THE SUDDEN DEATH OF A MILLIONAIRE:
CONVERSION AND CONSENSUS IN A
GHANAIAN KINGDOM

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The unexpected death of a citizen in 1977 triggered a series of events in one small Ghanaian kingdom, pointing to confusion in the locally accepted criteria for Christian conversion and to contradictions in the avenues to status and power. Since the deceased was a millionaire businessman, something of a huckster, and a person who was at the centre of an unusually complex constellation of social ties, his death forced the people of his local community to re-examine the relationships between traditional religion and Christianity, and between wealth, religious adherence and the display of status and prestige. There was long and bitter hostility between the two towns to which this man was affiliated by descent. Each town competed for the glory of claiming him as a member, and while once he too would have desired that, logically it could not be. There was also perennial conflict between the factions within the kingdom’s capital. This enhanced the drama and helped explain the urgency of the respective townspeople’s attempts to resolve the underlying structural contradictions which became manifest in the events following the death to their own advantage. At the same time this is the story of a self-made man, unusual largely because of his extreme wealth, who understood conflict and ambiguity, and who manipulated the social structure in which he found himself to his own advantage. The funeral of this one man, who simultaneously entertained contradictory belief systems and juggled opposing attributes of leadership, mobilised the attention of the entire population of both towns. It did so precisely because the ritual of his funeral was used to ‘describe in advance a desired but uncertain state of affairs. It [ritual] is about power and is itself more or less political’ (MacGaffey, 1986: 11, emphasis added).

Religious conversion is usually considered to be a matter of individual conviction, an individual’s conscious and deliberate change in religious belief and practice, in world view and ideology. Horton (1971, 1975) takes a single explanatory frame to argue (by means of a vast number of cases) that conversion to a world religion such as Christianity coincides with an increase in the scale of society and the dissolution of microcosmic boundaries. Peel (1977), while agreeing that the most essential aspect of religion is its world view, differs from Horton in seeing conversion as a highly multifaceted and complex process with many different causal explanations which need not be mutually exclusive. He illustrates this with two cases—Ijebu and Buganda—and enumerates many of the questions we should indeed be asking about the multiple causes and characteristics of conversion. More recently he again compares two societies and notes that culture (and changes in religious faith and affiliation) is ‘less a reflection of society than a reflexion on history’ (Peel, 1987: 112). Clearly one may change one’s religious identity for many reasons. In this paper I take one case study from a single society to look at the process of conversion. I focus here not on the concerns of the individual ‘convert’—
his emotion and religiosity, his intellectual interest and possible use of religious identity to express social mobility or specific political issues—but rather I examine how the two communities to which this one individual belonged perceived and defined his ‘conversion’ and what they saw to be the related issues.

Because conversion refers to change in religious identity (Peel, 1977: 108) it is generally held that when a convert adopts a new religion he jettisons the old: conversion is presented as ‘all or nothing’. Such an approach allows the statistically minded to refer to 56 per cent or even 99 per cent of a society as ‘Christian’, but it obscures the fact that there may be no primary religious identity, that sometimes people do not convert totally but rather adopt new forms of worship as useful supplements to the old. This ‘standing with one foot on either side of the fence’, A. D. Nock (1933, cited by Fisher, 1973: 33) calls ‘adhesion’, and it seems to trouble churchmen and tidy-minded social scientists more than it does the individuals concerned, who often see nothing perverse or blasphemous about simultaneously juggling multiple and inconsistent interpretations of behaviour and events. This is an age-old problem. In a recent review of Lane-Fox’s Pagans and Christians, Mary Beard (1987) addressed the case of the Emperor Constantine, who during his lifetime was a patron of both pagans and Christians and was only ‘converted’ on his deathbed. She argued that the notorious problem of whether or not he was really Christian is misconceived, for in that period of historical transition ‘the whole notion of religious adherence was itself being redefined . . . “what it was to be a Christian” was itself a matter of debate.’ So too in the Ghanaian case, where the question was both necessary and relevant to the people themselves. But merely to state that society is in flux, while admittedly faithful to the reality of everyday life, does not take us far enough. Religious conversion is a rite of transition and the newly acquired status must be socially validated. In the conversion of a living person the rite is typically that of his or her acceptance into the new church by the congregation. In the case of the deceased Ghanaian millionaire, the recognition of his conversion (the rite of re-aggregation) was at his funeral. In yet other examples decisions may take place long after the individual’s funeral (as in the processes of beatification and sanctification in the Catholic Church).

Rather ethnocentrically, conversion is generally taken to mean joining a world religion. Yet to join a spiritualist cult or a ‘fetish’ group is as much a conversion as to become a Christian or Muslim, to switch from being Protestant to Catholic or from Baptist to Episcopalian. In Nigeria prophets of the Aladura-type churches often begin their religious careers as possession priests in traditional cults (Horton, 1971: 104, n. 1). In Akuapem several Ghanaian priestesses were first possessed in Aladura-type Christian churches, then later by traditional deities and ancestors; and American votaries of the Akuapem-based Akonide cult in Ghana and New York were formerly Christian. Since chieftaincy and Christianity are deemed incompatible by the Ghana Presbyterian Church (due in part to the centrality of the ritual of sacrifice in the worship of ancestors), incumbents to office, many of whom were raised as Christians, are in a sense converted to ‘paganism’ upon royal installation. Clearly one must see conversion as one process within the historical development of a total system.
This paper is about one man's participation in the ever changing total religious system of his society; by logical extension, it is also about those people who interacted with him when he was alive or were affected by his death. It is about process, about how ideas are actually worked out in the everyday activities of daily life: this man's status was decided by means of a long process of inter-group argument, factional intrigue and final appeal to external adjudicators with political and religious authority. Although Christianity and colonialism have changed and to some extent undermined traditional patterns of behaviour in this Ghanaian kingdom, the latter still have an immediacy for local people (see recent work which addresses this point: Middleton, 1983; also Bond, 1987, for a Zambian example). Yet it still seems necessary to dispel the romantic view that where traditional religious practices persist side by side with Christianity they are merely what Crapanzano (1980: 84) has called the 'frozen symbols of an irrelevant idiom'. It is essential to provide the detailed social and historical context of the actors' behaviour, both of the individual concerned and of those who defined, interpreted and validated his conversion. This, while at first sight complex and overfilled with detail, provides the understanding of the ways in which the people themselves see conversion and their motivation. Only then do the structure and dynamics of the process emerge so that conversion is seen to be more than a matter of faith, enthusiasm or cognitive reasoning. Only then do the 'inconsistencies' make sense. Beidelman (1982: 20 n. 33) notes that 'it seems difficult to separate conversion from political and economic dominance and strategy'. Indeed, that is at the crux of this paper, for religious conversion is about social action as well as about a system of ideas.

A text
We begin with a text, spoken in English by a respected elder in the little Guan-speaking town of Abiriw, in southern Ghana. Abiriw is separated geographically from the neighbouring Akan-speaking town of Akuropon, the capital of the Akuapem kingdom, by only a shared marketplace. As a political unit the kingdom of seventeen traditional towns was established by Akan invaders in 1733. Since that time relations between the immigrant people of Akuropon and the indigenous people of Abiriw have been characterised by mutual hostility on a collective level, with insistence on traditional religious differences—respectively the one concerned with ancestors, the other with gods—as well as more obvious differences in language, modes of descent (Akuropon being matrilineal and Abiriw patrilineal) and perceptions of a common history. Although it is not approved of, there is considerable intermarriage between the people of the two towns; some of the structural implications of this will concern us below.

