

**Interview with Chief Fanyinama III, head of the Wangara community in Ghana
Kintampo, March 21, 2006**

Interview by Emmanuel Akyeampong with Dr. Sey and Rebecca Tandoh

Today is March 21st, 2006. We are at Kintampo at the palace of Chief Fanyinama III. This area of Kintampo is Fanyinama electoral area or Fanyinama line. We have come here today to talk generally about -- no structure -- Islam, your institution in the larger context, understanding how it has changed within the chieftaincy institution.

Fanyinama: Thank you very much for coming. We start in the name of God, in the name of Allah, the most merciful. First of all, about Islam, if you look at West Africa, and the Trans Atlantic slave trade, it was the collapse of the Mali and Songhai empires which separated everybody including our ancestors, this is during the C16, they were Muslims. After the collapse of the Mali and Songhai empires some left Mali to Guinea, some to Gambia, Senegal etc. But our ancestors came down through the Ivory Coast and during the C16 they entered this country. They dealt with the Dutch, the Portuguese and finally the British and as they are moving, you know, our ancestors even from the beginning when you took history, history talks about Batuta, Askia Mohammed, Sandiata, Mansa Musa etc. Even Mansa Musa, it is Masa Musa, It is Wangara, it is chief. In Ghana it is Dyula. In Ghana we are Wangara, in Mali it is Bambara, in Guinea it is Mandingo and when you reach Ivory Coast it is Dyula. In the present day Ghana, it is the Wangaras, when you look at the ethnic tribes in Ghana you see the Guans, Akans, Dagbanes, the Mandes, they are the Wangaras.

So many from the old empire, they have become Wangaras. As I was saying about Mansa Musa, when you hear Masa, it is the chief in Wangara language. But when we hear it in school it said Mansa Musa, but it is Masa Musa.

I understand the day he was leaving for his pilgrimage to Mecca, he went with a thousand people to Hajj. This shows that our ancestors were Muslims and we were born and bred in the Islamic religion.

To cut it short, [look at] the coming of Samori Toure. People don't know what brought Samori here. It was Islam that brought Samori here. When he met you he would try to convert you to Islam, if you did, you became friends, and if not then he would have problems with you.

Our ancestors were Muslims and traveled with Islam so they brought it to this sub region. Samori brought some, but the Wangara people traveled with it. They were born and bred Muslims. And in the olden days too, when you look Mali, Guinea, Niger, Burkina Faso they are all one, so passing through with Islam was quite easy.

Then coming down here, I mean coming to Sankana, that is the Wa area, I mean Nandom, that is the Wa Lawra, coming down. You see that is where our ancestors passed. In short for you to understand the Wangara, it was when they entered the Wa area that is Sankana (the Wale, Dagarte) they speak the same language. They told our ancestor that "come and pass" that is "Wangara". They were all Muslims up there. You see Samori did not come here (Ghana); he entered through the Sankana border, which is why it was easy.

And they all said “Wangara” meaning “come pass” and why our ancestors could spread Islam faith easily because whenever they reach anywhere they stayed for a while planted and harvested before moving on. Usually after a couple of years and they usually left some behind who had converted to come to Islam. They usually traveled in large groups. They couldn’t feed them so they usually stayed during the rainy season to plant harvest and dry before moving on.

Prof: So trade was a big part of this movement.

Chief F: Yes, they usually traded during the dry season so they could stay somewhere during the rainy season to plant and harvest. They were using horses. You see after the war. I don’t want to go too far back to the matters of war. You see after the fall of the Ghana, Mali, Songhai empires slavery started, that was simply a matter of the strong against the weak. After the collapse of the empires, the slaving started, selling the weak for food and other items. So in doing this, on and on, that is when they entered Asante. You see, when Asante say Kramo, it is Kramogo in Wangara meaning teacher. So it is not Kramo, and Asante Kramo is Tuba. All this is when my elders say Kramogo they mean Mallam.

Because it was the Wangara people that spread Islam the most. Most of the words in Akan, they are derivatives of Wangara words. When you go to Abofo, Kokote, Offinso, Techiman, etc. the influence is very great. My history tells me that, the Kenkansu Kramo who performed some magic with a cow for Asantehene, he is a Wangara and his Grandson is the current Imam of Kenkansu.

