

Chapter III–16: *How Boys Grow Up in the Villages*

How I have taken the girls and talked straightforward, I want to go back and start with the boys. And what I have talked about the boys already, this talk will get into it, but it is a different one again, because as we call each other's names, you will meet Fuseinis and Fuseinis, many of them, but they are not one person. And truly, talks come to meet one another. And so we will take what I talked and join it with everything about the boys, the work they do in the villages when they are children and the part they play, and how they sit in the house and grow up until the time they get wives.

When they bring forth a baby boy and this child grows to be about four years, that is when he starts going to the farm. And it seems that I have already talked about how children farm. When a child is from four years going to five years, he has no work apart from going to the farm. And there are some differences if the child is a village boy. Some of these boys, if their fathers have got cows, they can remove some of the children to be cowboys and be looking after the cows. Or if the fathers have got sheep or goats, the fathers can remove one or two of the children to be looking after the sheep or goats. And there are some children, when they are about five years, they know how to weave rope. They can go to the bush and cut cornstalks and peel them, and they will take the cornstalks to make rope. And there are some children who are there and they learn how to weave *zana* mats. In the olden days, when they wove a *zana* mat, it was two *pesewas*, and the one which was not nice was one and a half *pesewas*. And in the olden days, this was how the children were selling the mats, and they would use the money to buy *tuubaani*, the kind of food they eat in the morning. They would eat it and go to the farm.

Someone in a village may farm very far away, and there will be monkeys or baboons entering the farm and removing the corn. As the corn is standing, this man will remove about two of his children to go and wait in the corn. When they go, they make a bed in a tree. The bed will be higher than the whole farm, and the children can sit in it and see the end of the farm. And they make what we call *balankona*. They will cut a small piece of wood and make it hollow; it's like a box or a drawer but it's longer and not as wide. As they have removed the inside of it, they will make another so that one will be big and the other small. One can be about a foot long, and the other will be a bit smaller than that. And they take the two *balankona* and put them in the tree on the bed, and they can take sticks and be knocking them: *kokro, kokro, kokro*. One will cry low, and one will not cry low.

They don't use any skin to sew it; it's just a hollowed out piece of wood, but they can use it to play the sound of timpana or dawuli. That is how it is. And so these children have nothing to do: when it's daybreak they will climb to the bed and wait for the monkeys. And a monkey works from the morning to the evening. When it's night, the monkeys won't come to the farm, and when it's raining, they won't come. But any time in the day, a monkey can enter a farm. And so these small children will come and be knocking the balankona, and any monkey or baboons that hears that noise won't come to the farm. And the day the children don't beat that thing, the monkeys know that they have not come, and the monkeys will come and remove some of the corn. And so the children who are still small, this is the work their fathers let them do in the villages. And it is another work the small children do in the villages, and such children, we call them *jangulba*, "monkey-waiters." But nowadays, not many children know the balankona, unless a child who is in a far village. The monkeys are not plenty again. They have killed some, and the monkeys that remained have run into the bush. There are some places in Dagbon, if you want to go and meet monkeys, you will go fifty or a hundred miles. And so nowadays, how will a child see the balankona? But it wasn't long ago, if you were going from here to Savelugu, you would see monkeys, and they would be many.

And our Dagbamba children, when they get up, sometimes they can get hens or guinea fowls, or their fathers or their mothers have hens, and they will be looking after the hens. Sometimes the father or the mother will buy a hen for a child to look after, or a child's uncle or grandfather can buy a hen. And I think I told you that some of them do that in the *Buyim* Festival. And so these small boys, from four-and-a-half, five, to six years, that is their work, to be looking after the hens and guinea fowls and other animals. When they are going to the farm, the child will take the *nosuyu*, the basket for hens, on his head and carry it to the farm, and the hens will be in the farm eating, and when it is evening, this child will catch the hens again. It's not that it is only the work of children, because if you have no child, or if you have a useless child and he won't mind the work, you will be looking after your things. If an old person has no child, if there is a hen in the hen-room and he wants to catch it, or if there is a goat and he wants to catch it, will he say that because he has no child he won't go? And so not having a child does not fear the hen-room. If you don't have a child and you are looking after your hens, it doesn't matter. But if you have a child, the child will be doing this work.