The Abiriw elder and I were talking about the recent death of a local and notoriously wealthy businessman. He said:

'These days we are all clamouring for richness and to get rich is the end of everything. So by whatever means, no matter what your birth or position, because you have money we forget about everything and claim you as an important person. Whether you get it by genuine means or foul means, the possession of money is what matters. That is the case with this man.
'He had a Guan mother and an Akan father. Customarily Akans do not care about their children, so it is the mother's brother who looks after them and sends them to school. But we have observed that when our women marry and bring forth there, in Akuropon, their children won't come here; they won't come back to Abiriw. They think it is degrading to be Guans. They think their Akan parentage is more respectable, therefore most of our children remain there, even though they were brought forth and were cared for by the Guan side of the family.

'And, as for this man, his father did not educate him, but when he finished school and went to work, he stayed at Akuropon. These people who are half and half [half Guan and half Akan], we call them *boɔ-fa daded-fa*, which means "half stone, half iron". They speak Akan and refuse to speak Guan even though they know it.

'As this man became prosperous and rich, he was closer to his father's side than to his mother's side, until a certain realisation came to him. He was told that he was still not Akan. So he turned to his mother's side. He came to Abiriw to seek land to build a house. At that time, there were destoolment disputes here, and there was political turmoil; there was no proper chief who could offer him land. So he decided not to build his own house on Akuropon soil either. He built his own house at a place known locally as Ananse Nkwanta, which is on Late land. In addition, he built a house here in Abiriw for his mother. And he renovated his father's house and built houses for his brothers and sisters at Akuropon. He attended functions in Akuropon and in Abiriw. The most significant thing which he did, outside of for his family, was to build a church here. It is a memorial for him.

'He had four wives. None came from either Akuropon or Abiriw.'

The remainder of the paper concerns the meaning of this text and the events to which it refers as these were interpreted and reinterpreted over the weeks following the millionaire's death. Because of the centuries-old opposition between the towns, their respective members interpreted the events quite differently (see Robertson's account, 1973, of 'opposed' histories in Ahafo). Unable to give 'disinterested' interpretations, the various townspeople held to their own criteria of the 'truth' and there were as many well-defined positions as axes of opposition and contention. I, as an ethnographer, lacked information and was learning. Working in both towns, I was able to observe the creation of myths that took their meaning from and could only be understood in the context of the long and difficult relationship between the two towns.

The exegesis of the text is presented chronologically, that is, as I myself came to understand the events to which the elder was referring. An ethnographer can understand events and their contexts neither in a single moment nor in a single dimension; one must watch the meaning of past events as they are examined and then re-examined in the thoughts, words and actions of the people at different points over time. In this case every step in each particular argument took much of its meaning from that of the other side, so neither could be understood in isolation.

I have tried to keep the voices of the various protagonists distinct: the
Christians and non-Christians, the people of Abiriw and Akuropon, the king and his elders, and my own, because each speaks from a different interested position. To make the narrative voices more discretely audible and better to illustrate their different and multiple understandings as they themselves changed in relation to one another over time, I have bracketed and at times broken the flow of the narrative with a number of texts and direct quotations, not as background dialogue but rather to express more directly the temporally shifting, multi-subjective and power-laden context of the reality (see Marcus and Cushman, 1982).

September 1977: The death and the myth of wealth
News reached Akuropon and Abiriw of the death in Germany of Kofi Barima, also known as Rex Addo. For several days no one spoke of anything else. He was certainly the wealthiest man in Akuapem, probably one of the richest in Ghana. Among other businesses, he owned a large company which imported trucks, tractors and other earth-moving machinery. He was, according to the newspapers, fifty-four years old. He is said to have owned six houses in London and nearly ninety in Accra. Everyone was shocked. Because of his death there was even talk of not holding Odwira, the major annual festival of Akuropon, but merely of sprinkling mashed yam for the ancestors, as would be customary were Odwira to coincide with the death of a king.

Many stories circulated as to how he amassed such wealth. Wealth he certainly had. He donated 5,000 cedis (then $5,000) to the Akuropon Presbyterian church at the previous harvest festival. He built the Abiriw Presbyterian church, though some said the money for this would have to be repaid to him. There were numerous stories in Akuropon about how, when he was beginning in business, he cheated certain Akuropon people out of their money. In Accra people relate how once he went to one of the Lebanese-owned stores in Accra and emptied its shelves into his van, commenting as he left, ‘That is only for the interest you owe me.’ It is said in Abiriw that when he was first in business he bought cement from some Germans, used it to build a number of houses for himself, and then declared bankruptcy; the Germans, unable to do anything about it, returned to Europe.

Hardly anyone in Akuropon was sure of Kofi Barima’s origins. Some said his father was a Fante; others that his mother’s father came from Asante. He was known to be related through his father to the Asemhene, one of the sub-chiefs of Akuropon. His mother came from Abiriw and was still alive, although said to be deaf and very ill. He had built a very large and extremely attractive house for himself and his four wives on the far side of Akuropon; was building a large house in Akuropon for all his brothers by the same father; and had already built a house near there for a sibling with whom he shared a mother. It was said that his children were being educated in England and that his four wives rotated in caring for them there, six months at a time. Although cases are known in Akuapem of wealthy men ‘buying’ royal status, it seems that Kofi Barima never competed for chiefly office.

It should be noted that as Kofi Barima became rich, he contributed to the Presbyterian Church, the ‘establishment’ church in Akuapem, which carries
connotations of both high status and schooling. At the same time his wealth made him like a chief and thus vulnerable to other envious people’s ‘bad medicines’, for which he needed to protect himself in the only way known, namely by means of traditional deities and medicines (abosom, asuman and mnuru). Chiefs in Abiriw (who were in a position to know) said that Kofi Barima devoted much attention to Gyamfi abosom, the ‘heathen’ deity of his father. Some townspeople said that such a man, one who dealt unscrupulously in business and so on, rarely lived long.\textsuperscript{11}

The story in Accra, circulated by his business associates, was that he died of a brain haemorrhage, but this was supposed to be very ‘hush-hush’; the public story was that he died of a coronary.\textsuperscript{12} In Akuropon another story was emerging: that he died at eleven o’clock at night in Munich upon leaving a gambling casino. He was, according to this story, a heavy gambler and was shot in the head when leaving the casino having won \$58,000 or \$58,000,000! It is said he was told to continue gambling, but refused and left. There seemed no way to verify such stories in Akuropon as the Asemhene, who had accompanied Kofi Barima to Europe, denied being at the casino with him.\textsuperscript{13} The story for the public was that he died at a business meeting.

All these stories were clearly trying to account for Kofi Barima’s immense wealth. The fact that he was said to have been shot is culturally relevant and points to the continuity over time of indigenous ideas and metaphors about wealth and prestige. In Akuapem a sudden and untimely death is deemed a ‘bad’ death: such a person is called \textit{otsofo} and should have a minimal funeral; formerly the body would just be thrown away. In this case, however, since Kofi Barima was so powerful (an \textit{abirima} or hero) his death was attributed to a gunshot, which subtly suggested through war imagery the most respectable and prestigious type of death possible, that of a warrior. When a chief or a king dies (even from natural causes), songs are sung that he died at war; the memory of an earlier more glorious age thus remains alive.\textsuperscript{14}

\textbf{One week later: Ambiguity of family affiliation}

It appeared there would be a tug-of-war between Akuropon and Abiriw as to who would claim the body. Akuropon people said that his will stated he was to be buried in the garden of his Akuropon residence at Ananse Nkwanta. Abiriw people wanted to bury him in the yard of the Abiriw church that he had built.\textsuperscript{15} The Abiriw Presbyterians appealed to the chief of Abiriw (\textit{Abiriw-ahene}) to approach the family on their behalf: they wanted the body brought to Abiriw, to lie in state and to be buried there.

