

Chapter II-17: *The Damba Festival*

For us Dagbamba, the Damba month is the highest of all the months, because the Damba Festival is our big thing. I have already talked to you about the Damba Festival, and today I will take the talk into details. The respect of the Damba is so much that I don't know how to compare it with the other months. Damba is the month of white heart for all Dagbamba, and I think it is the same as you people are eating the sweetness of your Christmas. For us Dagbamba, the only sweet time that can be compared to the Damba is when the moon dies at the end of the Ramadan fasting. At the end of Ramadan, when the new moon appears for the prayers, that is the only time that can be compared to the Damba Festival for sweetness. But I can say that we are happier in the Damba, because in the Damba Festival, every Dagbamba, whether a girl or a woman, and boy or an old man, we all enjoy.

Every Dagbamba prepares everything waiting for the Damba. When the Damba moon is not yet up, if a woman buys a new cloth and sews it, she will say she is going to start wearing it in the Damba Festival. If a young man gets a smock, he will put it down waiting for the Damba Festival to come before he will put it on. If someone buys a horse, he will say he is going to start riding the horse in the Damba Festival. Women buy necklaces and earrings because of Damba. We have some white metal which is called *anzinfa* and which is made into rings; the women used to go to the blacksmiths and buy them and keep them down for the Damba Festival. If a drummer gets a lundaa, he will be playing it, but he is always saying that it will be very good if he can reach the Damba Festival and praise someone with the drum. Someone beating *gunḡḡḡ*, if the *gunḡḡḡ* is sounding very well, he will say, "Oh, this my *gunḡḡḡ*, it would be better if I am playing it in the Damba Festival." The one blowing the flute, if it is crying, he will say that in the crying he is saying that he is waiting for the Damba Festival. And so we Dagbamba, we don't respect any festival more than the Damba Festival.

The respect of Damba is so much that other people have collected the Damba from us Dagbamba. They got the Damba from us because they don't have their own lunsidrummers; we are their drummers. Who are they? The Nanumbas don't have drummers; we the Dagbamba drummers are their drummers. They have collected the Damba from us because our drummers go there and play and they see it. The Mamprusis have no drummers. It is we Dagbamba who sent some of our drummers there, and the Mamprusis got to know what is called Damba. Formerly the Gonjas didn't know Damba, but now a Gonja has no dance which

makes him happy more than Damba. If a Gonja eats food and is satisfied, he doesn't even mind if they play Damba for him to dance at once. The Walas, they too, they don't have drummers; it is Dagbamba who go and sit there and play the drum. These tribes I have counted even want to collect the Damba from us, because we only beat Damba for eighteen days, but if the Damba moon comes out they will beat the Damba up to the end of the month. Don't you see that they have collected it all? And so the respect of the Damba Festival is so much that we don't know how to compare it to anything; we only know the respect.

And the counting of the tribes, if you follow it again, getting to the southern regions, there is a tribe we call Ligbis. From Kintampo getting to Techiman, Wenchi, Banda, these are the places where the Ligbi people are sitting, and the Wangaras are there, too. The Ligbis and the Wangaras are the same, just like us and the Mamprusis. They are not Dagbamba, but they have seen the Damba from us and they have collected it. They don't understand our language, and we don't understand their language; but if they come out, they know how to say "Damba," and we play it for them. These people, and the Gonjas, and the Walas, their dance is in the neck. The Dagbamba, Mamprusis, and the Nanumbas, our dance is in our bodies, in the feet and every part of our bodies. That is how the dance is. And to follow it again, at Bawku are the Kusasis, and they celebrate Damba. The Chekosi people, too, they are living at Chereponi and getting to Sansanne-Mango, and we go to their place and play the Damba for them to dance. Truly, it is in all this we know that Damba is a very good thing. All the peoples I have counted, if you play Naanigoo, they will not know how to dance it; but if you play Damba, they can dance. If you play Naybieyu, they cannot dance it. Only the Nanumbas can dance Naybieyu, but not even the Mamprusis can dance it. But any type of Dagbamba dance, if you play it among any of these tribes, they will not be able to dance it. But if you play Damba, they will dance it. So Damba is our big thing, and that is the respect of Damba.

How I will talk of Damba, I will talk on the part of us Dagbamba, how we play the Damba and follow the month. We play the Damba and we respect it because it is the birthday of the Holy Prophet Muhammad. They have put it down that the eleventh day of the Damba moon was the birthday of our Holy Prophet, and the eighteenth day was the naming day. And I think that no one will ever be more happy than on the day your wife gives birth to a child, and you also perform the naming. And as for the good blessings of a child, how much more the blessings of the Holy Prophet? It is in the Damba month that we celebrate the birthday of the Holy Prophet, and so it is a happy month for all the Dagbamba.

I want to show you, and you will know truly that we are celebrating Damba, and truly, we drummers know more about it. If you ask somebody the meaning of

Damba, he will just tell you that it is “Damba,” and that is all; he will only tell you that it is Damba the Dagbamba celebrate as a festival. And formerly I thought that I would not be able to get inside the details of all the things we are talking, but how we are going through them one by one, sometimes when I get inside the talks, I get to some details. When I come to talk talks and I go back to my house, when I am on my bed resting or anywhere else where I am alone and everything is cool, I think deeply over many things and I try to get the ones I will like to talk about. And I have more ideas to talk about the drums and about me myself and about how we were living in the olden days and how we have changed nowadays. And so this is one of them.

It was Naa Zanjina who brought the Damba Festival. I have tried to learn much about Naa Zanjina because he brought so many things to Dagbon. We drummers say that Naa Zanjina lit a lantern and opened the eyes of Dagbamba, and for that reason we call him “the lantern of the Dagbamba.” Whatever we are doing in a traditional or custom way, it is Naa Zanjina who brought it. That is why I have been telling you more about him. If you say you are going to talk of something and not include Naa Zanjina, you will only tell a lie. If you want to tell the truth of how Dagbon has come up since the olden days, you are only going to stand on the feet of Naa Zanjina before you can tell everything. A drummer who knows how to praise and who knows how to sing all the songs of Naa Zanjina can sit down at eight o’clock in the evening to praise Naa Zanjina for what he did for the Dagbamba, and the drummer will sing up till daybreak.

In the olden days, before Naa Zanjina, there was no Damba Festival. We Dagbamba only got to know Damba during the time of Naa Zanjina; he brought it for us. It was Naa Zanjina who was traveling to many places, and he brought the Islamic religion to Dagbon, and he brought Damba. If it was that he traveled to the Hausa land and heard it from them, or if it was that he traveled to the Wangara land and heard it from them, we cannot know. We were only here, and he came with the dance. We only know that when Naa Zanjina was young, he traveled to many places, and he went to the Hausa land and stayed there for some time. He saw that the Hausa people were celebrating the birthday of the Holy Prophet Muhammad in the Damba month. And so to me, I think that Naa Zanjina got Damba from the Hausas.

But truly, as for the Wangaras, they know Damba. Sometimes the Wangaras call us to go and beat drums during the Damba Festival. And again, the dance we used to go and beat at their place is during the time of the Ramadan. That is the other time they will come and hire us drummers. In Kumasi, they hire drummers. Tamale too, they come here to hire drummers. We even go to the French land, because we go to Berekum, and from there to enter the French land is

not far. On the twenty-seventh day of the Ramadan month, in the night, if you go to any town of the Wangaras, you will see Wangaras all over the town. If it is this Ghana, they are in some towns: you see Wenchi; you see Techiman; you see Kintampo; you see Kumasi; there are many Wangaras in these places. As I am talking about the twenty-seventh day of the Ramadan month, I am talking about it because it is Damba that we go and beat for them. And so it looks like the way Gonjas are always beating Damba to dance. I think I have already told you something about it. That night, if you go and you start beating Damba, unless the sun is coming to rise before you stop. And so truly, the Wangaras know Damba.

