



OUR OWN WAY
IN THIS PART
OF THE WORLD

Kwasi Konadu

*Biography of an African
Community, Culture, & Nation*

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Biography of an African
Community, Culture, and Nation

KWASI KONADU

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Cover art: Kofi Donko carrying the Asubonten Kwabena shrine at the Takyiman Fofie Festival, 6 October 1970. From the Dennis Michael Warren Slide Collection, Special Collections Department, University of Iowa Libraries.

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To the lives and legacies of Kofi Donko, Adowa Asabea (Akumsa),
Akua Asantewaa, Kofi Kyereme, Yaw Mensa, and Kofi Obo

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[For those] in search of past events and matters connected with our culture as well as matters about you, the [*abosom*, “spiritual forces,” I . . .] will also let them know clearly how we go about things in our own way in this part of the world.

—Nana Kofi Donko

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CONTENTS

Acknowledgments ix

Introduction 1

CHAPTER 1. Libation

"Matters Connected with Our Culture" 17

CHAPTER 2. Homelands

"In Search of Past Events" 44

CHAPTER 3. Tools of the Trade

"I was a Blacksmith . . . Before I Became [a Healer]" 73

CHAPTER 4. Medicine, Marriage, and Politics

"Assist this State to have Progress" 107

CHAPTER 5. Independences

"Never Mingled Himself in Local Politics" 137

CHAPTER 6. Anthropologies of Medicine and Africa

"When the Whiteman First Came" 166

DUKE

UNIVERSITY
PRESS

CHAPTER 7. Uncertain Moments and Memory
"Our Ancestral Spirits, Come and Have Drink" 195

Epilogue 228

Notes 239

Bibliography 287

Index 307

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viii Contents

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MAP I.1. Map of Ghana, featuring modern boundaries, major rivers, and towns.

INTRODUCTION

He who would be a healer must set great value on seeing truly, hearing truly, understanding truly, and acting truly. . . . You see why healing can't be a popular vocation?

—AYI KWEI ARMAH, *The Healers*

A cream-white casket was hoisted into the rear of a battered pickup truck, strapped onto its cargo bed, and secured by two young men who did their best to ensure the casket would remain in place. The truck then reversed onto the main road and positioned itself behind another vehicle that led the way through the main streets of the market town. Soon the truck joined a long procession of cars and minivans, each packed with kinfolk and townspeople, drivers blowing their horns. The night was upon them when they finally reached their destination—the home of the deceased. It was mobbed by hundreds, perhaps over a thousand, in bereavement. Mourners of all sizes and ages stood in and around the rectangular compound or sat on plastic chairs, exchanging greetings.

Inside a twelve-by-thirteen-foot room painted white, long lines of mourners proceeded slowly, single file. Making their way around the gold-painted headboard and foot posts, the women sobbed hysterically and sang funerary dirges, the men paid their respects in words and in silence to the body of the man resting in the double bed. That body commanded an enormous audience and even more respect—observers noticed tears

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rolling from the eyes of some men, for whom crying in public on such an occasion is culturally inappropriate.

But this was no ordinary funeral, nor was the occasion for an ordinary individual. On this mattress, the dark brown-skinned body—less than five feet ten inches tall and perhaps one hundred sixty pounds—was dressed in all white, the same color as the two pillows on which the head rested. White sheets covered the bed and the body up to its waist, and the finest hand-woven *kente* cloth covered the body from the waist to the sternum. Gold-painted, black-handled ceremonial swords (*akofena*) were positioned on the thighs, two on the left and two on the right, pointing away from the body. He wore a white linen top, the forearms and elbows were adorned with gold ornaments, a black necklace with a large triangular disk hung around the neck, and a velvet headband along with gold ornamentation and rings on the fingers indicated his status as a healer. Individually—and certainly when taken together—these decorations told those in attendance something about the spirit or soul that had animated the body on view and the being who had occupied a central role in their lives.

Thunderous drumming and spiritually induced dancing and singing occurred outside the room, but the inside was more solemn, with several fans tilted toward the body and the viewers—and for good reason. The temperature that August day was 84 degrees Fahrenheit. The relatively high humidity was mitigated only by the cool evening breeze from the north. But the weather mattered little for the living. They had come to honor the life of the deceased. As the open casket laid adjacent to the double bed and as the unending flow of mourners encircled the bed, looking on the body, several spiritualist-healers (*akɔmfɔɔ*), including relatives and trainees of the deceased, vigorously danced barefooted in a counterclockwise circle outside the room. The elder women *akɔmfɔɔ* among these healers wore headbands made of green medicinal leaves.