These appeals and wishes are basic to understanding the whole affair. Funerals are the most important social and ritual event in the life of an Akuapem person, Christian or non-Christian; other \textit{rites de passage} are of minor importance. People return from their farms and workplaces all over Ghana to attend funerals in their home towns, thereby demonstrating kinship ties, factional alliances, political strength, family wealth, individual status and so on. The status of a living person determines the kind of funeral celebrated on his behalf, as well as his status in the land of the ancestors, distinctions being made between commoners, those who occupy black stools\textsuperscript{16} and the king. A large and splendid funeral is considered so
prestigious that one reason often cited by non-royals for converting to Christianity is to have a ‘fine’ funeral.\(^{17}\)

Every funeral has two parts: first, the wake-keeping, lying in state and burial; and, secondly, the announcement of the successor two or three days later. Both the mother’s family and the father’s family name a younger person of the same sex as the deceased to succeed him. In matrilineal Akuropon the odiafo (‘heir-of-things person’) from the mother’s side (abusua, ‘lineage’) is the real successor; the otenakyi (‘he sits behind’) on the father’s side (agyabosom) helps to look after the property and ensures that the odiafo does not behave recklessly. Thus there is a symbolic dualism: matrilineage/patrilineage, control/guardianship, wasteful spending/caring. The odiafo and the otenakyi are not just concerned with inheritance of property, but with orderly succession within the descent group, which is thereby ‘made strong’.

In patrilineal Abiriw the system is the mirror opposite.\(^{18}\)

The problem with choosing a successor for Kofi Barima was that his lineage status was uncertain: it was not clear from which town he really came. To clear up this problem discussions began about who should hold the funeral, so the funeral itself would settle and validate that decision.

According to Abiriw custom, if an Abiriw (Guan) woman marries an Akuropon (Akan) man, the children inherit from neither side and the responsibility for the upbringing and education falls on the family of the woman, even though in both towns the education should properly be the responsibility of the father. In such a case the family of the mother of the deceased names the successor and distributes the property as though the deceased were illegitimate. According to Akuropon custom, Akuropon could not name the successor or take charge of his successor since his mother did not come from Akuropon. Moreover, the mother was alive and the father was dead, so therefore she had more say than anyone. What should have happened was for the mother’s brother to meet with Kofi Barima’s sisters, brothers and the Abiriw elders, and then with his children, in order to decide what to do before the father’s side was informed of the decision.

4 October: Wealth and the authority of the king and chiefs

In Akuropon the king (Omanhene) discussed with his elders whether or not to provide a state funeral for Kofi Barima in the Akuropon palace.\(^{19}\) They decided to ask his relatives. Kofi Barima was neither a royal nor the child of one; he was rich, but he was an ordinary man. The reason for considering a state funeral was simply his great prominence: he was widely known in business circles and greatly esteemed by government officials. It is said that he had a great deal of foreign exchange and used it to import rice, tinned milk, sugar and other essential commodities on behalf of the government. A state funeral would encourage other young men to work hard and emulate Kofi Barima’s success.\(^{20}\)

In Abiriw the chief asked to have Kofi Barima’s funeral in the Abiriw church. The representative of his father refused because he said Kofi Barima had indicated he wanted to be laid in state at his Akuropon residence and buried there as well.

According to Akan custom the father is responsible for the funeral. It is announced to the townspeople in the name of the father and ‘supported’ by
an elder man on the mother's side, the *abusua panyin*. If the mother's brother makes the announcement, it means the deceased has no father who will take the responsibility. Furthermore the dead body is usually laid in state in the father's house. If, for any reason, the matrilineal kin think he must be laid in state in the mother's house, then they must go to the father with a bottle of schnapps and appeal for permission. If the father agrees, then that will be done; if the father says no, then the body must be laid in state in the father's house.\(^{21}\) In Abiriw it is the same; according to Guan custom, the father buys the coffin, takes charge of the burial and has the reflected glory.

So on 18 October the body was sent to Accra and laid in state in Kofi Barima's Accra house for the business community there to come to sympathise and pay their respects. Then, on Saturday, 21 October, the body was taken to the Abiriw church for two or three hours, and from there was taken to Kofi Barima's house at Ananse Nkwanta for further celebrations and burial.\(^{22}\)

18 October, Akuropon

The previous day two chiefs had been sent to Accra to invite members of Kofi Barima's Funeral Planning Committee to the Akuropon palace. Many rulers from other kingdoms were expected and, because it was to be a countrywide funeral, the king of Akuapem would also have to be there. The chiefs had waited all day in Accra but no one came; this was now reported to the elders of Akuropon and to the Akuapem king.

CHIEF 1: The Asemhene should have come right away to report to us. Maybe someone will come, so we should wait until morning to decide.

KING: No. It would be better if everyone makes a firm decision whether, in view of what has happened, the king should go to the funeral or stay in the palace.\(^{23}\)

CHIEF 1: The king should go to the funeral, pour libation for Kofi Barima, pay his respects and give him some money for the road.\(^{24}\) He should stay for a few minutes and then leave. Other chiefs may come and go; the king can receive them in his house [i.e. in the palace].

CHIEF 2: The family [i.e. the Funeral Planning Committee] did not show respect for the king, therefore, instead of going, the king should depute one or two people to go and present *asiede* ['things used to bury the body'].

CHIEF 1: Up to now, no one has said anything. Even his 'father' the Tredehene [the sub-chief who succeeded Kofi Barima's father] is still in his village and has not come to tell us anything.\(^{25}\)

KING: Yes. If I go, I am going as a stranger, but that is not proper. It is an important subject of mine who is dead, so I must go as someone who knows what is happening. Therefore I will not go.

CHIEF 1: We will not run away and leave the king. We will all stay with him.

KING: We will all meet again Wednesday to decide on the people to send with the things from the king.

In the evening several important chiefs from other Akuapem towns came privately to encourage the king to go to the funeral. They did not say who had
told them that he would not attend, but said that they had dreamed it. Many Akurupon elders believed that if the king were to go, then outsiders would not realise that the Funeral Planning Committee had not shown the king due respect or that the king had been angry about the funeral plans; if he went it would curtail gossip.

It was becoming clear that the Planning Committee had many supporters from the faction opposing the king;26 this is what the king feared and perhaps why he was so sensitive. Akurupon people had reports that in Accra the son of the king’s former opponent was announcing Kofi Barima’s funeral on the radio and television, reciting all the appellations of the seventeen towns in Akuapem and saying dammirfua (‘sympathy’, i.e. the funeral dirge); however, he was reciting them geographically in order from Berekuso (the southernmost town) to Mamfe, and from Abiriw to Aprede (the northernmost), so omitting Akurupon (which lies in the middle, between Mamfe and Abiriw). Or so it was said. The king’s supporters said the king must be strong or he would lose authority: ‘He should call this man [i.e. his former opponent’s son] to the palace to explain, and then exile him from the state.’

18 October, Abiriw: The family and lineage, further arguments

Competition now focused upon who would control the funeral money and take responsibility for the funeral—the father’s side or the mother’s? Then, finally, the Presbyterians entered the fray.