When you look at the population of the Wangaras because we have the Daafe, the Kro, Gemene etc., the last war that our ancestors were involved in was the Yaa Asantewaa that was 1901. Then after the war, they surfaced again in 1923 when they were honoured for their effort in the Yaa Asantewaa war. It was then that they received the provisional council medal.

Prof: Can I ask something about the Gonja, since the first [Gonjas were from] Mande.

Chief: well, why I don’t talk about the Gonja, the first Gonja man; well any Gonja man who doesn’t regard the Wangara as a kinsman is not a Gonja. Because the one who led the Gonja into the state Ndewura_Jakpa is not a Gonja, he was a Wangara. They Gonja too are Gbanya, a Wangara word. Gbanya means “come with me”. There is a lot, there is a history that brought some confusion between the Gonja and the Wangara but they use the same language with a little variation, primarily they used the same words. For example Ansum and Ansogoma means good morning Ansum is Wangara and Ansogoma is Gonja. Then the word “Antire” the Wangara word found its way even into Akan the program on Radio “Antire pa” is a Wangara derivative, it means good Afternoon and “Anula” means good evening. Then any Quran, any Wala who become a Muslim the tone is a Wangara tongue in their interpretation. So the Wares, Gonjas, Walas and even Asante Muslims all use Wangara interpretations. So when we look [it is] the Wangaras who dominate by percentage.

Prof: So all the vocabularies link also to trade.

Chief F: Yes, the Wangaras played the major role in trade, but why they didn't they get a place? Well, take Kintampo for instance during the beginning of the C19 or earlier but at least after the return of Prempeh [1924] they asked our ancestors to come and get iron sheet. You see, throughout Ghana you won't find any large group like ours at Kintampo. They told them they would give them iron sheets; there was a disaster in our area around 1937 during the war when the army came. But they decided against it because they felt that if the white men give you iron sheet they will take your buildings. They also urged that they are sojourners and need to return to their roots some day so they always felt that they would go, they would go. They even introduced a festival in 1923 but they were always in abeyance. That is why the Wangaras never had a defined place. Now there is a town in Tamale called Savrogo, it is predominantly Wangara. When you go to Kunburu the same thing among the Dagombas they have a group called Malagajaskar, they are Wangaras they live near Ivory Coast. When you go to WaleWale the same thing they always said they would go back, they would go back, now they are all over the place.

Even the last time we celebrated our festival, you know we celebrate the Kurubi festival, I don't know if I can give you a map of Brong ahafo. The leading festival in Brong Ahafo right now is the Kurubi and Apoo festival of Techiman and Nkoranza then the Kwafie.

So there is a guide to Brong Ahafo produced by the Minister and we are featured in it. It was started in 1923 and they stopped celebrating it but I revived it in 1999.

Prof: What does the festival represent? If we say Addae or Addae Kese we understand it.

Chief F: Actually it brings unity among the people. It is celebrated over the week and it climaxes on Saturday and it brings people together. It is usually celebrated in September and last year was my third year of celebration. We usually talk of emancipation. When we were discussing Panafest I told them that we should decentralize everything because when we look at the slave route it is from Sandema to Salaga then to Gambaga, Salaga, Kintampo, to Assin Manso; So Cape Coast is a destination. I gave them an example that if you buy a sheep at Kintampo and take it to Kumasi and decide not to kill it but raise it. And the sheep gets pregnant and produce many offspring when you take it outside Kumasi and you decide to trace its route you don't stop at Kumasi, you go to Kintampo, because Kumasi was a destination not the origin.

Those people who were sent to Cape Coast were sent there to be shipped. Some stayed there and some were shipped out. But that is not their root; it was just a stop and/or destination.

I was discussing this with Jake Obetsebi Lamptey [Minister for Tourism] when he came to the Kurubi festival.

What we are saying is that Kintampo in particular has suffered a lot. You know Kintampo was the first capital of the northern territory in 1830. Then it moved to Gambaga, then to present day Tamale. But when it comes to the western province, Kintampo played a very important role.

