Music and Historical Consciousness among the Dagbamba of Ghana[1]

The Dagbamba people[2] of northern Ghana have been studied from a number of vantage points, but their main claims to fame in the scholarly literature have had to do with politics. First, they have been the focus of several projects that inquired into the nature of their traditional political system and into related issues of state formation in West Africa because, more than five hundred years ago, the Dagbamba consolidated one of the earliest centralized political states south of the Niger bend, the traditional state of Dagbon. Second, they have been a focus for journalists as well as scholars because of an extended and continuing chieftaincy dispute that highlights the interplay between the traditional political system and the Ghanaian government.[3]

In the early 1970s, I went to Dagbon to study music,[4] and my research is an example of how the study of music can lead into broader ethnographic concerns.[5] I hope to earn for the Dagbamba another type of distinction that will be based on an appreciation of the way they use music to articulate images of their history and then act out those images within their community life. In their traditional state, music and dance play an important role in bringing historical meaning down to the level of participatory social action. The foundation of their musical repertoire and their historiography is an epic body of historical knowledge known as *Samban' luŋa*, literally, "outside drumming," because it is sung and drummed outside the house of the chief in major towns. The *Samban' luŋa* is one prototype of what we might call a "drum history." To me, a *Samban' luŋa* performance recalls an image of preclassical Greece, when Homer and his colleagues were singing epics about the Trojan War. It is not easy to see something like that anywhere in the world. I once attended a drum history performance with a poet. He fantasized himself appearing before such a forum, and he kept mumbling, "This is incredible! This is incredible!" Actually, it is normal for a drummer who is about to sing a *Samban' luŋa*, particularly for the first time, to be quite worried, and it is no wonder. He has to sing more or less non-stop for about eight hours, finding his way through his story and remembering countless details. And he is not just entertaining the people: he is singing about history and conveying historical knowledge to people who are already knowledgeable themselves.

I would note that when I first went to Dagbon, I knew virtually nothing about the complex relationship of music and history in that society. I merely started working in Dagbon with the idea of taking Dagbamba music as one example within a broader framework that would use the study of music as a way of looking at social relations in general. My early work in Dagbon and in other cultural areas led to a book called *African Rhythm and African Sensibility*.[6] The main point I tried to make in that book is that in many African societies, music is an agent for the articulation of generative cultural themes and for the socialization of indigenous values. My argument hinged on demonstrating that the stylistic elements in African musical idioms exist within contexts of interaction that sustain and socialize particular modes of participation. Despite a number of significant works by symbolic anthropologists on the influence of cultural systems of meaning on social structure and history,[7] the area of musical culture has not received much attention from social anthropologists because music has seemed so far from the political and economic realities that are the basis of functionalist perspectives on social systems. I believe that in Africa, because of the way that musical style or communication can influence or even dominate situational interaction, because of the particular modes of participation that musical settings institute, and because of the aesthetic sensitivity and contextual awareness required of musicians and participants, ethnomusicologists and ethnographers may hope that attention to musical data can lead to significant generalizations about culture and that these generalizations can be grounded in social action, that is, in performances.

When I decided to continue my research in West Africa, I returned to Dagbon with the idea of elaborating on the broader themes of my early work through detailed investigation of a single society. Essentially, it was because of my involvement with music that I began to have access to historical data and to the types of issues historical knowledge presents to those responsible for passing it on. Thus, rather than looking at the drum history primarily from the standpoint of an historian interested in reconstructing Dagbamba history or a classicist critic interested in its poetic form and improvisational dynamics, I looked at it in terms of its symbolic and social meanings and how those meanings are expressed in musical contexts. This perspective was a nice fit with my original interest because, instead of dealing with historical knowledge as we do, Dagbamba bring it down to participatory contexts and express it through music and dance.

In an African context, the Dagbamba are not really all that 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.[8] Music serves a crucial integrative function within many types of institutionalized activities,[9] and musicians perform a complex social role in community occasions.[10] Music and dance sometimes provide the generative dynamics of large- and small-scale social movements.[11] In many African societies, musicians are the acknowledged authorities on history and custom,[12] and, particularly in the Western Sudan, musicians often have important political functions.[13] In Dagbamba society, these musicians are drummers, with distinct lineage groupings and hierarchical chieftaincy organizations. Indeed, during the chieftaincy dispute that I mentioned, when issues concerning Dagbamba custom were brought before national government committees of inquiry, the expert witnesses for the contesting parties were drummers. Dagbamba drummers undergo formal training for years, and, like most intellectuals, they continue their acquisition of knowledge throughout life.[14] Not only do Dagbamba assert that drummers have "the facts" about historical and social realities, but they also assert that, "If something is happening and there are no drummers present, then you should know that what is happening is not something important."

By way of background, let me note that according to most reckoning, the Dagbamba entered their present traditional area sometime during the fourteenth century. Since its founding more than six hundred years ago, the traditional state of Dagbon[15] has been ruled by a single family in one line, making Dagbon perhaps the oldest continuous dynasty in the world. The Dagbamba have influenced the surrounding peoples of northern Ghana, and they played a role in the routing of precolonial trade and the penetration of Islam into southern Ghana.[16] Early studies by colonial officers emphasized the political sector, focusing on historical data in an effort to clarify and even codify chieftaincy succession patterns as an adjunct to indirect rule.[17] Recent research has had the same focus, an aspect of interest in and response to an extended chieftaincy dispute with national political implications.[18] Other discussions of Dagbamba life have been only brief sketches within works that attempted to deal with all the diverse peoples of northern Ghana or with selected aspects of social processes in the Volta Basin.[19] The historical literature has been reviewed,[20] and the process of Islamization has also received detailed attention.[21]

The Dagbamba entered their present traditional area as conquerors. With horses, spears, and arrows in their military technology, they subjugated the indigenous stateless tribes under an elaborate and competitive hierarchy of chieftaincies. They gradually intermingled and became agriculturists. Their 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. The Dagbamba are patrilineal, virilocal, and polygamous. Marriages are relatively unstable, and divorce is common. Funerals are elaborate, and there is an annual cycle of festivals. Just over a majority are Muslim, and the remainder practice animism and what is often called "ancestor worship," focused to a great extent on local and household shrines, land-priests, soothsayers, medicine men, and witchcraft. There are several craft-guild lineages, such as drummers, and within the cohesive political framework of Dagbon, there are a number of groups that retain a degree of foreign lineal identity -- assimilated Islamic scholars being one such group and many court officials of slave origins another.