It was known that 30,000 cedis ($30,000) had been set aside for the funeral by Kofi Barima’s company in Accra. The funeral committee, consisting of the mother’s family and the father’s family,27 plus executives of the company, met and everyone was given a responsibility: ordering and arranging for chairs, food, drink, the coffin, his attire (shroud), his burial (gravedigging) and so on. Drinks must be offered to sympathisers at the funeral28 and the announcement of the death to the chiefs and to prominent notables is always accompanied by drinks (two bottles of schnapps to both the king and the Nifahene,29 chief of the northern Guan towns); an area adjacent to the house was bulldozed to provide space for parking cars and lorries and for the canopies which would shelter the musicians and chiefs from the heat of the afternoon sun. The money was shared out according to everyone’s responsibility,30 but the father’s family took control of everything (they took the keys to the safe from the wife, and so on); and the Asemhene (one of Kofi Barima’s paternal parallel cousins) and an elder full brother were put in charge. The mother’s side said nothing, but the mother’s brother was given 1,000 cedis ($1,000) for any expenses he incurred. Abiriw elders commented ruefully he was not bold enough to take the body (as he might at least have attempted to do); that if the father’s side could not choose the successor, then they should not have taken the 30,000 cedis for the funeral nor have taken the keys (though it was acknowledged privately that Kofi Barima’s mother’s brothers were a rather incompetent lot, one being weak and another a drunkard).

What lay behind this was the following. According to Abiriw custom (see above), the father (or his successor) is responsible for burying his child.31 After the burial a successor is named (who takes charge of the wife, children and property). Normally the successor to a deceased male is chosen by the
father or a younger remaining male of the father’s generation within the lineage and is chosen from the younger remaining males of the deceased’s own generation within the same lineage. But in Kofi Barima’s case the mother’s brother had to choose the successor from his own lineage. Because his mother came from Abiriw and his father from Akuropon, he inherited from neither town. If he did not inherit property from his father, then if he acquired property it should go to his mother’s side. An Abiriw elder explained:

‘If he stayed here, in Abiriw, his mother’s brother would succeed him. If you are illegitimate, the mother’s brother takes charge of the child as if he is his own son. So, even if he doesn’t inherit property here, his property cannot go to his father’s side, it goes to his mother’s side. . . . Besides, Kofi Barima’s mother’s brothers sent him to school, not his father. He has no father there.’

It is for this reason that Abiriw people said the funeral should have been the full responsibility of the mother’s family in Abiriw and the family of the deceased should have used the mother’s brother’s name to make the funeral announcement. So when the Asemhene (Kofi Barima’s agya-maa, ‘father’s child’) took charge of everything, the Chief of Abiriw told Kofi Barima’s mother’s brother that this was wrong, and that if they would formally tell him of the death (i.e. according to custom) he would take charge of the funeral on their behalf. This they refused to do.32

So, because of Kofi Barima’s wealth and what he had done for the town, and because he had given them the church and important persons would come to the funeral, the Chief of Abiriw decided he could not just sit doing nothing while everything went on around him, even though he had not been customarily informed. Therefore the town elders decided to hold Kofi Barima’s funeral in Abiriw. The Chief of Abiriw’s spokesman went with a linguist staff to all the Nifa Division towns and officially informed them of the death and the date of the funeral, and they all promised to attend.33

The Akuropon Presbyterians had said that Kofi Barima was not a Christian, so they would hold no church service for him. The Abiriw Presbyterian minister, however, said, ‘He is my church member, so I will take responsibility for the funeral and perform a church service for him.’

Upon hearing this, an Abiriw elder dryly and astutely commented:

‘If they had adhered to the rules, they would not allow a man with a number of wives to have a church funeral. And probably they would not have accepted his money to build the church. He is not fit enough to be a Christian, therefore his money is not required. If he is not a full communicant, he cannot go to church for the funeral. If he does go [i.e. if his corpse is brought to the church for the funeral], then it is the size of his purse that matters.’

It is clear that if there had been no witnesses to show that Kofi Barima had wanted to be buried on his own estate, the Abiriw elders would have insisted he be buried in Abiriw. Had that happened there would have been certain trouble with Akuropon. Seemingly, the Abiriw Presbyterian minister, together with the Chief of Abiriw and his elders, took charge in a situation
where the mother’s brothers of the deceased, for whatever reason, were unable or unwilling to act. They thus formed an opposition to the Akuropon Presbyterian church and to the king, a pattern that was a long-standing one.

19 October, Akuropon: Further doubts and reflections on the king’s position
The state chiefs met with the king to decide what to do. The king had still been told nothing by the family and therefore had to accept that the funeral was to be celebrated as for an ordinary man. The king was being swayed to attend the funeral despite the disrespect that had been shown to him. It was alleged that the Funeral Planning Committee had invited the king of Asante and the king of Akyem (who had deputed six state chiefs to attend the funeral), and so the king of Akuapem could with reason have expected his own state to be formally invited. They decided to send immediately for the Tredehene and Asemhene (sub-chiefs from Kofi Barima’s father’s family) to explain.

Meanwhile privately it was being said that the Asemhene had a grievance with the king. It was said that he thought that although the announcement of Kofi Barima’s death was made after the beginning of Odwira, the ban on mourning could have been lifted for a few days for such an important personality; but the king did not do it. Furthermore Odwira should not have been celebrated the way it was: mashed yam could have been sprinkled for the ancestors, but the Friday durbar should not have been performed; and when it was, the king should not have worn gold necklaces, he should have been in a state of mourning. Other chiefs had not ridden in palanquins but walked; yet the king had celebrated joyfully; and on Sunday, the last day of Odwira, he had attended the Presbyterian church dressed in white cloth. In spite of this the king wanted to arrange the funeral. Akuropon elders said the Asemhene had still been wrong not to have come when the king called him, that as one of the king’s advisers he should have told the king how to behave. But it was thought unlikely that the Asemhene would do this, as kings do not greatly like to be criticised.

Ritual occasions such as Odwira and big funerals are the major arenas for expressing political support, opposition and conflict. By withdrawing his services the Asemhene used a traditional sanction in this apparently ‘modern’ situation.

20 October, Akuropon
The elders met again in the palace and again the Asemhene did not come.

Chief 1: The Tredehene, as ‘father’, was invited to bury his son, as the deceased, wealthy or not, should be in his father’s house. The next day the Tredehene said he was leaving for his village, but he had given all his powers to the Asemhene, who is educated [i.e. literate]. The Asemhene then said that he could not change the place of the funeral—that it was to be at Kofi Barima’s own house at Ananse Nkwanta. We have been told nothing. The kingdoms of Akwamu, Asante and Fante are all invited to the funeral, and many have heard the radio announcement giving sympathy (dammirifua) to the chiefs of Akuapem, but none to Akuropon. Therefore we have asked the Tredehene to come and tell us why.
FUNERAL POLITICS IN GHANA

Why is it that Akuropon does not know anything? The king’s name is not even in the newspaper announcement. Why? The Asemhene’s name is there.

Tredehene: Thank you all for showing such interest in my ‘son’. My son is not elevated by the state. [He is just a commoner.] But because he interested himself in the affairs of the state, you invited him . . . My eyes are only one, so I left all in the hands of the Asemhene. I suggest you get hold of him and what is wrong can be corrected. You know that I cannot do anything against you.

Chief 1: Mistakes were committed on your behalf because you are the ‘father’. They were committed in your name and cannot be corrected. Therefore, come, I will ask pardon of the state on your behalf. [A stronger person pleads and protects a junior or weaker one.]

Chiefs 2 and 3: We should be pacified. He has not apologised, therefore decide with what he should pacify us. [If you apologise, you must offer something: e.g. a sheep or schnapps.]

NifaHene: Kofi Barima’s money is paying for his own funeral and the Asemhene is there and will not come. The king and the Tredehene do not know about it. I was invited by the Chief of Abiriw with 2.8 cedis for the funeral announcement and asked where did the money come from. The Chief of Abiriw also complained that he had not been told anything by the family. Therefore we should realise something is going on. It is an Akuropon problem (asem). As for what Chief 1 has said, the ‘father’ was wrong and he is going to apologise and we should accept his apology, for if not, it will take us many days because there are many things mixed up here.