According to some documents all have seen Kintampo had problems. When Prempeh returned they shared some amount for all the chiefs to pay. You know before Prempeh came back chiefs

signed an agreement, our chiefs signed the agreement. The white men decided to run a poll to find whether Prempeh should be returned.

They wanted to find out actually what they should do. You know the White men, if you say no, they would put no, and if you say yes they would put yes.

So when they reached Nkoranza they signed, they came to Kintampo we signed, they also signed. The figures were very close. It was an optimum poll and the Yes beat the No by only five votes.

Mampong for example voted no because if Prempeh had not come by now Mampong would have been the most prominent, so Mampong was lobbying. That is why when Prempeh returned in 1923, they called back 130 chiefs within the Western province and Kintampo was given a provisional council medal for loyalty given by King George V. So Kintampo has suffered a lot. So from the Northern Province to the western province of Ashanti, and after that Nkrumah came to create Brong Ahafo. Our records here show that Techiman here and Nkoranza here came here lobbying my grandfather to support Nkrumah because after winning he would create a region for Brong, that is Brong Kyempim. But when he created the region, he added Ahafo and made it Brong Ahafo.

**This is the Brochure for the Kurubi festival. I will give you copies before you leave.*

So that is why Kintampo looks underdeveloped.

When the 130 chiefs met, it was on that day that they gave that medal to Fanyinama and when the Kurubi festival was started. We celebrate peace, rainfall and good harvest. During the farming season, we pray for rainfall, rain without wind. And if you don't pray well a strong wind might come and destroy everything during the festival. We do a lot of things; we slaughter a cow among other things.

You mention something about power of Asante. To me it is not that Asantes are powerful people. They respect their culture; any Ashanti man puts the culture first. Any Asante man believes that apart from the God he worships, it is the stool which is his second god. Even the richest Asante man would not go beyond Asantehene.

We have some tribes they don't respect their chiefs. Some chiefs can call and they respond "forget Nana, he bothers us too much." They say these things in the presence of their wives and children. What are you teaching them? But Asantes are not like that. Don't I always tell you people about this (addressing his attendants)? For an Asante, apart from his God whom he worships, Asantehene comes next. It is the same even in the United States. Last year around this time I was there. The moment you arrive, you see "America First" this is what the Asantes are doing. They are doing everything to preserve the culture. But here if you tell them they would tell you about Islam and civilization, modernization. Well, it is a problem around here. If not for this Kurubi festival, our people were forgetting our culture. This is our culture. These are virgin girls doing cultural dances and moves. Our culture is very nice but they want to forget it. The Arabs who brought Islam, they have their own culture and respect it.

We have a lot of chiefs. My grandfather enstooled some, my father enstooled some and I have personally enstooled eight tribal chiefs. But when they enter here, well, they would do the usual greeting and sit down and front that point on, nothing will show that I am their leader. But the Asantes, they would remove their sandals, lower the cloth etc to show the difference. Even the president observes all those gestures. So I always tell my people that the Asantes are miles apart, they are different. They are not trying to boast or exert power on anyone. Asantes respect the stool from infancy. So there is general pride in the culture and general respect for the stool. Secondly, Asantes make the culture known. They portray it at every opportunity they get.

When I started this festival, this was my goal. We have a beautiful culture. Now my people at Dunkwa and Obuasi, the District Assembly has notified that whenever there is a function they want them to come and display their culture. It is a beautiful culture, you should see it. These days everyone is talking about virgins. We have a cultural display where only virgins can climb these long poles. These days everyone is talking about HIV/AIDS. These virgins illustrate that our ancestors had some ideas of preventing some social ills, especially sexual promiscuity. In fact, if not for Asantes a lot of our culture would be lost. They make our people respect and honor their own cultures, they make it very appealing. And during the colonial days, anyone who served under Asantes, if you served very well, they won't deny you your honor because if you look at the medals we have, we were given during the western province. In 1952 there was no road to Tamale. They created this road. My ancestors, Fanyinama constructed the road and when the governor Arden Clark came here, there was no road to Buipe; we had constructed a road to Tamale using our hands. There was a construction company, (GWCC) Gonja West Construction Company, they were constructing the road. When they reached here, Fanyinama I continued for nine miles to Babato, before Arden Clark came here. So he took Arden Clark on a tour to see what he had done himself. Immediately Arden Clark sent a telegram to GWCC asking them to stop whatever at wherever they were and return to Kintampo because if someone can build a road by his own initiative then it needs to be encouraged. Our people get a great amount of satisfaction from community projects, they have a communal spirit which is very contagious.