In Dagbamba culture, 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 cultural groups in the region; 2) the political and technological innovations brought by the Dagbamba conquerors related to the Mossi, Mamprusi, and Nanumba peoples; 3) the Islamic customs introduced in the early eighteenth century through contact with Wangara and Hausa missionaries; and 4) the Western influence of the twentieth century. Significant complexes of customs have also developed through contact with the Asante, Guruma, and Konkomba peoples. The complex integration of these many cultural trends within Dagbamba society has resulted in a thoroughly distinctive culture; yet, to an extent, Dagbon may be characterized as a cultural laboratory of the pre-colonial Volta Basin. 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 to many societies of the Volta Basin that share a number of cultural traits, most notably Tampolensi, Kantonsi, Talensi, Frafra, Kusasi, Wala, and Dagaba.

A performance of the *Samban' luŋa,* or drum history, normally occurs twice a year, and only in towns or villages ruled by a major chief. The two occasions are during the festival for breaking the fast at the end of Ramadan, on the evening when the new moon appears, and during the festival in the pilgrimage month, on the evening before the sacrifice. The drum history can also be beaten for the installation of a chief. After the evening meal, from around eight o'clock, the people of the town begin to gather outside the house of the chief. The town's drummers assemble opposite the entrance, and several take turns praising their own ancestors in lengthy introductory sections. This prelude to a performance is referred to as "sweeping outside the compound" or "pounding [preparing the vegetables for] the soup." By around ten o'clock, the chief, accompanied by his wives and his elders, will come outside and sit. One of the chiefs of the town's drummers, or his delegate, will then take over the singing and begin the part of the history chosen for the performance. The drummer who sings stands alone and faces the chief across the compound. Holding an hourglass-shaped drum (*luŋa*) under his arm, he is accompanied by as many as fifty to one hundred drummers seated behind him, beating responses to the verses of his song. Most of the drum history is recounted through the medium of stories about the lives of past chiefs, their ancestry and progeny, what they did and how they got their proverbial praise-names. A performance normally focuses on one particular chief or period, although, because the drummer will sing about that chief's forefathers and descendants, the performance can cover a lengthy time frame. The actual historical account in the *Samban' luŋa* depends on the extent of the drummer's knowledge and also on the particular path the drummer chooses to take through the material. I was told, "The *Samban' luŋa* tells Dagbamba how they were living in the olden days, and it also tells a chief what is inside chieftaincy."

To give an idea of the sort of people the Dagbamba were and what was "inside chieftaincy" in the olden days and, presumably, the type of character they believe they have inherited up to now, I shall summarize one of the better-known stories from the *Samban' luŋa*. The story of Naa Luro, that is, Chief Luro, is quite long, and here I will only recount parts of it. Naa Luro lived several hundred years after the founding of the state. The story of Naa Luro begins in the early seventeenth century during the reign of his predecessor, Naa Dariʒɛτu. At that time, the Dagbamba were faced with an external threat from the Gonjas. The Gonjas had just entered northwestern Ghana and were pushing against the western boundary of Dagbon. They started acting up at Dagbon's westernmost market, at the village of Tolon, where there was considerable intermingling. The way the drummers sing it, the Gonjas were coming to the market with "hard eyes" and were catching some Dagbamba and selling them. The paramount chief of Dagbon, the Yaa-Naa, is praised with the epithet, "son of a lion": Naa Dariʒɛɣu, however, did nothing. The Gonjas even carried off some of Naa Dariʒɛɣu's own wives. When his elders asked him what he was going to do, Naa Dariʒɛɣu -- like many Dagbamba when they want to say something serious -- gave a proverb: "A ram walks backwards before it's going to charge." Unconvinced, the elders told him that, "A Yaa-Naa does not run from fighting." Thus reminded of who he was, Naa Dariʒɛɣu went to war against the Gonjas, who killed him. The Gonja chief was named Kaluɣsi Dajia, and Kaluɣsi Dajia cut off Naa Dariʒɛɣu's hand at the wrist and put the hand into a bag which he carried around on his shoulder. After that, things cooled down.

When Naa Luro succeeded to the chieftaincy, he did not seek revenge. What finally made him annoyed and woke up the war was the way one of his wives abused him. Because of her good example, many Dagbamba women like the story of Naa Luro. Her name was Koyibgaa, and she was Naa Luro's most beloved wife. The way the drummers sing it, some of Naa Luro's in-laws came to visit him, and he sent his messenger into the compound to tell his best wife Koyibgaa to prepare food for his guests. Two hours later, there was still no food. Naa Luro sent the messenger again, only to have the messenger come back to say that Koyibgaa was just sitting down sucking her cheeks, and that she did not answer him. So Naa Luro went together with the messenger into the compound, picking up his whip on the way.

The type of whip the Dagbamba had in the olden days was called *barazim:* it was made by taking the phallus of a slaughtered bull and stretching it, then cutting the end of the phallus into strips, like a cat-o-nine-tails, and then drying it. All things considered, therefore, it was a pretty nasty whip. Anyway, when Naa Luro and his messenger reached Koyibgaa in the compound and asked about the food, Koyibgaa still refused to answer, so Naa Luro gave the *barazim* to his messenger and told him to whip her across the ears. The way the drummers sing it, after three times, Koyibgaa finally jumped up and grabbed Naa Luro and cried out, "Look at a useless chief! It's food that's worrying you! If not food, what do you know? The chief who died and you came to take his chieftaincy, do you know where his grave is? If you say you're strong, go and see his grave!"

At that point, according to the drummers, Naa Luro's nose started smoking. He went to war the same day, despite the fact that it was the rainy season at the time. The story goes on in great detail to describe many difficulties of the campaign, including a lengthy scene in which the Dagbamba are stranded at the bank of a river and find blacksmiths to build a bridge. The campaign concludes with Naa Luro reaching Kaluɣsi Dajia's village and killing everybody in it, until they were lying on the ground like "so many dead flies," and finally, in an epic battle scene, fighting Kaluɣsi Dajia and killing him. Then, Naa Luro cut off Kaluɣsi Dajia's head, signifying the end of the war. There is a rather interesting denouement. Naa Luro called Koyibgaa to come and look at Kaluɣsi Dajia, and then he cut off her head, too. He built a big fire and burnt both of the heads until they were ashes. Naa Luro collected the bag containing Naa Dariʒɛɣu's hand and took it back to Dagbon, along with the ashes of Kaluɣsi Dajia and Koyibgaa. There he built a room, buried the hand in a grave inside the room, and smeared the ashes of Kaluɣsi Dajia and Koyibgaa like paint on the walls of the room. That grave is still in Dagbon, at a village called Pong Tamale.