The elders adjourned to consult in private. When they returned to tell the gathering of their decision, they said they had consulted Aberewatia, an old (and imaginary) woman who has ‘wisdom’ (i.e. who knows genealogy and history) and so can advise on customary family procedure.34

Chief 1: Aberewatia asked why did the Asemhene first approach the king and use his name to inform Acheampong, the president of Ghana, but then not use it to invite the other chiefs? Aberewatia says it is wrong. The Tredehene and his people were wrong. But Aberewatia says the Asemhene is on the Traditional Council and he did this error, therefore she says we should forgive the Tredehene [who is lower in rank].

It was agreed that they would all come on the following day to escort the king to the funeral and stay there with him.

Saturday, 21 October: The quandary of the church
In Abiriw the new Presbyterian chapel was filled to capacity on the occasion of the funeral service for Kofi Barima. This was the first time the church was in use and the coffin was displayed prominently in front of the altar. Outside meanwhile, in front of the chapel under a canopy protecting them from the sun, the non-Christian Chief of Abiriw sat in state with his elders and attendants to receive the visiting chiefs from the other Guan towns in the Nifa Division and to watch the traditional dancing performed to the f\textit{omfrom}
drums. The Christian/non-Christian cleavage was thus, for the moment, represented spatially; later they would be joined in opposition to Akuropon.

In Akuropon thousands attended the funeral celebrations at Kofi Barima’s house at Ananse Nkwanta. The king also came with a large retinue of attending town chiefs. The Nifahene went, and paid 50 cedis on behalf of the Nifa Division for Kofi Barima’s journey to the ancestors. He was also there on behalf of his daughter, who was Kofi Barima’s fourth wife. The Chief of Abiriw had not been informed by Akuropon of the king’s plans, nor had he been told officially by the family of Kofi Barima, so he did not go. Official delegates for the Chief of Abiriw did attend, however, and paid their respects to the dead by giving 4.8 cedis for the journey to the ancestors. Despite the elaborate preparations, the chiefs who attended later complained of the disorder: people were not welcomed according to their rank but were put together without proper hierarchy.

Monday, 23 October: Abiriw and Akuropon; succession
On the day for choosing Kofi Barima’s successor hundreds attended. In Akuropon itself everyone was talking about the cause of his death: he had been shot. I asked how they knew.

‘The women did the customary rites and thereby found out. The women from the father’s and the mother’s family must bathe the body, even though it had been in the ‘fridge’ [i.e. the mortuary]. They did this after it was brought back—in a small way—while he was still in the coffin. And they noticed a wound on his side. His mother already knew. He [i.e. his ghost] came to tell his mother he was dead and lying in blood long before she was officially told.’

There was also much talk about the Asemhene being in deep trouble. He did not inform the king of the funeral arrangements and he gave contradictory reports as to the cause of death. The Asemhene was with Kofi Barima before his death. It was thought that he knew how he died, the implication being that he was somehow involved in the death. It was also suggested that the Asemhene was feathering his own nest somehow with the 30,000 cedis he controlled for the funeral. Finally, at the funeral, the Asemhene became possessed. This, it was agreed, must have had implications, and they could not be good ones.

There was also renewed ‘family’ arguments at continual meetings. While Akuropon customarily could not elect Kofi Barima’s successor, they wanted someone from Akuropon to take charge of the wealth so that it would remain in Akuropon. The Abiriw family, knowing that they had customary authority, met and chose a candidate to appoint as successor. According to custom, the children inherit from their father, but a successor must be appointed to take charge of the property on behalf of the children so that the property will be fairly distributed. He will become the ‘father’. However, before leaving for Kofi Barima’s house the eldest full brother of Kofi Barima came and told the family that he wanted to be the successor. This was not customary, as it should be a younger person than the deceased or the mother’s sister’s son (as in Akuropon); nevertheless the family yielded.

So at Akuropon the Tredehene told the spokesman to ask the ‘family’ (i.e.
the mother’s side) to name their successor. The *abusua panyin* stood and said Kofi Barima was succeeded by his children and they had appointed his elder brother as administrator of the property on behalf of the children. The elder brother was called in front of the assembly and declared administrator. The Abiriw spectators were pleased, for it meant the children came from Abiriw, were inheriting from their father, and therefore were not from Akuropon. Then someone was named from the father’s side to link the families and to check misbehaviour of the successor on the mother’s side, as is customary. The children were asked if they agreed, and then the successor was asked to slaughter five sheep and to give one bottle of rum. From now on whatever any wife received would come from her children.

Despite everything that had gone on in the past weeks, it was only when the elder brother was named as successor that Abiriw people formally knew that Kofi Barima came from Abiriw and not from Akuropon. His home-town status was finally validated; until that time anything could have happened. The issue of Christianity verses ‘heathenism’, however, was not so easy to resolve.

*Abiriw and Akuropon: the Church, wealth and family stability*

Kofi Barima had four wives. He married a Kwawu woman when his father was alive and a representative of the father performed the necessary ‘customs’. He stayed with her for eight years, but they had no child during that time. Then he befriended an Accra woman who became pregnant, so they too were customarily married. Two other wives followed. The Kwawu wife and the Accra wife both claimed seniority. The Kwawu woman knew all his secrets, where his wealth was and how it came about: he came and went with her. She was instrumental in building the Abiriw church, so Akuropon people were against her and decided the Accra woman should be named as senior wife. Thus on Monday, when the wives were named, the first was the Accra woman, then the Kwawu woman and then the others. There was a loud protest from the elder sister of the Kwawu woman. The father’s spokesman said he did not know about that marriage as he did not witness it; he knew of the Accra marriage. It was not argued further at the time. In fact, as far as property is concerned, it made little difference; as there were four wives, the property would be divided into four equal parts, no matter whether one wife had more children than another. Fighting for seniority does not mean much in material terms, though it is more prestigious to be the first wife, and her son is the senior of all the children and has a certain advantage, for he will be in charge of the house, property and contents of his father’s ‘box’. ‘It is good being senior,’ I was told. Nothing was said about the will. Apparently Kofi Barima had made one and then withdrawn it and made another, but had not signed the second.

In Abiriw (and in Akuropon), when a Christian dies, the Presbyterians attend on the day the successor is chosen: they are witnesses to see to it that the property of the deceased who was Christian is distributed in a Christian way, which is different from the customary way. Since Kofi Barima was laid in state in the Abiriw Presbyterian church and had a Christian funeral and burial, the Abiriw Christians intended to go to his house on Monday to name the successor. But the Akuropon Presbyterians told them that they could not
do that because Kofi Barima had four wives, and if they did it would bring confusion. But, as an elder commented, 'There already is confusion; they brought him to the church and buried him!'

The background to this is as follows: according to the regulations of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, Kofi Barima could not be a communicant because he had four wives, and if one is not a full communicant of the church, one's body is not sent to the chapel for the funeral but only to the graveside, where the burial service is performed by only a single Presbyter. If one is a communicant, however, one's body is sent to the church, where a service is performed before being taken to the graveside for another service. Since Kofi Barima built a chapel for the Presbyterian Church in Abiriw, the Moderator of the Presbyterian Church was invited to officiate at the burial service and there was a full service at the chapel before Kofi Barima’s body was sent to the graveside. All this deviated from the rules. But because of the roles played by the Abiriw priest and the Moderator of the Presbyterian Church from Accra at the church and at the graveside, the Abiriw Presbyters asked the Akuropon Presbyters to come to the funeral on Monday. As the Christians had buried him, they would have to be present when the successor was chosen. They would be witnesses together. The Akuropon Christians said that, while Kofi Barima gave many gifts to the church, he was not a communicant, therefore they would not bury him and did not want to attend. According to the Abiriw Christians, he was a member of their church, with a card, and paid his dues, even though he was not a communicant; therefore they would bury him as a benefactor.

