

## *A Drummer's Testament*

### *Introduction part 4*

#### **The Anthropological Heritage**

When I first went to Ghana, I had not thought much about how this issue confronted Ghanaians. Dancing like a flea on the tail of the beast and heading in a direction a map told me was opposite of the way to Vietnam, I had enrolled to study African music and culture at the University of Ghana at Legon, seven miles outside of central Accra. After my arrival and first experiences with the inaccessibility of culture as I wished to know it, I nonetheless knew that culture was somehow the chaperone whose presence sustained the otherwise inexplicable self-assurance with which my Accra acquaintances were consorting with a rapacious history. In pursuit of my image of aged wisdom, seeking the singing masters of my soul,<sup>1</sup> I spent time in the library of the Institute of African Studies, an outpost of rationalism much farther from madcap Accra than an odometer could indicate. A university library is, after all, the last secular shrine of medieval High Church scholasticism,<sup>2</sup> where devotees of the intellect have left their offerings. Like their monastic precursors, many lived their lives under the vain illusion that their work provided an escape or an exemption from the corruption of the world.

Within the library at Legon's Institute of African Studies, therefore, are a great many reasonable reflections on culture and its forms, reflections as well of people who have cared deeply about the traditional societies they studied.<sup>3</sup> Most of the books in the library are the product of considerable effort, good intentions and disciplined thought, and one need not be a professional social scientist to know that students of traditional cultures have covered a tremendous amount of ground and commented on it and then commented on their comments. Their motives have been much the same from the days when missionaries and travelers and colonial officers, so self-conscious of their roles as harbingers and instruments of change, made the first steps in the development of social anthropology (in Europe) or cultural anthropology (in the United States) as we know it now, when the urgency of the ethnographic task was no more and no less energetically argued.<sup>4</sup> The old ways have always been challenged, and the resilience of culture has always been in question. Yet those who have wielded the ethnographic pen bore witness to an aspect of our own culture and history, a contrapuntal desire to assure the survival of the cultures that seemed threatened by our historical dynamic. Many threats were real, but many threats are only partially real, imagined within the vanity of our limited knowledge of our counterplayers'

cultural resourcefulness. Cultures have persisted, and the vague but powerful capabilities of culture for persisting through history have been little understood.

There is a significant body of anthropological work that asserts, if nothing more, a demonstration of humane interest with implicit allusion to that classical ancestor and model of peripatetic curiosity, Herodotus. Within this broad genre, the bulk of work that could be labeled academic or scholarly has kept one foot firmly within our Western concern to expand our consciousness about other possibilities for society in general and people in particular. Western anthropology was thus likened to a mirror, with its special province of reflection the realm of culture. Writing books and essays that reflected the nature of other people's sense of community and personhood and heritage is a particularly Western response, and not merely a reflection of Western literacy. After all, with a few exceptions, literate Muslims lived in Africa for hundreds of years and wrote mainly family and dynastic histories.

Under the banner of their discipline, Western cultural anthropologists still work to understand the versatile nature of humankind and to revitalize atrophied ideas through historical or personal sympathy. Perched on the outer limbs of our intellectual heritage, clinging to a once-golden bough, anthropologists have given voice to a unified image of humanity that comprehends its stunning variety. They have added their representations of human experience to the tree of culture, extending its ever-branching meaning for anyone who has questioned the benefits of culture, or anyone who needs to. Anthropologists who write about the people in other cultures have always addressed the basic questions of what we can learn about them and what we can learn from them, with the idea of placing them within the boundaries of our awareness and on the stage of our historical dynamic. In the modern world, the first stated principle of their professional code has been responsibility to those whose lives and cultures they study.<sup>5</sup> Their reason for giving priority to responsibility over knowledge seems a bit ironic. The role of these intellectuals, as an aspect of Western historical comprehension of other cultures, has mainly been to assist in that process. Somebody supported their being there. Simultaneously, though, for some openly and for others perhaps as a subtext in their hearts, many of them have felt a need to help people in other cultures defend themselves against the onslaught of the modern cultural apparatus.

If culture can be said to resemble a collection of stories that people tell themselves about themselves, then these books, considered as an aspect of our culture and history, are at least in part stories we tell ourselves about ourselves. Needless to say, because they are cast as stories other people different from us tell themselves about themselves, such stories can get very complex, and they have served many masters, intellectual, political, sentimental. Even in the service of

differing goals, they are a response to our encounters with other people who live or have lived in the world. Although in many bitterly ironic ways an adjunct to domination or usurpation, the books are also one aspect of our response to problems in our own history, a response deeply rooted within the core myths of our Judeo-Christian cultural heritage. It does not take much critical sophistication to see the myth of Adam and the Fall and the notions of eschatology and teleology reflected in the human sciences. Concerns about the nature of a community that has been lost and must be regained, of the nature of an ideal humanity that has been corrupted and must be redeemed: these have been abiding concerns of theologians since Saint Augustine. When the unifying vitality of High Church culture began to wane, these concerns permeated the Renaissance fascination with the classical pagan world. After the Reformation and into the birth of the modern era, they continued to provide the framework of social thought when historical processes radically transformed the foundations of our own social life. Early social theorists of the Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment, like Montesquieu and Comte,<sup>6</sup> looked for new kinds of objectivity that could be oriented to distinguish new bases for moral action in the middle-ground of life.

At this point in our history, when we have reason to doubt the moral authority of enlightened thought on our technocratic society, we may not share the optimism of our intellectual forebears, but we continue to share their problems, and enlightened thinkers persevere, despite doubt, as underpaid undertakers of their vocation. The library at the Institute of African Studies at Legon is filled with sophisticated products of this tradition of social thought, in the genre of social and cultural anthropology, the branch of Western learning that has specialized in the encounter with non-Western peoples. Cultural anthropologists, complementing their comrades who deal with the examination of evolution and human survival and their more distant cousins who deal with vanishing natural habitats, roam an intellectual territory encompassed by a concern for our particular species' threatened diversity.

The continuity of our own concerns and cultural motives within this enterprise in no way reduces the creative inspiration that each generation must exercise in its efforts to understand its alternatives. Much of the task of scholarship, even in an age that sees knowledge as something that advances precipitously, consists of work that must be redone and represented to every generation. Against the panoramic backdrop of our intellectual heritage, it is difficult not to notice that the dualistic oppositions with which Westerners represent the worlds we encounter or remember or project often achieve their instructive effect through privative means, by which others are defined in terms of what we are not. When motivated by good faith and not by the wish to

dehumanize, we have used privative frameworks the better to see ourselves, and we have often enhanced our awareness of our crucial concerns through dichotomized terms of reference, pairing contrasted code words like community and society, traditional and modern, mechanical and organic, Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft, folk and urban.

Such dichotomies are self-referential: they are not merely analytic distinctions; they also represent concerns and themes arrayed on axes of variation against which we measure ourselves and our cultural potentials.<sup>7</sup> The dichotomies of the early social theorists involved a recognition that our developing modern society posed real threats to the cultural values that have sustained the human species throughout history. Trained anthropologists may have been too sophisticated to associate themselves with the persistent image of the noble savage in Western thought, but writings about people in other cultures have often been apt to idealized projections, at least within religious and colonial missions. What was the role of this knowledge, and whom was it supposed to benefit? Classical social science was concerned with methods and objectivity, but it was not neutral: much of it was an effort to understand alienation and the loss of the sense of community; its parallel goal was to recover and reconstitute older cultural values within emerging forms of social organization. On its own challenging axis of variation away from this philosophical and theoretical pole, some cultural anthropology has also openly served the concerns of administration, mission, commerce and conquest, with explicit reference to the demands of history and development.

To an extent, ideas about any culture and its integrity are always somewhat artificial, for such ideas are aspects of the historical, economic and political processes which relate that culture to the larger world context. It is easy to take a cynical or ironic view of this intellectual process in practice, and Dagbon can provide a case in point. The first European contact with what is now Ghana was manifested along the coast in a series of forts and trading outposts in the late fifteenth century. The idea of Ghana was not on anyone's mind. Dagbon was there but not in its current form, and the Europeans knew little if anything about it, although some of the slaves they collected passed through Dagbon and Asante, the Ashanti state. By the mid-nineteenth century, the British had taken control of the Gold Coast from other European countries, made it a colony, and pushed inland. After a series of conflicts with the Asante state, the British extended the Gold Coast Colony to include Asante by the beginning of the twentieth century. The British also formally expanded their sphere of influence, making the area north of Asante a protectorate, the Northern Territories. As in many other places, the emerging anthropological literature generally complemented this type of political and economic conquest. The literature might often begin with observations of

greater or lesser professionalism in the accounts of people who were posted to the territory or who scouted it as travelers. Next were often collections of folktales that reach deeply into human affinities articulated in myths, preparing the ground for religious proselytism.<sup>8</sup> British colonial rule is characterized as “indirect” because the British generally relied on intermediary indigenous authorities, and serious inquiry continued into origins and political history that reflected administrative concerns. At the time, too, knowledge about political structures had significance in locating social systems on what was sometimes discussed as a continuum of evolutionary development.

With regard to Dagbon, for example, in 1930, just a few years after the British took over the place, they organized a conference of local chiefs on Dagbamba chieftaincy and succession patterns, resulting in a publication titled *Enquiry into the Constitution and Organization of the Dagbon Kingdom*.<sup>9</sup> The editors were Harold Blair, the District Officer of Eastern Dagomba, and A.C. Duncan-Johnstone, Commissioner of the Southern Province, Northern Territories. This work has been a focus of contestation not because of its provenance but because of its utilization, and therefore let us put aside questions about the challenges of translating the meaning of the conference participants’ ideas about themselves, to whatever extent such ideas could even be articulated and shared in that context. The conference was attended by an impressive array of the major chiefs and elders of Dagbon, along with their drummers. I also know that Harold Blair was particularly deeply involved in Dagbamba life during his posting there. Alhaji Ibrahim refers to him several times in our book, and he was well remembered by the name he was given, Yakubuzee. Half a century later, I corresponded with him, and my wife and I visited Blair and his wife at their home in Sherborne, Dorset, where Blair was then a Canon in the Anglican Church. He and his wife spoke with great warmth and enthusiasm of their experience in Dagbon. To help me in my work, he gave me his copy of the dictionary he had edited of Dagbani, the Dagbamba language.<sup>10</sup> When he passed away, I informed the Dagbamba drummers, who said prayers for him, and I carried a letter from the paramount chief of the drummers, Namo-Naa Issahaku, to post to Blair’s widow. He and the chiefs were worthy shepherds of this document.

