political Officers may well be excused for taking an unduly serious view of a new fetish. . . . To watch a known movement is much easier than to discover secret and mysterious rites, which invariably follow premature coercive action [on the part of the colonial administration].

—J. C. Fuller, Chief Commissioner of Ashanti, Ghana, on 30 October 1916

Medicine of Resistance

This chapter includes a fragmented history of Atikevodu, including the ways in which medicine Vodu cults often involved religious forms of political resistance to colonial states. Sometimes resistance was explicit; sometimes it was at work just by virtue of the very (cultural) nature of Vodu, and of