Several male and female *akɔmfɔɔ* joined the celebration. The spokesperson or speech intermediary (*ɔkyeame*) for the family of the deceased, Nana Kofi Ɖboɔ, poured some gin on the floor next to the bed, invoking the spiritual presence of the deceased's ancestors, the earth, the spiritual forces located in nature, and the cosmic force by which temporal life and death exist. Periodically, a cow horn (*aben*) transformed into an instrument was blown and gunshots from an old shotgun were fired ceremonially in the air. Morning came and more mourners found their way to the deceased. Nana Ɖboɔ poured yet another libation. Mourners screamed “old man” (an affectionate term for the deceased during his later years), while highlife music from a

small, black AM/FM radio played in the background. The deceased was eventually buried not in a plot of land, but rather in a room on his family compound, fittingly next to the abode of the particular spiritual force (*ɔbosom*) to which he owed his life and by which he forged a life worth remembering.

Nana Kofi Dɔnkɔ passed on *nkyikwasi* (Sunday, 6 August 1995), and with his temporal transition also passed a life story worth sharing with a world wider than his own, beyond those who paid their respects as the cream-white casket was covered and the door to his final resting room closed. This healer—and the figure of the healer in African and world history—was versatile, operating fluidly as custodian and interpreter of shared values, facilitator of spiritual renewal, promoter of social cohesion, settler of disputes, and assessor and planner of the community's growth. Kofi Dɔnkɔ's composite human history, however, survives what rests in the white casket. That history persists in the genes of his great-grandchildren, in the memories of kin and community, in the hundreds of healers he trained, in the tens of thousands of patients he treated, in the academics he enriched through his intellect and compassion, in the cultural quilt of a community he enlarged, and in a world where healers of his caliber and character are sorely needed. This book tells his and their composite story.



FOR REASONS I CANNOT fully explain nor necessarily understand, these facets of Kofi Dɔnkɔ's life, these integral roles he played in so many lives, these social and intellectual histories filtered through one person, spoke to me, so much so that in spite of not meeting Kofi Dɔnkɔ, I refused to throw away the aforementioned vignette of his videotaped funeral rites. I was a sophomore in college when Kofi Dɔnkɔ transitioned toward that ancestral village. I was also born in Jamaica and had only my grandfather, a healer himself, to make sense of Kofi Dɔnkɔ and his cultural homeland. In 2001 I boarded a Ghana Airways flight at Baltimore's BWI airport. The wheels retracted and the cabin, spiced with Akan/Twi and English, shook as the plane made its way through the layers of clouds. The Airbus A320-200 aircraft and I soon reached a comfortable altitude, moving effortlessly over the Atlantic. After landing at Kotoka International Airport in a sticky Accra morning, I stayed in the capital overnight before spending a few days each in Koforidua and Kumase, and finally reaching Takyiman. Armed with only a beginner's command of the Akan/Twi language, I did not use it during my initial encounters with my hosts, with whom Nana Kwaku Sakyi had put me in contact and who turned out to be family of Kofi Dɔnkɔ.

Having only a vague sense of a research plan, I wanted to study indigenous medicine for my doctoral research but had little clue about how and where exactly. Kofi Dɔ̀nkɔ́'s son, Kofi Sakyi Sapɔ̀n, helped refine my ideas and provided access—made possible by his relation to Kofi Dɔ̀nkɔ́—to several healers. As I moved around town on my own, and during my conversations with healers and townspeople, I increasingly heard stories about Kofi Dɔ̀nkɔ́. Although deceased, he was omnipresent. Patients from afar still visited his compound, expecting to see him. My Akan/Twi improved because I respectfully refused to speak English, and as it did I began to ask questions in the language, and again Kofi Dɔ̀nkɔ́ resurfaced. Eventually I completed my research and tried to pay little attention to Kofi Dɔ̀nkɔ́ or stories about him, but without success—he turned up in almost every interview, although he was invisible in the regional and national archives. Finally, I wanted to know more about this haunting figure and the lore surrounding him.

Who was Kofi Dɔ̀nkɔ́? And how might this person made invisible through recordkeeping and archiving become legible with only a slight documentary trail? How might his life and that of his community and his nation become a useful window to understand culture, health, and healing, and well-known transformations of the twentieth-century world, such as colonial empire, religious and medical missionaries, and nationalist and military governments, from everyday human perspectives? Beginning with that first trip to Ghana in 2001, I have traveled there every year until 2014, spending a month or two each time and vacuuming up all details I can about Kofi Dɔ̀nkɔ́'s life and times, seeking to answer these questions and more. I have written other books since. But as the years passed, that certain video footage of Kofi Dɔ̀nkɔ́'s funerary rites and the unending lines of the bereaved still lurked around the corner of each completed project. It was not the memory of the recorded events that haunted me; I had no intimate memory of the funeral because I was not there. It was the memory people kept of Kofi Dɔ̀nkɔ́, and the persistent fear, ricocheting in my mind, that the best of my skill might not do justice to the story those memories represented. The outlining and writing of the first drafts of that story in August 2015, precisely twenty years after Kofi Dɔ̀nkɔ́'s passing and a century after his birth, signaled an end to that fear. But little did I know the endgame of this story, and how it might all turn out.

