

Visit with Nana Kwame Owusu-Agyeman I Antoahene

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Interview conducted by Professors David Owusu-Ansah (James Madison University) and Emmanuel Akyeampong (Harvard University)

Purpose of Interview: To hold conversations about the Antoa Anyaman Bosom as part of the TrustAfrica Religious Tolerance in Ghana Project.

Also Present: Nana's senior counselor from the priestly family (abusua) for the Antoa deity, Nana Kwaku Tutu.

Location of Interview: At the Ahenfie (Antoa).

Comments:

We arrived at the Antoa Ahenfie on time (11:00 AM as agreed upon by prior arrangements) for the meeting with Nana Agyeman I, Antoahene. One of the palace functionaries seated Dr. Akyeampong and me at the main sitting room at the lower level of the palace. My meeting with Nana on 10 July took place at a space at the upper level of the house. While we waited for Nana to come down, an individual (male) walked into the sitting room, greeted us, took his seat and it was obvious he knew the palace. We will soon find out that this man by the name of Nana Kwaku Tutu is a senior member of the Antoa Bosom priestly family and that he has been invited to the palace for the purpose of our visit. Opayin Tutu will be an important part of our conversation for the day.

Nana arrived shortly, took his seat (facing Dr. Akyeampong and me, and Opayin Tutu was seated in one of the roll of chairs by the wall to the right hand side of Nana). Opayin Tutu initially acted as Nana's okyeame when we were officially asked the *amane* or the purpose of our visit to nana's palace this day.

Stating the *Amanee*: I stood up and indicated to Nana that we were honoring the arranged meeting for which I visited the palace two days earlier. Our interest was to hold conversations with Nana about the Antoa Bosom which belongs to his stool. The statement of purpose included the fact that Dr. Akyeampong and I are part of a group of scholars called upon by TrustAfrica (Dakar) to engage in research in religious pluralism/inter-faith tolerance in Ghana. Our visit to Antoa was part of that project but especially to investigate the defining characteristics of the Antoa Bosom and therefore how the history of the Obosom and its activities contribute to inter-religious peace in Ghana.

Formalities/Informalities: Prior to the *Amanee*. When Nana first arrived at the sitting room, he called my day name, Kofi. "You see, I did not forget," he credited himself. He asked for Dr. Akyeampong's name. "Kwaku Akyeampong, Dr. Akyeampong replied. "Oh, so you do not have a Christian name?" "Emmanuel," Dr. Akyeampong stated. "As for me, I took on my Ghanaian name in 1948 when for nationalist reasons I dropped my Christian name for the local given name. So I am Kwame," he added. This earlier engagement set the stage for a relaxed environment for the interview. After this nice break, Nana asked Nana Tutu to ask us the *amane*.

With the *amanee* already stated, Nana restated our purpose for the conversation in a formal way to the senior member of the Antoa Bosom, Nana Tutu. Nana asked that Nana Tutu tell Dr. Akyeampong and me the story of the Antoa Bosom.

Q: Nana Tutu: Do they want to know the theory, the practice, or the whole story of the Bosom. [In other words, were we interested in just talking about the Bosom and its activities, or did we want to add a visit to the stool house to see how cases were presented by clients plus a visit to the River to see how the Obosomfo performed rituals? We indicated that we wanted to see and hear everything.]

Interjection: Nana interjected and stated to Dr. Akyeampong and me that he had brought this senior member of the Bosom to talk to us because he [Nana] had spent a good number of years overseas in New York. However, he knew the stool matters even as a child because he stayed close to the elders. He asked us, “Do you know what Traditional Abosomfo and Christianity have in common?” You know that many people do not know that we all ring bells prior to worship or performing certain rites. You also remember that for the Catholics, when one sins the person goes to confession; the priest tells the sinner to perform certain penance which can be in the form of a fine. We used to have here in Ghana, when Ghana was the Gold Coast, an Anglican priest called Rev. Anglobey. He was a very strict priest. When one broke the rules of the Church, it did not matter the age of the person, Rev. Anglobey will lash the person before he advised you. That is to say that punishment comes with breaking the rules of God. The churches did it in their own way and so do we here at Antoa. Here, if one breaks the rules of Antoa, that person is punished!

Q: [By Dr. Akyeampong]. Nana can we ask you to tell us how and where the Obosom came to Antoa?