But who was the audience for a document? The work itself, in creating a so-called constitution, established a legacy in the explicit idea that there existed a political process that could be codified and, if necessary, adjudicated by others who are outsiders. Whether the resulting document was administrative or anthropological, it — as well as collateral research about the foundation of the state<sup>11</sup> — postulated a type of entity that was different from what had been there, by virtue of a simple assumption that it could be represented and transferred to

another context of meaning, where it could be interpreted and manipulated, as indeed it was in many successive government commissions and court decisions that have undermined traditional authority in Dagbon. The original colonial intention to stabilize the traditional state on its own terms has been transformed under various pretenses into a situation in which the national government has become an alternative entity that effectively chooses the paramount chief of Dagbon.

Contemporary thinkers from the later twentieth century and onward have often criticized anthropological models of the mid-twentieth century for this type of unexpected repercussion. The great anthropological studies of the colonial era focused on the social organization and social forms of the societies the West encountered. Anthropologists considered their theoretical orientation to be scientific, reflecting an effort to understand in a comparative manner how the societies functioned and what held them together. Because of this focus on classifying norms and structures, the emergent image of non-Western societies was formal and static, perhaps also reflecting an effort to elevate the logic of their social organization as a kind of justification of their development. The late-twentieth-century critique suggested that such models, when viewed in contrast against dynamic Western societies, minimized historical changes and did not account for the ways that adjacent groups had interacted and influenced one another. Without a sense of history, indigenous customs and traditional knowledge appeared to be aspects of a bounded and unchanging system that was handed down from previous generations, requiring mere repetitive fidelity rather than creative engagement from the current generation. The critique has often broadened to assert that administrative motives are intrinsic factors in such representations, because subjugated societies that have integrity and identity are also logical administrative units, wherein cultural or ethnic identity is a fiction created as an agent and an artifact of domination and control.

As the colonial era gives way to the global, one place where people are supposed to do without the concept of culture is in the rationalized and bureaucratic realm of the modern state and the functioning of its political and economic institutions. What is the role of anthropological knowledge in that environment? The very relevance of the academic discipline of cultural and social anthropology has been called into question, and its political functions and its institutional budgets are constricted. The discipline's theoretical reaction has embraced a wide range of responses, from political advocacy and engagement to philosophical skepticism re-evaluating the authenticity of the discipline's seminal ideas, including culture. Most people familiar with current anthropological theory can cite challenges to the very reality of abstract concepts like tradition or culture

as essentialist. Ideas of an essential or ethnic identity conveyed by culture have been criticized as illusions that distort the complex historical influences which are manifested in so-called traditional customs and institutions. In historical perspective, cultures were never really there the way people think, and it is appropriate to acknowledge this point and look at the ways that cultural circumstances change. It is also clear that people's available technology influences and circumscribes much of their cultural character, although people do not typically think of themselves in such terms. In such a context of knowledge, however, the idea of culture can still have use as an integrative construct; people use it as such: an abstraction that functions when needed to pull together various manifestations of social life in shifting perspectives. The components of culture — those local customs, beliefs, habits, lifeways, social relationships, technologies, and behaviors — have always been changing and will continue to change. This muddled process obscures what it is that people can or should hold on to from generations to generation.

Ironically, however, the critique of the concept of culture has implications that run contrary to the professed anthropological motives to help people preserve their ways of life and protect themselves against hegemonic domination. The focus on preservation in the anthropological mission has ambivalent affinities with reactionary forces. From religious and political considerations, there are very many people who just do not want the type of society associated with the technocratic Western world. They receive some of the benefits of so-called progress without assimilating, and they renounce or ignore or contest the rest. Others disaffiliate based on understanding their peripheral position relative to their national and global elites, while others can know their own status without needing to look at it too deeply. Who is to judge them? Anthropologists try to understand them. Anthropologists firmly reject aligning their work with global elites, but to the new nations and their global associates, ideas of essential cultural identity are anachronistic and regressive: they reverberate in tribalism and in regional and ethnic conflict. From such a perspective, cultural habits and loyalties cannot be rationalized and mainly present impediments to progress.

From a contrasting vantage point, a sense of cultural identity allows people to define a space for themselves in the world. Somehow, people in cultural groups still maintain a sense of their own affinities. At the very least, many people like to know about their grandparents and how their ancestors lived. More critically, cultural identity can animate a potential pathway to political action and help people to mobilize resistance against authority. Religious traditions, although susceptible to extremism or withdrawal, are probably the strongest cultural resource for preservation or resistance. Despite centuries of persecution, there are

still Jews in the world, and despite centuries of slavery and systematic repression, people are still practicing Yoruba religion from Brooklyn to Bahia. Secular traditionalism is typically less circumscribed and more relative, but the notion of culture nonetheless implies the presence of resources and capabilities that allow people to separate themselves from other social or economic relations, that is, from other histories and other cultural dynamics.

What is the significance of these ambiguities regarding this effort to objectify Dagbamba culture and society? Trying to do anthropology without the concept of culture is like trying to do art history without the concept of style, and indeed, the concepts are similar in alluding to distinctive common characteristics within traditions of action and influence. The Dagbamba whom I knew and whom you will meet would understand the theoretical issues in the anthropological literature. Who are the Dagbamba has been a continuing question for centuries, and the question is continuing to be asked as a result of the interactions between the Dagbamba people and historical forces like the colonial or national governments. Actually, the traditionalists I have met everywhere might be open to learning how the vicissitudes of theory could be put to meaningful use, but they remained grounded and they were not worried about the metaphysics of committing their lives to an idea without substance. No one with whom I have studied traditional anything has ever told me that what I was learning about was an illusion. Were they deceiving themselves about their culture? No: through their commitment and perseverance, they animated it and made it real. Alhaji Ibrahim and the consulting Dagbamba drumming elders were themselves historians with a multigenerational perspective. They knew that Dagbon has changed continuously, but they had a strong sense of their own identity. Initially, the Dagbamba had wanted little to do with Western ways, and they maintained their distance. Eventually they were more open to changes they saw as improving their lives, but they were not persuaded to let go of customs whose value they understood. They had no problem talking about Dagbamba custom, tradition, way of living, or character. They even used material imagery when talking about the cultural knowledge they were giving me, advising me repeatedly with the proverb, “Don’t let something you hold in your hands to fall on the ground.”

How did Alhaji Ibrahim and the drumming elders see the work we did together? They were specifically concerned to communicate what they thought future generations of Dagbamba should know if they were going to consider themselves to be Dagbamba. The senior drummers who participated in this project were the first generation to grow up and live in contact with Europeans, and they were the last generation who were raised and trained by drummers who had grown up and reached maturity before Europeans came to Dagbon. The elders wanted

their knowledge to be there for those who might want it or need it. Perceiving their tradition to be in decline, they wanted to write down their thoughts to create a testament of their way of living. They were not naively reverent toward the written document we would produce, for they had long observed literate Muslims arguing over the interpretation of texts. They were wary because the colonial research on Dagbamba history had been twisted to government ends and perverted in schoolbook adaptations. Nonetheless, they saw our written work as an additional medium to increase and expand their influence, and they trusted Alhaji Ibrahim to recreate the domain of their learnedness. The theoretical context of professional anthropology is a realm of knowledge informed by the West's encounters with non-Western societies, but in practice, Western anthropology does not emerge from or share the same historical problems as its subject populations. To my mind, the realization of such an alignment would appear to be a worthy goal and a guide to methodological integrity in research.

The people with whom I collaborated were facing their own challenges, and accepting them. They focused on themselves and their heritage, and they tried to anticipate how the intellectual product of our work could benefit their descendants. As drummers, they participated in the life of their communities by using music to elucidate the links among chieftaincy, kinship, and history. They provided people with knowledge of how exactly they were related to the past, and they created an communal artistic space of drumming, singing, and dancing where those relationships were made visible for other people to see. They projected themselves into those who would receive their lectures, and they placed me, as an apprentice drummer, into that tradition as a child of the next generation, joined also by the young research associates who were collaborating on the project. Consistent with this method, the elders' conception was that the intellectual product of our work should also reflect and stand for our relationship. And our work together was also grounded in music, a realm of celebration and praise where people display the best of themselves. The drummers' testament is also a celebration of the cultural achievements of the Dagbamba heritage and a celebration of their choice to embrace their heritage within the commitment of their lives.

To the people whose stories about themselves were retold in the books in the library of the Institute of African Studies, some texts were more useful than others. The most productive period of major ethnographic work on Ghana was probably during the late colonial era and in the early days of independence, when the library acquired ethnographic and historical titles bearing the names of distinguished authors like Fortes, Nketia, Wilks, Busia, Danquah, Goody, Ward, Fage, Apter, Foster, and Wallerstein, among others. Ghana had some but not

many missionary or colonial scholars like those who did extensive ethnographic work in eastern and southern Africa during anthropology's early days. Nonetheless, there were a few old, dog-eared books that were generally hard to get hold of, much harder to find on the shelves than the cutting edge work, and I rather suspect that they may no longer be there. During the time I was at Legon, their tattered look spoke of countless hands and continual circulation: R. S. Rattray's three volumes on *Ashanti*, *Ashanti Law and Constitution*, *Religion and Art in Ashanti*; M. J. Field's *Religion and Medicine Among the Ga People* and *Social Organization of the Ga People*.<sup>12</sup> Rattray's and Field's work was done under the aegis of the then-current colonial administration, and their books are the classics of Ghanaian ethnography. The longevity of their work can probably be attributed to their detailed descriptions, their style of dwelling on the names of this and that, on how to do this and that.