Kofi Sakyi (Dɔ̀nkɔ́) was a healer, blacksmith, drummer, woodcarver, farmer, and head of the family born to Yaw Badu of Nkoransa and Akosua Toa of Takyiman, into a Bono (Akan) family, around 1913 (figure 1.1). Kofi's



FIGURE I.1. Nana Kofi Dɔ̀nkɔ (left) drumming at Asuotipa Festival, Takyiman, ca. 1989. From the privately owned Nana Kwaku Sakyi Collection, Miami, Florida. Used courtesy of Nana Kwaku Sakyi, photographer.

early years and socialization in a family of well-respected healers and blacksmiths foreshadowed his eventual vocation, for while he engaged matters of spiritual culture and healing through a family that nurtured those passions, other young men in the tripartite Gold Coast colony were being socialized by the forces of latent empire, capitalism, and Christian missionaries. It is not that Kofi Dɔ̀nkɔ, as a fellow member of the colony, was immune to these forces, but he was less seduced by them and thus thought about them differently.

Kofi Dɔ̀nkɔ's path as a prominent healer was baked into the circumstances of his birth. After his two elder sisters were born, the next five children died shortly after birth, disturbing Kofi's parents and prompting a consultation with the family's ɔ̀bosom, Asubɔ̀nten Kwabena. Yaw and Akosua made several ritual sacrifices and petitioned Asubɔ̀nten for the long and healthy life of their newborn son, who in this circumstance received the name "Dɔ̀nkɔ," an allegory for service to Asubɔ̀nten Kwabena. Although reluctant to join a cast of healers during his early teenage years, Kofi Dɔ̀nkɔ would become the most significant healer for the spiritual force that protected his early and long life.

The healer-to-be spent his early years with his father, a skilled herbalist and blacksmith, in the Nkoransa village of Akumsa Odumase. There, Kofi Dɔnkɔ began to learn rudiments of the healing arts and blacksmithing before departing in the late 1920s for his mother's town of Takyiman to begin his almost seven-year training to become a healer. In the early 1920s, before Kofi's training, British colonial anthropologist Robert S. Rattray visited Takyiman and devoted a significant part of his writing to Bono cultural life, with a view that Takyiman was "the ideal ground upon which to study Akan customs and beliefs."¹ No evidence indicates that Kofi Dɔnkɔ crossed paths with Rattray, but anthropologists from Margaret Field to Eva Meyerowitz to Dennis Warren would pursue Rattray's claim over the next fifty years. The intervening years were punctuated by a series of local and regional transformations graphed onto global empire and the periodic crises of "indirect" British rule in the colony. British colonial imposition translated into the dual subjugation of Takyiman under Asante and British hegemony, and heavy social tensions brought on by a colonial economy anchored in cocoa corresponded to the rival popularity of "enforcer" spiritual forces, accompanying migrant cocoa laborers from the northern savanna that clashed with Christian missions and colonial officials from the southern region. Takyiman was the gateway between the northern and southern halves of the colony, and the town's and Kofi Dɔnkɔ's positionality—cultural, ecological, and economic—offer fertile ground upon which to examine those transformations and their human experiences.

Although Kofi Dɔnkɔ stayed away from politics, he too was ensnared in the morass of land and legal disputes that pervaded the colony, and he participated as a farmer with hired migrant laborers in the cocoa boom between the 1930s and 1950s. Yet Kofi Dɔnkɔ suffered an all-too-common fate: the exploitation of his labor and product by cocoa brokers during the boom years, and that of this intellectual history and vast healing knowledge during the coming-of-age for Ghana and African studies in the 1960s and 1970s. More than any Africanist anthropologist, Dennis Warren can be credited with bringing Kofi Dɔnkɔ's ideas to the academic marketplace. But Warren's pioneering research in Takyiman on Bono disease classification and medicines relied crucially on some 1,500 disease lexemes articulated by "one venerated Bono priest-healer"—Kofi Dɔnkɔ. This multiyear research constituted a foundation for Warren's later writings and his admirable academic career—he received promotion, tenure, and World Bank expert status along the way—whereas Kofi Dɔnkɔ was memorialized as an "informant" and certainly not an intellectual in his own right. Kofi Dɔnkɔ could justifi-

ably be written off as a victim of the politics of knowledge and of history, but this would be shortsighted. Two recently discovered record books for patients Kofi Dɔ̀nkɔ̀ treated during the 1980s certify Kofi Dɔ̀nkɔ̀ as an intellectual whose history contributes to our understanding of health and healing in Africa and the world.