And there are some things which hens eat, and it is a child who will get these types of food. And the first one, if a child doesn't go to the farm, he will go

and look for termites. As for them, they have their types. There is one we call *tambiɛyu*, and they build their houses near water, in a swampy place. Their building is small and rounded, and it doesn't go up. They are small, and we even call them ants, and there is a white one and a black one, and a red one too. And then there are the ones we call *yoba*. They are the large termites, the real ones, and they build the big hill. There is another type of *yoba* that doesn't build a big hill, and they are under the ground. They are red. They are not big, but their heads are large, and they bite. And again, there is another type we call *wurikoo*, and they are also different. They just build something like a small anthill, and there are some spots on top of it. These are all the food of hens.

When a child is going to catch the *tambiɛyu*, the child will take a basket and put leaves inside. Sometimes two children will go, sometimes three or four, and sometimes more than that. If they go like that, they will come to the termite hill. As these small termites build their house, they build it about a foot high. You will come and dig around the hill and leave the hill in the middle. Then you will take a cudgel and knock the middle, and then you just turn it over. When you turn it like that, all the termites are inside. Sometimes you will turn the hill and there will be nothing inside: all the termites have run into the ground. And sometimes you will turn it, and the termites that are still inside will be many. The children will put the termite hill in the basket, and two boys will stand to carry a basket. As the termites are inside, the children cannot put the basket on their heads to carry it. They will raise the basket on their thighs and catch it, and when two of them hold the basket like that, it will not be difficult to carry it. And the leaves they have put inside, the leaves will cover the holes in the basket so that the termites cannot get out. And when they come, they will be giving the termites to the chickens. Some of these termite hills have got a lot of children inside, and they will be bringing forth. If you bring it to the house, you just put it down and knock it, and you will see many of them. The hens will be eating them and come to be lying down: they are tired. Getting to day break, the termites will bring forth more children and fill the hill again. And so the small termite hill can feed your hens for about two or three or even more days. If the hens are large, and they have many children, even up to sixty children, they can eat this small termite hill for some days. And as for guinea fowls, a guinea fowl eats more than a hen, and if you get the *tambiɛyu* hill, then you have conquered your guinea fowls. This is how we do its work.

And another thing these children find and give the hens are the *yoba*. The time it doesn't rain, the *tambiɛyu* termites are not there, but these *yoba* are there. The child will get something to dig under their hill. Where he is going to dig, he will put down wet leaves and push the sand to cover the leaves, and he will leave

it. In about three hours he will take a calabash and go there. By that time all the yoba will come to eat the leaves, and when the child is coming, he doesn't walk heavily; he will come at once and pull the leaves and pull the sand to the open. And he will take his hands and collect the sand into the calabash, and he will bring it home and spread it for the hens.

And there are some big ants we call wurikoo, and they are the food of hens. They are like termites but their way of living is different from termites. The place where this wurikoo builds its house is like a swampy place or where there is water and there are trees. When you go there you will see some small things of sand they build on top of the swampy area, and there are holes inside. And a village child, when he comes from the farm, he will go and collect dried cow feces. And he will get green leaves and add to the cow feces, and he will take water and sprinkle on it. And he will get a gourd and open the mouth of the gourd. And he will collect the cow dung and leaves and put inside the gourd. Then he will take cornstalks and lay them inside the gourd to cover the cow dung. He will cut a cornstalks into two and bend it to cover inside the mouth, and then take another and bend it and cross it. That is how he is going to bend the cornstalks to cover the mouth of the gourd, and if he does that and it's all right, when he turns the gourd, the cow dung will not fall out. He will take water in his mouth and blow it on the mouth of the gourd, and then he will take it to the place these wurikoo are staying. And so if you are a child and you are going for the wurikoo, you go to where their house is and dig the ground and make a small hole and make it smooth. And you will take some water and sprinkle it into the hole. And you will take the gourd and turn it so that the mouth side will cover the ground, and you will take the sand you have dug from the hole and push it around the gourd and protect it. If you do that in the evening, when day breaks and you go there, by then these wurikoo have come and entered the gourd. When you are coming to remove the gourd, you don't make noise. If you make a noise, the wurikoo that have entered the gourd will run and enter the ground. And so you will come quietly and snatch the gourd. You will see that the wurikoo have filled the gourd. When you go, you won't put one gourd alone. At one place, you can put about ten gourds, and you can leave the gourds for some days, and you will be removing them for your hens. If you come and you remove a gourd, and you don't get the wurikoo from that hole, you will change to another hole. If you are many and you go, everybody will know his hole, and the next day you will all come and remove your gourds. And you will take it and go to the house, and you will gather the hens and throw the wurikoo for them to eat. And every village child who gets up, he will do this work.

