

Interview with Okomfoo Ataa at Aboaso, near Mampongten (Ashanti Region)  
Sunday, July 27, 2008.

Interview conducted with Rebecca Tandoh (aka Nana Serwaa Akoto, Kuntensehema), who had arranged for this interview.

Also present Okyeame and secretary to Nana Ataa, Nana Ata Panin

Subject: Akonnedi and Asuo Gyebi

Pre-interview visit, Friday, July 25, 2008

David Owusu-Ansah had gone to conduct an interview at Akonnedi at Larteh earlier this month. Becky had opined to me that all the elders at Akonnedi had passed away and could not see who was left that was knowledgeable enough to provide us with history and insight into the operation of Akonnedi to make the interview academically useful. She suggested she take me to see Okomfo Ataa at Aboaso, who is in her late seventies and knows more about Akonnedi than any living person. That I could also learn about Asuo Gyebi, and how come an Asante from Aboaso came to be in this privileged position with deities located in Larteh.

So we arranged to go to Kumasi on July 25. That very afternoon we went to Aboaso, where Nana Becky had not visited for thirty years. Nana Ataa was delighted and also saddened to see Nana Becky: she brought back memories about her mother, who was very devoted to these deities, and whose death had removed a major source of material support for them. They recalled her financial assistance during past funerals, and how she always did them proud. The Gyasehene of Aboaso has just passed away, a brother of Nana Ataa. The family was worried about how to finance the funeral and it made her miss Becky's mother even more.

She informed Okomfo Ataa of our mission, and my desire to know about Akonnedi and Asuo Gyebi – their identity, nature, history, present-day situation, etc. She said we had to bring imported schnapps and money for her to approach Asuo Gyebi to see if our request for the interview would be granted, and then we could come back on Sunday morning for the interview if all went well. She hinted that some Americans (college?) had come to interview her about Asuo Gyebi and had given her \$300. Nana Becky firmly stated that we are in a different category and she should not expect us to pay that amount of money. After some discussion between Becky and I, Becky gave Nana Ataa the equivalent of \$100 in Ghana cedis. I had the bottle of schnapps David had left me in Techiman, but it was a "Paramount Distilleries" schnapps made near Kumasi and not imported. I told Okomfo Ataa that I will bring her imported schnapps on Sunday. She took the schnapps I had for inspection and declared it acceptable as imported!

Sunday, July 27, 2008

We showed up for our 9 am appointment on Sunday. We were given seats on the verandah and word sent to Okomfo Ataa. Another family had come with a case, and she explained to us that she would see to them quickly and then would have time for us. There is a *pato* (three-walled enclosure) at the corner of the square compound which opens onto the shrine room for Asuo Gyebi. There are stools and other chiefly paraphernalia there – the deity is like a chief. The family met with Okomfoo and left. We sat waiting for Okomfoo Ataa. I heard grunts from Okomfoo's room. Apparently, Okomfoo Ataa had become possessed by Asuo Gyebi, the deity

she served. This was unanticipated as Nana Becky had wanted us to interview Okomfoo Ataa, not to meet with Asuo Gyebi. Okomfoo Ataa came out in a northern smock and holding a northern sword, essentially dressed like a male warrior. Inside the bosomfie is a reception room the deity uses, so now possessed by Asuo Gyebi, Okomfoo Ataa in an altered voice was greeted by everyone in the bosomfie as the deity for they knew the deity's modus operandi. The deity asked us to present ourselves before him in his parlor. Becky and I sat to the left of the possessed Okomfoo Ataa with Becky nearest to her, and across her sat the kyeame (spokesperson) and one other woman of the house. The setting became very formal. The deity first took umbrage with Nana Becky for neglecting him and not seeking him. He reminded Nana Becky of all he had done for her family, especially her mother. Why had Becky forsaken him? An interesting dialogue ensued as both affirmed their friendship for each other, but Becky firmly stated that she had become a Christian, though she remained Asuo Gyebi's friend, but could not continue even the token rituals for Asuo Gyebi, like she used to throw coins in rivers in the US when she crossed on bridges – remitting Asuo Gyebi – and others. Asuo Gyebi queried Nana Becky that she had come to visit him without bringing him a gift? And she knew the things he liked? Nana Becky replied that she had brought Asuo Gyebi "White Horse Whisky," his favorite drink, and it was in the car. That she understood that Asuo Gyebi had given up cigarettes. Asuo Gyebi demanded that Nana Becky present her gifts then. He also insisted that since Becky has not been to see him for so long, he also wanted money from Becky. Becky went to her car and brought the White Horse whisky and \$100 for Asuo Gyebi. Next Asuo Gyebi berated me for bringing him local and not imported schnapps. That his wife "Ataa" (Okomfoo Ataa) may not know the difference between local and imported schnapps, but he does. I apologized and explained that I had told Okomfoo Ataa that the schnapps I had was not imported and that I would bring an imported one for the Sunday meeting, but it was the Okomfoo who on inspecting the schnapps declared it okay. I offered to give money later that day for kyeame to buy the deity the schnapps of his choice.