On the twenty-seventh day of Ramadan, at the Wangaras' place, they make a kind of tent, and they bring out the very young Wangara girls, those who are mature but they are not yet married, and on that day, every matured young Wangara girl will get a husband. And the young mature girls, they will be inside the room dressing, and if they dress and come out, it is the sort of dress that you've never seen a woman dressed in. If you first saw her to be a tiny or small girl, after she dresses you will see her very large and tall. If you saw her to be ugly, when she finishes dressing, you will see her to be very, very beautiful. As I am talking, somebody might not see something and will just be giving the story, but I am not telling stories. Somebody will have heard, but it's not that I have heard. I have seen it with my naked eyes, and I have beaten drums for such things. And that day these Wangaras will weave some kind of beds that are joined to each other, about three of them. They weave these beds with stalks, and these are outside, and they take the mature young girls and put them on top of the beds. They will be sitting on top of the beds, and they will be holding the tails of horses. And we drummers will be standing facing them. And the young men will also come and be standing at one side. And those who are on top of the beds, their mothers will also be standing by them. Their mothers, their aunts, their brothers and their sisters will be there. And we drummers will be beating the Damba. When we are beating the Damba, we beat it the way we beat Damba for the Gonjas, just like Gonja Damba. And so to me, I will put it in this way: if not from us that the Gonjas got the Damba Festival, then they heard it from the Wangaras.

When we start beating Damba, you will see those matured young girls sitting on the beds, nodding their heads, and shaking their hands with the tails of the horses, and then beginning to sing a Wangara song. And the rest of the people there will be responding. Those on the beds will be singing the song, and those on the ground will be singing and responding. We don't hear their language, but how we are beating the drum, it follows their song. You will be beating, and at once you will see two young men coming up. And they will put their hands on the bed, and you will see a girl crawling from the bed to the young man, and when she

reaches the edge of the bed, and another one will come and add to the young man, and they will pick the girl from the bed and put her down. That day, everyone at that place will know that that is the husband of the girl. The time the girl arrives on the ground, as for the money we drummers are getting, it will just be adding, and we don't even mind to be looking at it again. And these Wangaras still do this sort of thing.

And so whether it was Naa Zanjina who traveled to the Wangara land and saw them beating the Damba, and he also brought it here, I cannot tell. When Naa Zanjina received the chieftaincy, we were in darkness. All parts of Dagbon were in darkness, but Naa Zanjina opened our eyes. If you ask any Dagbamba chief or any Dagbamba commoner, he will tell you that it was Naa Zanjina who opened the eyes of Dagbon. And so I can only say that it was during the time of Naa Zanjina that we knew about Damba. And so if somebody says that we got Damba from the Wangaras, I will not refuse it.

But if somebody tells you that we Dagbamba got the Damba Festival from the Gonjas, I will not agree. Since I grew up from my childhood, I have never heard that the Gonjas brought the Damba Festival here. Formerly the Gonjas didn't have drums, so how did they beat the Damba? The type of drum the Gonjas have is something we call bindihi. It is sewn from a calabash, and that is what they play. And how can this bindihi play Damba? Dances can be compared to each other, and you may think that they are the same, but they are not the same. It was the Yabonwura, the paramount chief of the Gonjas, who sent a messenger to the Yaa-Naa that he wanted drummers. And the Yaa-Naa picked some drummers for him and sent them there. The Mamprusis too didn't have drummers. It was the Yaa-Naa who sent drummers to the Mamprusi chief at Nalerigu. The Nanumbas didn't have drummers. It was the Yaa-Naa who sent drummers to the Nanumba chief at Bimbila. And if you look inside all the drummers who are drumming in these places, say, if you go to the Gonja land, you will see that they are Gonjas, but formerly they were Dagbamba. When the Yaa-Naa sent them from here to the Gonja land, they married Gonja women and gave birth to children, and now we call them Gonjas. But if you follow them deeply, you will get to know that they are Dagbamba.

And so truly, what I have heard in my drumming is that when Naa Zanjina returned to Dagbon from the Hausa land, he gathered the Dagbamba and told them how the Hausa people were celebrating the birthday of the Holy Prophet and that it would be good if the Dagbamba also celebrated it. How the Hausa people were celebrating the Damba Festival is that if the Damba moon appears, every day the people will cook and eat, and all the maalams in the various towns will come out and be preaching to people about the life of the Holy Prophet Muhammad, how he

was born, how he came to bring the Muslim religion, how Muslims should pray. They will be preaching up to the end of the month, and the name they gave this sort of talks is *mauluudi*, that it is also how the Arabs call the celebration of the Holy Prophets birthday in the Damba month. And Naa Zanjina said, “Those Hausa people I saw were Muslims, and they were celebrating it in a Muslim way. But I am not a maalam; I am a chief. As far as we are not Muslims too much, we have to take it to be a festival, and we will be playing drums and other types of music for dance. And this is how I and my people are going to celebrate the birthday of the Holy Prophet.” And when Naa Zanjina told the Dagbamba how the Muslim people were celebrating this festival, they all agreed that since we were not standing too much in Muslim religion, then we have to be beating the drums, because Damba is a happy month for all the Dagbamba to be celebrating.

After Naa Zanjina gathered the Dagbamba and told them this and they agreed, then they put down a day to be celebrating the Damba Festival for the first time. The one who came out first to start it and dance the Damba was Mba Duyu. What I’m telling you, I heard it at Yendi. When Mba Duyu came to the chief, the drummers were beating, and he was just among them and he stopped; and somebody from the drummers took his drum and told him, “*Damma mba*,” that is, “Shake, my father,” that someone was praising him and he should shake. This is the starting of Damba, and not everybody knows that it is *Mba damma*. As for knowing the meaning of Damba, it is the same thing as Bangumaṇa. I last told you that the meaning of Bangumaṇa is *Bem bo ma, be pam bo ma je*: “They will search for me but they will not find me.” But some drummers have not asked the old people, and they take the way the drummers are beating and how the beat is falling, and they compare it with what they think, and they say it is *Man’ dan yeli, ka nyim’ bi lan nya*, that is, “I have said it; but haven’t you seen it yourself?” So it is the same with Damba, because most people will only tell you that the only meaning of Damba is that it is a festival.

When I was showing you how to beat Damba, I told you that the drum does not have language apart from inviting someone to dance. How we beat the Damba dance and people dance it, the lundaa is saying: *Zayla, zayla, wam Damba; zayla, zayla, wam Damba*. “*Zayla*” is how we address somebody or anybody, or someone we don’t know, and so it just means, “you, a person.” We can use it with a man, woman, or child. But there are many people at the Damba Festival, and sometimes we don’t know all their names. And so the drummer is saying “You a certain person, you should dance Damba.” But if you know someone’s name, you can just beat it: “John, John, wam Damba”; or “Ibrahim, Ibrahim, wam Damba.” And so you are saying for that person to come out and dance Damba. If you are beating and you know someone’s name, like Alhassan or Musa or any

name, you can beat it and tell the fellow to dance Damba. That is how it is, and that is all. There is no language in the *gunḡon*, only in the drum. At that time, the *gunḡon* will just be making beats and playing the styles of the dance. It is not talking, and it is giving the rhythm of the Damba dance. If you are beating the drum, if you think something in your heart, and you think that if you beat it on the drum it will also follow the *gunḡon*, then you will be beating it. They don't teach Damba. If you know how to beat a drum or a *gunḡon*, if you think you know a style that will follow the dance, you will add it. If it is somebody's name, you can just put it inside. And so as for Damba, the real name of the drumming is just Damba, and the dance is also called Damba.

If the Damba moon comes out, on the part of the Dagbamba drummers, every drummer will go and be beating the drum at the chief's house. If it is Yendi, all the drummers go because of Namo-Naa, and Namo-Naa too goes because of the Yaa-Naa. When the Damba moon comes out, Namo-Naa himself may not go to the chief's house, but his children will go there and play the drums. And so Namo-Naa and his house people will start the Damba first before the others. And then everybody will come out. Every drummer's housechild will come out. At least, if there are twenty drummers in a house, every house must give two people, and they will go and be beating the drum. If they don't go, the chief has got the right to ask them questions. And Namo-Naa also has got the right to ask them. What are the questions? The chief will ask my grandfather Namoyu, "Why is it that yesterday the drummers were not many?" Namo-Naa will answer by saying that, "Yesterday, this or that housepeople were not there." And the chief will reply to Namo-Naa, "That is your case. It is because you don't give me respect, that is why all your people don't come." And so Namo-Naa will know how he is going to pull the ears of the people who were not there. How does he do it? The pulling of the ears is this: if the drummers are going to a wedding house or a funeral house or a naming house to beat the drums, and you come, they will take your drum and put it down and ask you not to play. And your question will be, "You refused to play and respect the chief, and it is because of the chief that we drummers are here. So how can you play for a funeral or naming or wedding?"