Prof: can I ask a few questions from the perspective of Asante? Until about 1874 very few Muslims came south of the Volta river and we made Salaga a commercial place. So the first time that Muslims moved south in a large number was when Salaga, well, Kpembe decided that they did not want the Asantes in there area. So when the British came and defeated the Asantes, Kpembe went to Salaga against the wishes of the Salaga people, and massacred the Asante traders there. It was more or less how the Asantes moved the kola and slave trading to Kintampo. Then obviously when the traders crossed [the Volta], the Muslims also crossed because it was the Mossi people who brought their donkeys and so forth. The Wangara and Hausa also followed.

Chief: it was not just that. You know when you talk about slavery you have to be very careful. During the abolition of the slave trade, during the SAGRANTI war [1874]. You know during the slaving activities, they had problems for example while crossing the Volta they lost most of the slaves. So when the idea of moving to Kintampo came it was favored because they didn't have to go through the rigors of transporting the slaves. The Asantes were very happy because the slaves were safe. When the market came here they did a lot. When Prempeh was arrested and the Yaa Asantewaa war ensued, by that time they used to carry the whites. They used the slave routes to

carry them during the Yaa Asantewaa war, they were carrying the whites, and it was when they reached Kyekyewere that the war broke out so we lost a lot of people.

Prof: the Wangaras are very close to Asante. I look at Asantehene's Kramo and they are all Wangara.

Chief F: it is true. I myself when Opoku Ware returned from a trip before his death I went to see him. See, we have documents here that keep repeating "refer to Asantehene for advice". And Kyekyewere, I met this man from tourist board Mr. Lomo who said that someone in his family is called Kofi Wangara; he was trying to tell me he is a Wangara man. Yes, the Wangaras are in Asante a lot. These are the people who are the real Mallams, not the "gyina ho gye" type. They stay indoors, chant, and perform all the proper Quran rituals. I have to see the Asantehene one of these days for advice as my ancestors use to do. There are a lot of documents that I need to discuss with him. When the native authority came, there are documents that I need to refer to Asantehene. Secondly, the reason why we are organizing this festival is because people think the Wangaras are strangers. But there is nowhere else that we call home from apart from Ghana. Yes, we are everywhere, but Ghana is our home. In 1852 when the Gold Coast army was formed they had a Wangara troop. Even by then the tribes were the troops and every tribe had a battalion of one hundred. The Wangaras had two hundred, meaning two battalions. Yes, check the history of the Ghana army. I have some documents in French about this. The 1852 army was started with 300 troops, two hundred of them were Wangaras. Even now when you look at the railroad construction it was the Wangaras, when you look at the mining industry it was the Wangaras. Now look at the cocoa farming. So when you look at the aspects of nation building, it is the Wangaras who have been building the Ghana nation, so how can the Wangaras be strangers. So this is why we need this festival, to educate people and celebrate our accomplishments. There are many people who are Wangaras but don't want people to know.

Prof: Nana, I don't mean to cut you short; the chief fisherman in the central region is called Nana Wangara.

Chief F: The chief fisherman, you see. The municipal chief of Cape Coast is a Wangara boy. Koto kuraba itself is 90% Wangara. We are doing a lot of work, educating people. Rashid Bawa, his father is a Wangara, he is the Zongo chief of Kajebi. I never thought about becoming a chief. I always thought it is for old men, not me. But I am here.

Well, I have a lot of documents talking about the western province and so forth. Some mention that [at Kintampo] there is a small number of people from Mo and Nkoranza, but no chief from Asante. Why this reference is made I don't know but I guess these are some of the things that I need to refer to Asantehene for advice. But I think anything concerning this place should be referred to Asantehene.

Prof: when we [Asante] come to Kramo, we often come for amulets etc. Asantehene's Batakari. So I found to my surprise that all Mallams [who divine] go to him [the Nsumankwaahene] for registration. It looks like we go to church, fetish priests and Mallams. So do you believe in what we do?

