

Culture and the Senses

*Bodily Ways of Knowing
in an African Community*

Kathryn Linn Geurts

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS
Berkeley · Los Angeles · London

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CHAPTER 6

Toward an Understanding of Anlo Forms of Being- in-the-World

In this chapter I concentrate even more intensely on aspects of the world that are thematized in Anlo contexts, beginning with perceptions of their homeland, their migration story, and the *nlo* of their appellation but then turning to issues of morality and personhood.¹ I explore the themes and motifs consistently presented to me as dimensions of Anlo core culture (categorized in anthropological terms as *emic*) in terms of the *etic* issue of the dovetailing of the senses, culture, and identity. Thematized aspects of Anlo personhood are probed for what they reveal about sensory, emotional, somatic modes of attention and processes of the self. Just as part 2 did not purport to contain a comprehensive account of child-socialization practices in Anlo worlds, part 3 is not meant to be an exhaustive account of the topic of personhood and the self. Rather, it is an analysis involving my third working proposition: that the local sensory order affects the concept and experience of being a person in the world.

We have seen how a local theory of immediate bodily experience, summed up by the term *seselelame*, highlights or culturally elaborates interoceptive as well as exteroceptive sensory fields. To really grasp the meaning of personhood and self processes in Anlo contexts one must appreciate the emphasis placed on interoception or internal sensory modes. Anlo sensibilities and Anlo forms of being-in-the-world involve a cultivation, I would argue, of interoceptive modes.

PAST AND PRESENT, BODY AND LAND

Some time in the late 1980s, several years before I first traveled to Ghana, an Anlo-Ewe friend of mine named Kwame related two pieces of what he considered vital information about his people. The first item concerned his ancestors' escape from slavery, three hundred years ago, and how they came to inhabit what is now the southeastern corner of the Volta Region in Ghana. Late colonial and postcolonial times constituted the setting for the second item. By this time, Kwame's account detailed, his people were no longer slaves, but rather they made up a prominent and vocal political force in contemporary Ghanaian society.² Linkages between the two parts of his account are at once rooted in the land (the terrain and soil often referred to as an Anlo homeland) and in the body (the ways in which their name, Anlo, has its origins in a body posture we refer to in Euro-American contexts as "the fetal position").

"As place is sensed, senses are placed; as places make sense, senses make place." Steven Feld calls this assertion of his a "doubly reciprocal motion" (1996:91), and Edward S. Casey invokes Feld's phrase to make the point that we are simultaneously "never without perception" and "never without emplaced experiences" (1996:19). Kwame described the place that he grew up as poor. By *poor* he did not mean culturally deprived, because he often spontaneously danced *Agbadza* and maintained that American jazz and other Western art forms derived from the music and inspirations of his very people.³ But by *poor* he meant that the sandy soil on the coast of southeastern Ghana consistently failed to produce more than "small-small garden eggs" (eggplants), bitter oranges, dry tomatoes, "hard-time corn," and so forth. His perceptions of Anlo-land as *poor* seemed to be shaped by two other significant factors. First, he contrasted his Anlo homeland with the land held by the more famous ethnic group of Ghana, the Asante, which readily yielded the lucrative products of cocoa, timber, and gold. Second, Kwame lamented the point in the 1960s when his hometown of Keta was overlooked in favor of Tema as the site of postcolonial Ghana's national port. In his youth Keta thrived as a port town: the docking of European ships provided Keta with a continual flow (in and out) of cloth, beads, vegetables, spices, and so forth. His mother was a bead trader and his father served as a manager in the United Africa Company. The bustling atmosphere of business and trade in Keta that Kwame remembered from childhood came to an end when Tema, a town closer to the capital city Accra, was designated the national port. From then on Keta was neglected, and as sea erosion

increased and the nation failed to erect a barrier wall, miles and miles of Keta and other parts of the Anlo homeland were lost to the water.⁴

As I entered the Anlo homeland for the first time in 1992, how much of Kwame's sense of the place of his childhood did I carry with me? Kwame's perceptions, built through emplaced experiences, were of a poor, almost disintegrating place, and the *feelingfulness* (to use Feld's phrase) in Kwame's portrayal of the destitute situation of Anlo-land would be hard to shake. His brother drove the Mercedes that I rode in, and I remember being awed (shortly after passing through Dabala Junction) by specific silk-cotton trees majestically standing alone in an expanse of grass and then again (once we had reached the coast) by luxuriant green carpets of flourishing shallots. But I put aside the pleasant and sensuous associations I gleaned from those isolated items and instead concentrated on perceptions of "poorness" that I felt obligated to feel and see. I did this because by the time I made my first trip to Anlo-land, in addition to Kwame's account, several Anlo people (in the United States and then in Accra) had conveyed to me with deep sadness the adversity they felt their relatives lived with in a *poor* place that was dissolving into the sea. In fact, on the morning of my first day in Keta, Kwame's cousin took me to meet one of their elderly relatives, who we found sitting on a chair on the porch of his house as water washed up the steps and spilled onto his feet. His house would be gone in a matter of months or a year, but he refused to abandon his home. His relatives checked on him daily to make sure he had not washed out to sea along with the portal.

"As place is sensed, senses are placed," according to Feld (1996:91). What were the implications for Kwame and other Anlo people of the disintegration of their natal place? In 1994 when I had returned to Ghana I met an American linguist who had been working with Ewe speakers on and off for twenty-some years. We had a brief conversation, but I will never forget his asking me, "Don't you find Ewe people rather *morose*? I feel exhausted and depressed as I work through translations of their poems and songs and as I listen to narratives about their ancestors and traditions—because they seem so invested in the woe that they associate with their history and lives." I was startled not by the content of his observation but by his frankness and his use of the term *morose*. I felt reluctant to generalize or characterize an Anlo or an Anlo-Ewe ethos in such a way, not simply because generalizations tend to be unacceptable in anthropology these days (for example, see Abu-Lughod 1991 on anthropologies of the particular) but also because of the very hearty sense

of humor possessed by many Anlo and Ewe people that I knew. *Morose* was the initial term he used, but what resonated for me was a kind of melancholy—a sorrowful and mournful affect—that he attributed to many of the Ewe individuals with whom he had worked over the years. I later heard non-Ewe Ghanaians characterize Ewe people (especially Anlo-Ewes) as inward, philosophical, and introspective.

THE FLIGHT FROM NŌTSIE AND THE TELLING OF A MIGRATION MYTH

Shortly after this encounter with the linguist, I began to notice that a shift had occurred in my response to their migration story. As I noted earlier, I had originally heard this story some time in the late 1980s (in the United States) from my friend Kwame.⁵ And in the course of research on Ewe culture and history, I had also read brief accounts of the flight from Nŏtsie in numerous sources.⁶ But once I arrived in Accra and began spending time out in the rural areas around Keta and Anloga (at first in 1992, and later for a longer stretch through 1994 and 1995), more than twenty additional people related their migration story to me. Perhaps it was simply that I was a newcomer to Anlo-land, but I was not prepared for how often I would be told this story. I even felt annoyance, sometimes, at having to sit through it yet another time. I knew all the twists and turns of the narrative by heart—trying to make rope from clay that contained thorns, throwing water against the wall, walking backwards out of the city, and so forth—and in retrospect I was clearly failing to appreciate, during those initial months, the significance of this story to their sense of identity as well as to the questions at the heart of my own research.

After the conversation with the linguist, however, I realized that I had begun responding to their story by curving my own body inward (often in sync with the rolling-up gesture of the storyteller) at the point in the narrative when the person described how their ancestor, Tŏgbui Whenya, folded into himself out of fatigue. Here is one oral account of their migration story told by a middle-aged gentleman I will call Mr. Tamakloe, who allowed me to tape-record as we spoke in English at his home in the town of Anloga.