Whether your father is a chief of drummers or a common drummer, in the Damba Festival you have to go to the chief's house to celebrate the Damba with your drum. We eat food at our houses, and by eight o'clock in the night we go to the chief's house. Many people will be there. We will be beating the drums up to ten o'clock before we stop. It is then that every child who wants to learn dancing will learn to dance. And every child who wants to be good in the Damba dance will learn how to dance it. It is not only the Damba dance they learn; they learn all the types of dances. When I was talking to you about the dances we drummers

beat, I told you that the place you will see all of them in the Damba Festival. I told you that in Dagbon here, everybody has the type of dance he likes. And anybody, whether a commoner or a chief's son, anybody who comes out and asks for any dance, we will beat it. And so it is in the month of Damba that every young man will learn how to dance. Women who don't know how to dance, they learn how to dance at that time. The children the chief has given birth to, they will also learn. If you come out and say you want Naybieyu, we will beat it; 3im Taai Kurugu, we will beat; Naanigoo, we will beat; Nantoo Nimdi, we will beat. All the dances, any dances our hearts catch, we will beat them for the people in the Damba month. In the Damba Festival, we continue beating at the chief's house every day, up to the eleventh day.

We the drummers also have a special Damba drumming, and every small drummer will beat it in the night: Damba Dali Paya, Damba day woman. If you are coming to dance at the chief's house, they will be beating Damba Dali Paya to the side, and everyone will be dancing and following it. The song is *Damba dali paya, nun lirgi ti ma, ka n nyebi m bini*. Drummers will beat this, and it means: Damba day woman, if she pushes it out to give to me, I will use my thing to sex her. They sing this because on the day of the Damba, no one quarrels with the wife; anybody can have sex with her. And so on that day, women are nothing. No one cares to fight over his wife. On Damba day, to find a girl to have sex with is very easy. On the Damba day, women are free, and that is why we play it for the people to know. How are they free? If you have four wives, they will all go to the Damba. And the bachelors are many. All the bachelors and the married women are at the Damba place, and you cannot be following them around. And everyone knows that on the day of the Damba, no one quarrels for his wife. You are not in the house to quarrel, and your wife is also not in the house. Someone can be at the Damba place till daybreak. If someone has a husband, and if I have no wife, I will just say, "My sister, come and I will see you." We will go to some place and I will say, "Come here." That is how it is. They enter a room, and they close the door. So the drummers play for it for people to know on that day women are nothing. No one will quarrel because of a woman. And so on the Damba day, women are cheap, and to find a girl is very easy. That is "Damba dali paya, nun lirgi ti ma, ka n nyebi m bini." It means that on the Damba day, if anyone's wife pushes it out to give herself to me, I will also use my thing. And it is drumming we drum during the Damba Festival.

On the eleventh day of the Damba month is the *Somo Damba* or small Damba. When you hear the name Somo, it is a chieftaincy that is given to somebody because of the Damba, and it is only for the Damba. He is the one whom the chief picks to come to the chief's house to start the Damba. The Somo

prepares in his house, and the drummers go to bring him to the chief's house, and when he gets to the chief's house, the people know that it is Damba. It is on the tenth day of Damba moon that the women in the chief's house begin preparing for the Somo Damba. On that day, they will get rice and pour it down in the compound. Drummers will be beating, and maalamas will be picking the bad rice out and leaving the good rice. And so we call the tenth day of Damba the rice-picking day. And it is on the eleventh day of the Damba that the chief's wives will cook the rice. When the drummers bring the Somo to the chief's house, it is about ten o'clock in the morning. The chief will get a cow, and they will tie the cow outside the chief's house. Drummers will be beating, and maalamas will be in front of the chief, and they will all be walking around the cow. I told you that when we are beating our drums and someone is walking and going, or when drummers are behind people riding horses, we call it *sochendi*. And so when the chief is walking like that in the Damba, that one is Damba Sochendi. They will walk around the cow three times. As they are walking, the drummers will beat *Sokam Mal' O Yela*, that "Everyone should hold his own problem." Some drummers don't know it that way, and when they are beating it at the chief's house like that, they know it as *Zuɔɔ Damba, namlana, namlana, namlana*, that "Today is Damba, the chief, the chief, the holder of chieftaincy." And those who dance *Naybiɛɣu* and the other dances, they also dance it. And so on the Somo Damba day, they will be walking and going around the cow, and when they get to the starting point, they will stop, and then they will go around the cow again. When they finish, the cow is slaughtered, and the women use the meat in cooking the rice. At that time, the drummers will be beat Damba, and the chief will dance before he goes back to his sitting place. And the drummers will be beating dances up to eleven or twelve o'clock. By then the women bring out the rice, and the drummers will eat and go home. So that is how they start the Damba.

In the afternoon the drummers will go back to the chief's house to start the Damba again. All the common people and the chiefs from the villages will be coming out and saying that they are going to the chief's house to dance the Damba, and their drummers will lead them. If it is Yendi, the chiefs of the small villages under the Yaa-Naa will come. And the Yaa-Naa has a lot of people in Yendi, and they all have drummers, and they will all come. By three or four o'clock, all of them will be at the Yaa-Naa's house. That is how it is in the towns where the big chiefs are sitting. If it is Tamale here, they will come to the Gukpe-Naa. If it is Savelugu, the small chiefs will come to Savelugu. They will all gather outside the chief's house. By that time the chief is inside, and the drummers have to go back to the Somo's house and bring him. By then it is about 3:30 o'clock. When the Somo is arriving, and the chief hears the drums of Somo,

he will get up and get ready to come out. And the drummers will bring Somo to sit outside the chief's house.

When the chief comes out, all the drummers rush to the main gate. And from the moment the chief comes out, he has no other dance except Damba. When the chief finishes dancing, he sits down. And the chiefs of the villages and towns who have come and the chief's elders and the princes who have gathered round, they will also dance. As they are sitting, they are in a big circle around the area in front of the chief's house. A drummer will go to each person and squat in front of him with his drum. He will praise him and ask him to come inside the circle and dance. When he is coming inside, he has to go to the chief and greet the chief. The chief will give him money before he starts to dance. The drummers will be calling them one by one to come out. By six o'clock time, they will all go back to their houses and remove their smocks and gowns and take food. They will eat and finish, and they will get ready again because they are going to go back to the chief's house again.

By eight o'clock time they will all come out from their houses again and come to the chief's house. The drummers are already there. And every small chief and big chief will sit at his own place with his drummers; they don't have to sit around the chief again. The drummers will be beating and the people will be dancing. The women will be singing the songs of the dances, and there are many songs. Their singing is that today is the day to visit the chief, and they will go and visit the chief. And they sing again that if you find your trouble, it is not the chief who has found it for you; your trouble is for you, so you should not hand it to anyone. That is the one I told you about when they walk around the cow: Sokam Mal' O Yela; everyone should hold his own troubles. The women are singing this and the drummers are beating it and singing it, and the people are dancing. It is a dance they like to beat on the Damba day.

You know that there are many different dances apart from Damba. Someone will come out and say he wants Damba and we will beat it; another person will want a different dance. If anyone comes out and says, "Beat this for me," we will beat it. Everyone is dancing at this time, and the drummers are happy and the dancers are also happy. As I have been showing you many of the dances in Dagbon here, these dances are also like the other dances: they are praise-names of people, and some are proverbs. They don't have anything to do with what the chiefs are doing, but they are the dances that people ask for and we beat. We will be beating Naanigoo, Naybieyu, 3im Taai Kurugu, Zamanduniya, Nakohi-waa, all the dances. Someone will come out and ask for Gbungbil' leli, where lions are, and we play it for him. We play Jergu Dari Salima, a fool buys gold. We play Nantoo Nimdi in Damba. You know it, because I have already told

you it is Naa Yakuba's name. And we play *Ijum Biε N-kpaŋ* in the Damba Festival, the name of Savelugu-Naa Yakubu. And we play *Ninsala M-biε*, a human being is bad, but God is not bad. We play it in Damba, and we play it at wedding houses and funeral houses, too. When we are playing all these different dances for the people who like them, we play *Tali-Naa Alhassan's* name, too: *Dam' Duu*, noise in a room. We play *Nayiγ' Naa Zaŋ Bundan' Bini*; *η-ηmalgi sɔŋ bindan' dooshee*: a chief thief has taken a rich man's thing and turned around to put it at the rich man's sleeping place. It is a name for *Diarilana Mahama*. And we play *Zambalana Tɔŋ*, a wicked man's trap. This is the name of *Karaga-Naa Abukari*. We play it in the Damba Festival for people to dance.

