

ANCESTOR CULT AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE IN AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITIES OF *DOKO* COMMUNITY OF GAMO HIGH LANDS OF ETHIOPIA

C. Subba Reddy

Associate Professor, Dept. of Sociology and Social Anthropology, Arba Minch University, Ethiopia.
E-mail.subbareddy.cs68@gmail.com

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Abstract: Tylor claimed that worshipping the spirits of the dead ancestor is the earliest form of religion, and many societies practice ancestor worship. This idea is supported by Reuter, who argues that ancestor cult is universal and the most ancient form of religion, strongly shaping the religious life of virtually all early civilisations. The present paper focuses on the practice of ancestor cult and its significance in the agricultural practices of the Doko people inhabiting the Gamo highlands of southern Ethiopia. A qualitative research approach was employed in the collection and analysis of the data. The interview technique was used for data collection. The data pertaining to the basic philosophy and purpose of agricultural rituals were collected from indigenous religious leaders and community elders of Doko. It is found that the Doko people perform various rituals such as rainmaking, sowing, magical protection of crops, harvesting etc., in which ancestor worship is the major activity. Ancestor worship is performed regularly to propitiate the ancestor spirits and get prosperity from them. Finally, it argues that the ancestor cult provides the Doko individual farmers and community as a whole with psychological and social assuage and social cohesion.

Introduction

Tylor (1958) posited that the belief in the spirits of dead ancestors is the earliest form of religion. He viewed primitive men as having the idea that the immortal and impersonal power exists in the body, and it will remain in invisible form even after the death of the

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individual and influence the living people. The living individuals started pacifying the ghost of the deceased person by performing some sacrificial rituals. Thus, ancestor cult originated. Smith (1950) observed that, in society, the ancestors play a very significant role, based on the belief that human personality survives the death and decay of the body. Though critiques attacked Tylor's (1958) concept of animism as the basis for religion, most societies perform ancestor worship. Reuter (2014) claims that the ancestor cult is more universal than almost any other social practice and the most ancient forms of religion, originating in historical times and strongly shaping the religious life of virtually all early civilizations.

Steadman, Craig and Christopher (1996) analysed the ethnographic material of the most famous cross-cultural study of religions of Swanson and claimed that the communication between ancestors and their descendants is a universal aspect of religion. Clark and Craig (2016) argue that in many societies, the generations of descendants not only claim that they are communicating with their ancestors but participate in traditional forms of sacrifice and other rituals to demonstrate their reverence for their ancestral spirits and their acceptance to be influenced by ancestors.

Ancestor worship is a form of traditional animistic religion where deceased ancestors have a central place in the religious beliefs and practices of the community (Heland & Carl, 2014; Ukpong, 1983; Sheils, 1975). Reuter (2014) lamented that the traditions of current ancestor worship are subsumed under world religions in many parts of the world, and they hardly get state recognition. Steadman, Craig and Christopher (1996) stated that one reason for the inability to recognise the universality of this phenomenon is the lack of the term in many societies that exactly equated with the English term ancestor. Thus, many societies that concern ghosts, shades, spirits, souls, totemic plants and animals and do not have the term ancestors are simply treated as absences of ancestor worship. Further, they argued that it is crucial to realise that whenever there is a reference to ghosts, spirits, or the dead in society's religious beliefs and practices, ancestors will be present, if not predominant, in this category.

In African societies, the practice of ancestor worship is ubiquitous. Despite the strong Christian presence, almost all rural communities have a strong belief in ancestors and perform sacrificial rituals to propitiate them. In defining the religious worldview of Africa, Mbiti stresses the fact that the spirit world of African people is very densely populated with spirits beings, spirits and the living-dead or the spirits of ancestors (Mbiti, 1969 as cited in Lausanne Movement, 2000). Amanze (2002) explained that people in Botswana perform sacrificial rituals to their ancestors to remember them and to cure diseases, increase crop productivity, and get rain. Nyamiti (n.d.) argues in Africa, the living considered their dead ancestors are still living on earth, and they must be respected, and the relationship should continue. Clarke (1930) states in the Ashanti community, family life, economic and social

organisations, and rules of moral conduct find their most concrete expression in the religious dogma of ancestor worship.