We Anlo were not always here; we once lived in Nŏtsie, or Hogbe, which is located in what's now Ghana's neighboring nation of Togo. But back in the seventeenth century our ancestors lived in the walled city of Nŏtsie. We weren't called the Anlo then, but Dogboawo. Most of the kings of Nŏtsie were benevolent, but then Agokoli took power some time around 1650.

Agokoli was a tyrant who took delight in tormenting his people by ordering them to make rope out of "swish" (or clay) filled with thorns. Well, as for that, no one can make a rope from a pile of mud, especially when your hands bleed, so our ancestors suffered under Agokoli's rule.

They began plotting their escape. It was a walled city, you know. And Agokoli had plenty, plenty soldiers keeping watch over his workforce. Many people say our ancestors in Njotsie were slaves. But it wasn't the same kind of slavery that happened when they were forced onto ships for *Ablotsi*—your place—so I'm going to call them his workforce.

The day for escape began with vigorous drumming. The men drummed to entertain and distract the soldiers while the women packed minimal necessary items into their *keviwo* [head-loadable baskets]. For days the women had been throwing their wash water against one small section of the wall. Some even say they urinated on the wall to make it soft. By midnight the drumming was at its peak and the soldiers had wandered away to sleep off their *akpeteshie* [an alcoholic drink]. An old man named Tegli offered up a prayer that the wall break open easily, and then he stabbed a machete into the softened mud. The wall fell and all the women and children went through first with the leaders. The elderly men followed, and finally the young men and the drummers escaped, and they walked backwards—*zo megbemegbe*—to make footprints that would deceive the soldiers. The tracks would make it appear as though the walled city was under siege and cause the soldiers to search inside for the intruders, giving our ancestors time to travel far from Njotsie long before Agokoli realized they had escaped.

Some traveled directly westward from Njotsie to the central part of the Volta River. Their descendants are the northern Ewe living around Kpando and in and around Ho. Most of the Dogboawo went southwest from Njotsie. Tɔgbui Whenya and his nephew Sri were among those who led their relatives south. It was a long, long journey; many hundreds of miles on foot, carrying their babies on their backs, balancing loads on top of their heads. Tɔgbui Whenya and his followers established Wheta-Atiteti and then moved on to settle Keta, Tegbi, and Woe. Finally, when Whenya arrived at the place we now call Anloga, he collapsed and said, "*Nyeamea meɲɔ afaɔkekeyiyi megale nunye o*"—which means "I am rolled or coiled up from exhaustion and I cannot travel further." So Whenya's followers stopped right there, and somehow the place has been called Anloga—Big Anlo—since that time.

As Mr. Tamakloe conveyed those final few sentences, he wrapped his hands around the outside of his arms, folded his head over toward his knees, and curled up into a ball—simulating Tɔgbui Whenya's weariness or fatigue upon reaching the piece of land that was subsequently referred to as Anloga.⁷ As I had become conditioned to anticipate this climax, I also rolled up. But after the conversation with the linguist, this seemingly small event of folding into oneself became magnified in my mind. As the

place they call their homeland was beginning to make sense to me, I was beginning to wonder about how the sensations experienced in curling up into what I knew as “the fetal position” could influence or *shape* one’s consciousness of *place* (*place* being culturally as well as materially constituted). In other words, in applying Casey’s (1996) notion of “emplacement” to Anlo contexts, was there a relationship between the nearly barren landscape of the Anlo homeland and the inward-turning bodily motion of *ɲlɔ* that we find encoded in their name?

ON THE POETICS, AESTHETICS AND ICONICITY OF *NLO*

“Nɔtsie is to the Ewe what Ife is to the Yoruba,” wrote Ewe scholar William Komla Amoaku (1975)—with Ife representing a kind of Mecca or Jerusalem. “Nɔtsie represents the ‘symbolism of the center,’ where their spiritual and political power originated. The history of their dispersion from this center is, therefore, often told under oath, for it is regarded as sacred history” (Amoaku 1975:88). No oaths were ever sworn when the story was narrated to me, which may be accounted for by the differences in location and time. That is, Amoaku’s work was conducted in the early 1970s primarily in northern Ewe-land, around Ho, where he grew up, whereas I conducted research more than twenty years later and worked primarily with southern Ewes and people who referred to themselves as Anlo. The story seemed to be presented to me more as a legend with a secular quality, so if any Anlo people regarded it as “sacred history,” I had teetered on complete impudence in the irreverent attitude I had taken toward hearing about Tɔgbui Whenya rolling up into a ball. But herein lies part of the paradox that will be elaborated later when I flesh out the second piece of information Kwame had related to me in the late 1980s. While doing fieldwork in Anlo-land, when I would point out that they were named in honor of “rolling up” with fatigue, I was inevitably met with a response of hearty laughter. This occurred even in the context of recounting the migration story. So while I cannot say that the migration story from Nɔtsie was a “sacred history” with the people who hosted me, the sheer number of times I heard the story was testimony to its significance.⁸ In addition, the story was probably told differently in the north, since the climax would not be Tɔgbui Whenya arriving at the coast and rolling up. But Tɔgbui Whenya’s “*mɛɲlɔ*” was certainly a focal point in the telling of the story in the south (as well as among Anlo speakers in Accra and in the United States), so the force and the meaning of “*Nyeamea mɛɲlɔ ...*” and their name Anlo will be ex-

amined now, and I will return later to Amoaku's observation of Njotsie's association with *the center*.

In the Ewe language, the utterance of *ɲɔ* (also *meɲɔ* or *Aɲɔ*) results in a very interesting effect on the body—an effect that is best understood in terms of synesthesia, onomatopoeia, and iconicity. To speak of *meɲɔ* or *Aɲɔ* requires a formation in the mouth and a sonic production that trigger a rolled-up or curled-up sensation and resonance throughout the body.⁹ The iconicity resides, in the first instance, in the curling of the tongue to duplicate the rolling up of the body that is being signaled by the term *ɲɔ*. But beyond this basic iconicity, there is an aural dimension to *ɲɔ* (stemming largely from the nasal *ɔ* rather than from the curling up of the tongue to produce the *ɲ* phoneme) that synesthetically prompts feelings of a kind of texture and timbre of roundness. In his work on lift-up-over sounding, Feld (1988:82) defined *timbre* as “the building blocks of sound quality” and *texture* as the “composite, realized experiential feel of the sound mass in motion,” and I am suggesting here that there is an “experiential feel” of a poetic round, rolling, or curling-up “sound mass in motion” when Ewe speakers say *Aɲɔ* or make the statement “*Nyeamea meɲɔ...*” So while the action or gesture of folding into oneself does not in any literal sense produce an accompanying sound—such that the word *ɲɔ* could be considered onomatopoeic in a technical sense—it synesthetically creates an “experiential feel” of roundness or an inward-spiraling kinesthetic return to the center.¹⁰

When Mr. Tamakloe curled up as he depicted and discussed Tɔgbui Whenya's fatigue, it was quite clearly an “iconic gesture” in that his action bore a close formal relationship to the semantic content of the narrative about their flight from Njotsie and their ancestor's exhaustion (see McNeill 1992:12–15 on iconic and metaphoric gestures). So on one level, we are dealing with an instance of kinesic behavior: a movement of the body that served to illustrate what was being verbally conveyed (Knapp 1978). In addition, we could also simply say that Mr. Tamakloe's rolling up was a display of affect, for while it is usually in a facial configuration that one looks for an affective display, “the body can also be read for global judgments of affect—for example, a drooping, sad body” (Knapp 1978:16). Clearly iconic and affective, here I want to explore how *ɲɔ* is far more than that, and it may be said that *Aɲɔ* itself is metaphoric for a sensibility and a way of being-in-the-world.