All these dances, they have no meaning inside the Damba Festival. We play all of them in the Damba, but it comes from those who come out to dance. Someone will come out and say, "I want this kind of dance," and we have to play it for him. And so it has nothing to do on the part of what the chiefs are doing in the Damba Festival. In Dagbon here, every person has got the dance he likes to dance, and in the Damba Festival, everyone has the dance he wants to be beaten for him. Sometimes six people will come out to dance, and they will dance only one dance. Sometimes someone will come out and say, "I want the one you played for the one who has just left." If they are dancing one dance, the way they dance it will be different. To know that someone is dancing nicely, you have to watch the feet, and how the body is moving. And truly, if you go the Damba, you will see many wonderful dancers, and if you are only watching the different dances, you will be interested. When the Damba moon appears, we play all the different dances. That day, all these dances, we play them for the Somo and the villagers and the chief's elders and all those who come. So that day is the small Damba. And they will dance till daybreak.

Going to a week, they will dance the *Naa Damba*, that is, the Chief's Damba, and that day is the big day of the festival. The day before, on the seventeenth day of the Damba moon, the chief will get another cow, and they will tie the cow outside the chief's house. That cow is more important than the one on the eleventh day, and so if a chief doesn't have the means, he will only kill a cow on the Naa Damba and not the Somo Damba. And at least he will get one cow and keep it until the Naa Damba. What they did on the eleventh day, that is the same thing they will do. The *maalams* will be in front, and the chief and the drummers will go round the cow three times, and the drummers will beat *Sokam Mal' O Yela*. If there is a *Limam* in the town, he will be in front reading, and his followers will be answering. When they finish, the chief will put his leg on the cow, and they will slaughter it. And the drummers will beat Damba for the chief to dance.

The cow they have slaughtered, they take the head and give it to Lun-Naa. And they remove the stomach and the lungs of the cow and give it to the Limam. And they remove the neck and give part of it to the elders and part of it to the chief's sisters. And they remove the lower leg and hoof and give it to the Akarima, the one who beats the timpana. And they take the hip and give it to the Kamo-Naa and his followers. And they take the ribs and they add some meat to it and give it to the boys in the chief's house. And they cut the rest of the meat into pieces and cook it. And they will prepare food for the drummers and the strangers who have come from the surrounding villages. They will eat and be satisfied, and be drunk from eating. And that is what they do to the cow.

That afternoon they will dance as they danced on the Somo Damba day. On the Somo Damba it is the Somo and the others who dance. If the chief wants, he can come out to the gathering, but truly, if he doesn't want, he will stay in the house. But if it is Naa Damba, then it is a must that the chief will dance. And those in the town, in the night they will also continue the dancing, and they will be dancing up to day break.

The next day is the eighteenth day of the Damba moon, and it was on that day that the name of the Holy Prophet was called. That is the last day of the Damba Festival, and that day is the biggest day. We call it *Damba Bielikulsi*, and we say that we are going to lead the Damba home. That day, we finish the Damba Festival. All the roads are filled with people. Every Dagbana, every man, woman, or child, whether he is in Accra or Kumasi or any other town, he will come to dance Damba and greet the festival greetings. That is the day when you will see whether Dagbon is Dagbon, or Dagbon is not Dagbon, because on that day you will see many wonderful people. And everyone is happy. And so the eighteenth day of the Damba moon is the last day of the Damba Festival: that is when we accompany the Damba Festival home. It was on that day that the name of the Holy Prophet was called, and that day, the town will be full of people. No one knows their end. All the town people are there, and all the people from any village around will come for the Damba. Only someone who has not got the means will stay home. Every village chief, if he has one or two drummers, he will come along with them. And the chief will say he is going to accompany the Damba home, because it is the day we are going to finish the Damba Festival. And so I want to tell you how the villagers of Dagbon come to the towns to celebrate the Damba Festival, and what we also do and finish the Damba Festival.

Truly, it is on that day that we know the respect of Damba. When it is the Damba Festival, in all the villages, even if there is only one house in the village, the people in the village must leave for the town to celebrate the Damba Festival. They will close all their doors and windows and come to the town. We

Dagbamba, if we celebrate the Damba Festival and we are lucky to meet another one again, we all go round to greet each other. As we have lasted from one Damba Festival to the next, we greet, “How is our good luck?” When the villagers want to come to town and celebrate the festival, they always come with corn flour and yams and guinea fowls to the town. As they are carrying all this food, it is not because of their friends in the town but because of themselves. If they all come to stay in the town, the town people cannot feed them. If tomorrow is the festival, those living in the far villages will start to come to town today, and they are the ones who usually carry the corn flour, the yams, and the guinea fowls. But those who are only two or three miles from the town, they will start their journey on the festival day and they will arrive before the festival begins.

Truly, to know that someone is a villager is easy. It is in their eating that we get to know that they are villagers, because a villager will take the food of three town people and eat all of it himself. If the villagers are going to leave their sleeping places to go to the festival place, they have to cook all the food they brought from the village and eat and be satisfied before they go out. That is why they want to carry their food. When they are coming for the festival, all the people in the village will be saying, “You know that those people in the town don’t eat a lot, so if you don’t carry more food, you will be hungry.” The reason why the townspeople don’t eat more than the villagers is because in town, there are many small things for sale. If you eat a little bit and you go out, you have your money, and if you want, you can buy a small thing and eat and go again, then buy another small thing and eat. The townspeople don’t mind food on the festival day, but the villagers are always thinking about food all the time, and they like it when their stomachs are big. So if they are coming to town for the festival, they don’t want to cheat themselves. For a villager to enjoy a festival, it means that he ate and was satisfied. If you happen to hear a villager saying that, “This year, the Damba Festival was not sweet or interesting,” it doesn’t mean that the festival was not interesting; it means on that day he couldn’t get more to eat. But if he ate and was satisfied, whether the festival was interesting or not, he will say that it was interesting.

And again, it is in the way villagers dress that we know that they are villagers. In the village, someone can have two or three smocks, and someone does not have even one. If a villager has a smock which is very nice, it is not for himself: it is for the whole village. Everyone will come to borrow it. If someone is going to the Damba Festival and the owner is not going, he will say, “Oh, your smock is nice. I would like to take it and celebrate the Damba Festival.” When these villagers are coming, they will put on shorts and a singlet; they will fold their smocks and trousers and put them into scarves and tie them, and they will let

small boys carry them. These little boys will put on only pants and use a small cloth to tie on their necks, and they will be carrying their fathers' and brothers' clothes on their heads. When these villagers arrive with their shorts and singlets at the houses where they are going to enter, they untie their scarves, remove their smocks and trousers, and put them on. It is there that you will know that someone is a villager. When he puts on the smock, it will all go to the back, and it will just be hanging down and not standing in the correct way. Even if his eyes are open, we will get to know that, yes, he is a villager.

And again, we have a black powder that we put around our eyes, and we call it *chilo*: antimony. We get it from the market, and it is just like charcoal. We get it in a solid, and we come and grind it and put in something we call *chiltɔŋ*. When we put the powder in the *chiltɔŋ*, we get a very smooth nail and put it inside. If you shake it and remove the nail, you use the nail and put it just at the edge of the eyes, and it will make the eyelids look black. We do it just to change our faces. If your eyes are red, it will make the eyes white, and so if your eyeballs are dirty and you put it on, your eyes will become clean. And also, if something falls in your eyes and you put it on, the thing will come out. But if a villager puts this black thing in his eyes, and we see him, it looks as if he put his whole finger inside the *chiltɔŋ* and used his finger instead of the nail and covered his whole eye. His fault is not from anywhere, because when he puts the powder on he doesn't think he has to look in a mirror, and he will not get a rag and clean it to make it just a little around his eyes. That is another way we know he is a villager.

And the village women, when they are coming, they used to carry what we call *mukuru*. This *mukuru* is woven by our local weavers. They weave it in strips, and they use twelve strips to sew a *mukuru* for a fat woman and ten or twelve for a slim woman. They weave different kinds of material, but we have a special one for women who are up to the age of thirty, forty, or fifty years and older. This is called *bimmanḡli*, and it also has its types like *nangbanyibu* and *kutumakɔaya*. When these old women get this kind of cloth, they sew it into *mukuru* and tie it in a scarf and let small children carry it, and they will follow them to the town.

The young village girls, if they arrive in the town, they also get a red thing they use to paint their lips. We call it *lipolipo*, and the Hausas call it *janbaachi*, or "red-mouth." The village girls are copying the town girls, and the town girls too get it from the film shows they have been witnessing, and especially the Indian films. You know the town girls only put only a little bit of it on, but the village girls don't know how to put it on, so they put it too much, and you will see their mouths looking like ripe mangoes. They don't take their time to put it on; they only put more, more, more, everything more, just to make themselves beautiful at once. Sometimes someone might put it and you will see that the sun beats it and it is melting. And we get to know that they are villagers.