A: [This is a summary of Nana’s response]. The land of Antoa used to belong to the people of Offinso. When they found the new land at Offinso that they found more suitable to their needs, and before they moved to the new land, Nana Sarkodie Date bought it. He lived on the land with his servants and even had a servant who traded for him. This was during the reign of Nana Obiri Yeboa. When Obiri Yeboa died and the people were looking for his successor they could not find an acceptable successor. One of the possible successors was the ruler of a town not far away from here (Kenyase), and when that chief heard that he was being considered for the position of king, he retorted that he will become their king only if the Kumase people were to dress the road from his town to Kumase with “*bommo*” or blankets. They thought that such a person who makes unreasonable demands before he is even crowned king could not be trusted as king because he demonstrated dictatorial tendencies. The people therefore settled on Prince Osei Tutu but the problem was that Osei Tutu had fled Denkyira and nobody knew where he was.

Nana Sarkodie Date of Antoa had a servant who traded for him and it was this trader who saw Osei Tutu in Akwamu and came to tell his master of the news. But Nana Date was afraid to tell the people of Kumase that Osei Tutu was alive when he Nana Date had not seen the prince himself. So he accompanied the trader to Akwamu where he saw Prince Osei Tutu himself before Nana Date made the news public.

Prior to leading an Asante group to Akwamu, Nana Date went on an *abisa* (divination) to seek spiritual help for the success of the travel to bring Prince Osei Tutu back to Asante. It was during the *abisa* that Nana Date was told that there is a stream in his own village of Antoa that is vested with great power. Nana Date came back home and went to the stream and asked that the stream protect him for the expedition. The spirit of the stream protected Nana and they brought back Osei Tutu. This stream used to be called “Abodwo Nsuo” (“cool stream”) because it was the location where people stopped to cool their thirst when they went to farm but when Nana returned successfully from Akwamu with Osei Tutu, the chief changed the name of the stream to *Manya me mman* which we have shorten to “Anyaman.” The story tells you the importance of abosom and wars and expeditions. Anyaman became the Antoahene’s personal bosom. [We were told how sub-chiefs in Antoa also had their personal abosom: Gyasehene’s bosom is Boosi, Baamuhene’s bosom is Oboo Kuntu, etc.] Over the years however, the character of Anyaman has transformed to the point where we have today. It has combined the attributes of both a nature deity and an obosom *brafo* (executioner deity). It must be noted that Antoa Anyaman does not do *abisa* rather it seeks truth and responds quickly to those who use its name to enforce injunctions. “Do you know that the concept of injunction is not original to the British?” the chief asked. They saw how, for example, the *Ntamkese* worked. When in an argument one took the *Ntamkese* the argument ended because the person has called on the abosom and what is left to be done was to seek the truth in the condition when positions became frozen. This is almost how the Antoa Anyaman works and its retribution is without fail. Antoa by going to bring Osei Tutu, the founder of the Asante nation and the source of Asante’s greatest oath *Ntamkese*, is sometimes referred as the one who went and brought *Ntamkese*.

While the Antoa stream is said to “belong” to the chief of Antoa as the lord of the land, the priesthood (*bosomfo*) is vested in a different family. It operates akin to a chiefly family as the priest of Antoa Anyaman must always come from this family and is not chosen through spirit possession. So Nana Kwaku Tutu informed us that his grandfather was the bosomfo of Antoa Anyaman, then his uncle, and now his brother, Nana Kwasi Asiamama. The officials of the deity and the chief work hand-in-hand in resolving cases brought before the deity, and a summons from the deity is carried out by the chief’s *boafo* (messenger), especially if the person summoned lives outside of the jurisdiction of the Antoahene. The *boafo* on arriving at a town of village informs the resident chief of the matter at hand and it the political infrastructure of chieftaincy that facilitates the work of the deities.

#### The Theory of the process

Dr. Akyeampong asked Nana Tutu to explain the process of how a case ends up at Antoa Anyaman.

Response: Nana Tutu presented a hypothetical case of a farm boundary controversy in the neighboring paramountcy of Juaben. Let’s say that Kofi and Ama’s farm have a common boundary about which they disagree to the exact dividing line. One day at the farm, they got into a controversy and in the heat of the argument Kofi abused Ama regarding her femininity. Ama responded to Kofi that “if I am an *obaa foo* [trash] then may Antoa Anyaman’s curse come on you if you sleep with any woman.” That curse could have been turned if they have had cool heads and prostrate themselves as they repeated “*Nana Kokotwea, Nana gyae maenka*” but they

did not. So if you use the bosom to curse and you allow the day to turn, then the curse takes effect. But you can reverse the curse yourselves the same day of the curse.