Serious students in Ghana welcome any publication that focuses on their life, but there is a special quality to the early work, a fascination with the details of daily life. Many educated Ghanaians have come to that point in their history when they might have to turn to written sources if they need to know about the things that they have to deal with, such as funerals and inheritance, weddings and divorces, and a host of other matters. And what they need is the flesh on the concepts, the view from within, the what and the how and the when and the where. Sometimes more than brilliant thematic studies that pull it all together, it is the documentation that makes cultural materials accessible to people because even those with minimal literacy can use documentation as a reference to procedures in daily life in which they participate. When new publications become available as part of the ethnographic record, it is those with documentation that have staying power and join the old classics. In the same manner with which some contemporary religious movements embrace the observance of ritual practices without needing to embrace anachronistic beliefs, participation helps people to feel connected to — or at least attempt to sympathize with — cultural procedures from which they have become alienated. In challenging situations, such texts retain a challenging character: fixing a tradition on paper without fixing its meaning, preserving a tradition's complexity by presenting its possibilities without presuming a broader transcendental truth, pointing to what has not been comprehended without promoting spurious explanations, calling for engagement with its life-styles without appropriating the decision about what to do. The secret of their longevity is this hidden historical impact.

There is a story that circulates in various forms as a contemporary anthropological cliché. A field worker is diligently spending time recording the answers of an aged informant to questions about cultural life. At one point the

informant is stumped, and he goes into his room and brings out and consults a copy of a book written fifty years previously by some missionary or colonial officer. Within that story, usually told to make an ironic point about the impurity of data, are also expressed hidden complementarities that link the cultural task of anthropology with the cultures it studies, the elite culture of artistic and scientific ideas with a universalist sense of culture as something lived. I acquired my personal version of the story from the chief of Tongo at the foot of the Talensi plateau in 1977. He told me that he was a boy when Meyer Fortes had done his major work on the Talensi,<sup>13</sup> and that when the elders with whom Fortes had worked passed away, it was Fortes himself whom the next generation would ask how this or that thing was done. They trusted him because they knew he was close to their elders who were no longer there.

To many people who are studied by anthropologists, the scholarly quest for systematic conceptions is peripheral, and they certainly do not see the ethnographic record in the same terms as those who created it. They understand the relevance of their old ways not as much through explanations that make sense of them as through engagement, acceptance, participation, learning by doing. Although relying for guidance on specific descriptions of what their forebears did and said, perhaps the most important point they know is that the very search itself is what constitutes culture, that relevance and personal meaning must be rooted in practice, with no attainment but abiding transference. From this perspective, which will be elaborated throughout this work, their culture is not a compilation of customs and behavior that can be classified or rationalized. They experience it as a challenge of commitment, and its ambiguity is the foundation that locates it in history.

After all, the important questions in life are uncountable, and the answers to these questions are also uncountable. People everywhere find answers and make decisions by looking at their family and their sense of their place in their society, and some look to their sense of history. Everyone must answer to his or her extent, for answers are demanded by the passing stages of life and by the absoluteness of death. Looking toward a time when they will no longer exist, they wonder what will be the conditions of life for their children and their community. What relevance for this existential dilemma does the specialized anthropological literature convey, at least to those who can overcome its issues of accessibility? Amid its theoretical vicissitudes, from narrow localized studies to the broadest hypotheses of evolution, the literature expresses the persistent relevance of the idea of culture as a medium for growth. From this simple organic conception stems the notion of culture as an evolved agent that links values and nature: it sustains human life across generations; it preserves and defends the group at

whatever extent that group may be considered. On that social level, culture is a medium for participation in collective life, experienced as nothing more yet nothing less than the alternatives or possibilities an individual may accept or choose or drift into or grow within. More profoundly, it reveals the corollary boundaries of awareness and the extent of one's experience of destiny's constraints, of the relativity of one's place and time and the limits of life.

Relative and anthropocentric, culture is the realm of inadequate answers to the inescapable questions of personal destiny and the human condition. It is a collection of empty threats used to frighten children, a collection of lies used to encourage lovers and warriors and workers, a secret thing of no power but the power that faith and fear and belief and persuasion and commitment can lend it. The symbols within the traditional repertoire of culture are multiple and redundant and relative and ambiguous and overspecified, meaningless in their protean capacity, their complexity and their plenitude. Culture, to extend a suggestion by a leading literary critic, is "an unreliable mediator."<sup>14</sup> The influence of culture is neither metaphysical nor transcendental nor external nor objective: it is existential. Culture presents a challenge to the self, even a threat to the self: it is a moral space that contains not the historical past but the historical present, where there are technological structures for action and historical frameworks for decisions but where nothing is clear. Culture is always changing and never as old as it seems; its aspects are continuously recast as they are brought to bear on dilemmas that require creativity and imagination, patience and understanding. Culture is not there to be idealized or certified, and what holds a culture together is not a single thing. Its effectiveness has to do with a style of engagement, with the way its myths and symbols inform the values that lead people this way or that, with the way its ambiguity conveys the perception or the hope that one has a choice.

Thus linked to moral vision, this ambiguous complexity is somehow important to culture and whatever it is about culture that is elaborated in our species and specific to being human. We generally think of ambiguity in terms of doubt and insecurity. We also tend to think of culture in terms of certainty and assurance, as an enduring set of customs, institutions and values that structure relationships, or often as an idea or a sense of origin that people rely on with varying degrees of vagueness when referring to whatever makes them unique as a group. Such terms represent culture as a type of knowledge that is overwhelming even when ignored. But even when culture is perceived as a time-honored heritage of solid truth, we tend to forget that people experience it as a problem, from the formation of character to the demands of exercising responsibility. The traditions of the past may seem limiting or compelling; still, even at the life-or-

death brink of desperate necessity, cultural themes persist and influence our response.

We have many words, generally pejorative, for a culture that forfeits or is deprived of this middle ground: alienated, depersonalized, stylized, devitalized, spurious, dogmatic, idealized, rationalized, inauthentic, reified, transcendentalized, radicalized, totalized, and so on. The simplification or reduction of cultural influence implies for individuality a corresponding host of words no less pejorative than those listed for an ineffectual culture: shallow, irresolute, weak, passive, vulnerable, tentative, compliant, amoral, erratic, capricious, unstable, purposeless, and so on. In contrast, the ambiguous complexity of a given culture — or its record — works against a dictated response or a monolithic understanding. That complexity paradoxically both lends security and poses moral issues regarding the contingent truths and limited knowledge a human being can hold in reaction to life and in relation to community and history. In modern thought, sensitive notions of personal choice or agency do not idealize the autonomous individual within the imagery of the Enlightenment. If one can learn anything from anthropology, though not so much from its books as from the experiences one has in crossing cultural boundaries, one learns how fragile individuality is, how much of one's sense of self is a reverberation of adjacent people and surrounding circumstances. Psychologists and sociologists portray the process of individuation as a struggle or a negotiation, and individuality implies an evaluated response that is enhanced by the subtleties of cultural influence. Thus do those who presume to feel keenly the ambiguities of culture elaborate their individuality and claim increased energy and strength as benefits, and thus do those who exemplify the comprehension of cultural conflicts acquire leadership and admiration.<sup>15</sup>

The technocratic elite in Ghana is a small group with an inordinate amount of institutional power and coveted wealth but very little moral influence, a focal point more of envy than trust, and even for that group, so susceptible to frustration and anomie from the loss of cultural perspective, there are things they know they have to do in their traditional cultures. Most who are of my acquaintance do not find meaningful answers to the important questions of their lives within the available options of their rationalized lifestyles. They try not to isolate themselves, but it is unfortunately the case that many of them find that they cannot step outside bureaucratic momentum during the week as easily as they can travel to their villages for the weekend, and they struggle with that problem. Only a few of them have been trained to know their indigenous cultures, and the many who are out of touch with the old ways of life have become somewhat familiar as stock figures in contemporary Third World novels. The worst are patronizing and

pompous toward the elders of their particular culture; they are too conscious of the status derived from their literacy to give appropriate respect to learn from non-literate sages, and they are defensive about their own ignorance; they bluff to others about being insiders and assert that they know the people and how to handle them. The best are more earnest but have lacked the opportunity to learn the subtleties and undercurrents of their traditional ways; for them, richly documented ethnographies can serve as a medium for the rediscovery of their cultures. Assisting them to increase their historical sophistication and cultural sympathy is important.

From the perspective of those concerned with national issues, the political complications that traditional cultures sometimes present are embarrassing. To them, it would be preferable if internal political matters could disappear and the traditional cultures could be reduced to a few inspiring symbols, and thus misunderstood, could conform to nostalgic visions and romanticized realities for purposes of personal solace, public consensus, and occasional commodification. To many politicians, the types of conflict that exist within traditional spheres and between the traditions and the nation call for the magic of legalistic minds to find a final compromise or impose a lasting solution. But because culture cannot be fully rationalized, the more one pins it down, the less validity it has as a tool for living. And unfortunately, the belief that culture's secret ironies can be willed away invokes sometimes a dangerous sorcery that links power to the use of force. Such wishful thinking has left its mark on the traditional state of Dagbon, to which we shall soon return: the many years of colonial and national government interest and involvement in rationalizing the role of conflict in traditional chieftaincy affairs have created mainly a vehicle for further conflict and further disruption of the traditional system. The lack of materials or appropriate sensitivities for understanding the deeper structures within Ghana's many cultural traditions is a handicap for the nation as well.