More than six years after I taped that interview with Mr. Tamakloe, I phoned a friend in Houston who considers herself an Anlo-Ewe person—even though she grew up largely in Accra and has lived in the

United States for more than twenty years. Her parents had been raised in Anlo-land, she grew up speaking the Anlo dialect of the Ewe language, and she periodically visited relatives in the rural Anlo homeland; hence, she had always and continued to identify as an Anlo-Ewe. I phoned her and very directly posed the following question: "You know how the term *Anlo* literally means to roll up or curl up in the fetal position?" She laughed and said, "Yesss?" I then asked, "What does it mean to you to be part of a people whose name means 'rolled up'?" In her lengthy response was the phrase "resentment and respect." She said that curling up in the fetal position is something you do when you feel sad, when you are crying, when you are lonely or depressed. She said that being Anlo meant you felt that way a lot, but you always had to unroll, or come out of it, eventually, and that gave you a feeling of strength. I told her that I had used the phrase "persecution and power" in one discussion I had delivered about the name Anlo (Geurts 1998:129-136), and I asked if that fit with what she meant. She confirmed that it did.

Resentment and respect. Probing such a sensibility, or an orientation in the world, led me to tracing the linkages between the two items Kwame had told me about: his account of their ancestors' escape from slavery and the migration to the coast, and then their ascendance to a position of influence (and resentment) in contemporary Ghana. The connections seemed to coalesce poignantly around feelings associated with *ɲlo*—and here I have glossed *ɲlo* as "the fetal position," but this translation does not map perfectly from one language and cultural context to the next. While *ɲlo* refers to a bodily position in which one folds or rolls up (curving inward as is customary for a baby in the womb), *ɲlo* does not directly correspond to the posture of a fetus, nor is it reified or objectified in the same way that "the fetal position" is in the discourse commonly associated with Euro-America. Here we can borrow from the phenomenological anthropology of Michael Jackson (1996:1) in refusing to "invoke cultural privilege as a foundation for evaluating worldviews or examining the complex and enigmatic character of the human condition." While I suspect that "the fetal position" is recognized by most if not all human groups, what it means, in what circumstances it is invoked, how it is encoded in local languages, and the ways it is elaborated or repressed are just some of the issues we can wonder about as we resist the assumption of equivalence from one cultural world to the next. With Togbui Whenya's "*Nyeamea meɲlo* . . ." as a critical moment in their migration story and with Anlo as both a toponym and a label they readily assign to their own "ethnoscape" (Appadurai 1991), I am led to ask

about the consciousness of *ηλο* in its “lived immediacy” among people who grew up attending to and orienting themselves toward *ηλο*.

EMBODIED CONSCIOUSNESS

Toward that end, I want to now shift our notion of *ηλο* away from that of “the fetal position” and ask what does it mean to grow up with *ηλο* as an underlying theme (albeit on an unconscious level) of one’s cultural history, identity, and ethnicity? How does a person make sense of *ηλο* as a fundamental aspect of *Αηλοτωο* (one’s people), *Αηλογα* (one’s ancestral homeland), and *Αηλογβε* (the language one speaks)? I would suggest that as a historically constituted object, *ηλο* paradoxically symbolizes *freedom* from enslavement and *exhaustion* from the flight, *joy* for the arrival at a new homeland and *sorrow* for those who died along the way. It is emblematic of *comedy* in the sense that people often laugh when discussing the fact that their name means “rolled up,” and *tragedy* in the sense that *ηλο* signifies aging, returning to the fetal position, folding into oneself and then into the ground. Merieau-Ponty (1962:148) surmised, “To be a body, is to be tied to a certain world, . . . our body is not primarily *in* space, it is *of* it.” Anlo-Ewe people are of that time-space of *Νοτςιε* on to *Κετα-Αηλογα-Αηακο* (etc.), of the Anlo homeland to Ghana and West Africa in general to living in Europe and the United States, and they are still telling that story of the flight from *Νοτςιε* and *Τογβυι* *Whenya* rolling up. What interests me is how *ηλο* constitutes and is constituted by the existential condition of being Anlo (of people who grow up as or identify as *Αηλο*).

The migration story was told to me on numerous occasions and by a variety of individuals.¹¹ Furthermore, when it was recounted, certain individuals imitated *Τογβυι* *Whenya*’s rolling into himself, thereby literally rehearsing this somatic mode of attention reflected in their name. What happens to a person’s *being-in-the-world* when she “rehearses” (re-lives, re-enacts) *Τογβυι* *Whenya*’s *ηλο*? The experience could be reduced to a cognitive process of intellectual reflection in which *Τογβυι* *Whenya* and his behaviors are objectified, or treated as an historical and cultural object distinct from the storyteller. But the question that arose in my mind was why in more than a dozen instances people did not simply explain to me in words how *Τογβυι* *Whenya* coiled up; instead they spontaneously reenacted (and relived) this almost primordial somatic mode referred to in their language as *ηλο*. I also became intrigued by how, as the months proceeded and I became *sensitized* to Anlo *sensibilities*,

my own bodily response to the climax of the story was to join in with the rolling up when Tɔgbui Whenya expressed his exhaustion. The point here is that among many individuals who participate in an Anlo ethnoscape, there exists an attention to *ɲlɔ*—a probably unconscious and clearly somatic mode of attention—that defies delineation in our traditional analytic categories.

I turn to the argument that one way to treat this culturally constituted phenomenon is to return to the phenomenon itself and to fully embrace the *indeterminacy* of *ɲlɔ*. Csordas explains (1993:149) that the “‘turning toward’ that constitutes the object of attention cannot be *determinate* in terms of either subject or object, but only *real* in terms of intersubjectivity.” Consequently, *ɲlɔ* becomes “real” in a time and space between body, mind, self, other, subject, and object (rather than exclusively in one of those domains). Such indeterminacy as is illustrated here is an essential aspect of one’s existence in the “lived world of perceptual phenomena” that constitutes Anlo ethnoscapings and Anlo selves. A methodological approach of “embodiment” (Csordas 1990) suggests we ask, when “turning toward” or attending to *ɲlɔ*, not only what is gleaned cognitively (which may turn out to be the least fruitful analytic category in relation to *ɲlɔ*) but what is experienced in terms of intuition, emotion, imagination, perception, and sensation (cf. Csordas 1993:146–149). The next section will begin to address this concern and will lay some of the groundwork for my contention that a “turning toward” *ɲlɔ* is a fundamental though mostly unconscious dimension of self processes in Anlo contexts and in the development of Anlo sensibilities, for to many Anlo people, *ɲlɔ* holds something chthonic or “primordial” (if you will) about human existence.

RESENTMENT AND RESPECT

I have described several dualistic phenomena that inhabit or constitute the idea and experience of *ɲlɔ*: *freedom* and *exhaustion*, *joy* and *sorrow*, *humor* and *grief*. While this portrayal connotes a holistic and balanced essence for *ɲlɔ*, I believe that in general *ɲlɔ* tends more toward the exhaustion, sorrow, and grief side of the equation. Earlier I suggested that this is in part due to the iconicity of *ɲlɔ* and the way that the utterance itself can synesthetically create an “experiential feel” of roundness or an inward-spiraling kinesthetic motion toward the center. This is not to suggest that most Anlo-speaking people are completely inward or morose (as was the feeling of the linguist immersed in translating funeral dirges

and laments), but I do think that "being Anlo" (or *Anlo-ness*) involves a certain sense of persecution and a feeling of being misunderstood, maligned, and feared and that this dimension of their identity (or of an Anlo sensibility) is embodied in the melancholy and inward-turning somatic expression *ɲlɔ*. This raises the question of why some Anlo speakers feel persecuted and misunderstood and how this relates back to the two pieces of information I first heard from my friend Kwame.

The migration story recounted earlier indicates that Anlo-speaking people have lived in their present homeland for about three hundred years and came there due to persecution by King Agokoli, who ruled Nɔtsie. Histories of Ewe-speaking peoples prior to their life in Nɔtsie also focus on movement westward out of Oyo and then Ketu presumably as a result of persecution. Hence, the telling of histories among Anlo-speaking people rehearses (almost mythologically) stories and collective self-images revolving around experiencing persecution and fleeing from oppressive situations, triumphing in escape and freedom, and facing persecution in yet another place.