And when the village girls arrive in town, they also bring along powders, and they are putting this powder on their faces. It is because most of the town girls are using different soaps to make their faces look nice, but the villagers think they are using powder. So when the village girls come they just go to the market and buy more powder and ask their friend to pour it on their faces, and the friend will use a rag to spread it. They will put this powder on their faces, over their mouths and everywhere. Everywhere is just white, and their faces look like donkeys' faces.

Even any time they put something on, you will get to know that, yes, truly they are villagers. When they put on a scarf, they don't tie it gently; they always tighten it so that it will be close to their heads. And again, you know what a wig is: they also buy it but they don't know how to put it on their heads; they put on the wig and cover their ears. Even when they put on sandals to walk, they are not used to it. The girls in town can put on sandals in an easy way, and they are walking straightforward so that you cannot know whether they are copying people or not. But when a village girl puts on sandals, she doesn't know how to wear them, and she will just be walking sideways or zigzag. Any time the villagers put something on, you will know them. But one thing is that the village girls are used to our locally woven cloths and the town girls are used to the textile print cloths, so when the village girl and the town girl put on the locally woven cloths, you will see that the village girl is looking more beautiful than the town girl.

And these young village girls, when they get to the town, the only thing they will do is stand at one place and clap their hands and dance *Lua*. They will not go anywhere because of the lorries, cars, motorcycles, and other things. If any one of them tries to move away, they will tell her, "Oh, if you move away, you will get lost, or a car will knock you down." And so they will just be standing at all the corners, clapping their hands and dancing. In every Damba Festival, the *Lua* is for the villagers. You will not see a town girl coming to play in the *Lua*. Sometimes, the young girls will approach the drummers and tell them to get a place and organize the *Lua*, and if the young girls are many, the drummers will divide them into two groups, and the drummers will be in the middle beating the drums.

This *Lua*, truly, I don't think it can be compared to a dance. Those who dance it, we call them "Lua fallers." They stand in a line, and one will run into the middle and approach three girls, one on the left, one on the right, and one in the middle. They are standing there, and the girl will turn her back, and they will catch her and throw her up; she will fall down and be standing on her feet, and then she will go and join the line again. And so the *Lua* is different from the rest of our dancing. Not every woman or girl knows how to dance it, because it has

some trouble. Sometimes they might throw someone up, and she will not be lucky and will fall and break her arm or leg. The fault can be from those who throw her, because the ones on either side will catch the arms, and if it happens that the one in the middle throws her and you on the right and left don't let go of her hands, you are going to bring the trouble. To dance it nicely, they must all let go at once. Sometimes the fault comes from the one dancing, because when they raise her up, she is holding their hands tightly and they cannot let her go at the same time as the one in the middle. And so Lua is very difficult, and people don't often call it. They can learn it in the Damba Festival, and it sometimes happens that when we are playing the drums after the Ramadan Festival, they come and ask for Lua and we play it for them to dance. And sometimes, after weddings, those who have the means will call it, and someone can even call Lua for one week. But I have never seen them dancing Lua at a funeral house. And so we don't take Lua with big eyes, because the thing which can let you get a high wound, will you like it?

That is why Lua is not danced more in Dagbon. I think Tɔra is better, because every girl can grow up and learn it, and we beat it all the time. Even, if a girl or woman says she doesn't know how to dance Tɔra, then we don't call her a Dagbana. But Lua is also like Kambɔŋ-waa, the dance of the Kambonsi, because before you dance it, you have to know how to jump up and down: sometimes it happens that someone will jump and fall, and his leg or arm will break. But the village girls dance Lua at the Damba Festival. They sing and clap their hands. Usually they can't call drummers because the drummers have a lot of work on that day, and so there is not much interest for people to watch them. If nobody is beating a drum, and you are dancing, do you think the dance will be nice? But when drummers are added, people will come and see it. The drumming for Lua is very nice. When the girl comes out, her footsteps will follow the drums. When she is coming out before her friends, the dancing seems like Adamboli. Adamboli is a Hausa dance. And how the drummers play shows her how she has to go to her friends before they will they throw her up and she will fall. It all follows the drumming, and it is very, very sweet. But as there is danger in it, they also fear it. As I have told you that they get wounds, it is not that they have been falling all the time. It is only sometimes that someone will make a mistake and fall down. The girls you see dancing it at the Damba Festival are those who are perfect in it, but the rest, if they throw them once or twice or three times, they will fall. And so that is Lua, and the young village girls come to town and dance it in the Damba.

So the villagers, their ways are different, and when you watch them, you will know they are villagers. Even, to see all this in a simple way, you will just see that the villagers are always walking on the side of the road. They sometimes fall in open gutters because they are afraid of lorries and cars. If a lorry blows a

horn, they run away, and sometimes a lorry will blow a horn and the villager will just fall down like that. And so if the villagers are walking in the town, every town person sitting there will know that they are villagers. They walk in a straight line, one behind the other, like chickens. Even sometimes when they are walking they hold hands. If they are five, they will all hold each other's hands, and if a car should come to knock one of them, no one will let go of the other. The villager is thinking that if he lets go of his hand and runs away that he has done a wrong thing. And so they will keep on holding hands and the car will kill all of them. For us to know a villager is easy, because their eating, their dressing, their walking, their every movement is different. If not in the Damba Festival, then many of them don't even come to town, and we don't see them.

Even the dancing of the villagers is not like that of the town person, because their feet are not smart. If these villagers reach the town and go to the chief's house, they cannot go out and dance Damba. They don't know how to dance. In the Damba Festival, too, every horse-rider is trying to dance with his horse. But the villager who has a horse is always holding his horse tightly. He never releases it to dance. He is afraid that if he releases it, the horse will jump and step on somebody. He is thinking that if his horse steps on somebody, they will arrest him and go and lock him in the police station.

And so the villagers are afraid of the town. They are afraid of the town lorries and cars and motorcycles. But when the Damba Festival comes, they force themselves to come to town. There are some people in the villages who come to visit the towns only in the Damba Festival. It is because they like it, but if not that, they will never come to town. I told you first that if you celebrate the Damba Festival and you are lucky to celebrate another one again, then truly, we say you are lucky. And when a villager comes to town, and you are his friend or his relative and you meet him at the Damba Festival, you say you should have a long life to meet him again. If not because of the Damba Festival, how will you meet him? And so for us in the town and for the villagers, the Damba Festival is a very high thing. Even a useless Dagbana, when he is crying, he is crying for the Damba Festival. If somebody is praying to God, he will pray, "May God bless me to live up to the next Damba Festival." And the one who is not praying to God, he is also praying for the Damba Festival. That is how the Damba is. It is a respectable thing, and we are celebrating it. And so the villagers fear the town, but they will come to the Damba. Even if it happens that a villager comes to the Damba Festival and a car knocks him down and he dies, it is a very good respect to him. The people of his village and his parents and children will be remembering him in every Damba Festival. They will say that he is blessed because he died on the Damba Festival day. Not that he wanted to die; it was just

something that let him die. His parents and his friends will say, “It was because of Damba that he went to town and died, so it doesn’t matter. He is blessed.” That is the respect of the Damba Festival, and that is how the villagers are celebrating it. And so everything of the villagers, it is in the Damba Festival that we know it.

But we in the town, we are used to festivals because we are always seeing festivals. When we come to the Damba Festival, we also take our children to the Damba Festival. We want to teach them to become used to it in the future, and so our small children from the age of three, four, and five up, we will dress them very nicely and take them to the festival. When they go, it opens their eyes. Some children are afraid of going to the Damba Festival just because of the horses. If you see these small children at the Damba Festival, you know that, yes, they are children who are brave, and their eyes are open.

So on the eighteenth day of the Damba Festival, that is big day of the Damba because that is the day the Damba will finish. That is the Damba Bielikuksi, that we are going to lead the Damba home. And it is the chief who will lead it, and the whole town will follow him and be dancing. On that day, everybody will gather, and any Dagbana anywhere will come, unless the fellow hasn’t got the means. If the chief has towns or villages under him, all those chiefs will come to greet him and accompany the Damba home. All the villagers will come, and all the young men of the town will come. And many people who are not Dagbamba will also come just to see it. The chief will prepare and dress very nicely, and he will ride a horse; and the chief’s children, and his elders, and his sub-chiefs, and the young men who are commoners, they will all climb horses. They will be going round greeting people. They will accompany the Damba home, and if it is to somebody’s house they will accompany it, they will go there, and if it is under a tree they will accompany it, they will go there. And every dance, they will dance it, and it is drummers who play for them to dance. This is how it is.