Beyond the elite, moreover, an increasingly literate Ghanaian population will not all accrue the status that literacy brought to preceding generations, and neither will they be close to the real and mythic centers of modernity. Most will have very limited access to reliable information about their traditions. Despite this tenuous position, they will live their lives within their cultures, by choice, as individuals in communities firmly rooted in tradition, and they will receive and reshape the historical story in their image. They will need documentation because they will seek understanding of their traditions primarily from the inside, and they will want details and not reductive labels no matter how astute. It has been my experience that most people truly involved in learning about their customs and history prefer an approach to knowledge that separates rather than synthesizes the

details, that differentiates possibilities rather than abstracts one-dimensional generalizations. Getting involved in the details makes things interesting, for it preserves the multivalent ambiguity of cultural symbols and provokes the ancient and emerging spirits, both threatening people and allowing them to change.

It is the problem of new generations to decide what seems sensible or useful or meaningful for them as they relate to the lives and deaths of their elders. Attaining sympathy for the ways previous generations dealt with life and death is a challenging task inside which people mature. The complexity of their understanding or their disregard for the details of their heritage reflects the extent they have personalized the challenge, for whatever direction they face, they cannot choose their starting point. They will continue to live within cultures in continuous transformation, as they did before we came to know them, and their cultures will retain validity as always, through people's perceptions of their own destiny as individuals within a group. They see their cultures in such terms, not as some predetermined thing of the past but as a living endowment of the past for the present and future. Their priorities will not be based on ideas of assimilation within the national state but rather on ideas for enhancing and extending their cultures' relevance, and they will devote their energy and intelligence to improving their traditions and limiting whatever accommodation is necessary. There are many unassuming people doing such work now. A leading psychoanalyst once wrote, "Identity connotes the resiliency of maintaining essential patterns in the process of change."<sup>16</sup> The task of documentation and description, so simple and so complex, is to assist people in restructuring and reviving the most important features that have made their cultures authentic ways of living.<sup>17</sup>

To the extent that cultural documentation might have relevance on local levels as a means of perpetuating indigenous historical dynamics, it assumes a different kind of historical presence or objectivity from its academic value. A work's local impact is not typically a publication reviewer's criterion, and not only because such information is generally remote. Western scholars assess the objective value of their work in terms of the work's relevance to Western traditions of knowledge, in government or education or general discourse. The critical territory of their work is occupied by their colleagues, and in most circumstances they claim authorship and accept responsibility for their work's accuracy by themselves, both absolving and excluding indigenous sources from the final product. The objectivity of ethnographic work, however, can also be assessed by its local presence. As we have noted about Dagbon, as in other places, the products of the colonial ethnographers and their successors returned and made an impact on Dagbon, and that impact has had its own reality. To the drummers I

knew, any misuse of the information by the government and its various commissions of inquiry had two possible explanations: first, those who had talked about custom had not told the truth or had hidden some parts, and had been misunderstood; or second, the government commissions did not care about true understanding, and they had twisted the information and done whatever they wanted to do.

From the earliest contacts, indeed, there had been some people who distrusted outsiders and felt that revealing information about Dagbon was wrong. In the vision of Alhaji Ibrahim, however, any book that would be the product of our work together should be a visible or material representation of our own relationship. He was thinking about the work as having an objectivity that would be validated partly by the lasting strength of our friendship but more by the indigenous model of learning that we reflected, and both thoughts lent a measure of methodological control. By placing me into the receptive role of the generation that would follow them, the drummers recreated their own experience and confirmed the work as their testament. The idea that we were creating a work that could describe Dagbamba customs to a Western audience was not separate from the idea that the work could be used in Dagbon by Dagbamba themselves. Thus there were a number of reasons why Alhaji Ibrahim and the drumming elders undertook this work. They trusted themselves and the authority of their knowledge. They felt that the vulnerability and atrophy of their cultural influence justified an effort to preserve it in another medium. They trusted me to respect their authority and to carry out the work properly.

Alhaji Ibrahim's motivation was rooted in the respect drummers continued to have in Dagbon. Despite the larger historical processes through which significant decisions about Dagbon were made from afar, the Dagbamba I knew were deeply interested in their culture and their history. Their sources of information were mainly indigenous, within their traditionally circumscribed means of access. As a traditionally non-literate society, Dagbon does not have its own written records. Most people continued to rely on contexts where cultural knowledge had previously and traditionally been conveyed and learned. Such opportunities were more and more limited because many significant activities occurred outside the scope of chieftaincy and family institutions and within the domain of the national economic situation or under the jurisdiction of national political and social authorities. With increasing wealth in towns like Tamale, however, there was more music at gatherings like weddings and funerals, and festivals were widely attended in towns with major chieftaincies. I followed this issue of access to indigenous knowledge during my time in Dagbon. Many people whom I interviewed, both literate and non-literate, were serious to take advantage

of such opportunities to participate and learn more about Dagbon, and many were very well informed.

What few writings existed about Dagbon were not readily available. The main written resources when I was there were actually for school children, the reading primers that give synoptic versions of the few colonial government publications on the origins of Dagbon, along with some stories acquired in that research. There was a nice little book about Dagbamba childhood, but I bought it in Accra and did not see it in Tamale.<sup>18</sup> Much of what I knew to be there continued to reexamine and reflect upon the previous documents and their ongoing effect on political conflict and adjudication. Some of my colleagues have told me that many research documents I had photocopied or read in the archives at the Institute of African Studies are now missing. I had given a number of copies of my own work on Dagbamba music to various libraries, and I have been told that those books are not around, either. Libraries in Western countries have reduced their acquisition of new materials, and in a country like Ghana, funds for buying books are severely limited, and lost or stolen books are not replaced.

Even in what would be the best of libraries, the ethnographic record on Ghanaian cultures is uneven. Information on Dagbon is not as detailed as that on other traditional areas of Ghana. As might be expected, there are numerous studies of the various Akan peoples who comprise nearly half the population. Somewhat well-represented are the Ga people of Accra and their relatives to the east, less than ten percent, who have been at the center of the colonial and national sphere. The Ewe people and their relatives, just under fifteen percent, have played an important part in the history of Ghana, but oddly enough, at the time when I did some research in the Ewe area, the library at the Institute held only some source documents and a few studies of their social life. Other groups such as the Gonja and Talensi and Lowilli and Konkomba peoples of the Northern and Upper regions bear the stamp of individual ethnographers whose significant efforts have placed them on the anthropological map, and there is piecemeal treatment of many others.

In the contemporary world, insofar as local cultural matters are excluded from global interactions, anthropology exists at the periphery of decision-making, and it no longer has the same value it had to colonial administrators. Nationalism and globalization have changed the types of research people do. Authority in the formerly colonial countries has been passed on to politicians or soldiers, who do not often seek anthropological help with administration. Anthropology's research topics are more narrowly focused than the large-scale classical studies were, but its role remains similar in seeking to rationalize cultural matters and diminish potential conflict that could affect the implementation of policy. Its educational

mission to engage diversity remains broadening, but it is usually included on lists of potential college majors that American undergraduates are advised to avoid. Among anthropology's subdisciplines, archaeologists, linguists, paleontologists and physical anthropologists have a few institutional bases. Sociocultural anthropologists have followed their traditional subjects into the modern global world, where privative distinctions like Western and non-Western have lost their rationale, and where anthropologists are somewhat difficult to distinguish from sociologists or other social scientists. In similar fashion relevant to Dagbamba drummers, a related field like ethnomusicology is allocated the study of non-Western music or folk or ethnic music, in privative distinction from classical Western music; the latter is the province of musicology, which has a similar mission as ethnomusicology to examine music in its social, historical, and cultural contexts. Anthropologists struggle against the marginalization of their field, but their discourse shows tendencies toward increasing alienation and radicalization as well as toward formalism and constant dogmatic reinterpretation. In the mid-twentieth century, a compilation of then-current anthropological definitions of culture occupied a lengthy volume,<sup>19</sup> a list that has not become shorter or less slippery; that slippery listing long ago raised the invidious question of whether intellectual progress in the field could be distinguished from changing the subject. If cultural anthropology were a hard science, it would not be possible to be bored with new developments in the field. There would be technological extensions and exciting ways to demonstrate the practical power of its knowledge. But theoretical developments in anthropology basically represent shifts in the perspectives from which we define and view the issues in the field. What anthropologists know and advocate about culture's universal characteristics and the complementary importance of diversity is mainly perceived as a collection of meaningful but peripheral humanizing insights.

As I have noted, most of the scholarly writings about Dagbon are not available to indigenous people who would hope to use them to connect to their heritage or to the lives of their parents and grandparents. If the writings were there, most of them would be found to address specialized theoretical issues of their period and would be relatively inaccessible even to more highly literate seekers. The ethnographic record is constricted. The books and journals that are the products of anthropological research now circulate among a small number of people, where they are linked to the advancement of careers. University publishing has retreated from its original role to subsidize the dissemination of faculty work.<sup>20</sup> The national endowments and foundations that support research long ago eliminated subvention grants that would help to fund scholarly publications. Even the most prestigious university presses are under pressure to

generate at least the minimal sales they need to recover their costs, limiting length as well as supplementary material like images. Many scholars themselves retain deep loyalties to the people they have studied; however, the institutions where they work are no longer as prepared as before to subsidize their publications, or more telling, to subsidize work that returns to the field. One academic publisher whom I asked about the issue of returning research knowledge to the field laughed and told me rather that giving one's work to most academic publishers is analogous to throwing it down a well. Unlike many anthropologists from the classical period, most anthropologists do not spend years doing fieldwork in one place, and many instead even recommend trying to do research in different venues. There is really no reason to expect their ethnographic work to be better than that of previous generations, nor to be more directly responsive to the existential dilemmas of their subjects.