I begged permission to tape our interview since I had a lot I wanted to learn and could not keep up note taking and listening to the deity at the same time. The deity asked what I would do with the interview. I explained that I was a college professor devoted to accurate knowledge and would use it to teach my students the true way of indigenous worship and the nature of our deities, as the present prominence of Pentecostalism and charismatic Christianity made most people deny that they had any links with indigenous deities. Asuo Gyebi gave me permission to tape the interview. I was asked what I wanted to know, for his priestess had informed him that I wanted to learn about Akonnedi. I explained that I did indeed want to learn about Akonnedi, and about him Asuo Gyebi, and how he came to reside in Aboaso. That I had other key questions about the nature of indigenous worship, like the difference between *suman* (charm, talisman) and *bosom* (deity). Did every *suman* have a *bosom* behind it for its efficacy? Etc, etc.

Asuo blessed me and told me that he would address my issues. He assured Nana Becky that he would help the friend she has brought. Asuo speaks in a northern Ghana accented Twi with interjections of "tor" or "okay," "I have heard." He states that his aberewa (old woman) Akonnedi (suggesting precedence, antiquity), the town Larteh, she owns it.

"Odomankoma created the world, but the Larteh town is Konnedi's. There is only one Larteh, there is none anywhere, and it belongs to Nana Konnedi. When the year comes to a close and

Nana Konnedi is celebrating her festival (hye fa), there can be no funeral or burial in the town until Nana has finished eating. What town can obey such an injunction? But Larteh is able to do this. She has tumi (power, authority) in the town. Because of Nana, no one can pound fufu in Larteh after 6:30 pm. She gave the laws to the town, and everyone obeys. If you are a Christian and Nana is celebrating her festival and you want to bring a corpse into the town, even the chief of Larteh will not allow you to do that. That is one of Konnedi's laws. Nana does not cross rivers or the sea (o n'twa nsuo nnko suogya). This is because she fought against the Germans and was victorious. So we have African Americans. They belong to Nana. But a pure white person is taboo to Nana and they cannot come to Nana's house because she fought them. If a white person comes to Nana's house and leaves, he will die immediately s/he returns to her place of origin.

I Asuo Gyebi, I can determine if any African American comes from Ghana and can even show their village or town. You (Akyeampong) are from here, you are one of us. I Asuo Gyebi, I am water (me ye nsuo) and I come from Larteh. I come from the rocks and descend. The rocks are there with ropes hanging from it. I descend the rocks and stream down the ropes to the ground. I have a short course and then I go underground and cannot be seen again. I do not join any water (stream or river) as I do not want contamination. I am a pure body of water. In Larteh my real or original name is Asume Labi. I am a golden hoe (sika aso). When I revealed myself to humans and I was brought home, I am a pot (ayowa) with a golden hoe on it. In Larteh I am known as Asume Labi. It is because of my travels that I styled myself Asuo Gyebi. But my actual name that my aberewa Konnedi gave me is Asume Labi. I am Nana Konnedi's executioner (brafo). If someone curses using Akonnedi, I am the one who goes to catch the culprit. If you are a witch, I am the one who comes to catch you. If you are a thief, I am the one who comes to catch you. I am Nana's brafo. Adade Kofi is my older brother, he is Nana Konnedi's son, and he is also a brafo. We are both offspring of Nana Konnedi. Adade Kofi is impatient, but I am patient. Now that you have come here, if you go somewhere to disgrace me, I will bring you down from overseas. Nana Konnedi is not a suman. You cannot go to the north to acquire a suman called Konnedi. She is an nsekyereni (a miracle, a wondrous creation), a bosom (a deity), God created her. Nana is unique, only one. If you go abroad and see someone saying I am an Akonnedi priest(ess), the person is lying. Akonnedi does not cross the sea. There are many deities (lesser) in Larteh who serve Akonnedi. A person abroad may be possessed by one of us, but it is not Akonnedi. In the past no white person could come here [Larteh?]. It was Nana Komfoo Oparebea who changed that with modern times, and said we had to change. Then Americans came, and Jeanne Soro [?] was able to come from America and learn to kom here. Before then Nana hated white people. There are pure whites. They still don't come to Nana's home and I do not possess any pure white person. I am water, I am also Nana Konnedi's brafo. I go on all Nana's errands, go here go there, go and catch this person. I serve Nana Abena Konnedi (me ye somfoo). Nana is a great mother. Every deity bows down before her, for she is great in all of Ghana, and her esteem will never be lowered in Ghana and Akuapem so long as this country exists. She is not a deity that approves of murder, theft, etc. If you come to Nana Konnedi, and you go to get asika duro, Nana will send a brafo to kill you. Nana hates that. Nana is clean. She gives children to the barren, she receives strangers, she helps the jobless, she gives money. She will not allow anyone to kill you unless you do evil. Even in an accident, if you are a devotee of Nana, she will take you out of harm's way. Nana is a great deity in the entire world, that is her nature. Nana was not found or dug out, Odomankoma brought her. So Larteh holds Akonnedi in great reverence, for they know her essence. Nana does not roam around, you don't find her

everywhere possessing people. As for me I have many wives, Adade Kofi has many wives, Nana Esi has many wives, I will tell you about Nana Esi shortly. Nana Akonnedi is not like that, but she is a sumsum, so wherever you call her she can here, for she works in the sumsum. She does not aid evil, she likes only what is good. Nana Konnedi is not a suman, she is a bosom.