The reverential and reciprocal relationship between ancestors and their living descendants has been highlighted by many scholars (see Nyamiti, n.d; Laroche,1968; Zahan,1979; Parrinder,1969; M'timkulu, 1977), and these studies show that the ancestors take care of their descendants by bestowing prosperity and protection from all sorts of predicaments as long as the latter perform sacrificial rituals in respect of their ancestors. If the ancestors are forgotten, and the social rules are transgressed, they will punish their descendants by sending diseases, famines, failure of crops, etc.

Even some of the African people do not accept that their deceased people are really dead. Brown (1926) states that the Mochuana of Botswana does not speak of his deceased father or mother as being dead. They are referred to as those who have left us, those who are no longer with us, and those who have passed away. Laroche (1968) claims that many African communities believe that the soul or spirit, which is the essential part of human beings, survives the destruction of the body when a person dies.

There are some scholastic works on the practices of indigenous religious rituals in Southern nations and nationalities in the region of Ethiopia. They focused on various issues, such as the interrelationship between ancestral worship and the protection of sacred forests among Sidam people (Zerihun, 2019), rituals and myths about ancestors of Sidama people in the context of changing circumstances (Hamar, 1976), political ritual system among Dokos to gain the political titles and ancestral worship to get general prosperity to the community (Freeman,1999), spread of Protestantism and its impacts on Gamo people (Freeman, 2013). It is noticed that there is no research on the interrelationship between the ancestor cult and the agricultural practices in the *Doko* community.

At this outset, the present paper made an attempt to elucidate the importance of ancestral cults pertaining to the agricultural activities among the *Doko* people of Gamo highlands in southwestern Ethiopia. In the first part, a brief description of various agricultural rituals pertaining to ancestor cults is given, followed by a discussion on the significance of these rituals in the *Doko* community.

Review of Related Literature

Many scholastic works have been conducted on ancestor worship across various indigenous people addressing multiple issues. Steadman, Craig and Christopher (1996) emphasised the universal phenomena of ancestor worship, irrespective of some cultural differences. They attacked the anthropologists for exaggerating the differences in the indigenous religious practices and for overlooking the universal aspects of religion, i.e. the ancestors' influence on the living and/or are influenced by the living. They claim that the communication between

the dead ancestors and their descendants is the key to understanding the universality of religious belief.

The maltreatment given by the dominant world religions to the indigenous religions and ancestor cults was highlighted by some scholars. The scholars argued that the systemic cosmological bias within Western thought (Reuter, 2014) and misrepresented phenomena of the indigenous religious practices by the world religions paradigm (Maarif, 2019) prevented scholars from taking ancestor religion seriously as an alternative truth claim. There are arguments for a deeper appreciation of ancestor religion as the oldest and most pervasive of all world religions (Reuter, 2014) and proposals for taking the indigenous religions as an alternative paradigm to the world religions paradigm since it is more helpful and just to be employed since it is based on the cosmological concept that cosmos is occupied by different 'persons' of human and non-human beings. Personhood is not identical to only humans but beyond them (Maarif, 2019).

The interrelationship between ancestor worship and the major world religions is also analysed. Amanze (n.d) discussed the interface between ancestor worship and Christianity in Botswana. He argued that the failure of Christianity to supplant ancestors and associated rituals caused for emergence of African Independent Churches (AIC), which are the syncretic form of both ancestor worship and practising Christianity. AIC attracted many Botswana Christians because they feel at home in such churches in terms of meeting their spiritual and material needs. Chakanza (1989) studied how the African Ancestors' Religion (AAR) emerged in the middle of the 20th century in Malawi as a revitalisation movement of the indigenous African religious beliefs and practices. He described how the AAR was strengthened based on the antagonistic ideas against Christianity. This movement urged all Africans to embrace their traditional ancestor worship.