One can judge the pervasiveness of this view from a small pamphlet (Barawusu n.d.) I purchased at a bookstore in Anloga. The pamphlet was written and produced by a secondary school student named Solomon M.K. Barawusu and is entitled *The Hogbetsotso Festival: A Comparison between the Liberation of the Ewes from Slavery in Notsie—Togo—under the Wicked King Agorkorli and the Liberation of the Israelites from Slavery in Egypt under the Wicked King Pharaoh*. The opening lines of Barawusu's poem in free verse are as follows:

If there have ever existed
 Any twin nations of the world
 With astounding records of similarity
 In their struggle from slavery to freedom
 Such twin undisputable nations
 Are the Israelites and the Ewes
 The Bible and Ewe history
 Prove them sisters in terms of slavery
 Brothers in terms of leadership
 Comrades in terms of liberation
 And friends in terms of escape
 Both had common obstacles
 That stood in their way to freedom
 The Israelites had a wicked Pharaoh
 After serving under kind ones
 The Ewes also had a wicked King—Agorkorli
 After serving under kind ones ...

I quote this pamphlet simply to make the point that the self-image of persecution was sufficiently prevalent among Anlo-speaking people that in the 1990s a secondary school student could write and sell locally (through distribution in bookstores) a document such as this. The historical accuracy or the validity of the comparison between Ewes and Israelites is not what matters here, but rather what is of interest is the ethnic imaginings that correspond easily to *ɲlo* as a rolling, coiling-up kind of somatic mode that attends to and expresses the melancholy and sorrow that pervades Anlo-Ewe stories and myths about the past.

Historians attest to the reality of this experience of persecution, which is the heart of the second item that was first told to me by my friend Kwame and which had been reinforced by additional Anlo people that I had since met. Numerous Anlo people have commented to me on how the Anlo-Ewe homeland is devoid of any rich natural resources (particularly in comparison with the gold, cocoa, and timber prevalent in the areas occupied by Asante peoples who live in the forest zone of Ghana). Sandra Greene (1985:83) points out that "after the advent of colonial rule the Anlo sought to overcome the limited opportunities available to them in their own area by emigrating to non-Anlo/non-Ewe districts in Ghana." She then explains that "while few studies exist on Anlo relations with other ethnic groups, it appears that it was not uncommon for the Anlo and other Ewes in diaspora to be the subject of rumor and suspicion" (Greene 1985:83).

Then Greene discusses several specific historical incidents that could certainly be interpreted as "persecution" of Anlo-Ewe speaking people (such as the burning of villages), and she explains how other ethnic groups in Ghana consistently perceive Anlo-Ewe speakers to be "thieves, kidnappers, sorcerers, and ritual murderers" or as people who dabble in "sorcery and evil medicine" (Greene 1985:83-84). Her review of several studies led to the conclusion that "[i]n systematic surveys among and interviews with Ghanaian university and secondary school students, as well as 'the general adult population' about the images of members of other ethnic groups, all respondents consistently described the Ewe in some of the most negative stereotypical terms" (Greene 1985:84). The historical and cultural factors underpinning this situation of animosity certainly deserve careful and lengthy consideration, but a full exploration of relations among various ethnic groups in Ghana is clearly beyond the scope of this study.¹² The point I believe this material makes is that while negative stereotypes of Ewe speakers seem to be generally cultivated by other ethnic groups, they also serve to feed Anlo speakers' self-perceptions of

persecution. Relevant to our discussion here, therefore, is how various Anlo-speaking individuals explained Greene's conclusions and what these explanations then reveal about the ways in which "culture and psyche make each other up" (Shweder 1991:73).

Anloga is the ritual capital of Anlo-land, and the place or the site where three hundred years ago their ancestor Tɔgbui Whenya is said to have experienced the emotional and sensory feelings of *ɲlɔ* when he bent over and curved his body inward with arms and legs drawn toward his chest, resting and determining that his people would rest there too. In *ɲlɔ* itself we find an indexical sign of a central feature of what we might call an Anlo sensibility: the perduring mood of sorrow and woe that is counterbalanced by the sense of strength and vigor when springing back out of this position. As one *mɔfiala* explained, "There is an Anlo proverb which states that *Amea deke metsɔa anyidɛfe wɔa mlɔfe o*—Nobody makes the place he fell his sleeping bed. Tɔgbui Whenya may roll or curl up but he will surely spring back with strength, power, and energy to resist every form of enemy persecution and domination. *Nyeamea menɲlɔ* has defined our worldview as far as fear of subordination by other ethnic groups is concerned" (Adikah 2000).

Many Anlo-speaking people with whom I worked began their explanations of persecution with reference to the dearth of natural resources in their own homeland. They explained that since the land provided limited opportunities for livelihood or for inheritance of wealth, the place of Anlo-land itself was a source of depression. While it remained a place that they held close to their heart because it was the ground of their heritage and childhood (in the case of many individuals), Anlo-land did not provide a ready source of sustenance, with its sandy soil and lack of industry, in the late twentieth century. Due to these conditions, many Anlo speakers have stressed education for their children and the development of skills that would allow them to work in other areas and to mingle with other ethnic groups. For instance, many Anlo speakers pointed out how they typically learned various other languages spoken in Ghana (such as Twi, Ga, Akan, or Fante) but they very seldom encountered an (ethnically) non-Ewe Ghanaian who could speak Ewe. One *mɔfiala* told me that an Ewe professor once said to him, "Kofi, *agbalea srɔm haa?* You know that we have nothing. It [studying] is the only mineral resource we have." This emphasis on education has led to perceptions of Ewe-speaking people in general and Anlo speakers in particular playing the role of what some call the "intelligentsia" in contemporary Ghana.¹³ What they meant was that although Ewe-speaking people (and especially

Anlo-Ewes) were a minority in Ghana, they were also conspicuously active and present in the professional and educated sector of the nation. A number of people explained that while other ethnic groups claimed this was due to nepotism or "tribalism," among Anlo speakers it was perceived as resulting from the higher percentage of Ewe speakers (compared with other ethnic groups) who achieved advanced levels of education and who were therefore qualified for civil sector and professional occupations. Anlo speakers often expressed that they pursued work in the civil sector due to limited economic opportunities in their homeland, and the self-perception of being Ghana's intelligentsia was considered as burdensome as it was beneficial—hence the connection back to a *mythos* summed up in the trope of *ɲlo* (coiling up or rolling into oneself) as a somatic and kinesthetic mode that attends to and expresses a sensibility featuring melancholy and sorrow. As my friend in Houston explained, "Being Anlo, for me, is about respect and resentment: on one hand they respect us for being so industrious and hard working, but then they turn around and resent us when we succeed. It just makes me sad."

Another explanation about why Ewe-speaking people in general were feared, disliked, or negatively stereotyped revolved around their classic ritual practices and moral code rooted in a complex religious system commonly referred to by outsiders as *voodoo* or *vodun* (for background see Blier 1995; Gilbert 1982; Meyer 1999; Rosenthal 1998). All over the world the English term *voodoo* elicits pejorative images and thoughts that illustrate why practitioners were frequently labeled as "thieves, kidnapers, sorcerers, and ritual murderers" (Greene 1985:84). *Vodu* is an ancient metaphysical philosophy and set of sacred practices involving the use of herbs, incantations, sculpture, and so forth to reinforce Anlo-Ewe moral codes (see Blier 1995; Geurts 1997; Rosenthal 1998), and it will be discussed in more detail in chapter 8. The fact that Anlo speakers themselves realized others in Ghana perceived aspects of their classic religion in a very negative light is evidenced by the deeper issue being addressed by Greene in the work referred to previously about ethnic relations in Ghana.¹⁴ Greene suggests an explanation for why the office of the Paramount Chief (known as *Awoamefia*) was once clearly associated with religious and ritual practices, but more recently these associations have been omitted or dropped in most oral accounts of traditions and history surrounding the Paramount Chief.