I Asuo Gyebi, as I have told you, I am water, but I am also a rock (aboo), with a hole in it. God created that hole in the rock for me to enter. You cannot enter. All my power is in the rock and my water. You can use it for everything and it will succeed. So I am water, and I serve Nana Konnedi.”

Question by Akyeampong: Nana, you mentioned earlier that you first came to Adwumakase in Asante and then to Aboaso. So how did you come here from Larteh?

Answer: Laughter. This young man, you want to know about me. Yet you brought me no gifts. It is my daughter Serwaa (Nana Becky) who brought me whisky and money. Yet you are asking all these intimate questions.

Kyeame interjected that I have already stated that I will give Asuo Gyebi money after the interview. Asuo Gyebi conceded and continued.

“How did I come to Aboaso? This is a serious matter. It is a case that brought me to Aboaso. My Aberewa Konnedi Abena, someone from Okomfoo Ataa’s family traveled in search of work. Someone’s money sre duasa (30 shillings?) came into the hands of Okonfoo Ataa’s relative. He did not have money to repay, so he decided he would go to his hometown and look for the money and come back to pay the debt. He did not return. If there was money at home, would he have traveled in search of fortune? The creditor was a Larteh person, so he called Nana Konnedi and cursed Okomfoo Ataa’s relative. That his money sre duasa that the man had taken away to his hometown, any house in that abusua that he spends some of that money there and anyone partakes of anything bought with this money, may Akonnedi kill them. The man got to his hometown, Adwumakase, made no mention of the circumstances of his return, and gave 2 shillings to a woman in his house to prepare food. All the household sat down and ate. So the money had touched the entire household. Akonnedi sent Adade Kofi and Nana Esi to come and live in that abusua. That abusua has a branch in Adwumakase and another in Aboaso, but the head of the family is in Adwumakase. So the matter begun in Adwumakase. People died in Adwumakase, and here in Aboaso. Since all the family met in Adwumakase to eat, all the elders in the family died. One old woman who had 11 children lost 10. Another who had 12 children lost 11. A third had 7 and lost 6. This matter killed Nana Ataa’s mother from grief as she was the first woman to be given some of the money to cook. The family was left with Opanin Kojo Tua, Manu, Amponsah, and Kwasi Donkoh. They were dying off like flies. They go to the cemetery to bury one, they won’t even get home and they will be informed that another relative had died. This was a big matter. The family decided that they needed to inquire into what was happening. They went to several diviners but could not be helped because Nana Konnedi does not mix with other deities because she hates kola (bisi). So they went to Dompouse where there was an odeefoo (a seer, prophet?), and he could see. He was an osofo. That is where Akonnedi revealed herself to the osofo that a major deity has come to live in their house so they should go and find out where to go to seek pacification. At that time a case like that had happened in Asankare, so the family went there to see a family headed by someone called Fori. Fori told them how his