On 10 November there was a memorial service in the Abiriw Presbyterian church for Kofi Barima, and on 11 December there was one in the Akuropon Presbyterian church. The Presbyterians of both towns wanted to honour his memory for what he had done for both churches. The Akuropon Christians peevishly grumbled that Abiriw had no right to hold a memorial service before theirs, yet they did not schedule it on the same day as they knew people would go to Abiriw to see the new church.

As for the confusion, a Swiss missionary attached to the Basel Mission, who was visiting Akuropon at the time, told me that it did not mean anything as far as the Presbyterian Church of Ghana was concerned that Kofi Barima’s body was brought to the church; since the chapel had not yet been consecrated the Presbyterian Church of Ghana's rules did not fully apply and the funeral could take place there without going into all the questions which would have had to be clarified for a funeral in a full Presbyterian church. In other words, it was really just like his house, and a big one at that. But there was no disputing the fact that the burial service was done by a Presbyterian minister, indeed by the Moderator of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana himself. It was generally agreed that if Kofi Barima had been a poor person, the Christians would have said they would not bury him simply because there was drumming.\footnote{Afterword}

The Abiriw elder explained:

'The reason they asked the Akuropon Presbyters to come on Monday is because the Christians buried him, therefore they have to be present for
choosing the successor, and so on. Abiriw did it to spite Akurop. From the start Akurop Christians said he was not a communicant. As for paying dues, he has done far more than that with his gifts to the Akurop church. But he had four wives, so they won’t take him to the church and won’t bury him. The Abiriw Christians said he is a member of our church and has a card and pays dues, therefore we’ll bury him. Then the Akurop Christians said he’s a member of our Akurop church: he was confirmed here, therefore we’ll bury him. But the Abiriw Christians had the first claim. So all combined to bury him as a Christian. The Asemhene wanted all the Akurop Christians there in order to spite Abiriw. So each community claimed him. And so Akurop could have the memorial service, so they too could collect donations.

‘On the other hand, Kofi Barima himself had said he was under the deity called Gyamfi; he was a supplicant to Gyamfi obosom. Therefore how can he be a Christian? Even though he built a Christian church in Abiriw, he did not expect the Christians to accept him. He built the church as a business enterprise. His Kwawu wife was a Christian here. She could register here and be a communicant. Therefore why not he accompany her? Maybe someday he would have left Gyamfi and converted to Christianity like his wife. He was “under conversion” and he registered and was given a card, but he was not a communicant; he did not receive Holy Communion.’

CONCLUSION

The incident we have been examining concerns one man, atypical primarily because of his very great wealth. The circumstances in which he was caught up are not unusual in other respects. He was a man from two towns (which were opposed for historical and social reasons), and he and his various kin played with that conflict, going from one to the other. Kofi Barima was wealthy and therefore powerful; but wealth here (as elsewhere) has to be transformed, legitimised. In this kingdom high status and privilege are traditionally associated with chieftaincy and high office; or alternatively with literacy and its concomitant Christianity. Kofi Barima was not a royal and he could not inherit a title in either town. But he acquired some of the traditional attributes of wealth: many houses, many wives (and the necessary protection from the envy of others by means of offerings to traditional ‘fetishes’). At the same time Kofi Barima associated himself with the Presbyterians (the ‘establishment’ Christians): he attended the Presbyterian churches of both towns, made many highly generous offerings and indeed built them a chapel; he also educated his children in Europe. At his death the structural ambiguities and paradoxes inherent in his multiple affiliations were brought into the open. His funeral was the arena for resolving the inherent contradictions.

I have described the detailed minutiae of the social actions surrounding one person’s death in order to show how multifaceted conversion is in actuality and how exceedingly difficult it is to separate conversion as ideology from the strategies of individual and community politics and economics. As Kofi Barima changed his status and became rich, he tried to change his kinship
and home-town affiliation and to juggle two ‘churches’ (that of the Presbyte-
rians and that of Gyamfi ebosom). The completion of his conversion
occurred after his death when the Christians said he was their convert
because they buried him. The funeral was the ultimate validation of his
conversion, as it was of his home-town and kinship affiliation. Conversion
here was not just a question of one individual’s belief; the community had to
accept him, and it was a political issue as well because he was rich. Kofi
Barima gave money to the Presbyterian Church, it seems, largely to be
noticed and remembered, and he appears to have been more interested in
acquiring a firm and respectable social classification while at the same time
receiving mystical protection than in adhering to the logic of a mutually
exclusive religious system. While one may see conversion as a form of
acquiring a new social identity, it is more than that. Kofi Barima already had
a widely recognised, respected and even feared social identity. However, he
lacked the properly sanctioned legitimisation of that identity. He still needed
a reclassification of his status, and for this he required a legitimate religious
identity and a legitimate home-town (descent) identity. This could only be
given by others, and in this case it only came after his physical death; his
social death sealed his having undergone conversion (and established him as
an Abiriw subject as well). One can convert for many different reasons and on
fronts which are opposed. The categories involved in conversion are more
complicated and more overlapping than the literature suggests.

NOTES
1 The name of the Ghanaian gentleman who is the subject of this paper and the businesses in
which he had an interest have been changed, as have the titles of the chiefs who were his
kinsmen. There is neither Asemhene nor Tredehene in Akuropon. Many of the people
concerned are alive and have a right not to be embarrassed by material published about them.
The ‘facts’ are as reported.
2 There is relatively little written about Akuapem. The best history of the kingdom is by
Kwamenapoh (1973); see also Wilks (1964) and Reindorf (1951). Brokensha did a general
survey of the state (1972) and a study of the Guan town of Late (1966). Middleton (1979 and
1983) wrote accounts of the capital, and Gilbert (1987) a brief account of the kingship. The
historic roots of the conflict between the towns and within the towns can be partly traced in the
Ghana National Archives, Accra, and in the Basel Mission Archives. I shall examine these past
cries related to the chieftaincy structure in Akuropon and Abiriw in a future publication.
3 This is the patrilineal Guan view of the matrilineal Akan. Ideally the Akan father is
responsible for his son’s education, as is the Guan father. In fact, in Akuropon, due to moral
pressure on the mother’s brother, nephews often go to university on abusua (‘clan’) money while
sons stop at middle school due to lack of funds.
4 While Ananse Nkwanta is legally on Late land, in popular thought it is considered to be part of
Akuropon. In recent years land has become a delicate and volatile issue in the relations
between Akuropon and Abiriw. Note that the name as well as the location of this house is
liminal. Ananse refers to the culture hero and trickster Ananse the Spider. Nkwanta means a
crossroads.
5 All Akuapem people have several names. Kofi is a name for any man born on a Friday, while
Barima means a hero, an important man, a man with a capital M, as it were. Addo is a family
name, traditionally bestowed by one’s father; the connotation of Rex as king is well known in
this former British colony with kingships of its own. Both names allude to the publicly
acknowledged Akan title of Obirempom, which itself resonates images of accumulated wealth
(women, land and subjects) and public display. McCaskie (1983 and 1986) masterfully describes
the contemporary successful businessman as a ‘new-model Obirempom’.

The real names of this man have been changed, but the connotations of the original names
have been retained.
Whether or not this is an exaggeration is not important. The point is that houses are not a neutral commodity in Akuapem. Traditionally, wealth was expressed by owning slaves, gold and cloth (as movable property); land and houses (as immovable property). With proceeds from the cocoa boom in the 1920s and 1930s all who could built 'storey' houses (two-storeyed wood and plaster houses), and the years since independence have seen the rise of many splendid Mediterranean-style mansions in Akuapem and elsewhere. Most of the latter were built with self-earned money; money deriving from family land is usually recirculated to family members or used to improve or build a new 'family' house.

