

## Transcription of the fragments from the Interview with Dr. Datey-Kumodzie

### Hogbetsotso

The name Hogbetsotso. A lot of people do not know where the name comes from. They translated it as the migration Ho, meaning 'to move', "gbe", but there they run short, they do not know how it goes further. Because our language, the key to our language is lost. Nobody takes notice of these things anymore. If you watch it very carefully, we have Ho [that] is heaven, the source of creation. Gbe is the mother of creation and Xi is the first region of creation,...and Xe is where we are now. So our forefathers gave cosmological names to their places. When they say Hogbetsotso it means from the original Ho where they were, where they came from, they were living in provinces called Ho and Gbe. So they say Hogbetsotso, or, migration from Ho and Gbe.\*

If you come to the Hogbetsotso, there is a ceremony they do. We call it Huzago. The Huzago is a type of dance where they move backwards. It is a cultic dance where they move four steps forward and two steps backward. Four steps forward, two steps backward. That also has its own meaning. Now, during the Hogbetsotso festival they dance backwards like this. In the front of the dancers you find two men holding two hens. They tie them on delō, the rope made of palms, the oil palm tree. They draw them backwards like this as the dancers move backwards. The two men hold the hens and they draw them on the ground. The hens spread their wings and they wipe their footprints away. They simply wipe their footprints away. That is a symbol. They are telling you we are a group of people, enigmatic, if you want to know who we are you must trace our footprints backwards. But remember, we have wiped our footprints from the sand of time. So you will not know who we are. That is the meaning of that ceremony. So they are dancing backwards while they are wiping their footprints away.

Originally we were not called Ewes. The name Ewe appeared only in Nigeria. When we were in Nigeria. If you go to Ketu, north of Ketu there is a small village there called Ewe. That is where the name Ewe started appearing. Before this time they never named themselves Ewes. They were changing names. Originally...

(translating the song) Oh ye divinities embodied in nature, awake and rejoice...  
...for men, the blissful deathless beings have appeared.  
Oh ye divinities embodied in nature, awake and rejoice...  
...for men, the blissful deathless ones have appeared.

This song takes us to the very beginnings of life, when the first human beings appeared on the scene, they crept out of water, and the mother Goddess was calling the whole of nature to rejoice that the human beings have come. It is a long story, it was at the end of the evolution of nature. Life crept out of water. The first human beings, life, evolved in water. When God created everything, and the Earth was settled, then God started evoking life, calling life to come. The mother Goddess is called Hagbe. "Hagbe" means blissful sound. Life, the human beings, everything is called "agbe". So when the mother Goddess started calling life... When the mother Goddess started evoking life - agbe! - there came no response. When finally the response came, it came out of the depths of the oceans. The mother Goddess asked 'why is this so?' Life responded: "This is the time of water, we are in the time of water. Aquarian Time." The first living being was called hamueba. Which became amoeba. The Americans call it better, they say 'amoeba'.\* It is the human beings on the way. So from that amoeba, originally hamueba, it is the blissful deathless human beings underway... started the evolution of nature, at the end of a long process of evolution... the human beings appeared out of the dolphins. So amoeba became "hamuedo". That is the human beings have come. That is the first song I sang to you.

... From Ketu, they moved to Dahome.

(translating song) Arise! Let us go to fight! Dahome is threatened by catastrophe.  
Arise! And let us go...

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\* The group which he refers to as the Gbe are actually called the Gbi.

\* According to linguistic research, the term "ameba" and the Ewe "hamu e ba", or 'person has come', are unrelated philologically, whereas folk/popularizing etymology relies on the sound resemblance of the two forms to assert their correlation/derivation. See discussion under "Scientific Questions".

So they built Dahome. Probably when they were in Dahome [Benin], the Yoruba started following them, harassing them. So they had to fight. Because of that harassment they started again towards the West. They came to Dogbo in Togo. Then from Dogbo they moved again northwards to build Notsie.

A part of the Ewes, they did not move to Notsie. They rather moved directly from Ghana. My family, we did not move through Nigeria, we rather moved with the Akans directly from Ghana. We came to Gonja. That is why if you go to the Gonjaland, you see the same practices, the same cultural practices. Then from the Gonjas, we moved to Techiman, the Brong Ahafu. From Techiman we came to Kumasi among the Ashantis because we were one and the same group.

From there we came to Legon, this Legonland. Our chief is called Le. The hill of Le, Legon. You ask any Ga, they will tell you "the hill of Le", so that Legon, the whole of that Legoland belongs to my grandfather.

It is this festival, this whole migration story that we celebrate in the name of the Hogejetsotso. In that festival we try to reconstruct our history as far as we can. We trace it back and do things to revive the spirits of the nation.

Now, every year the mind becomes dirty after a long period. If you want to do it every day, to renew your conscience "le tsi" or "tso tsi" - it means to purify the mind and the soul. So, over a long period of time, every year, that must happen. The religious state, they do their own purification. They organise it, at times for four to five weeks they are dancing and playing music. For the secular state, it must be organised also. And that is hidden under the name Hogjetsotso. It is the yearly purification of the state on a secular stage. So during the Hogjetsotso, all the things that are done in the religious state and the sacred state, like cleansing of the land, we call it "dodede", cleansing of the mind, we call it "afekpokplo" and then "nugbidodo": reconciliation of the people. These three things must take place, before all the other ceremonies follow. That is actually the meaning of the celebration of Hogjetsotso.

We have the King, the Awomefia. The Awomefia, it is a state in a state with a whole organization. The Awomefia is a quadrivium. The awomezi is a stool, it is a sacred stool. It is a quadrivium: four people sit on the stool. We have the Awomefia and we have the Awadada, the war marshal, the organiser of the State. Then we have - let's say - the prime minister. These three together are around the King. Surrounding them there are the priests of the state. When the Awomefia moves, he moves always like a priest. He is surrounded and followed by all these priests. Surrounding again this group is the council of elders. We have fifteen clans. The fifteen clans, the priests, the three generals of the Awomefia form the legislative. They build the legislative, they are the lawmakers. So all the organization, all that takes place in this state, they organize it. They have their appointees, we call them the "dzanu", the movers of all the people. This is the first song you will hear at the Hogjetsotso. So the songs I am singing to you contain the knowledge of our people. There are thousands of them.

[Question] - Are they also used during the festival?

Yes, you will hear part of them. They are used in all the festivals. Some you will not be allowed to sing. Because they are sacred songs. Like they don't allow you to read certain sacred books. So you are not allowed to use certain songs because they are so sacred. When we meet, all the groups come. If you want to know about the history of our people, you have to go into the shrines. The shrines contain the sacred, but if you go, you may not find anything, until you hear these songs and you can interpret them. When they meet at the festivals, the various groups. Let's count about sixty musical categories. The songs they are singing, if you analyse them you will get a lot of our knowledge.