On that day the chief will put on *kurugu*, the local trousers, and boots. And he will put on a white gown and a white turban. If it is Yendi, what the Yaa-Naa wears, it is the same thing that Namo-Naa will wear. And the chief will dress his horse. There is something we call the *turizima*, and they use it to cover the body of the horse. They sew it like a cloth, a very wide one, and when they put it on, it lies over the body of the horse so that you cannot see its body, only the feet. And they have something we call *gbingbirloyirgu* to cover the front legs; they use goat skins to make it, and the cobbler will cut small strings of the goat skin and use them to sew designs with different styles to make it look fine. And there is one which is called *galsurgu* and it hangs from the saddle and covers the stirrups. And there is one called *nimpɔbira*, and they use it to cover the eyes and face of the

horse. And then they will put a rope on the horse's neck, and they will put many kinds of medicines and other things on the neck. If it is Yendi, Namo-Naa's horse too will be dressed in the same way.

And anyone who has a horse, he will also dress his horse, but it is not like the way the chief and Namo-Naa will dress theirs. The young men and the princes will only put on the gbingbirloyirgu and the galsurgu. And these young men, say from fifty years old and down, they also have their leader. We call him Nachimba-Naa, the chief of the young men; some people call him in the Hausa way, that is, *Salchi Samaali*. These young men, when they dress their horses, they will get up and go to Nachimba-Naa's house, and meet him, and he will take them to the chief's house. They ride their horses through the town, and when they reach the chief's house, they have a dance for the horses, and we call it *Worbalsili*. We the drummers will beat *Worbalsili*, and the horses dance in a circle, jumping up and down. One horse is leading them, and the rest are following in a circle.

Let me curve the talks here and add you salt. I want to tell you about how we Dagbamba regard horses and why these people all try to ride horses in the Damba Festival. Our Dagbon has no animal which has more respect than a horse. A horse is a big talk in Dagbon. If not with some people now, I can say that a horse has more respect than a car. If someone is riding a horse, he has more respect than some people who are riding in a car. One person alone rides a horse, and you can be as rich as anything or as fat as anything, you cannot gather people and ride a horse. And so a horse has more respect. We all grew up and met the buying of horses, and it has all come because of the chief. As a town is sitting, if a chief buys a horse, if he has the means, he can buy horses for all his elders. As the chief has done that, it adds heaviness to his chieftaincy. When he says any talk, it stands. Any Dagbana who grows up will try to get money that will be enough to buy a horse. If he is not a follower of the chief, but he is just somebody from the town, if he is fit to be a person, he will try to get money to buy a horse. It is because you will take it and knock your chest, and others will say, "Oi! He's a big man. He has tied a horse outside his house." And other people will be hearing. The tying of a horse in someone's house is a big talk here.

It is still there up to now that if you are following a chief to get a small chieftaincy, and you don't get it, if you are fit to be a person and you are going to die, you will gather your family and tell them, "You should try to tie a horse for me before I die." It's just because a horse is a big thing. If someone knows he is going to die, if he is fit to be a person, and he doesn't have a horse, and he dies, people will say, "This man's living was useless. He was fit to be a human being, and he came to die, and he had no horse tied in his house. That is useless living." And so buying a horse in Dagbon here is a big talk on the part of respect. Even

from the olden days, if you wanted a name, you could go and beg to borrow a horse, and you would ride it and go to greet your in-laws and your friends. It would give you respect, and people would say, “He has no horse, but he can get a horse to go and ride somewhere.” This is how it is.

As the riding of a horse has come from the chief, it has also come because of war. It was a horse they used to use to chase a person, to use a cutlass to cut him, and come back. When they were preparing for war, all the medicines someone was eating, his horse would also eat them. I have heard them say that someone would ride a horse to a war, and if he was going to fall and die, he and the horse would just vanish. That is why I say that a horse is a heavy talk. A horse is war. If there is a war and there is no horse, then the war is a weak war.

It is because of this that the chiefs are supposed to have horses, and the chiefs are supposed to buy horses for their elders. It can happen the chief drummer’s horse will die, and he has not got the means to buy a horse. The chief will have to get a horse from his house and give it to him. If the chief doesn’t have more horses, and he hasn’t got the means, then he will be riding and the chief drummer will walk and follow him. But if the chief drummer has a horse, he will ride the horse and follow the chief, and he will be holding the drum and be beating while he is riding. And so it is the big chiefs who are supposed to give horses to their elders. If the chief doesn’t do that, if the chief drummer has the means, he can buy his own horse. Why does the chief buy a horse for the chief of drummers? In the olden days, there were no cars, and if the chief wanted to go to some place, at least he must have a drummer accompany him. I have already told you that if a drummer is not there, then chieftaincy is also not there. Maybe the chief drummer is an old man, and he cannot walk, and if the chief wants the drummer to follow him to where he is going, then it is good for him to get a horse for him. If a chief has the means, he can get a horse for the Wulana and for the Kamo-Naa. If he doesn’t have the means, it is not a fault. But for Namo-Naa, it is a must: if Namo-Naa has no horse, they have to buy the horse today. If the chief doesn’t buy it, Namo-Naa’s people will buy it.

And so in Dagbon here, if you have money and you don’t have a horse, they don’t respect you. They give more respect to the horse than the money. It’s just like when you are in a car going somewhere, and somebody is walking following you: you have more respect than the one walking. And so if a money man is walking, and I don’t have money but I am riding a horse, I am more than the money man. I have more respect than he. I can take the horse and knock him, and he will fall to the ground. Can he take his money and knock me down? And so the person riding a horse has more respect than a money man. We know that it is money someone will take to buy a horse. But he hasn’t taken the money to buy,

and so it shows he hasn't got any money. That is how it is. Nobody has ever sold a horse to buy another animal. Someone will sell hens and buy a goat; someone will sell goats and buy a sheep; someone will sell sheep and buy a cow; when the cows are many, he will sell some cows and buy a horse. From the olden days up till now, a horse is the most expensive animal. That is how the respect of a horse is. We Dagbamba take the horse to be a wonderful thing, and it has got some talk. If you try to roam on the selling of horses, and you buy a horse to take it and sell, you won't gain and you won't get money.

A horse has so much respect in Dagbon here that we don't even leave it to stand outside. It will sleep inside the hall of the house. Where the chief sits and receives people, that is the same room where the horse stays. There is no animal you can compare to a horse. When a horse is in a house, it holds the work of three people. The one who gives the horse water is a woman, and there is a child who will be cutting grass for the horse, and an old man will look after it. Can any other animal eat like that? Keeping a horse is different from keeping other animals. It is because a horse has respect that someone will keep it inside the hall of his house. Just imagine: sometimes there will be several towns and there is not a single female horse; all the horses are males. If there is a female horse, and it conceives and becomes big, if you come to see it like that, will you hold it well or not? You won't mind even to sleep in the hall with it, just to watch it well. That is how a horse is.

And it is all respect. You will buy a horse to be knocking your chest and showing yourself. And people will give you respect. That is how it is in Dagbon here. And the Damba too, it is respect. And so in the Damba Festival, these young men will be riding their horses and showing themselves. As they are riding, they will make the horses dance. Worbalsili is the dance they will dance first, and there are many types of drumming we beat for the horses to dance. You know that it is not only Dagbamba dances that we beat. We often beat Suberima Kpeeru and follow the young men. This Suberima Kpeeru is from the Dandawa language, so I know the beat and the song but not the meaning. It is the nicest and the best beating for the horses to dance coolly. When we play it, even if a horse does not know how to dance at all, it can dance a little bit. And there is another dance we beat called Gbada. We beat it in the Damba Festival for the young men who are riding horses. It is a Kotokoli dance. That is why I am saying that the dances we are playing, it's not the Dagbamba who are for all of them. Zamanduniya is not a Dagbamba dance. Gbada is not. Amajiro is not. Adamboli is not. Suberima Kpeeru is not. We beat them for the young men. It's not that we beat them because of the Damba. I already told you that the dances we beat don't have any special meaning in the Damba festival. But when the horses are going

and you beat Gbada, it measures the going of the horses. That is why we beat it for the young men who are riding horses. If it is a drum-beating place, if not that somebody comes out to ask for it, we won't beat it. We don't care about it, unless somebody says we should beat it for him. That's why you don't hear it all the time like Naanigoo or Naybieyu or the Dagbamba dances.