The Presbyterian church is the 'establishment' Christian church in Akuapem. Formerly Abiriw Christians worshipped at the Presbyterian church in Akuropon. Wishing to build their own chapel, they approached Kofi Barima. The Abiriw church was a pre-financed building: that is, he paid for everything, apparently with the idea that, once completed, the congregation would pay him back. When it was almost finished, he died and nothing had been written about repayment; he had just put it off. The Moderator of the Presbyterian Church said that Kofi Barima stated he was building it for God, so neither the children nor the successor should say, 'I'm going to demand money from the church.' The Abiriw townspeople said he did it for Abiriw because his mother came from that town.

Again, this may be a 'myth'. These myths of a local nouveau riche getting the better of Lebanese and German businessmen have obvious implications of the 'local boy makes good and beats the wicked foreigners'. This points to another issue, namely that to be nouveau riche in modern Ghana is to be admired, not condemned. Wilks (1979: 20), discussing the emphasis on individual achievement among the Asante and the concept of okaniba, the good citizen who makes money by skill and industry, notes that 'It is implicit in this view of society that the wealthy citizen will take every opportunity conspicuously to display his riches, and to acquire formal recognition of his achievement at whatever level is appropriate. . .' McCaskie (1983: 27) describes the Obirempn as the primary referent for the okaniba. Public display of wealth and largesse seems always to have been the norm in Akuapem, although the expression Late-kan-so (literally, 'on the road to Late', the place where many early Presbyterians lived) refers to a tradition (derived from Basel Mission discipline presumably) of quiet, unassuming moral integrity, without arrogance or ostentation. This perhaps is the exception that proves the rule. Beideman (1982: 12) appositely observes that ' . . . for most Africans conversion to Christianity is associated with securing access to modern skills and superior social status, rather than with developing homely virtues defined by dour, atavistic missionaries'.

This also illustrates his mythical status as an outsider and stranger.

In fact, Kofi Barima's father came from Akuropon and his mother from Abiriw. The Asemhene was his father's brother's son.

The assumption here is that an hbosom or suman killed him: an unnatural or early death is implied. This kind of ex post facto explanation is always considered after a death which is out of the ordinary. There are many stories about a man dying just after or just before the completion of a new house. It costs a lot of money to build a house, and often a new house is built when a lineage segments. Jealousy and envy on the part of others, or witchcraft, are therefore considered to be the causes of death.

I have no idea as to the actual cause of his death, nor why a coronary is better than a brain haemorrhage, though heads are symbolically important—in war and in ritual sacrifices. Medically either could be the case, as high blood pressure is endemic in this part of Ghana and he clearly led a fairly fast life.

It is said that the Asemhene, a relative and an employee of Kofi Barima's Accra business, accompanied him to Europe in part for medical reasons of his own. His presence in Germany left him vulnerable to accusations of inside knowledge and possible involvement in the death.

See Arhin (1986: 27) on the view of 'progress' of the early twentieth century Asante asonkofo (wealthy traders/businessmen); they traced it from warriors to merchants, traders, Christians, and men of property with well-educated children. See also McCaskie (1983 and 1986) on the continuity of ideas about wealth among the Asante.

The Abiriw Presbyterian church, while completed as a building, had not yet been dedicated as a church. Some said that Kofi Barima was building it so that when his mother died she could have a very big funeral there, that he was planning it as a memorial for her.

Black stools are ancestral shrines. The occupant of a black stool is a ruler and a hereditary lineage or clan elder.

A non-royal Christian funeral emphasises (in testimonials and eulogies) the achievements of an individual on earth; royal non-Christian funerals (with no eulogies) stress the continuity of the
deceased chief with his ancestors and lineage, perhaps another reason for the conversion of high achievers of ambiguous ancestry.

A considerable body of work on related subjects in other Akan kingdoms exists (cf. Fortes, 1969, on the Asante, and Christensen, 1954, on the Fante). This is not the place for a comparative study of Akan institutions but the reader should be cautioned that subtle differences do exist and words for the 'same' concept often differ from one kingdom to another; for example, Akuapem agyabosom is the same as Asante ntoro and Techiman–Bono ntom.

Some years before, an important minister for the state of Ghana who came from Akuropon was killed, and because many influential outsiders were expected to attend the funeral he was laid in state in the palace. The resulting pollution was deemed so severe that, to renew the power of the town, a live oguan-funuma (a newborn lamb with the umbilical cord still attached) was buried under the sacrificial stone in front of the palace.

In nineteenth-century Asante lavish funerals were made for the wealthy in recognition of their contribution to the national wellbeing; no funerals were celebrated for those in debt. Wilks (1979: 11) notes '... the man (or woman) of self-acquired property was regarded as—and indeed was—the benefactor of the community by virtue of the system of death duties,' a practice only abandoned at the end of that century (see Arhin, 1974; McCaskie, 1983: 34).

Generally this is arranged amicably: the Asafohene's funeral in 1985 was an exception. In that case there were three axes of conflict: between the king and the Kurontihene (the senior divisional chief of Akuapem), between the Christians and non-Christians, and between the father's side (agyabosom) and the matriline (abusua).

When the Asafohene died, the Kurontihene and his people wanted to bury him because he was a royal (adheye) in their family and a chief. The king too, as father, wanted to bury him, for he was the child of a former king (shenba). The king said, 'He is my son, so the palace is where he should be laid in state. Furthermore, six months ago you told me he resigned his post as Asafohene, and you brought someone to me to succeed him as Asafohene.' The Kurontihene replied, 'He resigned, but we didn't accept his resignation.' Needless to say, trouble ensued.

The children of the Asafohene cooperated with the king, and arranged for a grave to be dug in the Christian cemetery, because when the Asafohene resigned he became a member of the Christian community, gave up his other wives and was admitted for communion. But the Kurontihene and his elders arranged to bury him in the Kurontihene's ancestral grove, as a traditional chief should be buried. So two canopies were erected to protect the mourners from the sun, two sets of chairs were arranged, two graves prepared, two of everything. On Friday evening, the children, who managed to get the body from the mortuary, had wake-keeping in the palace; and at the Kurontihene's house all the customary rites were performed, but without the dead body. There was drumming in both places. The people of Akuropon went to one or the other funeral, depending upon their family and political alliances: it is said the Kurontihene threatened to punish those relatives and dependents who went to the palace. On Saturday everyone went to pay homage to the deceased lying in state and the Christians came and buried the dead body in the Christian cemetery. Again there was drumming and singing in both places. On Monday the Kurontihene was invited to the palace to help choose the successor. He refused to go. Instead he went to the Moderator of the Presbyterian Church and complained that the local pastor had organised the (funerary) succession without the abusua panyin from the mother's side. The Moderator investigated, found that according to Akan custom the father must be obeyed in these matters, and told the Kurontihene that he could not help him. The case was finally brought up in the palace: the Kurontihene was found guilty and asked to slaughter three sheep. On the level of politics, many believe the Kurontihene was the victor.

The delay in performing the funeral was both because it took time to plan such an elaborate funeral and bring the body from Europe, but also because during the celebration of Odwira no dead body may be brought to the town.

The king hoped they would plan the funeral with him so that he could send his spokesmen, sword-carriers and other officials. As they did not invite him, he could not send anyone; it would be humiliating for the king's delegates to go with linguist staffs (the official staff carried by the 'linguists': or chiefly spokeswomen) and other regalia and then be turned away.

When a person dies it is believed that he goes on a journey to the land of the ancestors; thus he is given spending money to buy water to quench his thirst on the road.