And so the village children, actually their work is farming, but it isn't that farming is the only work for them. Sometimes these children will walk from the village into the bush, and they will get a dry tree and cut it down to cut into pieces. And they will carry it into the village and sell it as firewood, whether two-and-a-half pesewas, ten pesewas, or twenty pesewas. Sometimes they help each other, cutting more for each other. I have been seeing it. Sometimes they will group together, say about six or seven, and help only one; they will cut sticks for a whole day to help one person. And they will gather the sticks, and on the market day, they will come again and carry all of it to the market, and sell it and give all the money to a single person. And such children, if you have them, they are more than old men. Can you imagine how small they are and they are helping one another? At about eight or ten years, they can group to do this. Sometimes they will arrange to come together to cut the grass which we use to roof our houses. They will cut it plenty, and one of them will come to the town and try to find somebody who will buy the grass, and he will sell it to him. And so these children, the time they are doing the farming work, they do this too. And all this is how they try to do hard work.

And sometimes it happens that a child who is not yet matured will run away and leave his village. Such small children are in this Tamale here, boys seven years and eight years old who have run from the villages into this town. Some of these children are going to the farm only by force, and if they know that their father's brother or someone in their family is in town, they will just run from the village to the town. Sometimes someone in the village may die and leave his children, and the senior brother or junior brother will come to perform the funeral, and if his heart is good, he will collect these children to his house and be taking them to the farm. If he is taking good care of them, and if these children know that they are getting enough to eat, and abuse and shouting on them is not there, and the women in the house do not treat them wickedly, then the man can hold such children. But if the junior father or the senior father is wicked, and if he abuses these children every day, then despite the fact that these boys may be five or six years old, they will run away and leave the man. Usually they run to this town. Some of them run and find the houses of their other parents or some of their family who are living here. Or sometimes they can just come and be hanging in town. When you see those small, small children pulling hand trucks on the road, some of them are such children. They are those who said, "I will not agree to cheating." And so the children some people take to cheat are the ones who run away to town, and if you see that this Tamale is full of people, it is the village people who have run to the town.

And as I have said that the girls suffer more than the boys on the part of work, truly, every trouble has got its way. You know, every work a boy does, he does it with strength. But a girl doesn't do her work with strength. That is how it is. A boy and a girl are not the same. The girls work more than the boys, but the boys do hard work more than the girls. You yourself can look inside it and see. Can farming be the same as fetching water? And so the girls' work is not as hard as the boys's work, but the girls suffer because their work is plenty. And again, if you like, you can say that the girls' suffering is not up to that of the boys.

And when it's night, and the old men from the houses gather and eat together, these children will also gather and eat their food. This one will bring his house's food; this one too will bring his house's food; this one too will bring his house's food. They will bring it and gather. They will eat this one's food and then join to that one's food. This is how they will eat until they finish. As for that, I know it, and that is how it is. And when these children finish eating, they will gather and sit with the old people. And I have told you that a child will be pressing his father who is an old man, and the father will take all the sense he has and show the child that he should fear what is forbidden. And the child will learn sense. And the children too can gather together and they will reach about ten, and they will go and sit in front of somebody's house. One will say, "Here runs-runs my story." And this one too will say, "Here runs-runs my story." And that is how they will all tell stories until it is about eleven o'clock or twelve o'clock, and they will go to sleep.