Kofi Dɔ̀nkɔ̀ was a marginal peasant-farmer whose fortune and misfortune rode the tides of the cocoa boom, an everyday person who gives us a window into the social lives and networks of rural dwellers, and an exceptional and important person who articulated a profound understanding of disease and therapeutics to trainees who resided in West Africa and throughout the African diaspora as well as a notable group of scholars. Location and an integral cultural heritage stand out as two of several factors that shaped the life of Kofi Dɔ̀nkɔ̀ and Takyiman. Situated at a crossroad, his and his town's positionalities invite us to think of Takyiman as a gateway for cultural contact and exchanges, rather than solely the coastal region of the Gold Coast/Ghana; a gateway that does not presuppose a European presence and as a counterpoint to scholarly accounts that valorize the perspective of Christianized and "modernizing" individuals along the Atlantic seaboard. Rather than prop up Kofi Dɔ̀nkɔ̀ as some cultural nationalist whom Black Atlanticists would love to topple, it is precisely Kofi Dɔ̀nkɔ̀'s deep devotion to his craft, his culture, his community that framed his transcendence of academic boundaries—African/diasporic, indigenous/allopathic, colonial/postcolonial—and that makes him a figure from whom we might learn to heal the traumas caused by those binary, yet artificial, categories.



KOFI Dɔ̀NKɔ̀'S FUNERARY rites, described at the opening of this introduction, were recorded on video, but for technological and cultural reasons—each with their own episteme and logic—a great deal of the rites, the preparations leading up to them, and the collective and individual meanings, feelings, and immaterial participants were not and could not be recorded. Most recordings of human action—the basis of human history—capture only episodic fractions of it, leaving aside an interlaced range of human emotions, ideas, exchanges, and connections. It is not that persons like Kofi Dɔ̀nkɔ̀, who are often categorized as "marginal" or "the poor," are difficult historical subjects because they leave behind insufficient evidence of their lives. Instead, we tend to reduce historical evidence to documents and consequently consecrate documents as the beginning and the end of a

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story. Through this act, we make historically marginalized subjects ghost-like figures, haunting but never fully revealed; said another way, history writing has been an act of making illegible certain categories and constituents of humanity.² That Kofi Dɔnkɔ, like most of humanity before the digital age, did not (and may not) leave a dense documentary trail means that such persons will remain hidden to those of us who are ill equipped to reconstruct or are unreceptive to alternative ways of thinking about their stories. The story of Kofi Dɔnkɔ and his community invites us to imagine history as a craft, an intellectual platform to help write/right the world.

The more I watched the video recording of Kofi Dɔnkɔ's funerary rites, the more I saw filmmaking as a methodological analog to standard history writing. Filmmaking is like history writing in that both establish an artificial order on a story (or a series of stories), on time and space, and much of this is done after shooting, during the postproduction process of editing the frames, angles, and shots to create a product that will draw a paying audience. If history is the long shot (the scene-setting, general impression), biography is the close-up (the most detailed view). Here and in the book's subtitle, I use the familiar term *biography* only to draw the reader's attention to a new approach, "communography." In this way, *biography* is simply a placeholder. I have chosen to tell the story of Kofi Dɔnkɔ and his community and homeland through an approach to writing meaningful history that I call communography, in that my concern is *not* with an individual life story but rather with the thousands of kin, community members, and strangers who knew, interacted with, and lived during historic moments Kofi Dɔnkɔ shared. I choose also to tell this story through the evocative and varied moments in which humans live, rather than through the predictable and artificial plots historians devise. Staying with our filming metaphor, professional actors who act in plots are poor actors, in sharp contrast with those who act in the moment. Great actors who consistently work on their craft all indicate losing themselves in the moment—most do not remember the details of their performance. Prominent healers like Kofi Dɔnkɔ, who enter into conversation with spiritual forces in a trance-like state and access another archive while performing the roles of medium and interpreter, also do not remember much of their "possession" once the extended moment is over. The spiritual forces in conversation with healers show us life and temporal death in each trance experience, as each force enters and hyperanimates the human body and then, after the force's "human" moment, leaves it exhausted. Humans, likewise, do not live their

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lives in plots. We live in moments, and in a series of moments strung together that we call our temporal lives.

By “moments strung together,” I mean that human beings live *in* historical moments and those moments—the contexts in which the contents of our lives are generated—come to form our temporal lives. Certainly, this is not the only way to think about the ebb and flow of human lives, but it is one way to envision those lives, since human experiences do not often subscribe to plots or the sequential order of events in which a life story is (re)presented. Thinking about human history in terms of moments—in all their variation—means that each story about a person or community does not necessarily have two sides. A story may have five sides or one, depending on the moment and the kinds of human action involved. Kofi Dɔnkɔ became a remarkably skilled healer, blacksmith, and family and community leader—and these constitute multifarious sides of a story—but he also remained an “ordinary” person, embedded in the mundane ebb and flow of community life. (The quotation marks around *ordinary* indicate that this descriptor and category, on its own, inadequately characterizes the composite person that was Kofi Dɔnkɔ.) Through neither celebrity nor individual triumph, he took a selfless position that placed community above self-interest and that minimized social breakdown by fighting for wholeness. In effect, the ordinary, the marginalized, and the proverbial “people without history” are precisely the historical subjects who give us a wide-angle view of moments both mundane and cross-fertilized by local and global events. To interpret Kofi Dɔnkɔ’s multitiered story is to do so in ways he, if alive, may not have chosen, especially through my approach and words. A communography is therefore a composite production, and the subjects of this approach are composite persons to the extent that their lives can be revealed through documentary fragments, repositories of ideas, memory, language, ritual, and material culture.