Chief F: actually, we use verses from the Quran, that is whatever my ancestors used from the Quran. There are a lot of things in the Quran. I believe the Al Qaeda people use Quran recitals. There are a lot of things in the Quran. My grandfather called Sogolo Sanga was asafohene during the Yaa Asantewaa war. The day of the war, they asked him how they would know he had reached Kintampo. He told them that they would hear gunshots at Kyekyewere. And they heard all three gunshots at Kintampo. There is a lot in the Quran. But because the liars are plenty, we have problems. You talked about registration with Sumankwaa. I don't go to anybody. Sumankwaahene comes here. When there is any important function like Addaekese that they need to stop the rain, they come to me, I just pray. Sumankwaahene brought me drinks: Guinness, schnapps, etc. so everything is within the Quran. Why Asantes are registering all those people, well, the moment to come here, one has to come here. Most of them I have to take care of them. I am guided by the religion. I believe that the hand that gives is the strong one and the one that takes is the weaker one. That is why I still work as a contractor, so that I can continue to give.

Me, what my ancestors left for me is the Quran. Some, they wrote themselves. They wrote verses over and over again.

Prof: As we Asantes believe and use Kramo, do you also believe or use ours, the Bosom?

Chief F: if you mention "Bosom" it goes different ways.

Prof: I am using bosom for want of a better word. I see that these days when I use that word people raise their eyebrows or frown, but I hope that you know what I am referring to.

Chief F: The bosom itself, these days how they are portrayed in the news. Someone may come to you and say "I am going to start a church and I need a deity or Kramo under it or behind it. It's like you see the power in the sun, but the one taking care of it is in the shade. Just like someone is drying gari in the sun, but the one watching it is in the shade.

Prof: we heard you, but it's a bit deep. Could you please elaborate a little for us?

Chief F: it is like, well, you see the cross, but the real power behind it is somewhere else.

Prof: remote control.

Chief F: It is worse than remote control. The bosom will put one through all kinds of display. But it may well be that a root was boiled and the power is in that simple potion, but the komfo will give you a runaround just to show you how powerful he is. For example, if Sumankwaahene tells nananom that the upcoming event would be fine without rain, because he has moved the rain somewhere else. He does not tell you who or what is behind it. That way he looks powerful. There are some things that need to be preserved. For example, there are households that were known to have certain specific cures for various ailments. Most of them died with it because the generations after them did not bother to learn. That is why we are so behind. White people developed because they learned and developed and improved on what the ancestors handed down. This is a Quran. Our ancestors did not wait for one to be printed and sent down from

Mecca. Imagine, from 1950s we have no records. But we have records before that. Why? Isn't it ironic, that we are more civilized but they preserved more than we have. I went to the Manhyia museum. I paid money, to see things our ancestors had. Even the cloth that Yaa Asantewaa is wearing, I paid money to go and see our own things.

Quest: So do you have a museum here?

Chief f: No, but I have a lot of items here. The spears, guns, regalia and so forth. I was planning to open something like that to display the items. But it's me who appreciates things like that, but the people don't understand that. Asantes will display things like that and let you come and pay to see it. See, my brother, it is from these that we say Asantes like money. They don't leave anything to chance. I tell people in Accra that if the sea was in Kumasi they would build a gate around it. I respect them for that.

A break for prayers, picture taking snapshots of medals, and plaques.

Anybody who had a provisional council representative is a paramountcy. I believe that when Otumfuo sees these medals, he will say Fanyinama.

March 21st , 2006 Fanyinama Cont'd

We are still at Kintampo rounding up a fascinating and constructive interview with Chief Fanyinama.

Quest: Nana, when you were talking about the construction of the roads by Fanyinama. You mentioned that Arden Clark was received under this structure (a big hut), how old is this structure?

Chief F: Well, let's say roughly 200 hundred years. It is referred to in documents as RH meaning Rest House. In archival materials, there are only two RHs in Nkoranzaman (Nkoranza Nation). One at Duroman Kese and Fanyinama's palace. So when you see Fanyinama RH it is this structure they are referring to. But this is over 200 years. I say that because this structure was here in 1830, long before 1830.

Quest: What does Benkade means?