family had almost been wiped out and that it was at Larteh that he found succor. That he would take them to Larteh. At that time Nana Mansa had passed away as priestess of Akonnedi and Nana Oparebea had been made priestess. Nana Akonnedi had a station called Nkumkurom. When Nana Ataa's family got there, Nana Akonnedi informed them that she had killed all of them and was tired of killing them. So if they have come to see her that is good. The culprit who had brought this on them was alive but ill. Akonnedi told the family to go and ask him about what he did to bring this misfortune. The man informed the family what happened, and died soon after he finished narrating the case. The family elders came to petition Akonnedi. Akonnedi told them that she would send a ginyinaye to their family, and all the relatives that had died the abusua would be fruitful and replace all of them. But they should bring one person to replace the ginyinaye. They sent one young woman. In the past, that woman would never have returned to her hometown. Then I Asuo Gyebo said if they have given up a family member, then I would come and marry in that house, so that they can have the freedom to come to the house. So I possessed my wife Ataa. First, she was not a priestess, she was sent to end the deaths in the family. I said I would come to the house. To begin I possessed Afriyie [Nana Ataa's twin] at Adwumakase. That was to stay in the abusua in Adwumakase. I possessed my wife Ataa for Aboaso. That is how Asome Labi I came to be in Adwumakase and Aboaso. It is because of ginyinaye for my mother Akonnedi. Do you know what ginyinaye is? In the past, when there were deaths in a family, they will send a child to a deity as ba gyina (a child that ends calamity). That person is Nana Esi. So when Nana [Akonnedi] was coming to visit the ginyinaye, I married Nana Ataa and I gave her to Nana [Akonnedi] to take her with her. When a person goes to be tutored in akom (possession to a deity) and is finished, she is brought home. Every year, all the priestesses trained at Akonnedi come to Larteh to worship. So every year my wife Ataa goes to Larteh to worship. She takes a sheep, money and customary gifts. In a year that I am very active, Nana takes a lot of gifts and buys the entire abusua. Today if you look at Nana Ataa's family (abusua), they have so many children. Even young women have 10 and 11 children. Nana herself when she goes to the abusua house has to ask the children, whose child are you, and then they laugh at her. Nana herself is a twin hence Ataa. When I took her as wife, she went to live in Larteh for 11 years, and she had not seen a man. So she has only 2 children. When I possessed her, she had a child who was 7 months old. She was separated from the child and taken to Larteh. Today if you even come to this house we are in in the evening, you will be amazed at the number of children or people you will see in the house. All of them are Nana and her sister's descendants. That is how I came from Larteh to Aboaso. My water still lies in Larteh. So every year Nana Ataa goes to Larteh and fetches my water with a drum. That is used to wash me, cook for me, etc. I do not join any water so no other water but mine can be used for me. When I came to Aboaso, there was a body of water here (stream, spring). It was bayie (witchcraft). So I caught it, and it was forced to disappear. I did not allow her. All the witches in the town of Aboaso, that body of water was their hideout. When I arrived, I caught 120 individual witches in this town. [The kyeame confirmed that they even have written records to this effect.] Right now I have caught a witch. Aberewa (old woman), I am here, she came to report to me that someone had killed her child. That I should find her culprit. Then I caught her as the culprit. I will kill. There were many witches in this town. There was a man who had 7 spirits. He was destroying the town. I caught them and killed them. I am Asuo Gyebo. Tor. People have warred against me in this town but I have prevailed over time. They plotted to even kill my wife Ataa. She was involved in a car accident in which the front tire exploded and the car crashed. I took my wife Ataa out of the car. Do you know crocodile bile, how poisonous it is. My enemies plotted for a niece of Nana Ataa to

put some in food for her to eat. I Asuo Gyebo removed the poison from Nana Ataa's stomach. That is when the doctor advised Nana Ataa not to eat fufu. This is Nana's own brother's daughter. The brother (gyasehene) who is dead now and his funeral is pending. The brother pleaded with me not to kill her daughter, for the house is where the stool is and they worry about descendants for the stool. I relented, but she confessed to 110 crimes she had committed. My kyeame who you see here (Nana Ata Panin), her daughter plotted against Nana Ataa because she was a witch and I was not allowing them to feed. I killed her. Someone else would have stopped serving me but because my kyeame is loyal, he still serves me because he knows I was right to do that."

"Because my aberewa Konnedi stands behind me, I am empowered to act against even deities who allow evil. If they condone evil, I catch their komfoo and kill them. I deceive the deity and soften them, and then I kill your priest. When I came to this town, there was a man who was noted to be powerful. He could appear and disappear (ayera aduro). You will be with him in Aboaso. He will arrange with you to go to Kumasi and you will take a car while he is in his house. You get to where you are going to in Kumasi and he will be there waiting for you. He came to test me. I caught him and killed him. He was on the road coming here. First I killed his wife. Then he was coming here and I appeared before him on the road and struck him. He lay there through the night chewing grass. He was found in the morning and he begged the people to bring him to Okomfo Ataa. He was brought here. People were surprised because they thought he was powerful. [A woman in the room interjected to say something about this man. Okomfo Ataa/Asuo Gyebo told her to be silent as the recorder was on. In a sense this was an official interview by Asuo Gyebo himself.] I serve my aberewa Konnedi well. So I am empowered to act even against deities. That is how I came to Aboaso. Asem (trouble) was what brought me here.

When I got here, other Larteh deities followed me to Asante. Adade Kofi took a wife at Edweso. So now there are many Larteh deities in Kumasi. So if Nana Serwa has brought you, this is my story."

Nana Becky: You mentioned Edweso. Is that Nana Serwaa?

Asuo Gyebi: Yes, that is Adade Kofi's wife. Then Nana Esi, she is a ghost. She was human. You are an Akan. You have heard of samankom (ghost possession). This is done when someone dies. So Nana Esi is someone who was involved in samankom, and while possessed was taken by samankom and came to exist. She is chief of all ghosts. So when someone dies and you want to ascertain the cause of death and you approach a komfo, Nana Esi can possess the komfo and reveal the circumstances of the death. After Nana Esi's visitation, the komfo possessed by her lies in a coma for three days. Today we have stopped this practice. If you are pregnant and there are attempts against your life and you are brought to Nana Esi you will have a safe delivery and live.

Prof. Akyeampong: So Nana Esi is not a bosom and not a suman.