Most place emphasis in their discussions of the nature of the Anlo political system on the non-religious aspects of the *awoamefia* office; they also omit or downplay any reference to the role of religion in any of the other politi-

cal offices as well. Instead they focus on those features in the political system that they themselves note are quite different in kind, but nevertheless share some common characteristics with the perceived predominately secular Akan political culture which has come increasingly to dominate the popular image of southern Ghanaian culture in general. This, I believe, is not an unconscious act of omission, but reflects the concerns of these scholars not to focus on information that can be misinterpreted and misused to besmirch the image of the Anlo. (Greene 1985:84)

Since Anlo-Ewe religious practices were feared and viewed in a negative light by many Ghanaians, West Africans, and "outsiders" in general, associations between such actions and the Paramount Chief (as well as other politically oriented items) were gradually downplayed.

In other circumstances, however, fear of the ritual powers of many Anlo speakers was exploited, since stories abounded among Ghanaians about the potency of Ewe *juju*. A vignette from my fieldwork in 1994 may illustrate this point more clearly. Marion, a young American researcher I knew in Accra, purchased a twelve-foot piece of *adinkra* (cloth) in the marketplace of the Center for National Culture, but when she delivered the cloth to her seamstress (who was an Anlo-speaking woman with whom I was also acquainted), Marion learned that the cloth was very old and would soon begin shredding or tearing apart. Indeed, the seamstress showed me the very cloth, and as she pulled gently on the threads, she demonstrated how the weave of the *adinkra* was very loose. Marion's Ewe-speaking friend, neighbor, and occasional research assistant, Rejoice, suggested that Marion had been cheated and that they should return to the market and confront the merchant from whom she had purchased the cloth.

Several weeks later they recounted to me how they went to the market together and Rejoice appealed to the merchant while speaking a combination of English and Twi (the national lingua franca), but the merchant and her partners refused to exchange the *adinkra* for a newer, more durable fabric. The dialogue escalated into a heated argument, but the merchant refused to budge. Rejoice then began escorting Marion toward the exit, stopped, turned around to face the merchant, and declared loudly and *in Ewe*: "*Miekpɔge loo!*" This translates simply as "You will see!" but is closer in meaning to the English phrase "Just you wait!" and connotes a curse or impending recourse to sorcery. They then turned and exited the market. Approximately five minutes later a young man from the stall (probably the son of the market woman) came running up to them with a splendid piece of *adinkra*, beseeching them to exchange it for the old and tattered cloth. The transaction was completed and they left.

The point of this story is that once reason failed to produce a positive result, Rejoice made it known to the merchant (and others in the market) that she was an Ewe (-speaking) person, which in and of itself signified access to the powers of a potent curse based in *vodu*. This display thereby exploited, to a certain extent, general perceptions of Ewe-speaking people: that they could and would resort to using a curse (or *dzosasa*, as it is called in the Ewe language) to get their way. These ritual practices thus have a quality of indeterminacy; they were simultaneously a source of persecution and power. Here *resentment and respect* hold an indexical relationship to *ɲɔ* as a rolling, coiling-up kind of somatic mode that attends to and expresses a melancholic Anlo sensibility.¹⁵

GRASPING THROUGH TO THE MYTHOPOEIC

To further probe this association I want to return to the issue of what Bourdieu calls the “socially informed body” and to begin to raise some questions about cultural memory. The *body* that we encounter in Bourdieu is not divorced, of course, from either the mind or the social environment, but rather he insists that “every successfully socialized agent ... possesses, in their *incorporated state*, the instruments of an ordering of the world, a system of classifying schemes which organize ... practices...” (1977:123–124, emphasis added). The incorporated state at question here is one of Anlo ontology. That very Anlo ontology begins, in a word, with the migration story or mythic account of how Tɔgbui Whenya led his people out of slavery and then folded into himself (and declared “*Nyeamea meɲɔ...*”)—a story that may have been circulating for three hundred years.¹⁶ Bourdieu has suggested (1977:124) that “to grasp through the constituted reality of myth the constituting moment of the mythopoeic act is not, as idealism supposes, to seek in the conscious mind the universal structures of a ‘mythopoeic subjectivity’ and the unity of a spiritual principle governing all empirically realized configurations regardless of social conditions.” Bourdieu’s argument is that grasping through to the constituting moment of the mythopoeic act involves instead a reconstruction of the principle of the *socially informed body*, which is a principle that unifies and generates practices and which is inextricably cognitive and evaluative. His notion of evaluative, of course, opens the floodgates of the sensory, for evaluation involves taste and distaste, compulsion and repulsion, and the attentiveness and tuning out that is done through all sensory fields. Here I am suggesting that *ɲɔ* is a part of the socially informed body of those who share in the her-

itage and sensibility of being Anlo, or those who participate in and are oriented to an Anlo ethnoscape.

But we cannot seek the mythopoeic subjectivity of *ηλο* merely in the conscious mind. We have to break away from our own ethnocentric attachment to a dualistic split between conscious and unconscious and be willing to play with the indeterminate space between those categories that are often not meaningful in other cultural contexts. So without backing down from the interpretation of *ηλο* that I am putting forth here, I can acknowledge that *ηλο* is forced into what Bourdieu calls "rational systematization and logical criticism" by virtue of the very methodology he critiques. That is to say, Bourdieu argues (1977:123) that when a person lacks the symbolic mastery of schemes and their products, the only way such a person (an observer) can participate is by creating a model. As an anthropologist and a person who inhabits at most only the fringes of an Anlo ethnoscape, I construct a model of *ηλο* because it is "the substitute required when one does not have . . . immediate mastery of the apparatus" (1977:123). My model of *ηλο*, then, is aimed at approximating a phenomenon at work in Anlo worlds, which I am suggesting cannot be reduced to a word (*ηλο*), an event in a story (Tɔgbui Whenya's declaration and performance of "*Nyeamea meηλο* . . ."), a body posture (curling or folding into oneself), an emotional-sensory state (exhaustion, sorrow, depression), or a cognitive concept (*ηλο* as a mere metaphor of persecution). *ηλο* is part of the "system of classifying schemes," part of the "instruments of the ordering of the world," in an Anlo habitus—an Anlo habitus that has been recapitulating a history of Tɔgbui Whenya's *ηλο* such that we are forced to confront what this means about how *history is turned into nature*.

Merleau-Ponty suggested that in the philosophy and phenomenology of consciousness, the concept of "institution" could serve as a kind of hinge. By *institution* he meant "those events in experience which endow it with durable dimensions, in relation to which a whole series of other experiences will acquire meaning, will form an intelligible series or history—or again those events which sediment in me a meaning, not just of survivals or residues, but as the invitation to a sequel, the necessity of a future" (1963:108–109). *ηλο* might be that kind of hinge, that kind of institution. As an eminently polysemous symbol, it "sediments a meaning" not just of an event three hundred years ago when Tɔgbui Whenya rolled up, but rather it sediments a meaning that is an "invitation to a sequel." It invites the recapitulation of the sensations Tɔgbui Whenya felt when he landed at the ground that has been perceived as Anlo-land

ever since. And as an institution, in Merleau-Ponty's sense, *ηλο* allows for a whole series of other experiences to acquire meaning. As one *mɔfiala* explained in a letter to me:

The Nɔtsie story and *Nyeameu meηλο* invokes a participatory emotion in us. *Meηλο* conveys an image of a curling-up hedgehog. It conveys a nostalgic feeling of tiredness, fatigue, weakness and sadness borne out of never-ending journeys across mountains, rivers, and more significantly of breaking-free from subjugation. "At last I can relax my tired bones!" Tɔgbui Whenya decided to *ηλο* not only because he was tired but also he might have gained a nostalgic moment and the satisfaction that his people, hedged in by the sea and the lagoon, were well protected from enemies. Nɔtsie represents the genesis of our subjugation, our heritage, our ancestry and *Nyeamea meηλο* represents the climax, the conclusion after long years of suffering. Nɔtsie is the beginning; Anloga the finishing point. When my grandmother danced backwards and later curled up with excitement written all over her face, it was a dramatization of ... being Anlo." (Adikah 2000)

NɔTSIE AND THE CENTER: EMBLEMMENT AND AN AESTHETICS-POETICS OF *ηλο*

Amoaku (an Ewe scholar) suggested that for many Ewe people Nɔtsie is metaphorically the sacred mountain, the *axis mundi*, or the place where heaven and earth meet. He tells a story of visiting the site where Nɔtsie used to exist¹⁷—of standing amidst the debris of the wall—and he explains that before he left the site he engaged in washing his face with water and herbs as a "symbol of communion with our ancestral gods" and as a means of atoning for "deserting them" or abandoning and separating from his ancestors.