After the exchanges with Ama, if Kofi goes home and sleeps with his wife or any other woman, then he has indeed broken the rule and therefore the curse becomes effective. If on the other hand Kofi did not sleep with any woman and came to Antoa after the curse has been made, then we would have only performed rituals for him to remove the curse without even involving Ama, but once the forbidden act in the curse had been committed, then it becomes a bigger case. So, let's say that after sleeping with a woman, Kofi becomes afraid or that over time he becomes sick and remembers the curse and comes here to seek help, then the process of curing starts, and for us to know what to do through knowing the whole story, we will need both Kofi and Ama to be here.

Q: So how do you get both of them to come?

A: We do not deal with individuals. Let's say Kofi came here to tell his story but that we need Ama too to come here. On behalf of the bosom, we send one of our men to Juaben (that is if Ama is a resident of Juaben). We will go to the king of the town and the messenger will tell the king of Juaben that Maame Ama who is a resident of this town has used the name of Antoa Anyaman in a curse and that the bosom wants Maame Ama to appear at the shrine. The king will get one of his elders to accompany the Antoa Bosomfo's messenger and the call will be made to Maame Ama. If Maame Ama refuses to come, we will take Kofi through the necessary rituals but Ama now is the one who must await the wrath of the Bosom. Note that the case as it has been presented to the bosom has nothing to do with the boundary at the farm about which the controversy started. It is all about the curse of sleeping with another woman so the land case will have to be dealt with separately by the elders of Juaben and if anything at all, the Bosom at Antoa will use this process as a moment for educating both parties with regards to the appropriate traditional ways of resolving conflict about land.

Or let's say a married woman slept with another person and her husband confronted her and she swore that if she has done what she is accused of then she must be killed by the Antoa Anyaman. The woman gets protractedly sick and a spiritual source of the malady is suspected and in an *abisa* she is reminded of her act and denial. She will be directed to Antoa and so when she comes here, then the process here also goes like the following.

When the parties come here to the Antoa elders (there are two family houses associated with the bosom that cases are heard), the case will be presented to the senior elders of the bosom and we will ask questions and if we find a person having committed adultery for example, we will want the whole truth, and after that we will impose charges and forgiveness in the form of *mpata* to be given to the person who has been offended. Then we will tell the offender to carry the *Yawa*.

#### *Carry the Yawa*

The carrying of the Yawa or silver bowl is part of the ritual. We require that the person carrying the Yawa places in it a chicken to be sacrificed, a knife, a piece of white calico and a bottle of schnapps. The person is paraded through the streets of the town amidst hooting and the intent is to disgrace or humble the sinner. If the person is too sick to walk the streets, we have people in town that can carry the sick person for a fee. Throughout the parading, the person who is

carrying the *yawa* is hooted at to humiliate him/she for the sin committed. The *yawa* carrier MUST NOT turn to look back but keep on parading till it ends up at the Antoa Anyaman stream where the *obosomfo* performs his part of the rites.

At the stream, the *Obosomfo* calls the parties. The accused party can add to her/his confession if there is something that has not been said at the stool house because entering the stream. Technically, the *Obosomfo* must call the parties before him as they all stand in the stream and interrogates them to make sure that all the truth is said. And the *okomfo* will pour libation in the stream and then asks *Kofi* and *Ama* to go kneel down by the edge of the stream and to *Nana kokotwea*. The chicken is then slaughtered and thrown or left in the water of the stream to die. As the dying chicken struggles in the water, the parties to the case keeling on the edge of the stream beat the water in the stream with their flat palms intoning *Nana kokotwea*, *Nana fa yen bone firi yen* (“Nana, relent, Nana forgive us our sins”).

Q: What is the color of the chicken that must be submitted (*Owusu-Ansah* asked)?

A: Any color of chicken is allowed but only the *akoko asense* (*Rasta* chicken) and the chicken that has no hair/features naturally around its neck. Otherwise all colors of chicken are acceptable. It should not be a poultry chicken. Once the chicken is slaughtered, it is cut up and what we look for is the kidney. The kidney turns white if the *bosom* accepts to forgive the offender as having told the whole truth. If the kidney turns white but a small black dot remains or that it turns completely black, this will mean that the offender would have to do more reflections to see if there is anything forgotten. When he/she returns, we ask this person to provide only another chicken.