Asuo Gyebi: No she is not a bosom. She is a saman (a ghost). We don't sacrifice chicken to her. She does not want blood. I Asuo Gyebi, I also do not like blood. Things offered to me are Florida water, dry gin, whisky. If you give me whisky, you have killed me. White Horse, Johnny Walker. I also like Gordon Dry Gin.

Nana Becky: And in the past 555 cigarettes.

Asuo Gyebi: Yes, I liked smoking, but I have been advised against it. But I still like gifts of cigarettes, though I don't smoke it. I am offered cigarettes and a box of matches. After a while you will find out that the cigarette has lost its flavor. I enjoy the flavor though I don't smoke it anymore.

Nana Becky: Asuo, I have told Prof that I remember that in Larteh there are many deities. I mentioned that even Bosumtwi, Pra, Densu, all have akomfoo in Larteh at Akonnedi's. Could you tell him a bit about this?

Asuo Gyebi: I am coming to that. Densu is a river or a body of water (nsuo). I am also water (nsuo). I am Densu's brother. It was Densu who possessed Nana Opabea. Nso Otumfuo woro ka'a, oworo fa n'ebeti (a proverb about the power of Otumfuo to do anything, including overrule other powers. Used often in reference to the Asantehene). So Nana Akonnedi claimed Nana Opabea. Nana Akonnedi's komfoo was Okomfoo Mansa, but her days were numbered (she was old) and Akonnedi was looking to replace her. Akonnedi chose Opabea. Densu was angry about this and took Opabea and hid her in his waters (in the Densu river) for 40 days. Drummers drummed and search parties searched. Who has survived for 40 days in water? They found Nana Opabea at Anarfo. When they found her Akonnedi was standing over her. Densu said you are my mother, if I have found a woman and you want her have her. It was Nana Opabea who opened up spirit possession for even African Americans to come and learn spirit possession. Nana Opabea went to America. As Akonnedi does not cross water, it was I Asuo Gyebi who possessed 7 individuals in the US, who returned with Opabea to train as priestesses. Korantemaa, Ansa, etc. They came for training. I have many wives in NY, many are even old women. I possessed them, and I help them in their work. Some time back one of my wives in Maryland came to take some of my priestesses to Maryland, Nana Ataa, Adjiri, and Nana Afoa. But she was not patient. Within three days she wanted them to leave and they returned. It was later that I was going to demonstrate my powers (ye adwuma), but she had already booked the tickets and was returning them. So they came back. When they went, they visited NY, Washington, etc. Korantemaa wanted to have a big durbar for them, but she could not do that. It is I Asuo Gyebi. Ooh! Eeh! [Apparently Asuo Gyebi makes these exclamations when he is about to depart.]

Nana Becky: Nana [Asuo], don't go. I have a few questions. When I was at Larteh, Bosumtwi had a komfoo there. What is the status?

Asuo Gyebi: Yes, Bosumtwi had a komfo in Larteh. But the komfo is now dead. Eh! [Asuo Gyebi rose and left and said she would be back. We conversed with the Kyeame, whose name is Ata Panin. He is both the secretary and kyeame to Asuo Gyebi. He is a triplet. The family has many twins and triplets! Their family history has now entwined with that of Akonnedi. He mentioned that his birth during Prempeh II was seen by Asante as miraculous for that was the first recorded birth of triplets in Asante. The babies were taken to Manhyia. Nana Ataa returned from Larteh in 1967. He Ata Panin is a cousin to Nana Ataa (my uncle's daughter). Ata Panin had gone to Ivory Coast to work. He was recalled to come and serve as kyeame and secretary to Nana Ataa. I asked about Nana Ataa's twin. Her name is Afriyie. She is the komfoo to Nana Esi. Samankom has now been banned in Asante. It was seen as too dangerous. Okomfo Ataa/Asuo Gyebi returns.]

Asuo Gyebi: I almost left, but I have returned. What do you want to know?

Nana Becky: About Bosumtwi's komfo.

Asuo Gyebi: Okay. You remember the man Yaw who believed he was powerful (wa bin). He went to Abidjan and a Mossi man stabbed him to death. I rid him of his powers and he was killed. But Bosumtwi's ginyinaye is at Larteh, there is a home there that elects the priesthood. But there is no komfo now.

Nana Becky: Asuo, if I am recalling clearly, there were so many deities in Larteh. I would even say perhaps a 100 deities. How did all these deities end up in Larteh? Is it because Nana Akonnedi is seen as a powerful mother so many deities relocated there? Did families take their deities there?

Asuo Gyebi: Nana Akonnedi is a powerful deity. So in Ghana, a komfo who is not faring well can even decide to come to Akonnedi, bringing the deity that s/he serves as well.

Nana Becky: Nsiah and Fofie is an example? Nsiah was Fofie's priestess before you married Nsiah?

Asuo Gyebi: Let me explain. Fofie is a deity (bosom) that belongs to a family. Fofie did not have a komfo. Fofie brought Nsiah to Larteh, and then stepped back and I took Nsiah as wife. Fofie lent us his strength. Afram was part of this. If you want to know the deity that really possessed my wife Nsiah who now lives in New York, it is the River Afram (Nsuo Afram). These are the facts. My wife Ataa's deities are me Asuo Gyebi, Adade Kofi, and Nana Esi. There are cases where they may be other deities in a family, then a komfo may add these to the deities that have possessed her.