There are other dances too which we play for the horses to dance. Dam' Duu, we have it for the horses to dance, and when Dam' Duu sounds, every horse will try to dance. Another is Baŋ Nira. That is a name of Karaga-Naa Alhassan. We say *Man' ku baŋ nira ka nira lam baŋ ma*: I will not know a person and let him know me again. And another dance we play for the horses is Pɔhim Ʒeri. We beat *Pɔhim Ʒeri yuyu; churi di mali karimbaani*: a wind is blowing clay pots; gourd calabashes should not make themselves proud. Do you see? A pot is heavier than a calabash, so if the wind is able to blow a pot, how much will it blow a calabash? This is Savelugu-Naa Ziblim's best name in drumming, and the horses are able to dance it very nicely. And if not these, we play Ninsal' Ka Yɛda, which means never trust a human being. Ninsal' Ka Yɛda is the name of Savelugu-Naa Bukari. We say *A yi ninsal' yɛda, a dɔ a zayim*: if you trust a human being, you are lying down naked. For example, if someone tells you he will give you something, and you already have it, but he says he will add you more, you will spoil the one you have already, thinking he will give you another, but he will not give it to you. Have you seen that before? We play it and the horses will dance. And all of these dances, the horses are dancing them in the Damba Festival.

As the horses are dancing, it's not that they want to dance. A horse dances because someone is disturbing it. That is why it's dancing. They have taken an iron and put in its mouth, and they put a saddle on it, and they put irons on their legs and kick at the sides of its stomach. What the horse wants: it wants the way it can take you and put you down. It's doing what it does because it wants to free itself. We say, "The horse is dancing," but will someone worry somebody and that fellow will dance? You will take a big iron and put it in somebody's mouth and be pulling it. You will put irons on your legs and be kicking somebody's sides. What if you tear the stomach? And so the horse is not dancing, but it is dancing. And if you see a horse that does not dance, it is because it does not know what to do with itself. As for that, it thinks inside its heart that it is dead. When they come to remove the thing that is on top of it, that is the time it will think it is not going to die. That is how it is. And so when you see a horse dance, don't think that it's the way he's being dressed, and that's why he's happy, and he's dancing. It is the rider who dances with the horse. The rider controls the horse to dance, and it is the drummer who is directing the one sitting on the horse, and then the

rider also controls the horse. It all comes down to the drummer. And as they are riding the horses like that, when you see them, it is wonderful, and you will know that Dagbon has got people.

The time they reach the chief's house, then they will come down from their horses. When they come down, we drummers will play Doyu for them to dance. This Doyu is from the time of Naa Siyli, when Naa Siyli finished the war against the Gonjas. It is a dance for his first-born son, Tonglana Yamusah. I have told you about it. When Naa Siyli finished the war, that was the dance they beat for him to dance. We beat and say *Doo be toto, nyeli karabara*, that "A person separated in a quarrel, his shouting is boasting," and it means that it doesn't show that he has won. And so if you quarrel with somebody and they separate you, when you go to someplace and start shouting that you have defeated that fellow, it is because he is not around that you are talking like that. That is Doyu, and we also call it Zuu-waa, the dance of the first-born son. It is a fast dance, and it is good for the young men to be dancing. And after dancing, they will go and sit down.

By that time, if it is Yendi, Namo-Naa will come with his elders. They ride horses. When the chief drummer arrives, the chief will come out. And when the chief comes out, you will be hearing guns shooting: *kpaa! kpaa! kpaa!* It is standing in every Damba Festival that the chief will give the Kamo-Naa twelve bottles of gunpowder for the guns, to make the guns fire. This local gunpowder is a black thing like gunpowder but it is not gunpowder. The people who are firing the guns belong to the Kamo-Naa. They are the Kambonsis, and I have told you that it means Ashantis. They are not Ashantis; they are Dagbamba. In Dagbani their name is *sapashinnima*, soldiers. We call them Ashantis because they were trained by the Ashantis, and the timpana belongs to them, and their drum language is Ashanti. That is why we call them Kambonsi — Ashantis. They have their own dance, too, and that is Kambon-waa. When the chief gives the gunpowder to the Kamo-Naa, the chief will add money and tell the Kamo-Naa to give it to the small Ashantis to drink *pito*. If they are drunk, they won't be afraid to fire the guns. So when the chief comes out, everywhere you will hear guns firing. They are shooting the guns in the air. After the chief comes out and they shoot, they will put more powder again, and the Wulana will come out, and they will shoot again, but they will not fire the guns as they fired for the chief. After the Wulana, it is the Naa Paani, the senior wife of the chief, and they will fire guns for her, too.

When the chief comes out, the young men will climb their horses again. And the chief too will climb his horse. If it is Yendi, the first beat we drummers will beat for the chief to walk with his horse is Nantoo Nimdi. The reason they beat Nantoo Nimdi is because it is Naa Yakuba's name, and any chief who is there

now is in the line of Naa Yakuba. And after that, the next one is Sokam Mal' O Yela. By then we will divide the drummers into two. The first group will be playing Sokam Mal' O Yela and following the chief, and the other group will be playing Gbada and the other dances and following the young men. And the horses will be jumping up and down, dancing. We will use all the dances to roam in the town. Wherever the chief goes, we have to follow with him with drumming. Wherever the chief stops and comes down to greet people, we also stop there and greet. And the chief and his followers will take their Damba and be going.

Let me add salt to this talk. When the drummers are following the chief around the town, those who follow the chief are the chief's house drummers. Who are they? Lun-Naa's children, Sampahi-Naa's children, Taha-Naa's children, they are there. If it is Yendi, Namo-Naa's children are there; if it is Savelugu, Palo-Naa's children are there. In the towns, they follow the chief. But the town drummers are there, and they don't eat any chieftaincy. In this Tamale we are sitting, don't you see that every day there are drummers gathered at my house. Alhaji Adam's father who died, he was the young men's drummer in this town. When he was old, Alhaji Adam collected it, and they were following him. And he also became old, and my brother Sheni took it and we were following him. And now Sheni has also left it, and I am holding it. And everywhere, in every town, it is like that. We have that type of drummers. Even if they are not there, there are some children from the Lun-Naa's house who will separate and it will come like that. The chief drummers who died, some of their children will be sitting down, and they are the town drummers. The children of the chief drummers who are women, and they have their children, they are inside the town drummers. The town drummers follow the Nachimba-Naa and the young men, and the Magaazia, the leader of the women, and the Zongo-Naa, the chief of the *zongo*. The *zongo* is the area of any town where Hausas or Muslims are living. And so as we are sitting, we don't follow any chief, but any chief we meet, we follow him. Anyone who calls us, we follow him. Where we beat, the chief's drummers cannot go there. And we also know how the chief's drummers beat. And so we have two benefits. We know the chiefs' beating, and we know the young men's beating. But the chief's drummers don't know our beating unless they come and learn it. And so every town has the young men's drummers. That is how it is.

We are different from the chief's drummers. If it is on the part of a small chief somewhere, then when something is happening, the big chief who gave him his chieftaincy has to let his Lun-Naa send some of his people there. If we go there, there will be some talk, because we are not on the drum chieftaincy way. Even if the chief calls us, and there is no housechild of Lun-Naa or Sampahi-Naa, it will bring some talk. But in our Tamale, it doesn't matter. If Nakohi-Naa calls

us, we go; if So-Naa calls us, we go. As it has come now, everyone is living where he is living. And as we are divided now in Dagbon, this town's Nakohi-Naa, and the Nakohi-Naas in Savelugu and even in Yendi, they are all standing that they don't want the chiefs they have put, and they don't have one mouth with the chiefs in their towns. And so we the town drummers are for this town's Nakohi-Naa. The drummers from the chief's house here cannot attempt going to Nakohi-Naa's house; he doesn't want them. And it is the same thing at Yendi and Savelugu. That is how things have spoiled. Formerly when you first came here, didn't we go and beat the Damba at some place, and we don't go there now, and the drummers from there also don't go to some places. We are all one, but we have separated. As for us the town drummers, we don't follow drumming chieftaincies, but you can see with your own eyes that there are some people, any time they want drummers, they come to my house. There are people older than I am in our group, but I am the only one holding all of them. All the rich men and the big men in Tamale here, any time they want drummer, it is I they will call. I will gather my drummers and know how they should go there. Even the Gonjas and other tribes in this town, if they want drummers, they come and tell me, and I will find drummers for them. And so chieftaincy is in the bone.