Chikwekwe(1997) opines that the understanding of ancestral worship in the African context provides meanings and explanations to the complex issues of life. For all social issues, usually, answers are obtained from ancestors or within the realm of the ancestral spirit world. The ancestral cult is deeply rooted in many African communities. There is a close relationship between culture and traditional ancestral practices, which are a form of religious worship. Bae (2004) observed that ancestor worship has a social function that considerably solidifies kinship relations and communal identity.

Research Methods

The study employed a qualitative approach in order to comprehend and portray the perceptions of the Doko community about the beliefs, rituals, etc., pertaining to ancestor worship. The study was conducted among the Doko community in Chenchu Zuria *woreda'* of Gamo zone in the Southern Nations and Nationalities Peoples' Region. This area was

purposely selected based on the regularity of ritual performance and the availability of knowledgeable members on ancestor worship and agricultural rituals. Data were collected from both primary and secondary sources. The primary sources of data consist of the traditional leaders such as *Kawo*², *Eba Maga*³, and community elders who practice indigenous religious rituals. The secondary sources encompass published books, reports, and unpublished information about the ancestor worship of Gamo. The data were collected by using research techniques like narrative interviews and focus group discussions.

Findings

This section describes various agricultural rituals pertaining to the ancestor cult among the *Doko* people. By adopting Wallace's (1966) broad typology of rituals, the agricultural rituals performed by the *Doko* can broadly be classified as technical rituals which are performed to increase agricultural productivity, to bring or stop the rain, to protect the crops from thieves or pests, etc, with the help of supernatural beings (God and spirits of ancestors).

As per the information provided by *Doko* elders, success or failure of crop cultivation and animal husbandry are intimately associated with the guardianship of ancestral spirits and God, and the propitiation of these spiritual beings by ritual activities is highly needed. Agricultural rituals of *Doko* can be classified as rain-making rituals, sowing rituals, crop protection rituals, harvesting rituals, etc. The process of each ritual is described below.

Ira bokiso Ritual (Rain-making ritual)

Dokos interpret natural phenomena like floods and droughts as the manifestation of the ire of *Xosa*⁴. They believe that when the *Doko* people do not uphold social values, not revering the ancestor spirits, *Xosa* becomes angry and punishes people either with droughts or floods. Both of these situations cause predicaments for the community. The former causes a drought which subsequently inflicts agriculture and the animals. The latter one dismantles the crops in the field. On such occasions, *Doko* people perform a rain-making ritual known as *Ira bokiso*. Rain-making or rain-stopping rituals are performed by *Ira kawo* (rainmaker). *Ira kawo* gets the power to bring or stop the rain from *Xosa*. The *Ira Kawos* are primarily chosen by *Xosa*.

Whenever the *Dokos* experience a drought, the *Dere*⁵ elders discuss among themselves the need to conduct *Ira bokiso* ritual, and after having come to an agreement, they send *Maaga* to other *Deres* to convey the decision and to convince other *Deres* to cooperate to perform rain making rituals. The *Eba magas* of all *Deres* will visit the *Ira kawo* of *Dere Chench* to request him to perform the ritual. After discussion with all *Maagas*, the *Ira kawo* will fix the day of ritual and order the *Dana*⁶ to announce the day of ritual to all kebeles under his control. Further, *Kawo* orders the community elders to buy the sacrificial animal,

i.e. black ox to bring rain or a white ox to stop the rain. The Chief of each clan of the Doko community is given the responsibility of collecting monetary contributions from their respective clan. Further, each clan has to provide barley for preparing the local beer. On the day of the ritual, *Ira kawo*, along with *Maagas*, *Huduga*⁷, *Danas*, and some community elders, visit the *shab*⁸. It is a sacred place, and access to normal people is prohibited. The *Shab* is associated with a big evergreen tree, which is considered the abode of ancestral spirits and *Xosa*.