I have gone into some detail because telling the story is one way of presenting what many Dagbamba have to contemplate when they ask themselves about the type of past they come from. In this respect, the drum history does what any history does in representing the past. The *Samban' luŋa* is one of the ways Dagbamba deal with their past, but it is only one aspect of a very complex response. What I shall describe next is the way in which the Dagbamba have made a musical event like the drum history the center of a constellation of customs that link history to political and kinship institutions within a number of communal musical events. In that regard, as much as the Dagbamba drum history resembles history as we know it, there are some ways in which it is not quite the same as history because it has a different kind of dynamic in its cultural context. It relies on different cultural means, different types of media, different types of knowledge, and different types of sensibilities. Therein lie not only its interest but also a number of methodological problems.

The general ambience of Dagbamba social life and gatherings contrasts quite a bit with the image one might develop of them based on the story of Naa Luro. The complementary human values that Dagbamba admire are patience and shyness, which is conceived as a sense of shame. They say "Patience gets everything," and they also say "Shyness is a human being." Together, as a basis for social action, the two values address ideals of cooperativeness and interdependence and ethics of respect and obedience within the many hierarchical structures that coordinate an individual's life and social position in Dagbamba society. At the other end of the axis is pride or impudence exemplified by the notion of "showing oneself." Dagbamba do not like people who are proud or who boast, who get annoyed or who argue, who bluff others or who show themselves to be "more" than others. Given these values, the social atmosphere in the Dagbamba traditional area is, as one might expect, restrained and tranquil; the people are reliable, temperate, and generous; the pace of life is relaxed.

A sense of history is central to the integration of Dagbamba culture and to the Dagbamba musical heritage. In contrast to societies in which political offices or scientific-technological establishments control and authenticate information transfer, Dagbamba tradition is transmitted through artistic specialists, that is, musicians. 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 and historical information.

Regarding the rest of the Dagbamba musical repertoire, the drum history is extended to lend meaning to Dagbamba social dances, which themselves are based on the proverbial praise-names of the paramount chiefs, who sit at the town of Yendi, and the chiefs of other traditionally important towns. Different dances have associations that relate aspects of centralized political power with family origins, since drummers say that there is no Dagbana whose ancestry cannot be traced to a former chief. Although a typical Dagbana's preference in dancing is not necessarily overtly political, and although dance preferences can vary, many Dagbamba may demonstrate their relationship to historical figures by dancing to the name of a great forefather. The important musicological point is that the different dance beats are themselves rhythmic elaborations of the proverbial praise-names of former Dagbamba chiefs.

A dance called *Ʒim Taai Kurugu* can serve as an example of how a name becomes a dance beat. *Ʒim Taai Kurugu* is a praise-name for Naa Alaasani, who was Yaa-Naa at the beginning of the twentieth century. At the time he became the chief, there was a civil war between him and his brothers over the chieftaincy. Naa Alaasani's rivals were what we would call his cousins, the children of one of his father's younger brothers who was the Yaa-Naa who had just died. Naa Alaasan' Ʒim Taai Kurugu's full name was *Ʒim taai kurugu, ka chinchansi wɔlinjɛ*, which means "Blood touches iron: rats will try to eat it and fail." Obviously, the name refers to the way in which Naa Alaasani ascended to the chieftaincy -- by asserting his strength over his rivals: the "blood" is the chieftaincy, and he is the "iron; the "rats" are his rivals who were not able to get or "eat" the chieftaincy that has come and "touched" him. The name also refers to the element of contestation within Dagbamba chieftaincy succession, and it makes an allusion to the civil war. In that sense, one can see why drummers sometimes say that the chiefs "throw their names at each other." Employing the well-known practice of using a drum to duplicate speech patterns, drummers set up a responsive alternation between the first and second phrases of the proverb. The text of the proverb itself therefore becomes the basis for the rhythms of the drumming, and a dancer picks up on these rhythms as he or she moves, embodying the proverb, so to speak. Drummers may beat other phrases or improvisations on the rhythms of the main phrases, and a good dancer can apply the variations as well to improvised dance movements.

A dance called *Nantoo Nimdi* serves as another example. *Nantoo Nimdi* is a praise-name for Naa Yakuba, who was Yaa-Naa in the mid-nineteenth century. *Nimdi* is "meat," and *nantoo*, defined by Dagbamba as a very poisonous flying creature, is a disease vector of anthrax. The praise-name means that meat which has been touched by *nantoo* cannot be eaten or approached. With regard to Naa Yakuba, the praise-name therefore asserts that he is the *nantoo* who has come to touch the chieftaincy, the meat his rivals wished to eat. On a general level, in addition to obvious respect for the power of chieftaincy, the name implies that whatever a chief's hand touches becomes a dangerous thing; thus, the name cautions that citizens should not do anything bad or should not become involved in a matter that will come before the chief. The name the drummers gave Naa Yakuba is not only appropriate to his violent career: it has a good dance beat. Drummers beat the name *Nantoo Nimdi* and improvise on its rhythm, and people dance to it.

Dances such as *Ʒim Taai Kurugu* and *Nantoo Nimdi* are danced individually inside a circle of spectators. A dancer may dance several dances inside the circle, while friends and relatives press coins onto the dancer's forehead or place coins into the dancer's hands, publicly demonstrating their relationship. At a typical Dagbamba community celebration -- whether a funeral, a wedding, a festival, or a chief's installation -- music, dance, and proverbial praise-naming are integrated with status encounters, concerns of social control, and genealogical and historical elucidation.

In an actual community situation, what do the dances look like? How are they performed? I mentioned that Dagbamba do not like people who "show themselves"; the social realm in which people do show themselves, however, is dancing, though they do so in quite a limited way. In music and dance, Dagbamba provide a format for the display of character, and, in both music and dance, character is represented as the flexible expression of individuality within the rigidity of structured affiliations. At a musical event like a funeral, a person seated in a circle of friends and relations is invited to a solo dance by a drummer who squats and beats and sings praise-names of that person's ancestors, who are traced to some point on a chieftaincy line. "A person does not praise himself," Dagbamba say, but thus identified and addressed by the drummers, the dancer stands up, looks around, smiles, arranges his or her clothing, then comes into the dance circle and "shows" himself or herself briefly with a solo dance before being surrounded by people who, as I noted, publicly demonstrate the dancer's integration into the community.