The story of Kofi Dɔnkɔ and his community began from a ground zero in published knowledge, where no earlier historical works existed on which to build, and so I had to develop a map for his life and his community’s life, research nearly everything around them, take it all in, and then process all on three intersecting scales: individual, village/township, and homeland/world.³ Although most of us strain against evidentiary limitations, trying to recover bits of human experience and to place content in context, I took the methodological position of a detective unrestricted by disciplinary practice and ideological boundaries. My quest for Kofi Dɔnkɔ’s life and

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times brought me to institutional archives in England, Ghana, Switzerland, and the United States. I consulted collections of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Salvation Army, Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society, Roman Catholic Mission, and Holy Family Medical Mission; the Basel Mission Archives; the Bodleian Library of Commonwealth and African Studies at Oxford University; the University of London's School of African and Oriental Studies archives; the British Museum library and archives; the British Library; the National Archives of the UK (Kew); the Indiana University Archives of Traditional Music; the Melville J. Herskovits Library of African Studies at Northwestern University; and other African studies collections in the United States.⁴ In Ghana I raided the national archives (Public Records and Archives Administration Department), the Manhyia Archives in Kumase, and the regional archives at Sunyani and Kumase. From these archives I assembled maps, land surveys, photographs, legal and religious documents, typeset and published oral histories, letters, newspapers, regional and local court cases, published ethnographies, historical accounts, and annual reports for the Gold Coast region (ca. 1895–1939), which was then divided into the three colonial holdings of the Gold Coast Colony, Crown Colony of Ashanti, and the Northern Territories. In all these repositories, there was no evidentiary trace of Kofi Dɔnkɔ, although he was a prominent person in locations where several of the aforementioned organizations worked and where records about those communities were kept.

The most helpful repositories, however, were the local archives in Sunyani, the records of the Holy Family Hospital that operated in Kofi Dɔnkɔ's Takyiman, and more than anything else, the photos, documentary fragments, family and shrine histories, interviews, songs, and oral and video recordings that came from people who knew him in some capacity and at some moments of his life. The strength of these sources is that they help bring Kofi Dɔnkɔ and his sociopolitical world vividly to life, while archival and published sources, especially rarely used and locally produced Akan/Twi-language texts, make up for what the former lack in distilling Kofi Dɔnkɔ's life by filling out the broader social, cultural, and political contexts of well- and lesser-known historical events. I examine a bevy of Akan/Twi terms that appear in the archival and oral sources specific to Kofi Dɔnkɔ, fleshing out key concepts he put to work and that worked to translate his therapeutic knowledge into social practice.⁵ This attention to language serves the purpose of explicating cultural practice, following orthography and conventions established by the Ghana Bureau of Languages (but I

have left spellings as they appear in the sources), and grounding the subject in a world he would have easily recognized.⁶ This is, after all, his and his community's story.

But for all this, there are instances in the book where Kofi Dɔ̀nkɔ's specific role or place in historical events is less than certain, and he unfortunately disappears briefly because of limitations in the sources. Then again, the life of an individual or community will always have gaps in its recorded and remembered histories. Some of these expected gaps in this case are fortunately filled by a remarkable set of patient records kept by Kofi Dɔ̀nkɔ's secretary or scribe, but almost nothing about Kofi Dɔ̀nkɔ himself except for frail scraps of paper where a scribe jotted down spare lines Kofi Dɔ̀nkɔ dictated about his children, his family, and his community work. In sum, my decade-long journey through national, missionary, university, family, and individual (re)collections revealed that had I made the usual research commitment to institutional archives fashioned by empire, I would not have found Kofi Dɔ̀nkɔ and his place in the history of his community, homeland, and the world.