When certain Anlo people present the story of their own flight from Nɔtsie (Amoaku is from Ho, not Anlo-land), the event is accompanied by what for me is one of the most profound physical gestures the human body can perform: the folding inward or coiling up of *ηλο*. When I first tried to write about witnessing Anlo-Ewe people coil forward as they told me about Tɔgbui Whenya, I was reminded of Jackson's (1989) essay "Knowledge of the Body." He opens with an account (1989:119) of beginning to practice yoga in his mid-thirties. Initial work with *asanas* (postures) was like "unpicking the locks of a cage" because prior to this his body "passed into and out of my awareness like a stranger; whole areas of my physical being and potentiality were dead to me, like locked rooms" (cf. Stoller 1997 on the "scholar's body"). I had been practicing yoga for more than fifteen years before I first sojourned to Anlo-land,

and I mention this because it is possible I was struck by *ɲlɔ* in large part because of this dimension of my own biography. It is commonly understood in yoga that "forward bends" (such as what one does when folding into oneself or gesturing *ɲlɔ*) are known to produce sorrow, nostalgia, and grief. During one particular class I began to spontaneously weep, for reasons totally unknown to me, in the middle of a session on forward bends. My teacher quickly removed me from the group engaged in forward bends and instructed me to initiate back-bending postures. Along the lines of a principle of the obverse, forward bends in yoga must be countered or complemented with backward motion.¹⁸ This anecdote is offered as a way of making two points. First, it is to acknowledge my own predisposition to having attended to or focused on this specific aspect of Anlo worlds, whereas other researchers may have glossed over it. Second, the yogic philosophy of forward bending asserts that rolling up or gesturing in the manner of "the fetal position," or *ɲlɔ*, will necessarily generate sorrow, introspection, even grief, providing a precedent for an association of *ɲlɔ* with sadness, sorrow, and their stories about the past.

So, from *ɲlɔ* as an iconic gesture and the onomatopoeic and synesthetic qualities I suggested accompany the utterance "*Nyeamea meɲlɔ* ..." to the yogic implications of this forward bend, I want to extend this exegesis out one final ring. I want to suggest that when certain Anlo people present their migration myth and we reach the moment of Tɔgbui Whenya declaring "*Nyeamea meɲlɔ*...", we are dealing with a "direct presentation of the feelingful dimension of experience" (Armstrong quoted in Feld 1988:103) that characterizes what Robert Plant Armstrong means by his term "affecting presence." To explore this idea, let me direct our attention to Feld's (1988:103–104) synthetic distillation of Armstrong's three works on aesthetics, consciousness, and myth. Feld explains that Armstrong "wishes to examine works of affecting presence as direct forces and sensibilities, through which one might grasp '... the very consciousness of a people, the particular conditions under which their human existence is possible'" (Armstrong 1975:82, quoted in Feld 1988:103). Anlo and Ewe people lived in oral societies for centuries before the Ewe language was transliterated, and storytelling as well as other verbal arts have a robust history and continue as vital forms of cultural production across West Africa.¹⁹ The myth or legend of Nɔtsie, or the prose narrative concerning their migration out, first struck me as just some story that certain people wanted me to know, but after years of reflecting on how and how often it was presented to me, I have come to

regard the tale itself as a “work of affecting presence” (in Armstrong’s terms) and the moment of gesturing Tɔgbui Whenya’s curling up as an “enacted metaphor.” Feld highlights (1988:103) Armstrong’s argument about how “affecting presences, as works or events witnessed, are ‘constituted, in a primordial and intransigent fashion, of basic cultural psychic conditions—not symbols of those conditions but specific enactments—presentations—of those very conditions—the affecting presence is not a ‘semblance’ but an actuality . . . in cultural terms it presents rather than represents.’” When Mr. Tamakloe folded into himself, it was an enactment, a presentation of the condition of “being Anlo” for more than three hundred years. *Nlɔ* emerges, then, as a trope, an enacted metaphor for a melancholy sensibility, an embodied consciousness with its obverse: *nlɔ* as persecution and power; *nlɔ* as resentment and respect.

One final insight from Armstrong and Feld sheds light on these interpretations of *nlɔ* especially in relation to *seselelame*. Feld suggests that through his interpretive matrix, Armstrong is able to transcend a false dichotomization of cognition and emotion or body and mind: “For him, it is never that the viewer’s affect is caused by the artist’s sensibilities packed into work; it is that the viewer’s feelings are drenched in comprehension of enacted sensibilities that live in the work” (Feld 1988:104). In the course of a myriad of presentations about the flight from Nɔtsie by Anlo interlocutors, when I began to roll or curl up myself, I believe that my feelings had finally become “drenched in comprehension of enacted sensibilities” rooted in *seselelame*. Here I have tried to describe how beginning with “emplaced experiences” in a land washing out to sea, there arose an attentiveness to Nɔtsie as the center and to Tɔgbui Whenya’s never-ending and somatically expressed “*Nyeamea menlɔ* . . .,” which poetically and aesthetically captures a vital dimension of the condition of being-Anlo-in-the-world.

STRAIGHTNESS AND TRUTH: ASPECTS OF MORAL KNOWING

Decades ago Victor Turner employed (1967:43) the phrase “biopsychical individuals” to suggest the inextricability of physical sensations (the phenomenal dimension of experience and knowing) and psychological orientations (the noumenal dimension of experience and knowing). The goals here are not unlike Turner’s penetrating insight into the multiplex (and largely unconscious) ways in which symbolic phenomena are experienced by individuals. While Turner’s specific focus at that point was on ritual contexts, this study includes quotidian life as well as ceremonial settings.

Moral knowing among Anlo-speaking people is a complex topic. Here I introduce three of the more extreme deterrents that people readily mentioned as reminders of the consequences of unethical actions: a tradition in Anlo-land of burying criminals alive (Tɔkɔ Atɔlia), prohibitions on wealth acquired through immoral or illegal means (*ga foɔi mawo*), and a form of restitution in which the lineage must provide (in perpetuity) a young girl to serve in a shrine (*trɔxɔviwo*). They are dimensions of an Anlo moral code that individuals internalize through discourse about these themes and through actions, deeds, and daily conduct (practices). Growing up in Anlo contexts means attending to these themes of Tɔkɔ Atɔlia, *ga foɔi mawo*, and *trɔxɔviwo*. The attending and orienting in turn contribute to the development of an Anlo sensibility, or what we might think of as a perduring mood, a disposition, or an orientation that is “patterned within the workings of a body” (Desjarlais 1992:150). And as one *mɔfiata* stated, this sensibility determines or guides “how you walk through life, how you carry and conduct yourself.” Here again we see the association of movement, one’s comportment and walk, with one’s moral character.