Observations of Dagbamba dancers as well as indigenous critical comments from master dancers indicate that Dagbamba dancers attempt to balance inward and outward movements to enlarge and contract their dancing space. Dynamic and expansive body movements that epitomize the force of personality are alternated with shifts into concentrated and precise movements that balance or freeze the body and establish the head and the eyes as the focus of the dance and of character. I have even seen dancers concentrate all movements the eyes alone, which moved from side to side. Changes of direction and focused body movements engage the rhythms of the drums, while composed control and release of the body demonstrate awareness of what I sometimes call the subtleties of presence and projection in artistic and personal expression. Dagbamba say -- to use their way of talking about dancing -- that to dance nicely is to dance "coolly," "according to the tradition": like a drummer, a dancer must "cool the heart and use patience and sense to dance." A dancer who follows the "crying" of the drums, so that the dance "fits," makes a gesture of respect to the tradition of the particular dance, and the dance becomes an embodiment of the tradition in which improvisation, the personal expression of the unique insight and imagination of the dancer, projects, in their words, "beauty" and "happiness" and exemplifies and "adds to" or "increases" the tradition's continuity and vitality. At a community celebration, therefore, praise-drumming, music, and dance are integrated into a dramatic presentation of self on multiple levels of projected and expressed reality.

There are quite a few divergent and subtle themes held in balance when a Dagbana dances. It is not just one thing that he or she is expressing regarding the presentation of historical consciousness and the representation of social values. It is too simple, though undoubtedly true in many respects, to say that Dagbamba musical events validate the political and social status quo. Obviously, the conservative function of Dagbamba drummers is to elucidate genealogical relationships at community events and to provide a framework for asserting both social integration and status differentiation. The status of the drummers themselves fosters and preserves their lineal identity and their effective professionalism, as do other factors such as ritual sanctions on the recruitment of children into the profession. The drum history itself unites Dagbamba in learning about their past and enhancing their sense of their community as both a tribe and a family. Social dances like *Ʒim Taai Kurugu* and *Nantoo Nimdi* as well as praise-names based on historical allusion augment concerns of political and social control and elucidate the nature of the chieftaincy.

But to an outsider, there are several peculiarities about the drum history and its influence on the Dagbamba musical repertoire that seem to require analysis on other levels. To someone raised on the exemplary myths of historical figures, like George Washington chopping down a cherry tree and Abraham Lincoln teaching himself to read in a log cabin, the first curious point about the drum history is that it presents a reality that is almost antithetical to the laid-back Dagbamba lifestyle. Many of its stories are tales of war, civil violence, and familial enmity, and many of its personages are treacherous, willful, vengeful, and proud, their characters and their praise the epitome of what Dagbamba would consider antisocial. Many of the praise-names flaunt the strength of a chief and abuse the weakness of his rivals; the praise-names also highlight the presence of jealousy, mistrust and wickedness in human affairs. The enjoyable ambience of community celebrations, where people present themselves at their best, stands on an incongruous foundation of dances whose names and whose drum language say things like: "I Will Not Know a Person and Let Him Know Me," "A Wicked Man's Trap Catches His Own Child," "If You Trust a Human Being, You Are Lying Down Naked," "Someone Who is Recovered from Illness is the One Who Says that the Medicine is Finished," "Wind is Blowing Clay Pots, and Calabashes Should Not Be Proud."[22] These are all fine dance beats, but in short, the reality represented by the social dances and drum history is poles apart from the pleasant daily lifestyle and values of the people. Yet there is also an element of reality in the dramatized transformation of an amiable farmer or petty trader into the actual blood descendant of a great leader, a flash of remembrance, commitment, and capability expressed in a dance that is bounded by initial shyness at its start and by an enveloping community at its finish.

In Dagbamba musical events, therefore, there are obvious discontinuities of the type that cause students of culture to salivate. On the one hand are the violent historical reality represented in the drum history and the amoral and disruptive social presences memorialized in the praise-names of chiefs; on the other hand are the dance repertoire and social ambience of public gatherings, when the disturbing dimensions of Dagbamba history are enacted and transformed through aesthetic display into a communal ethos that expresses, as I have noted, the social values of respect and patience, interdependence and modesty.

There is another point worth noting. When the drum history is beaten, or when certain stories from the drum history are told, an animal is sacrificed. Depending on the circumstances and the particular story, the animal might be a sheep or even a cow, or both, and sometimes other animals as well. For the *Samban' luŋa*, this sacrifice is made by the chief who has sponsored the performance. The sacrifice is made early during the performance, and food is prepared with the meat of the sacrificed animal; later in the performance, the drummers will be given that food to eat. The indigenous explanation for the sacrifices is twofold. First, because many of the stories in the drum history concern war and bloodshed, the blood of the sacrifice is necessary as commemoration. Second, the spirits of the past chiefs are still around: I was told, "They are not the kind of people who are buried and stay in the ground; they roam." They are dangerous because they did bad things and they do not like to be talked about, but they can be placated with the blood of the sacrifice. And that is about as far as people go to explain the sacrifices.

Beyond these points, there are ritual sanctions that exclude explicit historical discourse from everyday life and from community celebrations other than the drum history performance; in fact, the drum history performance is the only time in which detailed accounts of the past are presented openly. In Dagbamba terms, the "old talks" -- their word for history -- are "forbidden" and "hidden." Drummers acquire historical knowledge only after years of effort. It was four years after I started learning drumming that I was told about some of the more serious dances, and it was seventeen years before I was told a definitive account of the founding of the state. Many drummers only learn Dagbamba history to a comfortable extent, and most do not even want to answer questions about it. Someone who talks about Dagbamba history can be accused of "revealing the anus of Dagbon." Such control of information is supplemented by the notion that the "forbidden talks" are dangerous, and drummers can easily justify lying or giving false information as a way of avoiding the dangers of mentioning "forbidden" matters. Talking about "forbidden" matters or performing the drum history must be accompanied by gifts and sacrifices whose expense is borne by the one seeking knowledge. If appropriate sacrifices are not made, bad luck or trouble will come to either the chief who sponsored the history or the drummer who sang it, and drummers can run off a list of examples to prove the point. Drummers and chiefs generally meet in advance to discuss the extent of the drum history that will be beaten and what sacrifices will be needed. There are as well parts of Dagbamba history that are not sung in the *Samban' luŋa*: only a very few drummers -- the drum chiefs of certain towns -- ever have to know them, and most drummers do not even want to ask about them. "What good is knowledge," they told me, "if you get it and die?"