My collaborators and I designed and conducted our ethnographic work with the specific purpose of returning our work to the people of Dagbon. We hoped the work would attain an important aspect of its objectivity in terms of its potential to inform participation in the cultural setting where it was generated. There were many scholars in anthropology and related fields who understood the significance of that effort. Thus, once the research model was established and functioning, the project was awarded a dozen grants and fellowships that assisted its continuation for a number of years. Such judgment complemented the intrinsic interest and broad scholarly relevance a society like Dagbon signifies: Dagbon is an ancient traditional state with a non-literate intelligentsia that is hierarchically organized and that functions within a nexus of social action in institutional structures; moreover, the leaders of the intelligentsia perform a classical epic song for the historical edification of the populace. After enough of the work was drafted, the manuscript passed peer reviews with a major university press for a multi-volume publication, followed by a proposal to begin with the first volume. I deferred because I was reluctant to proceed before fully completing my ongoing work of cross-checking and verifying all the drafts, as described in the seventh section of this introduction (The Translation). The work later encountered some unexpected obstacles that caused extended delays. By then, it was not clear whether the eventual publication would proceed as intended. My lengthy work on post-colonial youth<sup>21</sup> had required compromises from both me and the publisher. I am told that those books too are not available in Ghana, Togo, or Burkina Faso, where the original research was conducted.

In the meantime, however, the growth of the World Wide Web provided an alternative to print as a means of dissemination. In a place like Dagbon, where access to written resources is severely limited, the internet represents a profound

change in people's potential access to information. With the advice and encouragement of several friends, I was able to begin the process of setting up a web domain to give free access to the work to Dagbamba and to anyone interested in the issues raised during our ethnographic journey. I am very happy with the opportunities the format provides for organizing information and helping people move through it, particularly for a work of this scale. In the 1970s and 1980s we did not have the technological prescience to foresee the possibilities of the current media, but an internet presentation provides a much closer match to the conception that I and my Dagbamba collaborators had imagined as the way the work could be used as a resource for future generations of Dagbamba to connect to their cultural roots. Their concept of the work's claim to authority almost resembled the open forum of the internet. Within their intellectual approach, drummers are particularly concerned with the provenance of information, but they typically do not demean the extent of one another's knowledge. With regard to the work of other researchers, they told me that it would be appropriate to point out people's mistakes, but they discouraged me from criticizing or denigrating other people's efforts. Instead, they offered the image of a table on which I as well as any others who had done research in Dagbon would place our various works for everyone to see and compare. They felt comfortable that people would be able to see which work had more depth and exhibited more knowledge. Currently, very few scholars are putting major new works on the internet, possibly because the credibility implied in a peer-reviewed imprimatur still supersedes the unlearned and cacophonous babbling that characterizes the prevalent modes of internet discourse. Nonetheless, there is certainly also a welter of terminologies and perspectives in scholarship: whatever the value of attempting to protect and maintain the boundaries of scholarly discourse, to my mind it is just as reasonable to look for a broader forum where one's work can be available to those who might find it or use it.

This consideration about access to the work was even more significant to me in my decision to forego a connection to academic publishing because I believe that the natural and most enduring audience for the work — the Dagbamba themselves — would not see a university press publication or scholarly journal article. My letting go of that connection was paralleled by Alhaji Ibrahim's releasing, sanctioned by his elders, of the restrictions and insularity that traditionally have been associated with the knowledge within drumming. In Dagbon, people do not just ask drummers questions about history or family. There were some people who resented the relationship between Alhaji Ibrahim and me, and they wondered what he was telling me. Their concerns did not go far because of the strength of Alhaji Ibrahim's position in drumming and because I was close

to the most senior drumming elders. Our relationship somehow enabled Alhaji Ibrahim and the drumming elders to see beyond the protocols. As products of two different intellectual traditions, we performed our collaborative roles with the idea that bringing the traditions together would serve our shared purposes of continuity and preservation. We worked to ensure the accessibility of the text to a wide range of readers, and using the World Wide Web expands that intention.

As we prepare to return to Dagbon, let us see what we can learn in the library. Encircling Dagbon itself, the Volta Basin in West Africa is a large savanna area nestled between the sweeping curve of the Niger River and the beginning of the tropical forest. The Volta Basin includes northern Ghana, northern Togo, the northern Republic of Benin and a major portion of Burkina Faso. This area, where the branches of the Volta River begin their journey, might well be characterized as a cultural laboratory of pre-colonial West Africa. The impressive states and confederations to north and south appear more consummate in their cultural hegemony: whatever traces that remain of the early inhabitants of the Ashanti, Dahomey, Songhay or Mande states seem insignificant in the anthropological record. The anthropological study of the Volta Basin, in contrast, has explored a landscape of varied social and cultural systems. From detailed studies of the great state of Mossi in Burkina Faso to the tiny Talensi area in northern Ghana, anthropologists have presented us with a number of fine ethnographies that nonetheless convey a sense of diversity in the region.

The area is united linguistically within the Central Gur branch of Gur languages, one of the major divisions of Niger-Congo. The dominance of Central Gur on the linguistic map suggests a common heritage for both the small-scale societies and the hierarchical states of the Mossi, Mamprusi and Dagbamba. To account for the broad axis of social organization among a linguistically related population, our most compelling conceptions typically reflect an image of layers of cultural patterns resulting from historical influences. Thus, much attention has been devoted to state formation, which has generally been considered to be an imported innovation imposed upon some of the aboriginal inhabitants more than six hundred years ago. The generally accepted account of the region's history is that sometime between the thirteenth to late fourteenth century, the Dagbamba arrived in their present traditional area from the east, probably from a Hausa area, and they entered the region as conquerors.<sup>22</sup> With horses, spears, and arrows in their military technology, they subjugated the indigenous stateless tribes under an elaborate and competitive hierarchy of chieftaincies, one of the earliest centralized political states south of the Niger bend. It is worth noting that this diffusionist model of the origin of the Dagbamba state (and perhaps related Voltaic states) has not been unchallenged within political anthropology. In contrast to a model which

presumes an imported link between patrilineal descent and statist ideas of chieftaincy and which projects a process of usurpation, conflict, assimilation and evolutionary stratification, it has been argued that the indigenous inhabitants of Dagbon may have been well into the process of state formation before the arrival of the Dagbamba horsemen.<sup>23</sup> Whatever the case, the distinctions and connections between chiefs and commoners constitute a major institutional theme of Dagbamba society and custom. Added to this superimposed layer of experience was the introduction of Islam three or four hundred years ago.<sup>24</sup> As noted, the period of profound Western contact extends only briefly, less than a hundred years. Each of these historical influences has settled on the region only to an extent, bounded in its own effect yet also bound to the others in intricate ways. The small societies exist beside and sometimes under varying degrees of dominance by larger states; and within the larger states, the standards of the great historical influences are borne by distinct yet intimately connected groups. It is this jostling mix of experience that creates the impression of a panorama of cultural forms in complex relationships.

Thus does the ancient state of Dagbon in northern Ghana, home to the Dagbamba people, merit description as such a meeting ground. The boundaries of Dagbon are roughly an oval surrounding two towns that generally appear on global maps, Tamale in the west and Yendi in the east. The boundaries of the oval are just over a hundred miles east to west and about seventy miles north to south. When I was there, the population was thought to be between 300,000 and 400,000 people, but by the early twenty-first century, you could find reasonable estimates of anywhere between 600,000 and one million. They speak the local language, Dagbani, which belongs to the Oti-Volta group within Central Gur, although the number of Dagbani speakers includes some smaller cultural groups who are shifting from their earlier languages. Dagbani is the most widely-spoken indigenous language of the Northern and Upper Regions of Ghana. Among the other Oti-Volta languages are Nanuni, Mumpruli, Frafra-Nankani, Dagaare-Waale, Talni, Kusaal, Buli, Konkomba, Bimoba and Bassari; Moore is the major language of Burkina Faso. There are varying degrees of inter-comprehensibility among these languages, to the extent that their relationship might be compared to Romance languages. Within Dagbani, there are significant dialectical differences from east to west, with some further blurring at the periphery.<sup>25</sup>

A common language has long been a conventional means to identify or establish the boundaries of a given culture. However, the Dagbani language is still not standardized, and we know little about the region's linguistic patterns during the past five hundred years. Although many contemporary perspectives subordinate the notion of cultural integrity in order to avoid holistic metaphors of

culture, Dagbamba themselves occasionally characterize and identify themselves as Dagbani speakers. The interjection *ŋŋɔ'iya*, which is typically used to preface speech, means roughly, "Excuse me, what I want to say is." Dagbamba cite usage of the word as a gloss for saying "someone who is a Dagbana," as in "Anyone who says '*ŋŋɔ'iya*'" meaning "any Dagbana." This linguistic convention is relevant not merely as a way to decide whom to include in Dagbamba culture. Rather, given the broader linguistic base of related languages, one might wonder whether one could legitimately extend a sense of regional cultural patterns into a conception of a similarly broad cultural foundation for the Dagbamba. The purpose of loosening the linguistic criterion is to go beyond the political and institutional boundaries of the Dagbamba state in order to get closer to knowing about their way of life or about what it means to be a Dagbana.

Apart from linguistic evidence, it has also been reasonable to assume that understanding the origin and development of the Dagbamba state would yield insight into the differentiation of the region's cultural groups. The conquerors of the indigenous populations had passed through the Guruma areas of Burkina Faso and occupied various places in northeastern Ghana. They arrived at an area about twenty miles north of where Tamale now is, and from there they imposed their chieftaincy over the area that became Dagbon. The modern chiefs of Dagbon are descended directly from those early rulers. What we do not know is how many Dagbamba there were. Gradually, the Dagbamba were assimilated into the local population, and the fact that Dagbani is closer to the local languages than to Hausa would indicate that the conquerors were few in number. Six centuries and more than thirty chiefs after the Dagbamba arrived in the region, Dagbamba drummers say that there is no Dagbana whose family cannot be traced to some point on the line of the chiefs, and that there is no one whom they cannot praise with the proverbial praise-name of a former chief.