And so the village boys, from the time they are small and growing up, they will be farming up to the time their fathers will get girls for them and they will be married. If you are farming for your father, and you are matured, it is your father who will get a girl for you. And so the village boys will always be suffering for their fathers, bending down and doing the farming work. Those children whose fathers and junior fathers and senior fathers take good care of them at the villages, they don't even have the interest to come to the town. Someone can hold about six children, and they will be bending down at the farm every day up to the time they will be matured and their father will get girls for them. It's not that the father will go and look for girls. The girls the father will get for them, sometimes they themselves will go and look for the girls. Someone who has come to befriend a girl at the market, if it happens that the girl has no husband already, then she is for him and he can marry her. But if someone has already been respecting the father of the girl, this boy will just be hanging and he will never get the girl. And sometimes these boys will be doing the farming, and the father will look for girls but he will not tell them. One day the father will come to tell them, "I've got a

wife for you and a wife for you, so get ready to marry them.” He will tell them this, and it is their work which brought it. And so if you have a child and the child is respecting you, and the work you are doing, this child is doing it for you, and there is no annoyance and no laziness, then every such child who grows up, the best thing to make him happy is that you will get a girl for him to marry.

And the boy who gets a wife, he is someone whose father has a good name. He himself will not get a wife; they won't give to him. It is the father's name they will hear and give the girl. As for the name of the father, there are differences. Someone's father might be a maalam, and everybody knows about him; that will let him get a wife. And again, someone's father might be a farmer and everybody knows about him, and this boy is helping the father at the farm and his everything is farming; that can let him get a wife. Sometime ago, and even today, if you are looking for a girl, before the parents of the girl will hand their daughter to you, they will ask whether you eat and are satisfied in your house. And that question is about your farming, whether you are farming heavily. And again, someone will be a rich person at the village, and if you are rich in a village, it means that the only thing you do is farming and that all your children are farming. As for a rich person, even if his work is small, people will say that it is a big work. Truly, there are people who farm more than rich people, but as for the rich person, God has given him: he doesn't have debt; he doesn't sell something and fall; he doesn't have troubles; even sickness fears him. This is why they say that a rich person farms more than a poor person, because he is getting the benefits of his farming, and because of that, we take it that it is the rich people's children who farm more than the poor people's children. And all these people, as people have said that they are rich or they are big maalams or big farmers, they have good names. And if someone wants to look for something, it is his good name that he will use to get it.

In the villages, somebody who hasn't got a good name is someone who gives birth to children and the children don't want to go to the farm. Only he himself will be farming. When it's daybreak, the children will join lorries to town and leave the father at home, and they will fall in the town. If such children grow up, even as they were always coming to town, they will never get a girl from the town. And in their village too, they will not get. If they go to a different village too, they won't get. Their name is spoiled. People will say, “So-and-so's children, they will not stay and do hard work for the father. So how can they manage to hold someone's daughter? If you give your daughter to such boys, it is only hunger that will kill her.” We have that in Dagbon. The child who will be staying with his father and mother or his junior father or senior father and will not be suffering for them, he will not get a wife.

And so at the villages, it is the owner of a boy who lets someone give a girl to the boy. If not that, before a village boy will get a village girl, it will be very, very difficult for him because in Dagbon here the men are more than the women, and some men too have got more than one wife. And so for a village boy to get a wife is very difficult. And as for the boys, it takes a long time before they get married. For a boy to grow fast is difficult, because suffering will not let him grow. Sometimes you will see a twenty-year-old boy in the village, and he doesn't look like a matured boy. And sometimes a boy will reach twenty and be matured. If you compare the town life and the village life, sometimes a town boy will marry and he is about twenty-four or twenty-six. The time Alhassan married, he was twenty-six. But sometimes in the villages, someone can reach about thirty years and he will not even have a first wife. And so the village boys, at thirty years, they can still be suffering a lot and doing hard work. They cannot get girls to marry, and this is how it is. You will hear that someone has travelled from his village to another village before he will get a wife.