Chief f: it means coming together. This is the spiritual home of all Wangaras. So it is the Benkade who is organizing the Wangaras. There is something that brings us together and it is the Benkade, thus "Unity is strength". So this festival; means a lot. We usually have it in the last week of September, but this year the fasting is coming around that time and we don't want to worry our people so we are drawing it to August so that it will give us three weeks between the festival and the fasting.

I think I should be invited to the Yaa Asantewaa festival.

Quest: You will be invited. I just found out about all this history and the connections. And please, Nana, we would be honored if you come, you are invited. I would also like to know if you have a queen mother.

Chief F: yes. The queen mother I met she died. So I replaced with her granddaughter.

Quest: is she from your family?

Chief F: she is a member of the clan, but not my family. She does not enstool or anything. Her title is Magajia. She does not have any powers like the Asante queen mothers have.

When you look at the documents, our ancestors should have stayed in Kumasi. The documents state that we should not pay tolls. They say it's because we were independent before the Yaa Asantewaa war.

I know Otumfuo is a very constructive man and I would like to meet him.

Prof: so Nana you are the Omanhene for all Wangaras in Ghana.

Chief F: Yes.

Prof: so when I go to Zongo and they are talking about the Zongohene it is completely different.

Chief F: completely different. Even the Zongohene the way it is going on in Kumasi I am not happy about it. There they are tribal heads, they are [not] chiefs, they are headmen. They don't take part in chieftaincy. The lawyers just take their money, because true chieftaincy matters don't go to court. Sometime I use to tell Nkoranzaman hene about some of these issues. And he would say "oh, they want to polish chieftaincy". Chieftaincy is a tradition so when you go beyond, like Ben kyiniye: not every chief has ben kyiniye and in Kintampo here no chief is supposed to carry that apart from me.

Quest: is there a Kintampo hene?

Chief f: No we don't have Kintampo hene. We have a certain chief who is claiming to be and he and Nkoranzahene are in court now over that. The Nwoasehene, not Wenchi Nwoase, Nana Drobo is my friend. But Nana Awotwe Kuffuor, the Kintampo Nwoasehene is claiming to be. We have Damoamahene, we have Nwoasehene, then we have Kyeremangoma, then we have Fanyinama, but I am overlord here. The Nkoranza, the Nwoasehene is a pamhene. Let's say we have the Mo pamhene and the Nkoranza pamhene. Because when you look at the 1924 demarcation by Sir Fuller, judgment of 1919 Kintampo the boundary is just down here from our old mosque which divides Kintampo partly to Mo and partly to Nkoranza. So when you look at the 7th June 1924 agreement, "made at Kintampo WPC Western Province Ashanti between Kwame Baffoe Omanhene of Nkoranza, and Yaw Badu, Omanhene of Mo, and Fanyinama of Kintampo". And "that in view of the fact that the land has been divided between Nkoranza and Mo, they have voluntarily withdrawn their tribute to Fanyinama". This document was signed by Mo, Nkoranza and Fanyinama. So anybody from Nkoranza cannot be Kintampohene, neither

from Mo. So I have been given everything to use. When dignitaries come, they ask for me not Mohene or Nkoranza here. The land is not for us, but the stool is for us.

I understand that the Old Nkoranza chief, I think collected money from Nwoasehene and told him he is Kintampohene, which started all the problems. Even today, the Mo has an Apamhene here, they can both have apamhene, but neither one can claim paramountcy over Kintampo. The Mo Manhene is staying at new Longro and the Nkoranza hema is staying at Longro. There is no agreement in this town on either side. The only agreements are between Fanyinama and Mo and Fanyinama and Nkoranza. Even the 1924 agreement had mistakes that I have overlooked. That agreement did not mention apamhene, but we have allowed them to exist.

Quest: Nana what is your academic background?

Chief f: I finished form four. That is all. I never got the chance to continue beyond that.

So during the colonial period, whenever dignitaries came to see me, the pamhenes would sit outside. But you see, the moment you elevate yourself then the problem starts. Both know that they have land here but no stool here. All documents show that: I am the president of the local council, president of the urban council. I have been telling our people that Kintampo is not a new town, we have been around for a while, during the formation of the regiment. It was from Kintampo here that the 1st and 2nd world war regiments departed.