These deterrents are understood to work in the end because of the importance of balancing, or *agbagbaɔɔɔ*, which we saw figure into child-socialization routines. Many Anlo speakers told me that they refrained from indulging in destructive deeds (alluded to previously) even though they had access to malevolent powers because of their concern with maintaining balance.

Tɔkɔ Atɔlia (The Fifth Landing Stage)

“The fear of Tɔkɔ Atɔlia is very real,” explained one *mɔfiata*. “To know that stealing or sleeping with another man’s wife could land you in the ground, buried alive, made me listen well to my parents. It wasn’t just that I thought stealing was wrong, I felt scared of the crows picking out my eyes—like Agbebada, you know—and of the thirst. My mouth goes dry thinking of being buried alive; of feeling each moment of my death.” In my conversation with this young man he made direct reference to a character, Agbebada, in a five-act play called *Tɔkɔ Atɔlia* (or *The Fifth Landing Stage*), written by F.K. Fiawoo (1981, 1983).

The title of the play refers to a piece of land in the settlement of Anloga where the forefathers of those in Anlo-land buried criminals alive according to the *nyiko* custom (Fiawoo 1959a:104–111). Previously forested, by the 1990s the area was a grassy field located behind the An-

loga police station and used as the central site of the annual Hogbetsotso festival (a festival that will be discussed in chapter 7). In the play's introduction we learn:

Our forefathers detested crime and showed relentless severity in exacting the penalty from the guilty. In those days there were no police in our land nor public prisons. Each member of the community was concerned to guard against social disorder, aiding the unwritten laws of the country to operate severely on those who habitually infringed them. Some of these offenders were made by the State to pay fines, others were banished, some were reduced to serfdom, while others were buried alive according to the gravity of the offence.... Concerning stealing, adultery, and the evil practices of sorcery, they said that these acts were responsible for the destruction of nations. They based their view upon their experiences from the days of their migration from Hogbe to Anlo land. (Fiawoo 1983:7)

Numerous elderly people I interviewed expressed the belief that Tɔkɔ Atɔlia was "something of the past" and had no effect of deterrence on the "immoral behaviors of today's young people." However, young people themselves did not necessarily hold that perspective, as indicated by the words of the young man quoted previously. Perhaps due to the influence or currency of Fiawoo's play, young people themselves often referred to *The Fifth Landing Stage* as they discussed what it meant to grow up in Ghana as "an Anlo person." That is, they perceived this site and tales of criminals buried alive in that soil as symbols of the strict code of ethics adhered to by their people. So the young man quoted previously explained that as he grew up he eventually came to understand that the custom was no longer in practice, and he was therefore not really in jeopardy of being buried alive. But he noted that as a child he remembered feeling terrified not simply of the idea but of the actual sensation of being buried alive.

People literally shuddered, therefore, as they talked with me about Tɔkɔ Atɔlia, and they usually spoke in hushed tones. People seemed pressed to make me understand that Tɔkɔ Atɔlia did not represent cruelty or perversity on the part of their forefathers, but rather it was the last resort in their criminal justice system and was a protective and preventive element in maintaining community stability and health. While this practice of burying criminals alive was no longer in effect in the 1990s, I would suggest that stories and memories of Tɔkɔ Atɔlia continued to have a *biopsychical* hold on many Anlo-speaking people with whom I worked. This hold was not merely on the elderly, and numerous young people held an almost somatic understanding (hence, the shud-

dering of the body and the memories of fear from childhood) of the consequences of committing a crime.

Ga foɔi Mawo: Prohibitions on "Dirty Money"

The phrase *ga foɔi mawo* literally meant "dirty monies" and was commonly used to express an ethics about the pursuit of wealth. Earlier discussions covered the issue of the dearth of resources and opportunities for lucrative work in the Anlo traditional homeland. Because of this situation, people commonly ventured out of the area to Accra, other parts of Ghana, throughout West Africa, and beyond, planning and hoping to create an enterprising and successful business. Such initiative was encouraged among many Anlo-speaking families, and several people summed up the prevailing attitude in the following piece of advice they delivered to young people: Go forth, work hard, be industrious, and don't come home empty-handed [i.e., bring back wealth!], but make sure you are not carrying "dirty money." The belief was that "dirty money" was acquired through nefarious means, and people in the family would begin to die if a member brought such money home.

This concept was not so different from *ɔɔigbedi*, or retention of "birth dirt," and here I would suggest that a similar quality marks the phenomenon of "dirty money." There was a kind of dirt or soiled state that could not be washed out of either human beings or money, and the presence of this filth ultimately represented a morally compromised condition. *ɔɔigbedi* (birth dirt) was often identified by an odor emanating from an individual, and the conclusion drawn often revolved around the idea that the person had not received a proper first bath (as an infant) or a proper upbringing in general, and this resulted in a compromised condition not simply in relation to physical hygiene but to the moral and social status of the individual as well. "Birth dirt" left on an infant could never be washed out. *Ga foɔi mawo* (dirty monies) also could not be "cleaned" no matter how much "laundering" the monies were subject to. While "dirty monies" were not identified through olfactory perception like *ɔɔigbedi*, they were perceived in divination and by the "recurring decimal" of death in a given family. That is, if one engaged in bribery and corruption or in accumulation of wealth by immoral means (including employment of *dzoka* or "juju"),²⁰ people began to die throughout the family. There were very few ways a family or lineage could put a stop to this "recurring decimal," but one form of propitiation was *trɔɔviwo*.

Trɔxɔviwo: "The Trɔ (Spirit or Deity) that Takes Your Child"

A *trɔ* was conceptualized as a tutelary god, spirit, or deity, and throughout the Ewe-speaking area shrines and devotional communities existed to serve a variety of *trɔwo*.²¹ *Trɔxɔviwo* was one such category of temple or sanctuary, and its name derived from how the spirit demanded a (usually female) child from the lineage as a way of atoning for a sin or as cosmic restitution for a specific criminal act.²² Unlike *Tɔkɔ Atɔlia* (the burying of criminals alive at the "fifth landing stage"), which was no longer practiced in the latter half of the twentieth century, *trɔxɔviwo* temples were still in existence at the time I lived in Anlo-land. In the 1990s, although the practice was rare, young children (usually virgin girls) were still turned over to become devotees of a *trɔ* and to live at the shrine.²³ It was an extremely controversial subject throughout Ghana, as evidenced by the appearance of frequent articles in the national newspapers (where it was referred to as the Trokosi Cult), and the debate usually focused on whether the practice should be banned. What follows, however, is an exploration of the functions of *trɔxɔviwo* (specifically in Anlo-Ewe contexts) and how this phenomenon related to moral knowing, somatic and sensory modes of attention, and ideas of personhood and well-being.

One *mɔfiɔla* explained *trɔxɔviwo* as "a deterrent sort of thing. It deterred people. They didn't want you to go there, so people lived a *straight* life. If you went there, it meant other people would be following you. Even when you were dead, they had to replace you." This *mɔfiɔla* was referring to the following system described in its "ideal" (but not necessarily actualized) format, which was believed to enforce moral codes. When a person committed a crime such as murder or theft of a significant amount of money (*ga foɔi mawo*: dirty monies), the victims of the crime would travel to a specific sanctuary or holy place and appeal to the appropriate *trɔ* for recompense. The perpetrator would be identified (through divination) and then summoned to the shrine. It was commonly understood that the penalty for crimes of that severity involved a female member of the perpetrator's family (or lineage) "serving the *trɔ*," which meant working and living at the shrine. The girl (who had to be a virgin) would "ritually marry" the priest of the shrine, so the family was required to provide a sizeable dowry and the funds for an elaborate ceremony. However, if during the subsequent years a man saw the young woman at the shrine and wanted to marry her, he could "buy her out of the shrine" (in a sense) by supplying a bride-payment to the priest and

the shrine. Under those conditions, a departure ceremony would be staged for the young woman, who would then leave the shrine as a wife of the man who dispensed the bride-payment.