After reaching *Shab*, *Dana* makes an announcement that the *Ira kawo* is going to perform the ritual, and everyone has to be attentive. *Kawo* orders all *Maagas* to bring the local beer and place it in a straight line near the trunk of the sacred tree. Then the senior *Maaga* will lead the sacrificial animal to the altar. The *Ira kawo* utters some words symbolically conversing with *Xosa* and ancestors that reflect his confession and apology on behalf of his subjects for breaching *Gome*⁹. So, the ancestors and *Xosa* will be pacified and forgive the wrongdoers. After observing silence for a few minutes, the *Kawo* slaughters the ox with the knife which is given to him when he was anointed as *Kawo*. The knife is believed to have spiritual power. The *Maagas* will assist him in slaughtering the ox. *Kawo* studies the intestines of the sacrificial animal. The *Kawo* will sprinkle the local beer and the blood of animals around the sacred tree and on the floor. He spits the beer towards the sky, symbolising providing beer to the ancestors. After the sacrifice of the animal, the *Ira Kawo*, along with all *Maagas*, and community elders, marches towards the nearby river, and the intestines will be thrown into the river and prays *Xosa* and ancestor spirits. *Ira kawo* supplicates *Xosa* and ancestor spirits to release rain from the sky for the protection of the life of their descendants. After finishing prayers, they come back to the *shab* and cook the sacrificial animal. Some portion of the meat is placed near the trunk as oblation to the ancestors. The rest of the meat and beer are consumed by all participants, and nothing will be carried home. On the way back community will be rejoicing itself with an expectation of rain very soon.

Kaso Doomo Ritual (sowing ritual)

According to the key informants, this ritual is performed at the household level and at the village level by the farmers of the respective villages at the onset of the agricultural season. Each village has *Eha*. *Eha* is a piece of farming land that is collectively owned by the village community and customarily donated to *Eha Maaga* for his spiritual services to the community. It is under the control of *Eha Maaga*. *Eha* is considered sacred because it is believed that it belongs to *Xosa* and is guarded by ancestor spirits, and defiling is considered as *Gome* and is believed to ensure the hazards to the entire village community, such as severe drought, failure of crops, invasion of pests, etc. It is traditionally passed from *Eha Maaga* to his

successor after his death. This land cannot be sold or transferred to anyone. *Eba Maaga* has only usage rights on this land.

The ritual performed on *Eba* is officiated by *Eba Maaga*. *Eba* is the showcase of crops cultivated in the village. *Doko* believes that if *Kasa doomo* is performed regularly every year, it will increase the productivity of agricultural land of all farmers in the village and protect the crop from all sorts of threats.

The day of the ritual is fixed by *Eba maaga* after consultation with the community leaders. Generally, the ritual is celebrated after receiving the first rain just before starting the agricultural operations. *Eba maaga* orders his assistants, such as *Angacha*¹⁰ and *Tokame*¹¹, to collect seeds for all crops that are going to be cultivated during that season in the village. After collecting the seeds, the *Angacha* will make an announcement in the village about the day on which the ritual is going to be performed. He invites all the members of the village to participate in the ritual.

On the day of the ritual, the *Eba maaga*, along with his assistants and village elders, reaches the *eba*, which has already been ploughed by the village community and made ready for sowing. The three designated individuals – *Eba maaga*, *Angacha* and *Tokame* - sit together at the edge of the *Eba* by placing their hands on one another and pray to the *Xosa* for providing highyielding and ancestors for protection of crops that are going to be cultivated on *Eba* and farmers' land as well. After the completion of prayers, *Eba maaga* will strew seeds. Then, the *Angacha* will declare to the village community that the sowing season in the village has symbolically been launched by *Eba maaga*, and farmers in the village can start their agricultural operations on their lands. Harvesting the crop was also performed first on *Eba* before harvesting on any individual's farming land.