Although the evolution of political institutions is somewhat more vague than linguistic evidence, chieftaincy is a fundamental element of Dagbamba cultural life. The Dagbamba are distinguished from their neighbors by their elaborate political organization, a hierarchy of patrilineal chieftaincies that exerts authority over those who live in the towns and villages of the Dagbamba state. Their paramount chief, known as the Yaa-Naa, is in Yendi, and most other chiefs move from town to town, shifting their positions upward within a complex system with twelve major divisional chieftaincies under the Yaa-Naa. The reasons why the Dagbamba political system has attracted its share of scholarly attention are partly in recognition of an ancient and venerable achievement: since its founding, the state of Dagbon has been ruled by a single line, making Dagbon perhaps the oldest continuous dynasty in the world. As I noted earlier, understanding the

complex process of succession was an important concern of the British colonial administration and continues to preoccupy the Ghanaian national government.<sup>26</sup>

The traditional historians of Dagbon, the lineage-based guild of drummers, are those who know the most about the first chiefs of the towns. They say that the story of such a distant time is shrouded in darkness, and the story is also shrouded in secrecy: it is not told publicly, and its telling must be accompanied by sacrifices of animals. According to the drummers, the invaders came as warriors under a single leader. At that time, there were no Dagbamba. Later, a quarrel among brothers, the children of the regional cultural icon named Naa Gbewaa, caused the group to separate, with some going north to found the Mamprusi state and others south to found the Nanumba state, each brother carrying the seed of chieftaincy. There are also accounts of a daughter of Naa Gbewaa who roamed and became a progenitor of the Tenkodogo Mossi. All these groups trace their starting to Naa Gbewaa. The Dagbamba chief who remained, Naa Shitobu, instructed his son, Naa Nyaysi, to wage war and place Dagbamba chiefs to rule over the towns, thus to secure chieftaincy for his descendants. At the time, the indigenous inhabitants of each town were ruled by a local priest of the land. Such a land-priest is called *tindana* in Dagbani. Up to today, there are *tindanas*<sup>27</sup> throughout the region and into the Mossi area of Burkina Faso. The word comes from *tiŋa*, meaning “town” or “land,” with the suffix *-lana*, which means “holder” or “owner.” In this case, the notion of stewardship of the well-being of the town predominates the notion of actual ownership, for the notion of *tiŋa* includes the land within and around the town that is related to the god or shrine of the place, known in Dagbani as the *buyli*, to which the *tindana* must make appropriate sacrifices.<sup>28</sup> The usurpation of the *tindanas* was not complete, for the chiefs could not perform the sacrifices to local spiritual manifestations, and the surviving *tindanas* or their heirs returned to the towns for that purpose.

As for the third layer of cultural experience, Islam, it was more than two centuries and sixteen chiefs after Naa Nyaysi, at the beginning of the eighteenth century, that Islam established a significant influence in Dagbon: at that time, a great Yaa-Naa, Muhammad Zanjina, brought learned Muslims to instruct the Dagbamba in the Islamic religion. Dagbamba say that Naa Zanjina “lit a lantern and opened the eyes of Dagbon,” and they call him the “light of Dagbon.” Islam was not unknown before Naa Zanjina: in the early to mid-seventeenth century, there were Muslim scholars of both Wangara and Hausa origin who passed through the Mossi state and into Dagbon and through Larabanga in the Gonja area. Nonetheless, Dagbamba attribute the introduction of Islam to Naa Zanjina because it was during his time that the people embraced Islam. Among the titled Muslim elders in the state, most are of Hausa origin, and there are only a few important

titled family lines descended from Mossi and Wangara missionaries. Dagbon also played a role in the routing of pre-colonial trade and the penetration of Islam into southern Ghana.<sup>29</sup> At this time, somewhat more than half of the Dagbamba are Muslim. Many important customs are performed according to Muslim teachings, from the naming of children to weddings to funerals. In addition, there is the full complement of religious organization and practice: Arabic schools, mosques, public prayer, clerics, Ramadan fasting, festivals, and so on.

Despite the visible presence of Islam, the animist religious foundation of the region percolates through most aspects of Dagbamba spirituality. These aspects reflect not only pre-Islamic religion but more particularly the deeper spiritual aspects of Dagbamba culture itself, which in this vein may be considered as a reflection of a descent group. In general, religious sentiments and ritual practices in many African societies tend to have strong associations with the family. Given the shared foundation of the regional culture base, it is quite appropriate, therefore, to contemplate Dagbamba spirituality within an ethnographic framework similar to the one sketched by Meyer Fortes in his body of work on the Talensi, in which the family is projected as an ubiquitous context for interpreting the vicissitudes of destiny. Fortes' work on the religious elements of the Talensi kinship system provides one of our most intimate views of what has been called "ancestorism" as a way of conceptualizing practical morality, grounded in divination and sacrifice.<sup>30</sup> On a broader political level, that of lineage organization, similar religious sentiments continue to support the notion of the Dagbamba as a group of relatives.

With regard to the increasing modernization the Dagbamba experienced during the twentieth century, it is noteworthy that many among the Dagbamba people were originally not interested in the educational institutions of their British colonizers, many of whom in turn considered the Dagbamba stubborn and backward. Within the national context since Ghanaian independence, the Dagbamba have been vulnerable to political domination by the national government and to economic management by interests from the more developed southern regions of the country. The drummers of Dagbon, as intellectual adherents of Dagbamba history, and as connected as they are to the traditional institutions of chieftaincy, have viewed the influence of colonial and national authority as a disruptive challenge. In accord with what we observed in the previous section of this introduction, Dagbamba drummers are the type of traditionalists who are particularly cognizant of the ways in which increased external authority over their social organization accelerates the decline of their way of life. Indeed, in 1974 the government of General I. K. Acheampong

intervened directly by removing the sitting Yaa-Naa, with unprecedented and continuing impact.

Insofar as scholarly studies of the Dagbamba people have been somewhat compartmentalized, those who might want a comprehensive overview of Dagbon have had to assemble it from various writings. As we have noted, early studies of Dagbon by colonial officers had emphasized the political sector, focusing on historical data in an effort to clarify and codify chieftaincy succession patterns as an adjunct to indirect rule. Much additional research has had the same focus, an aspect of interest in and response to the extended chieftaincy dispute and its implications. Other early discussions of Dagbamba life are only brief sketches within works that attempted to deal with all the diverse peoples of northern Ghana<sup>31</sup> or with selected aspects of social processes in the Volta Basin.<sup>32</sup> The historical literature has been well reviewed,<sup>33</sup> and the process of Islamization has also had detailed attention.<sup>34</sup> Apart from the often conflicting studies of historical processes and an emergent formalistic portrait of political organization, research has not focused on the major dynamics of social life or the economic or technological base.

Leaving aside the complexities of Dagbamba political and historical institutions, a brief summary of contemporary Dagbon would present a more simple portrait of a society of agriculturists. The Dagbamba's staple crop is yams, but they do multiple plantings in their fields, and they rotate crops. Their other main food crops are sorghum (guinea corn), corn, millet, and beans. Recently, intensive rice cultivation has been encouraged by the national government, with mixed agricultural success but with a markedly stimulating effect on emergent stratification tendencies as many villagers have become wage laborers. The Dagbamba are patrilineal, patrilocal, and polygamous. Marriages are relatively unstable, and divorce is common. Funerals are elaborate, and there is an annual cycle of festivals. As noted, just over a majority are Muslim, and the remainder practice animism and ancestorism, focused to a great extent on local and household shrines, priests of the shrines, soothsayers, medicine men, and witchcraft. There are several craft-guild lineages, drummers being one such group, and within the cohesive political framework of Dagbon, there are a number of groups which retain a degree of foreign lineal identity, assimilated Islamic scholars being one such group, and many court officials of slave origins being another.

The Dagbamba are a small group until you try knowing them one by one, as individuals. In their complex traditional circle are whirling eddies of human themes. Let me recapitulate the way seemingly divergent customs are layered into integrated patterns of institutionalized relationships and activities. The major

strata can be broadly distinguished as: (1) the surviving customs of the original and assimilated inhabitants who are representative of the indigenous culture base shared in varying degrees by many small tribes in the region; (2) the political and technological innovations associated with the conquerors related to the Mossi, Mamprusi, and Nanumba peoples; (3) the Islamic customs introduced in the early eighteenth century through contact with Mande and Hausa people; and (4) the Western influence of the twentieth century. Significant complexes of customs have also developed through contact with Ashanti, Guruma, and Konkomba people. The complex integration of these many cultural trends within Dagbamba society has resulted in a thoroughly distinctive culture, yet to an extent, much of our knowledge of this highly structured traditional society has bearing on our understanding of the closely-related states of Mossi, Mamprusi, and Nanumba, and also has varying degrees of general application on many societies of the Volta Basin which share a number of cultural traits, most notably Tapolensi, Kantonsi, Talensi, Frafra, Kusasi, Wala, and Dagaba.

An additional feature of Dagbamba society that must be elevated is the important role of music in the traditional system. In contrast to societies in which political offices or scientific-technological establishments control and authenticate the transfer and movement of information, much knowledge about the Dagbamba tradition is transmitted through artistic specialists. The Dagbamba are not unique in this regard. In many African societies, music fulfills functions that other societies delegate to different types of institutions. In Africa, music is an agent for the socialization of indigenous values.<sup>35</sup> Music serves a crucial integrative function within many types of institutionalized activities,<sup>36</sup> and musicians perform a complex social role in community occasions.<sup>37</sup> Music and dance sometimes provide the generative dynamics of large-scale and small-scale social movements.<sup>38</sup> In many African societies, musicians are the acknowledged authorities on history and custom,<sup>39</sup> and musicians often have important political functions,<sup>40</sup> particularly in the Western Sudan, the area north of the rain forest that stretches from Senegal and Guinea to Chad.

In Dagbamba society, these musicians are drummers, with distinct lineage groupings and hierarchical chieftaincy organizations. The paramount chief of drummers, Namo-Naa, is an important elder of the Dagbamba state, and in each important town, the chief of drummers is an important elder of the chief. A sense of history is central both to Dagbamba culture and to the Dagbamba musical heritage, and drummers know the most about history. Drummers undergo training for years, and they continue their acquisition of knowledge throughout life.<sup>41</sup> During my research, it was typical for a Dagbamba to answer a question about historical and social realities with the statement, "You should ask the drummers.