Q: Does Antoa *Bosom* do *abisa*?

A: No, you have to go somewhere to do that and you will be told by that shrine that you have offended Antoa Anyaman and then these people come here and we ask them what they have done and then take them through the process.

Q: Must one be in Ghana only to be affected by the *dua bo* or curse of Antoa *bosom*?

A: No, we recently had two persons who sent a representative to come perform rituals here and they were Ghanaians in Italy. So you can be anywhere. But if you came here because you are sick and you need help and you do not know who or what has happened, we will send you away to go do the *abisa*. However, when all is done and you seek protection, you can place yourself at the protection of the *bosom* (*akogya*).

Q: If one came here for the rituals and the person was already sick, what do you do?

A: After the successful ritual and the kidney turns white for you, the parties take a bath of the stream water. We have a section we have sealed off for the women. Then for the process to be complete as a form of treatment there is a need for 7 days of ritual bathing at the riverside. You cannot put some of the water and bring or take home for the bathe. You have to go to the riverside. So we have rental places that we provide in town--some at the either family houses and some at a house that *Nana* has built in town for that purpose. When the process is completed, we put *hyire* white clay on the person to indicate a re-purified state of being. The process is then complete. And if you want, since *Nana Antoahene* has other assignments on this Saturday, we can go to the stool house for you to see cases similar to that described.

We thanked Nana Antoahene and excused ourselves. In the company of Nana Tutu, we went to the stool house.

We sat through about five cases in about 40 minutes. The rapidity with which cases were resolved was amazing. What was central was whether a curse involving the name of Antoa Anyaman had been uttered. The process aimed not only at determining guilt, but at moral education and reconciliation.

There was the case of Ama Atta and Kwaku Adae from Kumawu when we arrived at the abusua (family house) of the bosomfo.

A Fanti woman came from Kasoa near Accra with a charge against her landlord. She and her late husband had completed a rental house on the understanding with the landlord that they would live in it for a specified number of years. Documentation covering this arrangement was not done while the husband was alive, and on his death, the landlord had proceeded to evict the woman and her children. Tearful, frustrated, and angry, she narrated her case before the elders of the obosom. She was asked if she was coming to curse the landlord, or whether she simply wanted the obosom to help retrieve the money expended on the house or to reinstate her in the rented home. The elders sensed her uncertainty, and carefully explained to her the implications of cursing with Antoa Anyaman. She was asked to step out and consider her options and then come and inform the elders of her decision. On her return, she decided not to curse but to ask the deity to seek the return of money expended in the construction.

A third case involved three teenagers and the theft of sneakers in a boarding secondary school. A student had stolen two pairs of sneakers from two brothers. The brothers had accused the wrong person, also a student, of stealing the sneakers. The accused in protesting his innocence cursed with Antoa Anyaman. The real culprit and mother now frightened. All teenagers and their mothers turned up at Antoa. Both the thief and the one who cursed to perform rituals, the thief to carry yawa. The mother of the boys whose sneakers had been stolen appealed to the elders that the mother of the thief be made to reimburse her for some of her expenses incurred in this case. The mother of the thief quickly agreed and an amount was fixed and paid there and then! What is clear is how no one wants to incur the wrath of Antoa Anyaman.

A fourth case involved a young Fante couple from Bedwuma. Also teenagers, the boy had sex with the girl and then denied it, making comments that hurt the girl. The girl cursed using Antoa Anyaman. Bedwuma is on the coast of Ghana, geographically distant from Antoa and thus revealing the hold of Antoa on the social imaginary of Ghanaians. At the shrine the girl admitting to cursing the boy and the boy admitted to having had sex with the girl. Rituals to be performed and yawa to be carried by the boy.

A sick man was brought to the deity. He had jettisoned his wife 15 years ago and had married a new wife. New wife had lost four children, only 2 left. On abisa they had been directed to Antoa and hence had come for healing the reversal of the curse.