THAT HUMANITY IS divided into “races,” the geography of the world into continents and nation-states, and historical time into moments dubbed “precolonial” or “postcolonial” is commonplace. But if we filter these conceptual divisions through the ideas and lived experiences of historical subjects such as Kofi Dɔ̀nkɔ, they might amount to semantic nonsense. Kofi Dɔ̀nkɔ offered his therapeutic services and knowledge to all, regardless of “ethnicity/race,” religion, and other markers of human-devised boundaries. On the one hand, Kofi Dɔ̀nkɔ was one of the first to train as healers diasporic Africans from the Americas and to actively participate in early health projects that sought to integrate indigenous and biomedical practitioners in Africa. In doing so, he transcended cultural boundaries between “Africa” and “diasporic Africa,” between Christians and Muslims, and between so-called traditional and allopathic medicine. On the other hand, healers like Kofi Dɔ̀nkɔ were problematized in such health projects because they often supported a one-way transmission rather than a mutual exchange of knowledge. This part of Kofi Dɔ̀nkɔ's story underscores how cultural and hegemonic boundaries are both porous and reinforced, and how individuals both transcend and resign themselves to the “fact” of those boundaries. For Kofi Dɔ̀nkɔ's part, there is no evidence that he exploited the boundaries he transcended. His ideas were born in specific contexts,

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but they did break out of those contexts, thereby transforming the condition of his life and work, and that of his community's engagement with the broader world. In fact, Kofi Dɔnkɔ might be considered global in the sense that his ideas, healing practices, and reputation touched people in West Africa, Europe, and the Americas.

Kofi Dɔnkɔ lived in moments scholars have trademarked "colonial" and "postcolonial," but his life story demonstrates that the ruptures signaling these eras are overexaggerated, and more so because they take their cue from a European script of imperial rule—in his case, the British/English variety.⁷ Kofi Dɔnkɔ and many Africans like him never folded their historical moments and lived experiences under the tent of precolonial or postcolonial. In fact, Kofi Dɔnkɔ and his Akan/Bono peoples have *their own* understandings of time (*berɛ*), history (*abakɔsem*, "matters that have come and gone"), calendar (*adaduanan*), and their place in a historicized culture and forest-savanna ecology.⁸ Further, his peoples' coded wisdom proverbially provides a method for locating those understandings: *Onipa behwe yie a, na ɛfiri nea wahunuie* ("If a person looks well, it is from what s/he has seen"). Viewed from this theoretical position, Ghana is less a nation-state defined by homogeneity and a citizenry of "one nation" than it is a geography populated by kin, strangers, and antagonists, all of whom are connected to communities and locations and to internal and external diasporic formations. Rather than simply ask how Kofi Dɔnkɔ's life story maps onto major themes in twentieth-century Ghana/Africa/world, we might also ask what specifically is revealed through the lived experiences and ideas of Kofi Dɔnkɔ and his community about the standard themes of colonialism, religion, disease, independence, global war, and human culture. The story of Kofi Dɔnkɔ and his homeland encourages us to take the cues and constructs in our narrations from the lived experiences, ideas, and optics of the people we seek to interpret.



THIS BOOK PRESENTS the contents and formative conditions of Kofi Dɔnkɔ's life in a narrative that demonstrates, on a broader scale, three principal themes in the human experience: (1) individuals cannot be representatives of the culture and communities to which they belong, but those who occupy different roles in that culture can offer integral, wide-angle perspectives on the lives of cultural and community members and a protracted commentary on an evolving culture or society; (2) African and world history can be greatly enriched by focusing more on communal

histories or communographies that take as their focus multifarious people rather than exceptional individuals; and (3) shared genetics and behaviors aside, humans are distinguished by their culture and the ideas and practices that flow from it. These themes take on greater shape in this communography, which is divided into seven chapters and an epilogue detailing the culture, community, and homeland that shaped the temporal life of Kofi Dɔnkɔ.

The first chapter is concerned with Kofi Dɔnkɔ's ontological world, that is, the world of spiritual forces, their variety and interrelationships, and how these conceptions formed senses of the world, organized societies, and histories, and how they fashioned the social world and work of a healer. Its aim is to understand key ideas that saturated this social world in the era in which Kofi Dɔnkɔ was born. With his own influential spiritual force called Asubɔnten Kwabena, Kofi Dɔnkɔ used a historically constituted partnership between spiritual forces and their human hosts for the "common good," constantly translating his ontological world into social practice and enabling his multifaceted culture to move through the history of his homelands.

The second chapter extends the ontological and social worlds outlined in chapter 1 to the entangled histories of Takyiman, Nkoransa, Asante, and the British from the late nineteenth century to the birth and adolescence of Kofi Dɔnkɔ in the early twentieth century. Although born in the Nkoransa village of Akumsa Odumase, Kofi Dɔnkɔ's mother was from Takyiman, where Kofi Dɔnkɔ would live most of his life but which was under a dual hegemony of Asante control and British colonial rule. Nkoransa, Takyiman, and a tripartite colony constituted the multiple (home)lands of Kofi Dɔnkɔ, and the clear majority of his and his family's lives oscillated among these locations. Although scholars tend to speak of one colony, in fact the three colonial territories (Gold Coast Colony, Crown Colony of Ashanti, and the Northern Territories), excluding the later addition of British Togoland, were administered, resourced, and viewed differently though the machinations of imperial Britain.⁹

In chapter 3, Kofi Dɔnkɔ's homelands of Nkoransa and Takyiman provide two poignant cases for examining the ways in which the emergent themes of religion/spirituality, education, health, and family took shape in them and in the broader tripartite colony during Kofi's late adolescence and early adulthood. As Kofi Dɔnkɔ and a new class of healers worked for the prosperity of his adopted town of Takyiman, the major themes of religion/spirituality, health, and family continued to take more intimate shape as

Kofi Dɔnkɔ grew into a life of medicine and marriage and navigated the politics of colonial life.