Nana Becky: So are there other deities in the family of your wife Ataa?

Asuo Gyebi: No, they have no family deities. They have a stool, the Gyase stool of Adwumakase. It is the Gyasehene that has died now.

Prof. Akyeampong: So not all stools have deities attached to them?

Asuo Gyebi with kyeame Ata: No, not all stools have bosom attached to them. It is upon tua stools that have deities attached to them. There is one in Nana Ataa's family.

Prof. Akyeampong: Could you please explain apontua to me?

Nana Becky: Asuo, are you aware that it is Apontua who gave Nana Yaa Akoto a child?

Asuo Gyebi: Apontua is a bosom that possesses. But this deity in Nana Ataa's abusua stool room just sits there and looks after their house.

Prof. Akyeampong: So there are stools with deities attached to them?



Asuo Gyebi: There are some stools when they were being brought, there was a deity (bosom) attached and there are some that had no bosom attached when they were coming.

Prof. Akyeampong: Those stools without bosom attached, can the family go and seek a deity and attach it to their stool?

Asuo Gyebi and Kyeame: It could be that the family has no people or they cannot reproduce. They can go to a bosom and get a ginyaye and come and put it in their house. Then a deity becomes attached to them. [Issues of reproduction seem so central]. In the case of Nana Ataa's abusua, when the family was migrating, the bosom was with them. That is their business and not mine.

Nana Becky: Could you tell us more about the numerous deities in Larteh?

Asuo Gyebi: It is because Akonnedi is an elder (panin). Many children and young people are brought to serve you. So Nana Akonnedi is a powerful deity. Every deity bows down before her. So if anyone in Larteh town has a bosom, the bosom is subservient to Akonnedi. If you have a suman that will kill people for you to make wealth, Nana Akonnedi will enter the family and kill people for people to go to abisa (divination) for her to reveal the cause of the devastation. Nana Akonnedi does not like evil. In Larteh town if a family has any evil suman, Nana can cause a wild animal to come into that house so that people will wonder what is in that house. She will expose you that there is evil in the house. In Larteh, they don't sell kenkey (dokono) on Tuesdays. Right now new yam has come. If Nana Akonnedi has not eaten yam, no one in Larteh will eat yam. If you hide and eat yam in the town, you will develop an incurable cough, no doctor can heal you till you confess. The elders will perform rituals and bring yam to Akonnedi's house before yam is brought into the town. After the ritual, yam will not be brought in Akonnedi's house again until the new yam season. Children in Akonnedi's house can eat yam but outside the house. Nana herself and her priests don't eat yam (omo kyiri). The one who cleans me Asuo Gyebi, and the brafo who kills chicken for me, won't eat yam until Nana Ataa has gone to Larteh for Akonnedi's festival and returned. Nana Ataa on her return will perform rituals in this house and then yam can be eaten. When new corn comes, and rituals have not been performed in Akonnedi's house, no one can bring new corn into Larteh town. If you bring new corn you will go to the chief's house to pacify with 3 sheep and you will come to Akonnedi's house to give 4 sheep.

Prof. Akyeampong: Nana, it seems like yam and corn are food that are central to the rituals and festivals of deities. Is there anything special about these foods?

Asuo Gyebi: It is simple that if you serve in the house of a deity, you don't eat any new food before the deity has eaten. New corn has come, some has not entered Nana's house. If you serve in Nana's house, a whole town may eat new corn, you don't until rituals are performed in Nana's house. New yam has come. Both are the same. If new yam has not been brought to Nana's house and rituals performed, those of the house don't eat yam.

Prof. Akyeampong: Does this ban on eating new yam apply to the chief of the town?

Asuo Gyebi: No. But in Larteh it does because the town is Akonnedi's so the chief's stool is Akonnedi's stool. When the Larteh stool was created, Akonnedi was the deity attached. So if

Akonnedi has not eaten new yam, the chief of Larteh does not eat new yam. The town is Akonnedi's. At the end of the year, that is the ninth to the tenth month when new yams come, they turn all the drums (ntwenie) in the chief's palace on the side (ye butu adaye). If someone dies in Larteh at this time, she is quickly taken outside of the town and put in the mortuary. No funeral celebrations take place until Nana has finished her festival. Aduru (medicine) is brought from Akonnedi's house and sprinkled in the home of the deceased. It does not matter if that is the home of a Christian reverend minister, it has to be done. Then everyone in the house has to be quiet. They cannot mourn. 6 weeks later when we do the awukudae, now that we remember the dead in the town. Then the houses with deceased can mourn. The Larteh chief then performs his Odwira. A week later, fofie, then Nana Akonnedi is coming to eat. No one wears dark clothes, no one mourns. After a week, and Nana [Akonnedi] performs her rituals on Friday and guns are fired three times, then the ambulances can bring the corpses into the town because Nana Akonnedi has eaten. The whole town turns black as funerals are now celebrated. Nana Akonnedi has great power.