The last case we witnessed involved a young man from Baanso who had two wives. His second wife had cursed using Antoa Anyaman. The man's senior wife was a Fante, and they had separated three year ago. They had four kids together. The senior wife went to live with another man though divorce had not been granted. The young man married again. The senior wife subsequently returned to the marriage, and the man to the new wife's irritation divided his farm between the two wives. The junior wife cursed that if the senior wife went to the farm to harvest food she should die. The young man came with the senior wife to reverse the curse at Antoa but the deity did not accept their pacification. Opanyin Tutu asked them to go and bring the junior wife, as it was only then that resolution could be found to the case. We were told the junior refused to come because she was sick, but claims she will come to Antoa if accompanied by Baanso chief's linguist or kyeame. It seems the junior wife no longer felt that her interests would be protected by her husband.

After observing several cases, we offered another bottle of schnapps to Nana Tutu to thank him for the time spent on us. From here, we were allowed to the streamside to observe the rituals in practice. Nana Tutu asked one of his attendants to accompany us and to introduce us to the Obosomfo for the opportunity to observe. We were asked if we could give the Fante woman from Accra in a tenancy case a ride to the stream. At the riverside, we were asked to take off our shoes prior to being escorted past a long line of persons waiting to present drinks, chicken, and knives arranged in *yawa*. The obosomfo sat on a chair on the opposite side of the stream. We saw persons doing the ritual wash and going through the motion of doing the *Nana kokotwea*. There were others in the boarded section for women taking ritual baths [we did not enter that section], we were escorted to the section across from the obosomfo, and after our escort had whispered to him and pointed him to our direction, the obosomfo motioned in recognition of our presence. We then moved to a good location where we could see clearly the ritual killing of the chicken. We also noted that the large collection of imported and unused bottles of schnapps. This is the case because when a bottle of schnapps is opened, only a shot or two is used in the ritual thus allowing the remaining in the bottle to be available for the next person in line.

The slaughtering of the chicken was done methodically. The process started with the cutting of the neck and allowed to drown or die as it flapped around in the stream; then the head is cut off, followed by the outer section of the wings, the lower section of the legs are also cut. These sections of the head, wings and feet are thrown away. The upper chest was cut and pulled down to expose the inner content of the chicken in search of the kidneys. The major sections remaining of the chicken is collected by attendants to be sent home by the Bosomfie attendants. The kidney when exposed is declared as turned white and all respond to the hoot. The obosomfo then stands from his chair, steps into the stream, schnapps is poured into a container and he does the ritual pouring of libation and *kankye* (invocation to the deity presenting a case). The person for whom the sacrifice has been performed then follows instruction for the ritual bath.

After observing several of these acts, we asked permission to leave. We were escorted to the same location from across the stream and information was passed on to the okomfo by our guide. The okomfo signaled that all was well and we thus took our leave.

A personal observation:

It appeared to me that even though the Antoa bosom is harsh with its treatment, views I noted in my pre-interview visit were confirmed. The bosom punishes but primarily it forces the truth from offenders and in a position of authority and power settles conflict firmly. Antoa visitation is not limited to traditional believers. People from all belief systems come to atone for their offenses. The concept of injunction as stated in the conversation with Nana Owusu-Agyeman is very important. The process is clear and at the point of interrogation, the senior elders of the Antoa stool house take the opportunity to advise offenders of acceptable behaviors. On learning that Dr. Akyeampong was born a Presbyterian, Nana Kwaku Tutu at the bosomfie mentioned that a case had come to Antoa involving a Presbyterian catechist in adultery.

Dr. Akyeampong had asked Nana Tutu and his elders in the bosomfie about the relation between chief and bosom. Nana Tutu responded with confirmation from the elders that every blackened stool is a bosom. Any chief who sits on a blackened stool – *apongua* – is attached to a bosom. A Christian chief in his opinion serves two deities.

I also asked about the difference between bosom and suman. A suman, which can be described as a talisman or amulet, makes a spiritual force mobile. There is no suman around Antoa Anyaman, as the deity does not possess and operates through a single family. So the deity or its essence is not found outside of Antoa. Indeed, you cannot take away water from the stream. All ritual ablutions must be done at the stream. During the reign of the preceding Antoahene, someone secretly fetched water from the stream. The person went blind at the lorry station at Ahinboboano as he was leaving. On inquiries he was brought back. Kwaku Tutu and his uncle Brobbey took the man to the stream. The man confessed and the deity was invoked with schnapps. The culprit beat the water in the stream thrice and was asked to wash his face with some of the water. He regained his sight.