Chapter 4 focuses on the politics and competing claims to land, religious authority, and decolonization as cocoa and other natural resources buoyed the tripartite colony during Kofi Dɔnkɔ's adulthood. It pays specific attention to his layered role as blacksmith, healer, farmer, husband, and father. In chapter 5, the patterns of life for Kofi Dɔnkɔ, Takyiman, and the colony/nation ran on analogous tracks, revealing a series of relationships, freedoms sought, and twists of fortune around the evolving story of Kofi Dɔnkɔ, his community, and his nation to be.

Kofi Dɔnkɔ's and his sister's known expertise enabled their family to turn a community tragedy into an independent "healer's village," while a Takyiman-led Bonokyempem Federation, a movement that consolidated Bono identity and independence from Asante, partnered with Kwame Nkrumah to forge a nation independent of British colonial rule. While competing national factions fought over independence, similar conflicts at the local level underscored the move by Kofi Dɔnkɔ and his colleagues to form their own autonomous healing association, although he helped shaped the cooperative relations with Takyiman's new hospital and the creation of new "customary laws" promulgated in the early republic. The new republic ironically inhibited "traditional" institutions but provided the conditions for "independent" African churches and an Islamic organization to take root under one-party rule. Because Kofi Dɔnkɔ did not take sides in religion or politics, he was sought out by Christian and Muslim patients and avoided much of the politics that fomented military coups and crises.

While the nation found itself in crisis, increasingly enthralled by Christianity and capitalism, Kofi Dɔnkɔ's healing knowledge gave life to the career of an anthropologist who would share Kofi Dɔnkɔ's intellect and remarkable skill with the world beyond Ghana. More than any other anthropologist, Dennis Warren would circulate and profit from Kofi Dɔnkɔ's accrued knowledge and reputation, placing in sharp contrast an independent Ghana claiming control over its human and material resources and a Ghana still exposed to the exploits of capitalists, neocolonialists, and the coming-of-age of African studies. Rather than cast Kofi Dɔnkɔ as a victim, chapter 6 considers the relations between Dɔnkɔ and Warren as an allegory to the intertwined coming-of-age of independent African nations such as Ghana and the academic study of Africa, set against global power relations and forces of exploitation. Within this setting, the chapter examines the politics of health and healing—more precisely, attempts to integrate bio-

medical and indigenous approaches amid a series of military coups and economic crises.

Although these conflicts and succession disputes plagued the nation, there was no sign that Ghana was immune from coups or the uncertainty and unrest that would require remedy during the years Jerry Rawlings ruled Ghana. Chapter 7 considers the recurrent theme of uncertainty in the lives of Ghana citizens. Flanked by national politics and unrest, this chapter argues, an aging Kofi Dɔnkɔ showed no sign of yielding to either volatility or mental decline. Takyiman and Kofi Dɔnkɔ were mutual gateways for migrants fleeing conflict and seeking therapy, and Kofi elevated and expanded his healing practice independent of Takyiman's foremost hospital. If Kofi Dɔnkɔ held in place community bonds and partnerships with local and foreign actors, so too did his passing in 1995 occasion a reverse in the partnership between that hospital and healers and a resurfacing of tensions within his family, community, and nation. The epilogue considers a few ways in which the major themes of this book resonate in the world in which we live, thinking through the watershed moments of 1948, the consequences of forced intimacy occasioned by colonial rule, the opportunities missed by independence leaders, and what the figure of the healer might mean for our present era.

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INTRODUCTION

1. Robert S. Rattray, *Ashanti* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923), 114.

2. My point is this: it is not difficult to write the history of a person or a people who have left a significant documentary record to follow; if this is true—and I think it is—then the challenge for scholars is to focus more on people like Kofi Dɔnkɔ who did *not* write about themselves nor had much written about them.

3. Beyond several articles and passing references in a few books, the only substantial study of Takyiman is Dennis M. Warren, *The Techiman-Bono of Ghana: An Ethnography of an Akan Society* (Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt, 1975).

4. Among these archives, I discovered that the Salvation Army only began working on the Gold Coast and in Ghana in 1922, but worked there more earnestly from 1978, when Ghana became a separate “territory,” to the present. The problem for researchers is that the Ghana territory has no archives, and whatever records are kept are sent to the International Heritage Centre on an ad hoc basis.