If it is Damba in this town, we take it to Dakpema's house first, and the chief will get down. He and Dakpema will greet one another and say, "God should add us another year." We will play Damba for the chief, and he will dance for the Dakpema to see, and the Dakpema too will dance. And then we and the chief and Dakpema will take the Damba to zongo. When we get there, the Hausas will come out. The Hausas come out because the first time we got to know the Holy Qu'ran was from the Hausas. The Arabs taught the Hausas, and the Hausas taught us. And they know the Holy Prophet Muhammad, and we also know him. And it was on that day that the name of the Holy Prophet Muhammad was called. And you will see the Hausas praying for the chief, that "God should bring us to another year on the day the Holy Prophet Muhammad was born." And they will get, say, a calabash full of cola and ten cedis, that the chief should give the ten cedis to the drummers and the cola to his elders.

And we will get up and go to the Mossi chief's house, because we and the Mossis are playmates, what we call *dachehi*. Your sister's children and your children are dachehi. And so the children of your uncles and your aunts, that is, your mother's brother's children and your father's sister's children, are your dachehi. Someone with whom you have the same grandfather, or your in-law, it can be that you are playmates. And so we and the Mossis are playmates. Didn't I tell you that we and the Mossis are one family? The Mossi chief will come out. When he has the means, he will give ten pounds and a calabash full of cola, and he

will say, “God should add us another year, and we will meet one another and greet one another.” We will play Damba for the chief to dance, and if the Mossi chief wants, he will also dance. And after they dance, everybody will just start dancing. By that time, it will be getting to six o’clock. We will play and the people will dance there for a long time, and it will become dark. And it is there that we will leave the Damba. And by then the Damba is finished.

By then the young men will follow the Nachimba-Naa to his house; and the women too will follow Magaazia, the chief of the women, to her house. And we drummers will divide ourselves: we give some to the chief, some to the Nachimba-Naa, and some to the Magaazia. And the people we came along with, we take them home. Any drummer who comes with any chief will take him home after the Damba. And all the people will go home. The villagers whose towns are near will go back to their villages, and those whose villages are far will go back to their sleeping houses before returning home the next day. And we will beg God to bring another year.

That is how we Dagbamba celebrate the Damba Festival. Every dance, people dance it, and it is drummers who play for them to dance. On the day of the Damba, if you were a useless drummer, on that day you will not be useless. And if you were a strong drummer, on that day you will become stronger, because it is during the Damba that a drummer gets a lot. On that day, only God knows the money you will earn. In Dagbon here, we have many types of playing and dances, but if anyone is after people who play for dancing, it is we the drummers they will find. No one in Dagbon plays a type of playing that is more important or better than the playing we drummers have. We have more respect, and the respect of drumming cannot be compared with any other music. If drummers are playing, and someone who has never seen people drumming sees them, he will say, “Oh, this thing is a respectable thing.” And so, I think in my heart that all people who play music would have wanted to be drummers, but they cannot. All of us who are drummers have our doors, and you cannot go and learn drumming unless you are born inside it. So drumming has no end, unless someone throws it away. And I think that the respect of drumming, it is like the Damba itself.

And in Yendi, the time the chief is riding the horse, my grandfather Namonaa is also riding, and his people are following him and they are taking the Damba. When the Yaa-Naa reaches his house, he will get some elders and more drummers to follow Namonaa, and they will take Namonaa to his house. The village chiefs and the small chiefs and the princes will also follow Namonaa. And all the drum chiefs of Yendi will be riding horses and following Namonaa. They go to their chiefs’ houses and bring them to the Yaa-Naa’s house because they can’t be staying at their chiefs’ houses and playing. All of Namonaa’s drum

chiefs, Namoyu-Sampahi-Naa, Namoyu-Lun-Naa, Namoyu-Yiwoyu-Naa, Namoyu-Wulana, they all ride horses. And the Yaa-Naa's elders, all of them have their drumming chiefs. Mba Duyu, Zohi-Naa, Kpatii-Naa, Balo-Naa, Kumlana, Mba Buja are all there, and the way they follow the chief, it is the same way their drumming chiefs follow Namo-Naa. Mba Duyu-Lun-Naa, Zohi-Lun-Naa, Zohi-Sampahi-Naa, Zohi-Taha-Naa, all these people are chiefs of drummers in Yendi, and they are under Namo-Naa. And the drum chiefs of the sections of Yendi, Buja-Lun-Naa, Baloyu-Lun-Naa, Kum-Lun-Naa, and Kpatii-Lun-Naa, they all ride horses and follow Namo-Naa. The Yaa-Naa has many people, and at Yendi, all of them will gather at the Yaa-Naa's house for the Damba, and their drum chiefs will lead them to the Yaa-Naa's house.

And when Namo-Naa accompanies the chief through the town, he hangs his drum on his arm but he will not beat it. He will hold the drumstick and be singing. After the drummers lead the Yaa-Naa home, then all the drummers and all these small chiefs and princes will be leading Namo-Naa. They will not be playing Damba. They will be riding and beating. Namoyu-Lun-Naa will be singing, and the rest will be answering. When they are leading Namo-Naa, if Namoyu-Lun-Naa is not there, Namoyu-Wulana will take his place. If Namoyu-Wulana is not there, Zohi-Lun-Naa will take his place. If Zohi-Lun-Naa is not there, Zohi-Sampahi-Naa will take his place. They play *Zoligu*: that is the praising song for every drummer. I have not asked more about it, but I don't think there is drum language in *Zoligu*. The one singing is just praising the forefathers of Namo-Naa. And we have grown up to meet it that if you ever hear it somewhere, then it might be that a chief drummer died, and when they are going to bury him and they are putting him into the grave, they play *Zoligu*. And when they lead Namo-Naa to his house after the Damba Festival, they also play it.

When you see them riding their horses, you will think that Namo-Naa is the paramount chief. And truly, for us the drummers, he is our chief. And for the princes and the small chiefs, he is also their chief, because Namo-Naa has the strength to tell the chief, "I want you to give this chieftaincy to this man." And so if a prince grows up and he wants to have respect and get a chieftaincy, he has to respect the drummers all the time. We know their lines, and we know the chiefs's lines. And we drummers are the same as the princes and the chiefs, because a chief has no power to shout at us, and a chief fears us. So when the village chiefs and the small chiefs and the princes reach Namo-Naa's house, they come down from their horses and dance Damba again. That is how they respect Namo-Naa, and Namo-Naa also shows himself in the Damba Festival. And after leading the Damba home, they will be finishing around six o'clock or six-thirty, and these drum chiefs will all lead their chiefs to their houses. And so to talk about the

Damba Festival is to talk about drumming and how we drummers are important in Dagbon here. If you see the Damba Festival at Yendi, and you see them ride their horses, you will know that it is true.

The Damba Festival is our big festival, and we don't have any dance in which the chief will take part which is stronger than the Damba Festival. Truly, apart from Damba, there is no strong dance in which the chief is to take part. The only other things are the Samban' luja and the Kunyisili. I think I have already told you about this Kunyisili: that is when we go to the chief's house to wake him in the mornings. We do it throughout the year, not only during festival months. We call this Kunyisili a chief's dance, even though the chief doesn't dance. Sometimes he doesn't even come out of his house. When we go to beat it, that is when a young drummer will learn to sing, and it is during this learning that a small drummer will catch the Samban' luja. The chief takes part in weddings and namings, because a chief can go to these things, but we drummers don't have any serious work for the chief himself apart from the Damba and the Samban' luja and the Kunyisili. And so how we celebrate the Damba Festival, it seems I have talked about it very well and I have taken it into details. And I want to tell you that something which is coming will not go back again. The meaning of what I say is that you have asked me about our way of living, and it is coming to you. If you think that the Fire Festival and the Damba Festival are interesting, you must know that as I move from here to my house, I get more interesting talks in my mind. So what is coming to you, you should wait and see what it is going to be. What I know I will tell you, and what I don't know I will not tell you, because I don't want to tell you lies. We Dagbamba say that when you start to eat, it is over to the food; if you start it, then you have to know how you will finish it. And the next one after Damba is the Guinea Fowl Festival. It does not need a twisted way of talking, and so it will not take long. But it is also interesting. And then I will start the talk about the month of Ramadan, which we Dagbamba call Nolori, the "mouth-tying" month, when we Muslims fast.