The fact that historical knowledge is hierarchically classified according to its degree of secrecy and danger is one of many cultural dimensions supporting drummers' lineal and social identity. What might be considered methodological problems by a Western historian are experienced as such by Dagbamba drummers who must deal, however, with an added dimension of concern for their lives. I have been in situations where one drummer was pressing to learn something with a stream of probing questions while another drummer was begging us all to leave the place. The context of knowledge in which drummers work -- where they are continually making judgments about appropriate boundaries for demonstrating respect or undermining bluffing or dealing with actual fear -- is certainly very intriguing in comparison with Western models, though it can also be encountered in several other African societies. Certainly, another issue that makes the Dagbamba stimulating from a comparative standpoint is how incredibly conscious they are about their past, about who they are and where they stand.

The drum history brings together many themes of Dagbamba culture. One notion in particular is worthy of reflection in this context. The facts of the sacrifices and the taboos, the physical and temporal structuring of the drum history as a performance, its repetitiveness and occasional periods of monotony, its mythic elements, its isolation from normal discourse: all these elements indicate that the event probably should be considered as a ritual. Anthropologists and other social scientists have generally discussed rituals as events based on a body of shared beliefs, in which concrete actions and things have symbolic meaning, functioning to affirm or realign a community's place in the cosmos, or, in the case of ritual healing, the place of the individual within the collectivity. The central communal metaphor of ethnographic studies is quite evident in interpretations of ritual as the reification of order or structure in the face of chaos; in more contemporary interpretations, the study of the relationships of ritual symbols reflects indigenous perceptions of a community's functional or structural order as well. To a musician, though, the portrayal of ritual meaning as established by the emotive force of comprehended symbols is somewhat uncomfortable: the perspective is a bit too close to the aesthetics of writing, including scholarly writing; the religious imagery as well resembles Western religious notions that project an "objective" view of chaos as something "out there." It is not surprising after all that the music which plays such an important role in rituals is often excluded from analyses oriented to the cognitive, symbolic, or iconographic dimensions of participation. It would seem as well that the Dagbamba case is one example among others that could help open up our perspectives on the nature of religious mediation toward models of action and engagement, particularly because general aspects of musical style and sensibility often convey ritualized presentations of order and participatory modalities beyond ritual boundaries into other contexts of social experience and cultural meaning.

In this regard, I would like to note that what is significant to me about looking at the artistic aspects of Dagbamba communal rituals is that, instead of posing a sense of community in terms of a covenant of the faithful or the blessed, Dagbamba look at aspects of uneasiness in their sense of history. When they dance at funerals or weddings or festivals, or when they assemble for the drum history, Dagbamba establish dramaturgical settings in which the unthinkable and the unknowable, the amoral and the disruptive, are incorporated into an expressive dialogue in which people define boundaries that enable them to feel involved with their society while they achieve a distanced perspective on some of its realities. Yet that distance is also challenged, for to dance with the identity of a forebear elicits the equivocal question: is the dancer up to the standard of his or her father or grandfather? The answer is a recurrent motif in the drum history: I am also capable of doing what my father or grandfather did. The drum history chronicles the destinies of individuals and families and the foundations of the social order in an ambivalent comparison of past and present. There is no sweeping affirmation of either the past or the present in the Dagbamba assessment of the drum history: "It tells a chief about his forefathers and lets a chief know what is inside chieftaincy." And we might note the sacrifices Naa Dariʒɛɣu, Naa Luro, and Naa Luro's beloved wife Koyibgaa had to make to know what was inside chieftaincy. I was told, "And for any Dagbana, whether man or woman, the drum history tells that person who he is. The drum history will open his eyes to the old talks that are inside his family, and it is inside his praise that he will know his relationship to chieftaincy."

Sacrifice typically has been understood as a gift and a kind of communion, a symbolic substitution in which one gives something of oneself in order to receive something back or to continue receiving benefits. Thus do the Dagbamba place themselves into a relationship of continuity with their tradition as they address the dead ancestors in their sacrificial prayers: "Your grandchild is coming to get your benefit." Within the Dagbamba ritualization of history, the sacrifices make a bond with power and with the violence and frustration that underlie political form and social stratification: to use a psychoanalytic analogy, the need for sacrifice can be interpreted as a memorialization of the pain of structural transformation.[23] Dagbamba come to terms with their history by incorporating and beautifying this ambivalent acknowledgment within participatory musical contexts that counterpoint and engage the "forbidden" through the generosity and communicative clarity of mature art and through the balance and control of personal expression. One may wonder whether the greatest achievement of Dagbamba civilization lies in the organizing genius articulated in a complex political system that has continued for more than five hundred years under a single dynasty. One may also wonder whether the Dagbamba's greatest accomplishment exists in the artistic genius that turns people into allusive proverbs and reconciles an awareness of the necessity of terrifying greatness in politics, sophisticating it until it turns to play. Dagbamba drummers answer, "Without drumming, there is no chieftaincy in Dagbon."

To most Dagbamba, music remains a meaningful vehicle of historical perspective and a foundation for moral awareness; such abstracted insights into the role music plays in their lives are relatively unnecessary. There are also others who have become partial outsiders to their tradition and who might find in the preceding thoughts a degree of historical sympathy to help them overcome the destructive and totalizing tendencies of the anomie and frustration that can be unleashed by the loss of historical perspective. When the mythopoeic function of the drum history as an elaboration of cultural values has become morally problematic in life situations, they might find, and many do, that artistic sympathy is also a guide to authenticity in social relations. A number of my Dagbamba friends have explained to me how they are able to address issues of self-consciousness and alienation within a participatory framework of music and song and particularly through dancing. They are not alone in apprehending the times when the cultural ordering of their existence fails or is displaced by destiny or death. Like myths and rituals, music provides a structure for the transformation of symbols; but, like art, music also provides a context for experiencing and enhancing a mature sense of historical location and personal meaning. Many Dagbamba continue to resist Western influences, but even for Westernized Dagbamba, music and dance continue to be relevant vehicles of individuation and perspective even when the mythopoeic thrust of the drum history is compromised. Nonetheless, for many Dagbamba drummers, mythopoeic and historiographic problems are aspects of their professionalism. They have struggled with problematic issues of historical meaning and the relationship between history and myth: when they learn their historical tradition in enough detail to question its objectivity, they must reconcile its contradictions in matters of factuality and evidence and in terms of different interpretations and presentations; they also must work to find ways to extend their traditional medium on its own terms while making it appropriate to their changing society. To my knowledge, the drummers have expanded their role throughout Dagbamba history and particularly during the twentieth century.