And truly, God has put it down that a man gives birth to a son and the child grows to be matured, the man should get a wife for his child. If you have a child and you don't search to get a wife for him, if the child goes and does some bad work like adultery, it's standing that it will follow you, because it is you the father they are going to come and ask. But God doesn't know that we search for wives with money. If you have money and you like your child, there is a way for you to search for a wife for him. If you give birth to a baby girl, and she comes to grow to get menstruation, you should let her choose a husband, the one her heart wants. And we human beings, if it comes that you have a child who is a boy, and you are holding him, if he is not doing good works for you, even if you have money, you won't get a wife for him. But God hasn't said that. God just said that we should search for wives for our children. Somebody will have money and have a child who is doing bad works and not doing good works, and the man will get a wife for the child. Somebody will not have money, and he will get a wife for his child. And somebody will not have money, but the child will have, and if the man has a good way of living, the child can go and search for his own wife.

Formerly, in the villages, they were not following money, but this time we are sitting down, even in a village they use money to get a wife. And they have been using money like that for more than twenty years now. But a long time ago, they were following, "This person's housepeople, they eat and become satisfied. They go to the farm." They weren't following money. This was how it was in the villages and in our Dagbamba living. But now they show that, "This fellow's house, they have many motorcycles, or they have tractors, or they have cars. This

and that are there.” If it is village, they still say, “This fellow’s house, they have such-and-such number of cows standing there. If you are going to enter the house, you will count the bicycles and they will be up to ten.” And so now it has come to enter the talks of money. In the olden days, you would watch somebody, and the fellow would have good character and the wife would have good character. If he gives birth to a child, you would just catch your daughter and give her to him to give to his bachelor. But now, if someone tells me that it’s still there like that, I will say that he is telling lies. It’s now left with money. There are many people who don’t follow the family again, and they don’t follow good character. That is how it is now. You cannot take it and compare it to long ago. In the olden days, God showed that you could even fetch sand and give it: that is the money for the wife. Long, long ago, in the time of the Holy Prophet, they were doing that. But as for us, it has come to the money-time, and if you don’t have, what are you going to do? And your child also hasn’t got money. No one will give you his daughter in the name of God; it is only a few people who can do that. And so nowadays, it looks as if it is the child who searches for his own wife. If the father of a boy has the means, he can get a girl for the boy to marry. And if the father hasn’t got but the boy has, the boy himself can marry. It doesn’t matter. But what I am saying is that when the boy goes to find a wife, they are going to ask, “Who is your father?” If anything on the part of finding a wife is going to happen, it will have to pass through the hands of the father. That’s why I have said that God says a child’s father should find a wife for him.

And so if you have a child, you will be looking at the child. You will have a child and the child hears your mouth. What is “hear your mouth”? You are farming, and the child is following you to the farm. Is he following your mouth or not? You are selling things or you are trading, and you give him some money to be trading, “Go and be buying.” Is he following your mouth or not? But let’s say today I am farming, and when I get up and go to the farm, the child is just lying down in the house or he is roaming about uselessly. If I am going to follow the works of the child, will I get a wife for him? But somebody will not follow the works of the child, and such a person will show that God said we should get wives for our children. Truly, if we are going to follow the bad works of our children, even if we have money in our hands, we won’t get wives for them. And if we don’t have money, whatever happens, we won’t do it. As you are sitting, you don’t have a farm, and you don’t trade, and your child gets up and hasn’t got money. How are you going to get money to find a wife for your child? If the child knows where he will go and get his money, then when he goes to search for a wife, it is no fault. This is how the talk comes.

And the children who are suffering for their fathers, their fathers will try to get wives for them. I have told you that if someone gives birth to children and they are good, then it will benefit the parents. And as these children are good, they are putting down their goodness for themselves. Even if you are suffering for your father, and you are not yet matured and if your father dies, you yourself will get a girl. If they look for you, you will get; if they don't look for you, you will get. When you were small, you were doing hard work for your father, and you are used to suffering. And your father is now dead, and if you don't respect somebody, you respect yourself. And so that is why we say that if you give birth to children and you are farming, you should try to force your children to be doing farming work. And this is how the boys too grow up in Dagbon up to the time they get wives, and they and their wives will also give birth to children. And this is what I know about it. And it seems that all the talk of children, I have talked to my extent, and we have finished it. And tomorrow, I will tell you more about how we get our wives in Dagbon here, because getting a wife has got a lot of talk here.