They have the facts.” Alhaji Ibrahim told me, “If something is happening and there are no drummers present, then you should know that what is happening is not something important.” A Dagbamba drummer is a political figure whose influence extends from conferring varying degrees of respect on chiefs to discriminating the status of individual lineage identities at social gatherings. As such, drummers acquire high respect not only for their historical erudition but also for their detailed knowledge of the kinship patterns of their local communities. Considered even against other African societies where music has a significant function in the institutionalization of tradition, Dagbamba society illustrates a further elaboration of this tendency into the maintenance and validation of political, historical, and genealogical information.

I have described in various writings the astounding way in which the Dagbamba integrate music into their social and community life.<sup>42</sup> Dagbamba musical institutions offer a key to understanding the depth of their cultural life and the validity of any claim they might make for a well-lit place on the world stage. Their music is anchored in epic songs that convey episodes in the history of the six-hundred-year-old dynasty of chiefs, one of the oldest continuous father-to-son dynasties in the world, and perhaps the oldest. These epic songs, part of a body of historical knowledge, are sung at a performance of what Westerners would call a “drum history” but what Dagbamba call *Samban’ luŋa*, literally “outside-the-compound drumming.” At certain times during the year, drummers sing and beat different parts of the Dagbamba drum history in an open area outside the house of their town’s chief, who sits with his wives and elders with the populace assembled around them. After the evening meal, while the populace arranges itself, the town’s drummers praise their own ancestors in lengthy introductory sections, until one of the chiefs of the town’s drummers takes over at around ten or eleven o’clock and sings until dawn. Most of the drum history is recounted through the medium of stories about the lives of past chiefs, their ancestry and progeny, what they accomplished and why they got their proverbial praise-names, which are appellations in the form of proverbs that are used to identify them.

Apart from having a performance context reminiscent of the Homeric epics of pre-classical Greece, the *Samban’ luŋa* informs other Dagbamba musical idioms which branch out into praise drumming and singing that use the proverbial names bestowed onto chiefs. These proverbial names are also applied to descended members of various chiefs’ lineages, whether or not the people still have any claim to chieftaincy. The drummers know the family lines of people in their communities, and with the help of drummers, everyone in Dagbamba society can trace his or her ancestry to some point on a chieftaincy line. Drummers sing and use their drums to beat these names and praise people in public places, identifying

and edifying them. In effect, music is what lets people know about their family. More than that, the rhythms of the proverbial praise-names are used as the foundations of wonderful drum ensemble pieces for social dancing. More than that again, this dancing is done by individuals inside a circle of spectators at events like weddings, funerals, and festivals. Drummers call a person to dance by beating praise-names of his or her forefathers. A dancer may dance several dances briefly inside the circle, while friends and relatives press coins onto the dancer's forehead or place coins into the dancer's hands. The people who dance to the names of past chiefs publicly demonstrate their relationship to the dynasty and to other members of their lineage segment. This incredible degree of historical consciousness is thus more than a focus for thought: historical knowledge, instead of being learned cognitively or represented through various symbols, is brought down to the level of social interaction, where people embody the residues of souls retained in memory, demonstrating their personal relationship to history by dancing to the very names of their ancestors in musical contexts while others in their community are looking at them. As I have written elsewhere, this image of preservation and recreation suggests an affinity between the premises of our ethnographic collaboration and the spiritual goals of musical performance. For Dagbamba drummers, the vocation of cultural knowledge and performance offers ways to access their dead people and to perpetuate that possibility.<sup>43</sup>

Needless to say, the ethnographic summary above, despite its handy condensation of information, does not convey the artistic intensity and concentration that accompanies such a cultural vehicle. There is no mention of the power of the music, or of the heavy spiritual repercussions when masters of drumming express themselves in a tradition of artistic genius: the bass drums vibrate inside the earth, and the singing of the hourglass drums resembles the breathing of the wind; when the sound of the drumming dies, it moves away like exhaled breath. The ethnographic record breeds a kind of sobriety, and the labels in the description are short words for some very basic arrangements of human life to which Dagbamba have held firmly. We must remember what labels are for: to help us taste the food we eat every day, the packagers put a beautiful and often deceptive picture near the label on the box; in some circumstances, a label can be more provocative, as on a present under a Christmas tree; but generally, a label is a term of generalized classification, or a brief reference to something's contents. Yet if we read between the lines, we can note that Dagbon came under colonial rule only during the twentieth century, and for the better part of it, Dagbamba have not wanted much of Western ways. They have lived among themselves, proud of themselves and their culture, taking people and things into themselves, influencing others, but not adapting to what is outside them. To enter Dagbon, we have to

move beyond the labels of ethnographic packaging to understand their human content. We are not unlike many Ghanaians, including some Dagbamba now and probably more in the future, caught in a problem of sympathy, needing to go past the labels for basic truths to deal with the stress of life.

Let us put aside our dictionaries and transcend the words and labels we are often too quick to hand over to judgment. Consider for example the word patriarchy. Is it a quick way of referring to a type of kinship in which the father is head of the family and descent is traced through the males? Or does it recall grand themes, like the religion of Moses and the Biblical patriarchs, and deep and disturbing conflicts, as in disputed inheritance or child custody? Consider polygamy not as an idea of inequality or exploitation but as a gathering of wives to live together in a house, for better or worse. Consider the work of farming, no doubt a dry topic in academic literature, but physically gripping when the dryness extends to the air and the earth, and there is no rain, only waiting and hunger. Consider a funeral as a way of disposing of a dead body, and then think of widows and orphans, then breathe, and then think of a death in your family. Consider politics as the art and science of government, and then think of power and violence, of individuals in conflict and goals in common, and of ambition that is prepared for sacrifice.<sup>44</sup>

Then transcend these connotations once again and place all of them within a context of artistic genius, one that partakes of the deepest abiding themes of African cultures. Within those contours, a broad aesthetic sensibility, one that permeates social relations, is evident not primarily in individual art works but rather in performance events that display multiple interrelated arts — participatory events characterized by rhythmic engagement through music and dance, iconic posture and sculpture, oral poetry and dramatic self-presentation. Even in apparently different musical contexts, there are aesthetic affinities between a rhythm that calls a god to descend and become manifest through a dancing medium in a religious ceremony and a rhythm that memorializes and personifies an ancestor in dance within a community celebration of history and family. Across many traditional African cultures, people use art to articulate a complex philosophical consciousness grounded in ancestorism, sacrifice, and embodiment. The uncertainty and discord of the world are met as personal destiny and resolved through a display of balance and composure that incorporates history as vital presence. This sensibility was evident in the practical morality of both the traditionalists of Dagbon and the young urbanites I knew, who projected respect and patience and gentility, playfulness and humor, collectedness of mind and a refusal to suffer.<sup>45</sup> These ideals are on vivid and engaging display in the multifaceted artistic performances that help to enrich and sustain their lives.

As the modern era evolved, the Dagbamba themselves were at the periphery of a changing world that swept Dagbon more and more into its orbit and discernibly undermined its cultural heritage. More contemporary concerns of environmental devastation throw into greater question the continuity of the Dagbamba way of living, among many others. Whether and how future generations of Dagbamba can recover and revitalize the historical and artistic sympathies that will allow their heritage to continue is their particular challenge. It is for all those concerned with the continuity of their own heritage to recognize the effort and commitment that task entails. Dagbamba drummers embody that task. They are formally trained and delegated to the preservation of cultural memory, that they may help their people to remember who they are, and help them not to forget how they came to be. That the drummers do so without writing is not unusual within a broader view of humanity. Oral traditions of epic history and family genealogy have existed in many places besides Africa — Indonesia, India, Finland, Ireland, the Balkans, the Philippines, Japan, Turkey, and others. In better-known Western models, such as pre-classical Greece, Memory was personified as the mother of the Muses, the animators of history and the arts. Students of oral traditions have marveled at the bearers of oral knowledge, how they perform it and how they maintain its continuity.

Still, for people living in a globalized world, sources of cultural knowledge may be limited because traditional performance venues may be limited, in terms of both access and integrity. This project reflects an effort to preserve the cultural memory of an authoritative generation of drumming elders within a different medium that can reach beyond performance. Within that transformation, this different medium presents its own kind of challenge of how to engage the cultural heritage of Dagbon; even so, that challenge is consistent with its purpose to provide an opportunity to engage, to recover, and to endure. This document as well bears witness to the artistic genius and intellectual achievements of the Dagbamba drummers of the twentieth century. For any and all of us who may engage their magnificent conception of their vocation, their drumming tradition is a thing of wonder, a testament worthy of hope for the human condition.

We are going to go back to Dagbon again, but this time, we will travel there not by zooming in from a distance, but by the more prosaic means available to the people, and we will go beyond the labels to know some of the people very well.