A focus on the artistic and expressive aspects of Dagbamba social rituals reveals a different dimension of cultural actualization that complements and expands other types of symbolic interpretation we might apply. An aesthetic focus can provide an essential complementary perspective that significantly enlarges our capacity to portray Dagbamba culture. A picture of Dagbamba society based solely on the privileged hierarchy of institutions in an orthodox functionalist analysis would be one of incredible tensions: a rigid and patriarchal feudal state that is characterized by political conflict and contestation within the elite; a stratified population of diverse origins; emphasized attention to status concerns among both elite and commoners; cultural conservatism and backwardness with regard to development; the exploitation of women and mistrust in social relations as evidenced in conjugal jealousy and witchcraft problems; and so on. Dagbamba life provides many manifestations of structural tension, even though the social ambience presents a calm surface. Without the musical data, however, the portrait of Dagbamba society remains a conflict portrait of difficult social and personal tensions, and the question of how these tensions are resolved or sublimated is left unanswered. It is not enough to refer the integrity of the Dagbamba state to an abstracted conception of something called culture as a unifying element that binds structural tensions. We have to characterize *how* contestation and conflict are culturally sublimated and *how* cultural representations achieve their effectiveness. As an element of culture, music does not inherently express anything functional, and music can be linked to social forms in many ways. But if it *is* music and dance that bind the tensions, then these aspects of expressive culture are not insignificant epiphenomena but are rather constitutive realities at the essence of the system.

It is tempting to speculate on the extent of influence that musical events have as vehicles and validators of historical and political information. Can the way in which this information is actualized in public gatherings and formalized in repertoire and process be said to exert meaningful influence on the traditional state? Although the details of Dagbamba cultural actualization are unique to Dagbamba society, it is my impression that in the broader culture area of which the Dagbamba are part, there are parallels in the use of music as a medium for articulating indigenous insight into patterns of social organization. In the Dagbamba case in particular, though, one cannot help but be impressed by the cultural creativity inherent in their institutional continuity. It is clear that the political aspect of Dagbamba music is not only a matter of using music to enhance institutional motives in political contexts, thus validating the status quo. Dagbamba spend a lot of time in contexts that present particular views of the relations between chiefs and commoners and the relations among various chiefs. These views elaborate a number of checks and balances in the relations of the paramountcy and the aristocracy, illustrated by stories of constraints on both the power of the divisional chiefs and the authority of the paramount chieftaincy. Beyond rationalizing the role of contestation within the political sector, musical events also designate channels of access and patterns of relationships that link persons and groups to centers of power in the social structure. In Dagbon, the social territory within which the drummers move is the political structure, but beyond the drummers' knowledge of history that people respect so highly, the drummers have applied their art so that historical data resonate through many aspects of Dagbamba social life.

To recapitulate: even given the sheer amount of historical thought that has permeated the society, the basic issue that makes the Dagbamba case interesting from a comparative standpoint is the way in which, through music, historical knowledge is brought down to the level of participatory social action -- dancing, praising, and giving money -- by the Dagbamba themselves. There is a significant distinction, I believe, between the Dagbamba situation and what we normally see in most societies, where historical knowledge achieves its functional effect primarily through the ideological comprehension of cognitive information or through the emotive or ritualized force of cultural symbols. Such means are there in Dagbon, of course, but Dagbamba augment those means within participatory modes that envelope their lives not only during events such as festivals, weddings, or funerals, but also in such mundane contexts as going to the market and being praised by market drummers or understanding the proverbs that people use on each other in family quarrels. More important, Dagbamba learn history not only as words but also as songs, and they not only listen to it but also dance to it and place themselves in relation to it at public gatherings where people look at them. These latter aspects of their historical consciousness distinguish them even from contemporary bardic traditions of epic history in such places as the Balkans, Turkey, Finland, Indonesia, the Philippines, and from the better-known Western models of preclassical Greece.

An effort to understand participation in Dagbamba musical contexts points toward musical expression as a dynamic style of mediating deep structures of meaning, the nexus of the complex institutionalization of history, politics, family, and community in Dagbon. Music is a permeating presence of symbolic and aesthetic forms in many types of participatory communal events where the actual translation of knowledge to social action takes place. In musical contexts, Dagbamba act out social identities with a self-conscious focus on origins that affirms archaic relationships and asserts a particular model of integration among the various layers of society and within the elite itself. Musical situations gather these elements and give them presence within a repertoire of historical allusion and concern. I believe that it is significant that musical events can give us access not merely to peripheral generalizations about expressive culture but perhaps to a more comprehensive overview of Dagbamba civilization, where history and historical consciousness have been refined to a sophisticated integration of perspective and practice.

When I noted above that the *Samban' luŋa* is only one aspect of a complex response to history, I was leading this essay into a description of the musical contexts that link history to political and kinship institutions. If the drum history is one foundation of the drummers' creativity, its imagery is a foundation of self-reflection and self-awareness for Dagbamba who must make their peace with the nature of their society and their place in it. The terrifying greatness of the chiefs who require sacrifices; the violence implicit in political form; the rivalry inherent in social stratification -- these aspects of history are transformed through music. A drummer told me that *Nantoo Nimdi* -- the name of Naa Yakuba -- is a bad name, but in musical gatherings *Nantoo Nimdi* becomes something good, a dance that adds to the community and extends the family. In his comment lies an answer to a difficult question: a single ruling dynasty in Dagbon goes back more than five hundred years; what accounts both for the longevity of the Dagbamba state and for the reasons why this quasi-feudal political system has not developed into a more autocratic type of despotism? Students of social history generally answer such questions by looking for certain types of often complementary social and cultural elements: one is the presence of conservative factors that prevent changes in institutional forms and, particularly, provide checks against revolutionary or radical breaks with the past; another is the presence of ritualized communal forms and generative elements of social meaning that hinder the development of new patterns of institutional relations which might have effect on structural cohesion.[24]