Prof. Akyeampong: When my colleague went to Larteh to interview the Akonnedi abusua, I noted that some were called "akomfo" and some were called "asofo." What is the distinction?

Asuo Gyebi: The asofo are there. They own the bosom as a family. The sofo is one, Nana Agyekum. He sits on an akonnua. There are asofo kuma. This is Nana Akonnedi's akonnua. The elders of Nana Akonnedi are called asofo. There are two families of Akonnedi in Larteh. There is one in Ahenase and the second is in Kubease. I Asuo Gyebi I am in Kubease. No one knows about me in Ahenase. I have no wife there so no one can speak about me. Larteh is a single town. The top is where the seniors are in Nana Oparebea's home. That is where Nana Akonnedi's power is located. That is where Nana Ataa went for training.

Prof. Akyeampong: You mentioned that some use deities for evil. So some of the deities are not "clean." You described Nana Akonnedi as clean. What exactly does this mean?

Asuo Gyebi: A young man may acquire a suman and it may be used by thieves for protection. If you bring it to Larteh, Nana Akonnedi will kill you. If you bring a bosom's suman to Larteh for sika aduro (medicine for wealth), Nana will kill you. So in Larteh there is no suman. There was a man in Larteh that had a bad suman that caused convulsion in children. If a pregnant mother met this man and gave birth, the child's head would be misshaped like a yam. Nana killed them, two men. I Asuo Gyebi was sent to kill them. They would demand money from pregnant women. If you refuse to give them they kill you. I was sent to kill them. I killed them in the afternoon. One of them came to Akonnedi's family home (Nana Sofo's home) and asked for meat. He was not given. As he left he was murmuring (cursing) and was about to wave his scarf, which has powers to kill. I caught him and killed him right there. Then I possessed Nana Oparebea and informed the town through her that I killed the young man for he was performing evil acts in the town. Some of these suman were brought from sarem. These are not bosom, they are suman. Bosom does not commit evil. It is suman that they use for evil. [Nana Kyeame talked about a man in Aboaso who has medicine for convulsion. He would cause convulsion in children and then heal them for money. There were two elders in Aboaso who did that. When Asuo Gyebi came to Aboaso he killed both of them. Bosom does not perform evil. Only suman are used to do evil. They are acquired for specific purposes.]

Prof. Akyeampong: Do all priests of deities get possessed?

Asuo Gyebi: There are herbalists (dunsini) who don't get possessed. They deal in herbs. They can divine in the room. But they are not possessed. He is like a kramo. It is these dunsifoo who can do bad medicines. People come and see them with petitions to harm people or kill them. They can do medicine for that. If I see that you have that in Aboaso and you are using that for evil in this town, I connive and became friends with their deities, since the deities are not in favor of evil, and I ask them to step aside. Then I kill these evil men.

Prof. Akyeampong: And their deities consent that you kill them?

Asuo Gyebi: Even domankoma (creator-God) would give his permission in such a case. Evil is not good. I am done.

Prof. Akyeampong: Nana Kyeame, tell Asuo Gyebi that today he has educated me. I am at the end of my research trip so I don't have much money on me. So I will give him some money plus more money for a bottle of imported schnapps. When I return I will bring Asuo Gyebi gifts and money and will continue my learning process.

Nana Becky: Prof you owe Asuo Gyebi, it is not a gift this time. I was not aware that Asuo himself would teach you and in such depth.

Asuo Gyebi: When my priestess Ataa communed with me and told me what you wanted to learn, I knew I had to come myself for my wife Ataa would not have been able to answer your questions. Some white people came here to inquire of me, I had to come myself. I teach history. If Nana Serwa has brought someone, I have to come myself. That is how networks are built.

Nana Kyeame: Now that our work is over, are all your questions answered?

Prof. Akyeampong: Yes, indeed.

Nana Kyeame: Then if you could perform what is customary, then we can get up?  
[Prof. Akyeampong left to bring some money and bid farewell. On my return Asuo Gyebi told me that next time I come there will be agoro (perform possession) for me.]

Asuo Gyebi: You have not met any of my wives in America?

Prof. Akyeampong: No.

Asuo Gyebi: I have wives in America, in New York, in Queens. I have a shrine in Queens, Jeanne Soro. Jeanne Soro became a cheat. So I tripped her from the top of her stairs in her storey building in Queens. She came to fall down and died.

Nana Becky: Eii! Kwai Gyebi! You killed Jeanne Soro?

Asuo Gyebi: Yes, I killed Jeanne Soro. She had turned possession into a business and wanted to ban Nana Oparebea from coming to the US so that she will become the sole medium for power. She even conspired to have Oparebea killed in New York. [Nana Becky interjected that she was witness to all this. That this is what brought Nana Oparebea close to Korantemaa for it was

Korantemaa who came to take Nana Oparebea away from Queens to Philadelphia for she detected that Jean Soro wanted to kill Nana Oparebea. At that time Nsiah was not doing so well in New York so she could not host Nana Oparebea.]