## Notes

1. William Butler Yeats, "Sailing to Byzantium," in *The Collected Works of William Butler Yeats*, 2nd revised edition, ed. by Richard J. Finneran (New York: Simon & Schuster, Scribner Paperback Poetry, 1996), p. 197.
2. Philip Rieff, private conversation, December, 1986.
3. Many of the ideas in this section are presented more generally in my essay, "Performance and Ethnography," Keynote Address to the Southern Plains Chapter of the Society for Ethnomusicology at the University of North Texas, 2009. Earlier version presented in 1990 at the Performance International Conference, Department of Performance Studies, Tisch School of the Arts, New York University. See HTML and PDF files at [https://www.johnchernoff.com/essays/Performance\\_and\\_Ethnography.html](https://www.johnchernoff.com/essays/Performance_and_Ethnography.html).
4. Robert Thornton, "The Rise of the Ethnographic Monograph in Eastern and Southern Africa: The Moral Motive and Market for Ideas," paper presented at the 1980 meeting of the American Anthropological Association, Washington, DC.
5. American Anthropological Association, "Principles of Professional Responsibility" and "Code of Ethics" (1990, 1998, 2009, 2012). See <https://americananthro.org/about/anthropological-ethics>; <https://americananthro.org/wp-content/uploads/aaa-code-of-ethics-2012.pdf>; <https://ethics.americananthro.org/ethics-statement-1-do-no-harm>; <https://ethics.americananthro.org/category/statement>; <https://americananthro.org/wp-content/uploads/ethicscode-1.pdf>; <https://americananthro.org/wp-content/uploads/AAA-Ethics-Code-2009-1.pdf>.
6. Raymond Aron, *Main Currents in Sociological Thought*, vol. 1, trans. by Richard Howard and Helen Weaver (Garden City, N. Y.: Anchor Books, Doubleday & Company, 1968).
7. Erik Erikson, *Childhood and Society*, 2nd. ed, rev. and enl., (New York: W. W. Norton), pp. 285-86; Kai T. Erikson, *Everything in Its Path: Destruction of Community in the Buffalo Creek Flood* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1976), pp. 79-83.
8. See A. W. Cardinall, *In Ashanti & Beyond: The Record of a Resident Magistrate's many Years in Tropical Africa, his Arduous & Dangerous Treks both in the Course of his Duty & in Pursuit of Big Game, with Descriptions of the People, their Manner of Living & the Wonderful Ways of Bees and Insects* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1927); A. W. Cardinall, *Tales Told in Togoland* (Westport, CT: Negro Universities Press, 1970 [London: Oxford University Press, 1931]).
9. H. A. Blair and A. C. Duncan-Johnstone, eds., *Enquiry into the Constitution and Organization of the Dagbon Kingdom* (Accra, Gold Coast [Ghana]: Government Printing Office, 1931).
10. H. A. Blair, ed., *Dagomba (Dagbane) Dictionary and Grammar* (Accra, Gold Coast [Ghana]: Government Printer, 1941).
11. Emmanuel Forster Tamakloe, ed., *A Brief History of the Dagbamba People* (Accra, Gold Coast [Ghana]: Government Printing Office, 1931); also in Cardinall, *Tales Told in Togoland*.
12. R. S. Rattray, *Ashanti* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923), *Ashanti Law and Constitution* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1929), *Religion and Art in Ashanti* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1927); M. J. Field,

*Religion and Medicine among the Ga People* (London: Oxford University Press, 1937), *Social Organization of the Ga People* (London: Crown Agents for the Colonies, 1940).

13. Meyer Fortes, *The Dynamics of Clanship among the Tallensi: Being the First Part of an Analysis of the Social Structure of a Trans-Volta Tribe* (London: Oxford University, International African Institute, 1945) and *The Web of Kinship among the Tallensi* (London: Oxford University Press, International African Institute, 1949).

14. Geoffrey H. Hartman, referring to myth, in "Structuralism," in *Beyond Formalism: Literary Essays, 1958-1970* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1970), p. 19.

15. See Erik H. Erikson, *Young Man Luther: A Study in Psychoanalysis and History* (New York: W.W. Norton, The Norton Library, 1958), and *Gandhi's Truth: On the Origins of Militant Nonviolence* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1963).

16. Erik H. Erikson, "Identity and Uprootedness in Our Time," in *Insight and Responsibility: Essays on the Ethical Implications of Psychoanalysis* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1964), p. 96.

17. Hartman, "Structuralism," p. 8.

18. Christine Oppong, *Growing Up in Dagbon* (Accra-Tema, Ghana: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1973).

19. A.L. [Alfred Louis] Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn, *Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions* (New York: Vintage Books, 1963 [Cambridge, MA: Papers of the Peabody Museum of American Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University, vol. 42, no. 1 (1952)]), 435pp. See also Alfred L. Kroeber, *Anthropology Today: An Encyclopedic Inventory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), and Kroeber, *The Nature of Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952).

20. Brent, T. David, "Merchants in the Temple of Scholarship: American University Press Publishing," in *Critical Anthropology Now: Unexpected Contexts, Shifting Constituencies, Changing Agendas*, edited by George E. Marcus (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 1999), pp. 361-86.

21. John M. Chernoff, *Hustling Is Not Stealing: Stories of an African Bar Girl* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003) and *Exchange Is Not Robbery: More Stories of an African Bar Girl* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

22. See J. D. Fage, "Reflections on the Early History of the Mossi-Dagomba Group of States," in *The Historian in Tropical Africa*, edited by J. Vansina, R. Mauny, and L. V. Thomas (London: International African Institute and Oxford University Press, 1964) for a review of the literature on these dates. Other scholars have suggested much earlier dates, based on chronologies of the founding of the Tenkodogo Mossi from the union of a Mossi prince and a Dagbana princess. For a brief summary of that literature, see Elliott P. Skinner, *The Mossi of the Upper Volta: The Political Development of a Sudanese People* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1964), pp. 7-8, pp. 205-06 notes 13-14. Several drummers, with unclear provenance, also told me origin stories that featured several elements of the Bayajidda narratives about the founding of the Hausa states.

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24. For a general account of the introduction of Islam to the region, see Nehemia Levtzion, *Muslims and Chiefs in West Africa: A Study of Islam in the Middle Volta Basin in the Pre-Colonial Period*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968.

25. For further information, see the chapters on Gur by Tony Naden in *The Languages of Ghana*, edited by M. E. Kropp-Dakubu (London: Kegan Paul International, 1988), pp. 12-49; and in *The Niger-Congo Languages*, edited by John Bendor-Samuel (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1989), pp. 141-68.

26. The main colonial document is H.A. Blair and A.C. Duncan-Johnstone, eds., *Enquiry into the Constitution and Organization of the Dagbon Kingdom* (Accra, Ghana: Government Printing Office, 1931); also Emmanuel Forster Tamakloe, ed., *A Brief History of the Dagbamba People*. (Accra, Ghana: Government Printing Office, 1931), also in A. W. Cardinall, *Tales Told in Togoland* (Westport, CT: Negro Universities Press [London: Oxford University Press, 1931]). See also in particular Phyllis Ferguson and Ivor Wilks, "Chiefs, Constitutions, and the British in Northern Ghana," in *West African Chiefs: Their Changing Status under Colonial Rule and Independence*, edited by Michael Crowder and Obaro Ikime (New York: African Publishing Corp, 1970); also Martin Staniland, *The Lions of Dagbon: Political Change in Northern Ghana* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975); Paul Ladouceur, "The Yendi Chieftaincy Dispute and Ghanaian Politics," *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 6 (1972): 97-115; and Paul Ladouceur, *Chiefs and Politicians: The Politics of Regionalism in Northern Ghana* (London and New York: Longman, 1979). The records of national government involvement are mainly to be found in the various reports of committees of inquiry, such as Ghana Government, *Report of the Yendi Skin Affairs Committee of Inquiry* (Accra, Ghana: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1974) and *Report on the Yendi Skin Enquiry, December 1968 to July 1969* (Accra, Ghana: Ghana Publishing Corporation, n.d.).

27. The correct plural form of *tindana* is *tindaannima* or *tindamba*, but in this context I have anglicized the plural for simplicity.

28. The plural of *buyli* is *buya*.

29. Ivor Wilks, *The Northern Factor in Ashanti History* (Legon, Ghana: Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, 1961); *Asante in the Nineteenth Century: The Structure and Evolution of a Political Order* (London and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1974).

30. Meyer Fortes, *The Dynamics of Clanship among the Tallensi; The Web of Kinship among the Tallensi; Oedipus and Job in West African Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959); *Religion, Morality, and the Person: Essays on Tallensi Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987). The role of the family in Dagbamba political and religious practice is also discussed in John Chernoff, "Spiritual Foundations of Dagbamba Religion and Culture." The only legitimate and authorized version of the essay is available in HTML and PDF formats at [https://www.johnchernoff.com/essays/Spiritual\\_Foundations\\_of\\_Dagbamba\\_Religion\\_and\\_Culture.html](https://www.johnchernoff.com/essays/Spiritual_Foundations_of_Dagbamba_Religion_and_Culture.html).

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33. Brigitta Benzing, *Die Geschichte und das Herrschaftssystem der Dagomba* (Meisenheim am Glan: Verlag Anton Hain, 1971).
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42. A detailed interpretive essay in HTML and PDF formats is “Music and Historical Consciousness Among the Dagbamba of Ghana,” at

[https://www.johnchernoff.com/essays/Music\\_and\\_Historical\\_Consciousness\\_among\\_the\\_Dagbamba.html](https://www.johnchernoff.com/essays/Music_and_Historical_Consciousness_among_the_Dagbamba.html) and

[https://www.johnchernoff.com/essays/Music\\_and\\_Historical\\_Consciousness\\_among\\_the\\_Dagbamba.pdf](https://www.johnchernoff.com/essays/Music_and_Historical_Consciousness_among_the_Dagbamba.pdf), originally published in *Enchanting Powers: Music in the World's Religions*, edited by Lawrence Sullivan (Cambridge, MA: Center for the Study of World Religions and Harvard University Press, 1997), pp. 91-120; also in *Approaches to African Musics*, ed. by Enrique Cámara de Landa and Silvia Martínez García (Valladolid: University of Valladolid, Centro Buendia, 2006), pp. 137-68. Parts of this passage are also taken from John Chernoff, “Ideas of Culture and the Challenge of Music,” [https://www.johnchernoff.com/essays/Ideas\\_of\\_Culture\\_and\\_the\\_Challenge\\_of\\_Music.html](https://www.johnchernoff.com/essays/Ideas_of_Culture_and_the_Challenge_of_Music.html), a revised version of an original publication in *Exotic No More: Anthropology on the Front Lines*, edited by Jeremy MacClancy (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 377-98.

43. This conception of "the residues of souls" is from Saint Augustine of Hippo, *De Musica*, trans. by W.F. Jackson Knight, in *Philosophies of Art and Beauty: Selected Readings in Aesthetics from Plato to Heidegger*, ed. by Albert Hofstadter and Richard Kuhns (New York: Random House, Modern Library, 1964), p. 195; the citation and discussion are in Chernoff, “Performance and Ethnography” at [https://www.johnchernoff.com/essays/Performance\\_and\\_Ethnography.html](https://www.johnchernoff.com/essays/Performance_and_Ethnography.html).

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