In Dagbon, despite the historical themes with which the *Samban' luŋa* seems to challenge the cultural ambience, an image of contestation and conflict does not appear to the same extent in popular conceptions of the state. There is a high level of historical erudition among people who are not drummers. They are quick to give credit to the drummers for the role the drummers play, for most people know their history and family lines in great detail because they pay close attention to what the drummers do and say. In concordant terms, they identify and discuss themselves with continual allusions to their historical background. To Dagbamba, the Dagbamba heritage is handed down not as a fixed body of tradition but as a living body of thought.[25] Their past is part of their present, constantly reviewed and revised and acted out in cultural events, and what they are doing at their musical gatherings is connecting themselves to their family. With regard to questions about historical continuity, what one hears from knowledgeable people is a very basic concept of political cohesion based on a family model. In simplest yet most profound terms, what has held the Dagbamba together is the understanding that, whatever their problems with one another as they struggle with the vagueness of chieftaincy succession and their own status as a group, ultimately they are one family. This understanding is the foundation of the social cohesion that has prevented constant political contestation and even occasional civil war from destroying the unity of the state. Throughout Dagbamba history, whenever there was a civil war among princes and chiefs, the contesting parties would come together at the end to bury their brothers and move on, holding the idea that they were a family. That family includes the commoners, who also consider themselves and are publicly shown by drummers to be members of the conquerors' descent group. Such ritual relations between living and dead are an important aspect of the association of history and family, in which the past chiefs are ancestors with regard to whom the living stand in ambiguous moral relation. The history itself presents several examples of sitting chiefs, like Naa Dariʒɛɣu and Naa Luro, who are reminded of the dead chiefs, should they not rise to the level of the tradition they have inherited. Within the broader Volta Basin culture area populated by people who speak languages similar to Dagbani, the Dagbamba share a spiritual foundation with groups that have projected the family as the ubiquitous context for interpreting the vicissitudes of destiny and as a way of conceptualizing practical morality, grounded in divination and sacrifice.[26] The *Samban' luŋa* and the political culture it portrays may be considered in this vein as a reflection of a descent group.

Given the regional culture base, it is no doubt prudent to contemplate Dagbamba spirituality and religious sentiment with regard to the precept that ritual and religion in that area of the world typically have strong associations with the family. The significant presence of ritual customs and sanctions within historical consciousness and political contexts points toward religious inspiration. The view that the formation of a centralized and feudal patriarchal state in Dagbon was an innovation brought by conquerors and imposed upon the aboriginal inhabitants of the region has perhaps been unduly influenced by Western scholarly interest in evolutionary schemes of historical development. From another vantage point, it is certainly logical to assume that the cultural capacity for that development had to have been in place and that Dagbamba history stands on that foundation. In Dagbon, the important transition that distinguished the Dagbamba from the other cultural groups in the region can be envisioned as much in religious motifs as in political ones, as much in terms of ritual aspects of kinship structures as of sanctioned authority structures. The unification of the towns and villages under the rule of a centralized state was also the unification of separate families into one larger family. The evolution of hierarchical political form was also the evolution of an elaborately segmented family.[27]

In Dagbon, musical situations represent in unique ways the strengths and weaknesses of the Dagbamba aristocracy as a whole and in their relations with one another. It is proverbial wisdom, however, that the strength of a chief is a commoner, and the strength of a commoner is a chief. Demonstrating the link between the commoners and the central institution of chieftaincy is the work of the drummers. Every Dagbana is the grandchild of a chief, the drummers claim, and they can use a drum to beat a praise-name for every Dagbana. In musical contexts, the historical continuity of the Dagbamba state is displayed as a dimension of the extended family. In musical contexts, as in many aspects of Dagbamba daily life, a sincere respect for older generations, for origins, and for the heritage of the past guides people's reasoning, their imagination, and their art. In the Dagbamba case, musical contexts are crucial to informing our perception of deep structures of meaning and refining our appreciation of the deliberateness with which the Dagbamba maintain their traditions. In the final analysis, one probably need not choose which type of cultural processes might have had the greatest significance in the development of Dagbamba society: what is impressive is the way in which the complex institutionalization of many cultural processes is manifested in Dagbamba music and made accessible to the Dagbamba themselves through participation in public events. Because of this cultural achievement, the Dagbamba merit a respected place on the world stage. I would also hope that for scholars in various fields, the ideas advanced in this essay indicate that a focus on music should not be the province of specialists, for musical events have the possibility to open a number of related and comparative dimensions to our perspectives on the people we meet in other cultures.

NOTES

1. This essay was originally published in *Enchanting Powers: Music in the World's Religions*, edited by Lawrence E. Sullivan (Cambridge, MA: Center for the Study of World Religions and Harvard University Press, 1997), 91-120. It was also published in *Approaches to African Musics*, edited by Enrique Cámara de Landa and Silvia Martínez García (Valladolid: University of Valladolid, Centro Buendia, 2006), pp. 137-68. Elements of this essay were presented in earlier publications, particularly "The Relevance of Ethnomusicology to Anthropology: Strategies of Inquiry and Interpretation," in *African Musicology: Current Trends*, vol. 1, *A* Festschrift *Presented to J. H. Kwabena Nketia*, edited by Jacqueline Cogdell Djedje and William G. Carter (Los Angeles: African Studies Center, UCLA; African Studies Association and Crossroads Press, 1989), 59-92.
2 *Dagbamba* is the plural form; an individual is a *Dagbana*. Their language is *Dagbani*. The traditional state is *Dagbɔŋ*.
3. 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); 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); Ghana Government, *Report of the Yendi Skin Affairs Committee of Inquiry* (Accra, Ghana: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1974); Paul Ladouceur, "The Yendi Chieftaincy Dispute and Ghanaian Politics," *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 6 (1972): 97-115; Paul Ladouceur, *Chiefs and Politicians: The Politics of Regionalism in Northern Ghana* (London and New York: Longmann, 1979; 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, 1970 [London: Oxford University Press, 1931]); 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); Martin Staniland, *The Lions of Dagbon: Political Change in Northern Ghana* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975).
4. John Miller Chernoff, *African Rhythm and African Sensibility: Aesthetics and Social Action in African Musical Idioms* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979); John Miller Chernoff, "Music-Making Children of Africa," *Natural History* 88, no. 9 (November 1979): 68-75; "The Drums of Dagbon," in *Repercussions: A Celebration of African-American Music*, edited by Geoffrey Haydon and Dennis Marks (London: Century Publishing, 1985); John M. Chernoff, *Master Drummers of Dagbon, vol. 1* (Cambridge, MA: Rounder Records 5016); John M. Chernoff, *Master Drummers of Dagbon, vol. 2* (Cambridge, MA: Rounder Records 5046). See http://www.johnchernoff.com.
5. John M. Chernoff and Alhaji Ibrahim Abdulai, *A Drummer's Testament: The Culture of the Dagbamba*. 3 vols. With the collaboration of Kissmal Ibrahim Hussein, Benjamin Danjuma Sunkari, Mustapha Muhammad, and Alhaji Mumuni Abdulai. An open access publication is at http://www.adrummerstestament.com.