5. The Akan/Twi language is a composite, rather than a singular, language, where four mutually intelligible variants—Bono, Asante, Akuapem, and Fante—make up the whole. Linguists have shown that a close synergy exists between the Bono and Fante variants, and those fluent in Fante have noted “the Brongs [Bono] are identical in language with Ashanti [Asante]” (TNA, CO 879/39, enclosure 1 in no. 45, Mr. Ferguson to the Acting Governor, 9 November 1893, 77). Assuming this is true, compare the following sentences in Asante, Akuapem, and Fante: Asante: *ɔbaa panin bi ne ne mmabarima baanu tenaa ase.* / Akuapem: *ɔbaa panyin bi ne ne mmabarima baanu traa ase.* / Fante: *ɔbaapanyin bi na ne mba mbarimba beenu bi tsenaa ase.* See S. K. Otoo and A. C. Denteh, *Abɛɛ* (Accra: Bureau of Ghana Languages, 1970), 7, 9; Ahene-Affoh, *Twi Kasakoa ne Kasatɔmmɛ s* (Tema: Ghana Publishing, 1976), v.

6. My grasp of the Akan/Twi language, especially its idiomatic phrases, has been influenced by the following texts: S. J. Kwaffo, *Fa bi Sie* (Accra: Bureau of Ghana Languages, 1997); Ahene-Affoh, *Twi Kasakoa ne Kasatɔmmɛ*; Kwabena Adi, *Mewɔ bi ka* (Accra: Bureau of Ghana Languages, 1975); Kwame Ampene, *Atetesem* (Accra: Waterville Publishing House, 1975); J. Yedu Bannerman, *Mfantse Akan Mbebusɛm* (Accra: Bureau of Ghana Languages, 1974); Ɔboadum Kisi, *Ɔba Nyansafoɔ* (Accra: Bureau of Ghana Languages, 1974); Ahene-Affoh, *Ɔdo Asaawa* (Accra: Bureau of Ghana Languages, 1973); J. Yeboa-Dankwa, *Tete wɔ bi Kyere* (Accra: Bureau of Ghana Languages, 1973); J. H. Kwabena Nketia, *Akwansosɛm bi* (Legon: Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, 1967); J. E. Mensah, *Asantesem ne Mbebusɛm bi* (Kumasi: Author, 1966); J. Kwasi Brantuo, *Asetena mu Anwonsɛm* (Accra: Bureau of Ghana Languages, 1966); Ofei-Ayisi, *Twi Mbebusɛm wɔ Akuapem Twi mu* (Accra: Waterville Publishing House, 1966); Thomas Yao Kani, *Akanfoɔ Amammere* (Accra: Bureau of Ghana Languages, 1962); Thoma Tao Kani, *Bansofo Akan Kasa mu Kasapo* (New York: Longmans, Green, 1953); Isaac D. Riverson, *Songs of the Akan Peoples* (Cape Coast, Ghana: Methodist Book Depot, 1939).

7. T. C. McCaskie, in his study of an Asante village, found “the transit from the pre-colonial to colonial was not a rupture with the past but a metamorphosis from it.” That a prominent European/white historian did not abandon either “pre-colonial” or “colonial” trademarks—with their domineering hold on the chronology of African history—shows how entrenched both have remained, although the point about “rupture” is clear. See McCaskie, *Asante Identities: History and Modernity in an African Village, 1850–1950* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), 115.

8. On the Akan *adaduanan* calendar system, see Kwasi Konadu, “The Calendrical Factor in Akan History,” *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 45, no. 2 (2012): 217–46.

9. See R. Bagulo Bening, “Internal Colonial Boundary Problems of the Gold Coast, 1907–1951,” *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 17, no. 1 (1984): 81–99.

CHAPTER 1. LIBATION

1. Richard C. Temple, “‘Tout Savoir, Tout Pardonner.’ An Appeal for an Imperial School of Applied Anthropology,” *Man* 21, no. 10 (1921): 150–51; Robert S. Rattray, *Ashanti* (New York: Clarendon Press, 1923), 5; Ernest H. Starling, “The Report of the Royal Commission on University Education in London,” *British Medical Journal* 1, no. 2735 (1913): 1168–72.

2. Temple, “‘Tout Savoir,’” 150; Rattray, *Ashanti*, 5.

3. Rattray, *Ashanti*, 5–6; Noel Machin, “*Government Anthropologist*”: A Life of R. S. Rattray (Canterbury: Centre for Social Anthropology and Computing, University of Kent, 1998), 23–28, 34–36.

4. Machin, *Rattray*, 36.

5. Rattray, *Ashanti*, 8, 10; Machin, *Rattray*, 36, 89. See also Raymond Silverman, “Historical Dimensions of Tano Worship among the Asante and Bono,” in *The Golden Stool: Studies of the Asante Center and Periphery*, ed. E. Schildkrout (New York: American Museum of Natural History, 1987), 272–88.