Asuo Gyebi continues: Yes, all that is true. Then I said, you Jeanne Soro, if I don't kill you I am not Asuo Gyebi. So I tripped her from the top of her stairs and she came tumbling down. She is heavysset. I tripped her. When she fell down at the bottom of the stairs I stepped on her and revealed myself to her, so she yelled: "Asuo Gyebi!" I wanted her to know that I have killed her.

Nana Becky: But Asuo she was your friend?

Asuo Gyebi: She became a cheat. I would perform wonders for her when she became possessed by me. She had a shrine and would bring people from all over to see spirit possession and charge them money. Every Friday her place was filled with people. I would possess others who came there and she would charge them money. When she had money she would not give Nana Oparebea, and she didn't not even want Nana Oparebea to come to the US, so I killed her. So, I am now leaving. So what is your full name and where do you come from? [I told her I was from Dwaben and Nkoronza]. Have you heard that any deity from Nkoronza is in America? I Asuo Gyebi I am the only deity in America. I took my wife Yaa Busuo to America. Then she refused to return to Ghana.

Nana Becky: Eiii! Yaa Busuo! I am not surprised she refuses to come back to Ghana. Her character befits America. This is a deity who likes men (flirt). But she will never greet a man by the hand.

Prof. Akyeampong: So how did she end up in America?

Asuo Gyebi: I took her to America. She is my wife. Then she got there and refused to come back. She possessed someone there. I hear she has been put in a very special place today. American guests give her money when they come to visit her. She is in Washington. She is also with Oparebea. She refuses to come back to Ghana. Oohhh eiii! I am gone.

Mossi Koda: Asuo Gyebi leaves Nana Ataa, who is immediately possessed by another deity Mossi Koda! That he Mossi Koda has been present through the interview watching on, but had to wait for Asuo Gyebi to depart before he could possess Nana Ataa and get a voice. Are we not interested in learning about him? Do we know Maame Yaaa Yonko? She used to kom (be possessed by) Mossi Akoda. You know only Yaa Busuo. I see you have been giving out money, give me some.

Prof. Akyeampong: So you are Mossi Akoda?

Mossi Akoda: Tor! (yes. Again Twi with a northern accent). My father is Asuo Gyebi. My brother is Tigare. I am the younger deity. Today it will rain a lot. You have to be careful driving to Accra. So give me money. I don't want much. I gave him two Ghana cedis. Don't you want to know me? I am from Bolgatanga. My father is Asuo Gyebi. My real father is Tigare. I am a child in Tigare. My father really comes from Nyinkpala, and not Bolgatanga. When Nana Oparebea

was put on a stool, Asuo Gyebi said she needed brafo (executioners/police). Asuo Gyebi asked my father Tigare to come and serve Nana Oparebea. I was brought along. It as because of Nana Akonnedi that is why Nana Oparebea did not kom (become possessed) Tigare. Rather her children would become possessed by Tigare. Ti Nyame, then Yaw Pare came to kom Tigare. Yaw Pare was misbehaving so Tigare killed Yaw Pare. Since then Tigare has not possessed any one, but works in tandem with Asuo Gyebi. I Mossi Akoda possessed Yaa Yonko. Then Afram came to take her. So when Afram comes and leaves Yaa Yonko, then I possess her. Yaa Yonko was misbehaving. She was a flirt. I told Nana Ataa I liked her so I would rather come and stay with her and leave Yaa Yonko. So I taught Nana Ataa how to do my rituals and then I came to live with Nana Ataa. I was able to come here because Asuo Gyebi is my father. So throughout your interview with Asuo Gyebi I was here. I saw you giving out money. I was determined not to let you go without coming for some of the money [laughter]. I liked Akua Domfe [Becky's mother.] She even bought me a batakari (northern smock). [To Nana Becky] Do buy joromi for me to wear. Nana Becky consented. I have 4 cedis. Can that buy a car? [laughter]. I am thinking of going to live in America. Yaa Busuo has gone to America and is now rich. [Wanted to know more about me. What do I do? Do I teach in a big university? When will I return to live in Ghana? I am Mossi Akoda. I do not know history. I work with Tigare and Asuo Gyebi. If someone misbehaves, Asuo Gyebi sends me to deal with the person. All I know is that I come from Nyinkpala. Drive carefully as you go. Talk about the Gyasehene's funeral and concerns about rainfall. Mossi Akoda asked them to give him money and he will tie up the rain so that they can have a dry funeral. If he cannot do it he will go to his father Tigare to do it. Mossi Akoda regaled us with stories about Akua Domfe. From the 1979 days when the military maltreated store owners and market women. How the deities watched over her to make sure no one would touch Akua Domfe. How Akua Domfe was so special. Asuo Gyebi does not encounter water, not even rain water. Not Mossi Akoda.]