Apart from communal ritual, it is performed at the household level as well by the individual farmer on his own farmland. Each farmer allocates a small piece of land as a sacred land referred to as *Biita Xosa* (god's and ancestors' farmland). *Xosa* and ancestor spirits are believed to live on this sacred land and protect the crops on the farmland. Before cultivating the mainland, the *Bita Xosa* cultivation ceremony takes place. The head of the family, particularly the father or the eldest son (in case the father is not alive), leads the ritual ceremony on an auspicious day. He takes members of his family and lineage to the plot of land and cleans the land. He takes a pot of honey and porridge. He spits the honey towards the sky and on the land, which is symbolically considered as providing sacrificial food to the ancestors and God. After the spitting event, he slaughters the ram and pours the blood at the corner of *Bita Xosa* so that the ancestors will receive the oblation. After leaving the body of the sacrificial animal for about 15 minutes, the meat is cooked and eaten by all the participants. This ritual is performed to seek the help of *Xosa* and ancestral spirits in the success of crop cultivation and to get bumper crops.

Zure ritual (magical protection of the property)

The term *Zure* connotes the meaning of protection of property from thieves. The informants disclosed that Doko people believe that ancestral spiritual power is associated with some natural objects, and the property of those who possess these objects will be protected from thieves and wild animals.

Zure ritual is performed at the household level and the community level. The individual household heads will visit *Eha maaga* and request him to conduct the ritual on his field to protect the crops against thieves. *Maaga* posts a big wooden pole at the boundary of the farming land and prays to the ancestor spirits to protect the crop for a stipulated period of time. *Maga* gets this power from *Kawo*. The wooden pole is considered as the abode of the ancestral spirits, and it has the power to punish the trespassers of *Zure* rules perniciously. Even the owner of the crop also is not supposed to use the products until the stipulated period is completed and the sanctions are lifted by the *maaga*.

The annual community-level ritual is performed by the *Eha maaga* of *Dere* regularly to protect the common village grazing land. This ritual is performed three months before the *Meskala* ceremony (New Year festival). On the fixed day of the ritual, the *Kawo* of given *Dere*, along with *maagas* of all *kebeles* goes to the centre of the main *Dubensh* of *Dere* and declares that from today onwards, the *jure* rules regarding the common grazing land of the *Dere* will be in place. He establishes a wooden post at the centre of the grazing land and utters some words to the ancestors. It is considered that ancestral spirits will protect the grazing lands, and no one should let loose their animals to graze on the land. It is *Gome* to breach the social norms. If anyone does not observe the *Gome* and graze his or her animals on the village's common land, animals or even human beings will face health problems. Hence every household will respect the *Gome*. On the day of *Meskala*, the sanction is lifted by performing the ritual of ancestor worship. The *Kawo* will order the *Eha maaga* of *Dere* to slaughter the sheep and splash the blood around the post, meaning that it is the oblation to the ancestor spirit for protecting the grazing land. The post is removed from the place, and all village animals will be allowed to graze on it. It is mentioned by the key informants that it is the post which possesses the spiritual power, and it will punish the offenders. Further, they disclosed that the *Meskala* festival is celebrated not only by human beings but by animals as well.

Bolle Ritual (to protect crops from insects)

According to informants, this sacrificial ritual is performed to protect the crops from insects. (*Bolle*). *Dokos* believe that *Itta ayana* (evil spirits) will attack the crops in the form of pests. The insects are the symbolic representation of *Itta ayana*. Sacrificial ritual is performed on

the ancestor spirits to get the protection of crops from the evil spirits. Whenever the crops are attacked by the pests, village leaders will discuss with *Eha maaga* of the village to perform *Bolle* ritual. *Eha maaga* orders the village leaders to arrange a sacrificial animal, usually a black ram, for ancestors. He fixes the day of the ritual. On the fixed day, *Eha maaga* prepares *Banga puske* (barley powder believed to have the magical power to drive away the pests). He will visit the fields of farmers in the morning and collect some of the insects from the crop. After returning from the fields, he sprays the *Banga puske* on insects, and he slaughters the ram at the communal sacrificial place.

The intestines and the chime of the sacred animal are removed. The collected insects will be placed in the intestines, and they are thrown out of the village boundary, which symbolically means driving away the *Itta ayana* from the village. In order to prevent the reentering of *Itta ayana* from outside of the village boundary again, the fat of the sacrificial animal is removed and mixed with *Banga puske* and distributed to all the farmers in the village so that they can place this fat in their fields. It is considered that the ancestors will relish the oblation and drive away the *itta ayana* and protect the crop from pests.