6. Chernoff, *African Rhythm and African Sensibility*.
7. For example: Clifford Geertz, *Negara: The Theatre State in Nineteenth-Century Bali* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980); Marshall Sahlins, *Islands of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985); James W. Fernandez, *Bwiti: An Ethnography of the Religious Imagination in Africa* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982).
8. Chernoff, *African Rhythm and African Sensibility*; Robert Farris Thompson, *African Art in Motion: Icon and Act in the Collection of Katherine Coryton White* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1974).
9. A. M. Jones, *Studies in African Music*, 2 vols. (London: Oxford University Press, 1959); Charles Keil, *Tiv Song* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979); Alan P. Merriam, "African Music," in *Continuity and Change in African Cultures*, edited by William R. Bascom and Melville J. Herskovits (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959; Alan P. Merriam, *The Anthropology of Music* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1964); Hugo Zemp, *Musique Dan: La musique dans la pensée et la vie sociale d'une societé africaine* (Paris: Mouton and École Practique des Hautes Études, 1971).
10. S. Kobla Ladzekpo, "The Social Mechanics of Good Music: A Description of Dance Clubs among the Anlo Ewe-Speaking People of Ghana," *African Music* 5, no. 1 (1971): 6-22; J. H. Kwabena Nketia, *Drumming in Akan Communities of Ghana* (London: University of Ghana and Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1963).
11. John Blacking, "The Role of Music in the Culture of the Venda of the Northern Transvaal," in *Studies in Ethnomusicology*, vol. 2, edited by M. Kolinski (New York: Oak Publications, 1965); John Blacking, "Music and the Historical Process in Vendaland," in *Essays on Music and History in Africa*, edited by Klaus P. Wachsmann (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1971); T. O. Ranger, *Dance and Society in Eastern Africa, 1890-1970: The Beni* Ngoma (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1975).
12. David W. Ames, "A Sociocultural View of Hausa Musical Activity," in *The Traditional Artist in African Societies*, edited by Warren L. d'Azevedo (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973); David W. Ames, "Igbo and Hausa Musicians: A Comparative Examination," *Ethnomusicology* 17 (1973): 25-78; Ayo Bankole, Judith Bush and Sadek H. Samaan, "The Yoruba Master Drummer," *African Arts* 8, No. 2 (winter 1975): 48-56, 77-78; Paul Berliner, *The Soul of Mbira: Music and Traditions of the Shona People of Zimbabwe* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1978).
13. Charles Cutter, "The Politics of Music in Mali," *African Arts* 1, no. 3 (spring 1968): 38-39, 74-77; Roderic Knight, "The Manding Contexts," in *Performance Practice*, ed. by G. Behague (London: Greenwood Press, 1984); Gordon Innes, *Sunjata: Three Mandinka Versions* (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, 1974); Thomas A. Hale, *Scribe, Griot, and Novelist: Narrative Interpreters of the Songhay Empire* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press and Center for African Studies, 1990).
14. Chernoff, "Music-Making Children of Africa" and "The Drums of Dagbon"; Christine Oppong, *Growing Up in Dagbon* (Accra-Tema, Ghana: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1973).
15. Fage, "Reflections on the Early History of the Mossi-Dagomba Group of States."
16. Ivor Wilks, *The Northern Factor in Ashanti History* (Legon, Ghana: Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, 1961); Ivor Wilks, *Asante in the Nineteenth Century: The*

Structure and Evolution of a Political Order (London and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1974).

17. Tamakloe, *A Brief History of the Dagbamba People*; Blair and Duncan-Johnstone, *Enquiry into the Constitution and Organization of the Dagbon Kingdom*; Staniland, *The Lions of Dagbon*.
18. Ferguson and Wilks, "Chiefs, Constitutions, and the British in Northern Ghana"; Ghana Government, *Report of the Yendi Skin Affairs Committee of Inquiry*; Ladouceur, "The Yendi Chieftaincy Dispute and Ghanaian Politics"; Ladouceur, *Chiefs and Politicians;* Staniland, *The Lions of Dagbon*.
19. A. W. Cardinall, *The Natives of the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast: Their Customs, Religion, and Folklore* (London: George Routledge & Sons, [1925]); R. S. Rattray, *The Tribes of the Ashanti Hinterland*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1932); Madeleine Manoukian, *Tribes of the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast,* Ethnographic Survey of Africa: West Africa*,* part 5, ed. by Daryll Forde (London: International African Institute, 1952).
20. Brigitta Benzing, *Die Geschichte und das Herrschaftssystem der Dagomba* (Meisenheim am Glan: Verlag Anton Hain, 1971).
21. Phyllis Ferguson, *Islamization in Dagbon: A Study of the Alfanema of Yendi*, Ph.D. dissertation, University of Cambridge, 1972; 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).
22. In order given, these dances are: *Baŋ nira*, a name of Kari-Naa (chief of Karaga) Alaasan; *Zambalan' tɔŋ*, a name of Kari-Naa Abukari; *Sal' ka yɛda*, a name of Savelugu-Naa (chief of Savelugu) Bukari; *Ŋum biɛ n-kpaŋ*, a name of Savelugu-Naa Yakubu; *Pɔhim ʒɛri*, a name of Savelugu-Naa Ziblim.
23. This phrase is borrowed from David Bakan, *Disease, Pain and Suffering: Toward a Psychology of Suffering* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971).
24. This formulation of variables owes much to Barrington Moore, Jr., *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967).
25. The phrase "living body of thought" is from Ivor Wilks, private communication.
26. Among the greatest ethnographic efforts ever undertaken are Meyer Fortes' studies of the kinship system of a neighboring group, the Talensi, who speak a closely related Oti-Volta language and who may therefore be presumed to share elements of a regional cultural base with the Dagbamba. See 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 Press, 1945); *The Web of Kinship among the Tallensi* (London: Oxford University Press, 1949); *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).
27. The diffusionist model of the origin of the Dagbamba state (and perhaps related Voltaic states), 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, has been critiqued by Skalník (Peter Skalník, "Early States in the Voltaic Basin," in *The Early State*, edited by Henri J. M. Claessen and Peter Skalník [The

Hague: Mouton, (1978)], pp. 469-93; Peter Skalník, "The Dynamics of Early State Development in the Voltaic Area," in *Political Anthropology: The State of the Art*, edited by S. Lee Seaton and Henri J. M. Claessen [The Hague: Mouton, (1979)], pp. 197-213). Skalnik, working from a perspective inspired by J. Vansina, has argued the logic of asserting that the indigenous inhabitants of Dagbon were probably already well into the process of state formation before the arrival of Dagbamba horsemen.