Staying away from the palace, i.e. withholding support, is the main way to show political protest and disaffection. In this case, the 'father' had a reasonable excuse: he was performing the annual festival for his deity, Gyamfi obosom.

I.e. supporters of the king's main opponent of two years previously. The king had been
entooled then in a bitterly contested installation and the rivalry was still not dead. The opponent came from a different royal sub-lineage; the houses rotate. The same factions were just as acrimoniously opposed in 1900.

27 The 'family' comprised the Tredhehene of Akuporon (who succeeded Kofi Barima's father), aided by the Asemhene (Kofi Barima's paternal parallel cousin), who took great responsibility for the funeral, and Kofi Barima's mother and her brothers from Abiriw.

28 Funerals are a time for weeping and drinking. Everyone fasts.

29 The Akupem kingdom is divided into four divisions or 'wings' for war: right, left, centre and forward. The Nifahene is chief of the Right Wing, which comprises the northern Guan towns, including Abiriw.

30 At the end of a funeral accounts are rendered: sometimes they exceed the amount, sometimes they make a loss. When the successor is chosen, sympathisers who also attend the burial donate small amounts of money to help offset the funeral expenses.

31 In Abiriw, when the children are grown up, it is they who bear the expense of the burial and lying in state of their father. A husband bears the expenses of the coffin and grave for his deceased wife, but he cannot bury her; he must inform her father and convey the body to her father's house, where she will be laid in state and buried next to her father. Her father then bears the rest of the funeral expenses.

32 They said the 'father' should customarily inform the Chief of Abiriw and his elders; and the 'father' said his son belonged to the family on the mother's side and therefore the family would have to inform the 'father' first.

33 All the towns of the Nifa Division are Guan. Administratively they are all under the Nifahene, who is the chief of Adukrom. The spokesman paid 2.40 cedis as the funeral announcement fee to Dawu, Awukugua, Apirede, Aseseso and Abonse towns, and 4.80 cedis to the Nifahene at Adukrom.

34 Responsibility for all decisions made in private consultation are projected in this way onto an imaginary old wise woman. 'Ma yenko bisa aberewatia' means 'Let us go and ask a very old woman [i.e. take counsel]' (Christaller, 1933: 18).

35 Funtunfum dancing is a form of mime and takes great skill and grace to perform well. In the past, if a Christian danced to the funtunfum he would have been excommunicated from the Presbyterian Church; while liberal and conservative Presbyters argue that point in Akupon, it is still the case that Christians rarely dance to the chief's drums.

36 The importance of 'tradition' is shown by the giving of sums like 4.8 cedis to a man who had millions.

37 In fact, the 'proper' successor to Kofi Barima was named because his position was necessary to 'straighten the descent line'; the property, however, would not go to him (he is illiterate). The senior brother (with the directors of the company in Accra) would probably look after the finances; he was given dispensation to do that.

38 The sheep were simply for his election as successor; customarily one is asked for only one sheep and one bottle of drink. That was wrong. Kofi Barima had no rank, he was just wealthy. In the event the successor produced one sheep and promised the others.

39 In the Christian distribution of property the self-acquired property of the deceased is inherited by the wife and children. The Christians formally name the wife, but in practice the adult children look after their mother whether she is Christian or non-Christian. A non-Christian wife can be told to return to her family or she can stay and be looked after by the successor.

40 To have many wives is a traditional way of showing high status, both in the past and today. One wife is all that Christians allow—probably yet another reason for 'death-bed conversion'.

41 In fact, the Accra woman was taken as the first wife because her son was senior, and in time he took charge of the property.

42 Generally the Presbyters just witness the succession. The Christian mode of distribution is only followed when the family request it as a means to resolve possible later conflict.

43 Not long ago a woman died in Abiriw. She was a Christian, a Presbyterian. Before her death she became ill and went for a cure to a herbalist (odunsini) who had a deity (suman) to help him in his healing. She did not get better, and one day when she was bedridden the minister and Presbyters came to give her Holy Communion, and she told them she was not prepared to receive the Communion on that occasion. They did not ask why, they did not pray for her, and the woman died soon after.

The family informed the Presbyterian Session of the death so they could assist in the burial. A senior Presbyter said that he had heard the woman had gone to a herbalist for a cure (which meant she had gone to a 'fetish'), and so they would not give her a proper Christian burial,
that is, her body would not be sent to the chapel and a priest in robes would not officiate.

The Chief mourner met with the priest and Presbyters. He told me: ‘I asked them if they asked her why she refused Holy Communion. They said they did not. . . . I said, well, as a minister and Presbyters, if a Christian goes wayward (wahwease), isn’t it their duty to try to bring her into the fold rather than to cast her out? Moreover, she has been paying her dues regularly, so that means she was performing her duty as a Christian. By refusing to take the Holy Communion once, does that condemn her from being a Christian? I told them they have judged that woman in her absence, when she was not in a position to defend herself; and when she was alive they didn’t ask her why. They wouldn’t listen, so we left. Then we too became annoyed.

We had a retired priest in our family. The grave had already been dug at the cemetery. The priest conducted the ritual at the house and we took the coffin and made our own procession and sang our own songs and went to the cemetery and buried her ourselves. . . . It is up to her whether she goes to ‘fetish’ and whether she takes Holy Communion or not. We have no right to judge her. And that is exactly what the Presbyterians did to her.

‘Christ came and tried to heal the sick. He didn’t work for those who were all right but he came to minister unto those in want—the poor, the needy and the sick. He was in the company of sinners all the time—of harlots, of thieves and the like. He wanted to reform them. And the same should apply to the present Christians too, but instead they throw them away. They want people who are sound to be in their church. . . . All they are interested in is for you to pay your dues regularly, to offer weekly in the church. Then you are a good Christian. If you put up a chapel for them, whatever sins you committed, you are taken into the church. It means you are a good Christian. No matter what you do in private, if you show off on Sunday and give generously to the church, if you present something to the church—a clock, a pew—then you are a good Christian. And when you die, you’ll be buried in the most ceremonial way possible: singing hymns, a service in the chapel, a procession to the cemetery, and burial in the place where proper Christians are buried—not where fallen ones are buried.

REFERENCES


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Résumé

La mort subite d’un millionnaire

La mort subite d’un millionnaire parti de rien, qui était affilié à des villes concurrentes de langues, d’origines et d’ethnies différentes dans le sud du Ghana a forcé les citadins à réexaminer les relations entre la religion traditionnelle et la christianisme et entre la richesse, l’adhésion religieuse et les signes extérieurs de statut et de prestige. Il s’agit d’une scène de conflit dans un cadre moral commun, de discours avec un accord sur les règles. La conversion religieuse est plus qu’une question de conviction individuelle ou de cosmologie, ce n’est pas une simple alternative et, pour mieux comprendre les individus qui ne possèdent pas une identité religieuse primaire, il faut étudier les groupes qui valident cette conversion et pour qui le changement de statut de la personne est important. De cette façon, on montre également la vitalité et l’attraction à la fois de la religion traditionnelle et de la religion du monde, telles qu’elles existent l’une à côté de l’autre dans une société.

Cet article apporte quelque explication sur la façon dont les gens eux-mêmes, à la fois les convertis et la communauté, considèrent la conversion. Il illustre au moyen d’une étude de cas combien il est extrêmement difficile de séparer la conversion des stratégies politiques et économiques et des sphères d’intérêt et comment chaque décision de la part d’un groupe intéressé est à la fois une réaction et influence à son tour les actions de la part d’autres groupes intéressés. Le contexte social et historique détaillé du comportement des convertis, les deux villes et les deux communautés religieuses montrent la dynamique du processus de conversion et dans quelle mesure la conversion possède une multitude de facettes. Les catégories engagées dans la conversion sont plus compliquées que ne le suggère la littérature.