Kapabule or Kafa pule or Qorxxa Banga Bulacha

This is a harvesting ritual conducted at the village level. The elders reported that it is celebrated to express gratitude to the ancestral spirits and *Xosa* for protecting the crops from all threats. They believe that successful crop cultivation depends on three elements, natural resources (like water and land), protection from pests, diseases, and wild animals, and finally, human efforts. The elders reported that *Xosa* provides land and rain, and ancestral spirits protect the crop from animals and diseases. They believe that it is a moral obligation on the part of farmers to thank these supernatural beings and give them their first share as oblation in the harvested crop before consuming the yield.

In *Doko*, there is a deep belief that eating the food grains without performing *Kapobule* ritual is a *Gome*, and those who violate the *Gome* will get sick and, in severe cases, will die. *Qorxxa banga bulacha* (New barley festival) is performed in the month of December and January after harvesting the crops. Generally, the common people harvest their crops only after harvesting the crop from the field of *Eha Maaga*. The sacrifices given to the *Xosa* and ancestor spirits are believed to secure the farmers from all sorts of threats in future.

The day of the ceremony is fixed by the *Eha Maaga* by consulting his assistants. Each household has to contribute approximately 10 kgs of *Wallo banga* (newly harvested barely) to the *Eha Maaga's* granary, which will be used for preparing the *Tella* (local liquor). The *Eha Maaga* distributes the collected barely to some active women to roast and grind in their respective homes. In addition, *Ochobasha* (roasted barley), *Gurdo* (barley porridge with milk),

Parso (fermented barley drink) are prepared to offer to the *Abo aayana* (ancestor spirits) and *Xosa*.

The ritual is performed at *Dubusha*¹² On the day of the ritual, the women bring *Tella* and other food items to the public place, and the males only will carry those items to the *Dubusha*. The stone slabs and bamboo poles are fixed as the symbolic representation of the *Xosa* and ancestor spirits. The *Eha Maaga* slaughters sheep as a sacrifice. The *Eha Maaga* takes the beer from Calabash and utters some words on a sacred stone as a prayer to the ancestors. He expresses the gratitude of the community to the *Xosa* and ancestors for protecting the crops and providing a good harvest. *Maaga* sprinkles the local beer on the spot to invoke the ancestor spirits and *Xosa* to come down and relish the feast offered to them. After offering to the spirits, the rest of the food prepared is consumed by all the participants.

Discussion

Religion fulfils the psychological needs of individuals (Malinowski, 1948) and societal needs (Radcliffe-Brown, 1965). These two arguments show that religion has its own bearing on individuals and society as well. The following discussion emphasises the importance of the ancestor cult of Doko society in the broad theoretical framework of functionalism. The author is conscious of the changes engendered in various cultural elements of Doko as a result of both exogenic and endogenic factors. Further, the whole Doko community is not treated as homogenous since there are multiple occupational and interest groups. Further, the majority of the Doko are converted to Christianity. However, ancestor worship is still practised, and sacrificial rituals are performed by many Dokos, including the followers of some sects of Christianity. The significance of ancestral cults is discussed by interpreting the major agricultural rituals broadly under psychological and sociological aspects.

Clarke (1930) posits that the integral relationship among various elements of society can be revealed in religion better than any other social institution. The economic, social, moral and legal principles evolved out of religion.

The major psychological functions of the ancestor cult in Doko can be categorised further as cognitive and emotional. Natural calamities such as crop failure, disease, attack of domestic animals by wild animals, accidents, thunderbolt hits, and falling in river gorges are not uncommon in Gamo highlands. Dokos seek answers to these incidents by resorting to ancestor cults. For instance, in Doko, if any farmer faces failure of crops and death of cattle frequently, he visits *Maro*. The diviner detects the cause of the problem and prescribes the remedial rituals – sacrifices to ancestral spirits. In such cases, the Dokos perform rituals to propitiate the spirits of their ancestors.

The belief systems of Doko concur with what Geertz (1973) states about the intellectual theory of religion, in which he says religious beliefs provide assurance to the believers that

the world is running systematically. All the events occur as per the scheme and are orderly. The *Doko* rituals show that the living *Dokos* are under the surveillance and guidance of ancestors, and whatever happens in the course of *Dokos*' life is considered the wish of the ancestors and the *Xosa*, and these wishes are unchangeable and imminent to everyone. In the *Dokos*, worldview ancestors are indispensable elements. By totally relying on their ancestors, they seek solace and comprehend the world.

When individuals face any anxiety and fear, they seek the help of supernatural beings irrespective of the cultural development of society. When people do not have control over the events/situation, religion and supernatural beings enter the scene. Malinowski (1948) portrayed that the Trobriand islanders perform magico-religious rituals when they plan for open sea fishing where they do not have confidence in their lives during rough weather conditions. This formula can be applied to *Doko* in many situations. They perform sacrificial rituals to the ancestors to get supernatural help for protecting the crop, growth, health and survival of the children and even the domestic animals. Many informants revealed that "once they perform sacrificial rituals to the ancestor, the ancestors will take care of our progress and protection. As human beings, we cannot control and predict the future. It is our ancestors who will provide safety to our human and animal populations and agriculture as well". This sort of belief provides psychological strength to the *Dokos*. This observation goes in concert with Zahan's (1979) view that recognition and submission to the authority of ancestors are believed to enable people in the social setting to avoid falling into dangerous situations.

Morality is often presumed to be the essence or greatest contribution of religion, and some argue that it is impossible to be "good without God" (Eller, 2007). Durkheim (1965), on the other hand, placed morality in the very definition of religion. Many scholars (Rattray, 1929; Culwick and Culwick, 1935; Edel and Edel, 1959; Westermarck, 1912; Middleton, 1960) argued that in many societies, the behaviour codes are founded based on the words and activities of the ancestors, without posing any challenge. According to Tylor (1958), ancestor worship inculcates good morals among the members of society. Radcliffe-Brown (1965) argues that ritual values contribute to the formation and maintenance of social order. The ritual enforces the belief in the people that if the ritual is not observed, misfortune will ensue in the community. The *Doko* people voluntarily contribute and participate in many rituals that help people maintain social solidarity. Further, the *Zure* ritual is one of the mechanisms to reduce immoral activities like stealing, robbing, etc. It instils the fear of sin in the minds of *Dokos* and contributes to maintaining social morals so that social tensions can be reduced and solidarity can be maintained.

Conclusions

Ancestor worship is the oldest form of religion and is widely practised in many societies. As long as human beings place belief in supernatural beings, irrespective of the spiritual

evolutions of societies, the ancestral cult remains the focal point of human societies in various forms. Though world religions have a ubiquitous presence in human societies, the influence of ancestral spirits has a remarkable print on the cultures of societies. Most of the Dokos are converted to Christianity, and they are advised by the Christina missionaries not to worship their ancestors, as it is considered a pagan practice. Further, the endogenic and exogenic factors have brought changes in the thinking process of the young generation on ancestor cults, which caused negligence towards ancestor worship. However, it still remains the dominant practice in the Doko community since it satisfies the social and psychological needs of the Dokos.

Notes

1. Local level administrative block
2. The local, traditional, hereditary king who controls the local community.
3. The local, hereditary spiritual leader who works under *Kawo* and officiates the sacrificial rituals.
4. The supreme God in Gamo language which is mother tongue of Dokos
5. Cluster of roughly 5 – 10 small villages
6. Messenger of Kawo
7. A Traditional local leader. This is achieved status in the community by giving gifts to the community.
8. The ancestral place of *Ira kawo*
9. The sinful activities
10. The messenger - assistant to *Eha Maaga*
11. Seed collector - sub assistant to *Eha Maaga*
12. The public open place in the village. It is associated with the presence of *Xosa* and ancestor spirits.

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