Marriage to a man outside of the shrine was the only sanctioned mechanism by which the girl could retire or withdraw from the shrine. In the event that no man ever asked to marry her, or if a man did but he failed to provide the bride-payment, the young woman would spend the remainder of her life in the shrine. Under those circumstances, once she came of age, or began to menstruate, she would bear the children of the priest at the shrine. Regardless of whether she remained in the shrine or left, the family was obligated to bring another virgin girl at the time of her death. The debt to the *tro* never ceased; the sacrifice had to be made continuously. The procedure often broke down if a young woman left the shrine to marry an outsider since it was not at that point that the family was supposed to "replace her," but rather they were to bring another young woman to the shrine years later when the original "servant" died. That is, by the time she reached old age and died, families often had forgotten her role in the shrine years earlier and thereby failed to send her "replacement." With the breach would come a rash of deaths in the family, and a diviner (*boko* or *amegashi*) was usually consulted. In cases of a "recurring decimal of death," divination would usually reveal that the family had failed to sustain the sacrifice for a major criminal offense. This could be a recent breach, or it could reach several generations back. The family would therefore be instructed to resume sending a virgin girl to serve in the shrine. As previously explained, the policy was that there was no way to expunge the culpability for a capital crime like murder or theft, and the family would "pay" for the violation for eternity. If they stopped "making payments," family members would begin to die. It is for this reason that the *trɔxɔviwo* system was perceived as a very strong deterrent to criminal behavior and why one *mɔfi* explained, "They didn't want you to go there, so people lived a *straight* life. If you went there, it meant other people would be following you. Even when you were dead, they had to replace you." The sensory content here is more attenuated, but it is none the less important.

As indicated, "people lived a straight life" for fear of getting (themselves and their family) caught up in *trɔxɔviwo*. The use of the word *straight* by this *mɔfi* was not insignificant, for it alluded to the bodily dimension of moral knowing that was integrally tied to the highly valued sensory experiences of balance and movement and to the topic of comportment and morality. It will be recalled that *agbagbaɔɔ* (bal-

ancing) and *azolizozo* (walking, movement) involved posture and gesture, which in turn were read and experienced along a continuum ranging from "crooked" (immoral) to "straight" (ethically sound). The cultural logic underpinning *trɔɔviwo*, I would suggest, contributed to somatic modes of attention centering on straightness, morality, and truth. In terms of symbolic value, the institution of *trɔɔviwo* had a deep grip on its "adherents" as well as a strong hold on people who grew up knowing that *trɔɔviwo* was right down the road (so to speak) if they diverged from the straight (moral) path.

Ewe scholar N. K. Dzobo's work on the phenomenology of knowledge and truth among Akan and Ewe peoples of Ghana directly addresses the issue of straightness and truth. He explains that the most commonly used word for truth in the Ewe language is *nyatefe*.

Etymologically the word is made up of *nya* and *tefe*. *Tefe* which means "place" or "spot" is a common suffix in the Ewe language.... And so *nyatefe* literally means *the statement/word that is at its place, i.e. a correct statement*. A statement is said to be correct when it describes accurately the state of affairs as it is. Another way of saying that a statement is true in Ewe is to say *Nya la le etefe*: "The statement/word is at its place," and this is usually said about the report of an eyewitness.... the report of an eyewitness can be trusted to be true because such reports normally give accurate accounts of the state of things. For this reason when the elders at a court want to question the validity of a report of a person they ask him ... "*Eno nya la tefea?*" Literally it means: "Did you sit down (witness) at the place where the event occurred?" (Dzobo 1980:95)

While Dzobo's linguistic and ethnographic data was generally derived from the northern Ewe-speaking area of Ghana (in and around the town of Ho), this particular item also pertained to customs and dialect of many southern (Anlo) Ewe-speaking peoples. In fact, in the same way that English-speaking people might utter (in response to another's commentary), "That's the truth," Anlo-Ewe speakers might respond with the word "*Nyatefe*," which literally meant "The word is at its place." Truth, in metaphorical terms, had a kind of kinesthetic-proprioceptive quality in that it concerned placement and position. The inquiry "*Nyatefea?*" meant "Is that the truth?" but in essence the question asked whether the word was at its place (meaning proprioceptively positioned).

Furthermore, Dzobo pointed out that the phrase *Eno tefea*, or *Eno nya tefea*, was the common and colloquial expression among Ewe (and I would include Anlo) speakers when eliciting an eyewitness account. He translated this phrase as "Did you sit down (witness) at the place where

the event occurred?" While *nɔ* did not exactly mean "sit down," it certainly referred to a *somatic presence*, and such bodily attendance was perceived and experienced as an integral part of one's ability to "witness," or to know something and recount it.

However, in the phrase *Enɔ nya tefea* and in the cultural logic surrounding truth and moral knowing there was not exhibited much concern with *eye-witnessing*. Dzobo used the term "eye-witness," of course, to translate an Ewe concept into a Western idiom, for visually based knowing might represent what many Westerners would understand best. And certainly Anlo speakers might also ask, "Did you see it?" which would be expressed as *Ekpɔ etefea* and would mean "Did you see the place (where the event happened)?" Such phrasing was not as common, however, as putting it in terms of words, speech, or in relation to one's knowledge of a talking-oriented matter (hence, *nya* and *nyatefe*). In the Ewe language, the whole phrase rested in an idiom of *bodily presence* and *sound* (hearing of words), which was a kind of somatic and aural "witnessing" (or knowing) rather than an *eye-witnessing*. The more somatic and aural rendition, of course, exhibited a direct correspondence to a sensorium in which auditory and kinesthetic perception was culturally elaborated. To elicit the truth, then, the elders might ask, *Enɔ nya tefea* or *Enɔ nya la tefea*: Were you present (somatically) when the word (which was an aurally based signifier for event) was at its place?

Another common way of expressing truth was *nyadzɔdzɔe*, which derived from *nya* (word, matter, speech) plus *dzɔdzɔe* (straight, upright, fair).

Truth as *nyadzɔdzɔe* therefore means literally "straight statement/word," and so falsehood is referred to as *nyagoglo* or *nyamadzɔmadzɔ*, meaning "crooked statement/word." ... The knowledge of normative truth-statements is acquired through long years of experience and is also passed down from generation to generation. In non-literate societies the memory is the repository of truth as *nyadzɔdzɔe*. (Dzobo 1980:97-98)

Truth as straightness reverberates back to the explanation given by one *mɔfiala* that "people live a straight life" in part because of their fear of *trɔxɔviwo*. Righteousness, fairness, and moral knowing were culturally construed as straight words, straight statements, straight behavior, and even (referring to the discussion of *azolime* in chapter 4) a "straight walk."²⁴ *Trɔxɔviwo*, therefore, symbolized the ultimate penalty for the morally compromised condition of "lack of straightness," or divergence from a moral and truthful life.

Additionally, *trɔxɔviwo* represented an intricate convergence of self, society, and cosmos, which will be taken up in greater detail later and which was alluded to over thirty years ago.

Closely related to the ordeal but probably more exacting is the custom of *fiasiqixexe*, a sort of penal servitude by which a criminal is bonded to serve for life in a cult house in atonement for his crime. In lieu of deciding guilt or innocence by simple ordeal, where the gravity of the offense warrants it, one of the “convent cults” (*trɔxɔviwo*, lit. cults which take in children) may be sworn. Where perjury is established by the god concerned, the person involved engages in what is known as *fiasiqixexe* or ritual expiation. He enters the cult house and dedicates himself to the service of the cult as a cult servant. If he dies in service, it is the responsibility of his family to make replacement. If the original crime is murder, his life may be claimed immediately by the cult, but the family responsibility to the cult remains unchanged. The understanding is that the family has entered into a perpetual covenant with the cult to the effect that a member of the lineage shall always be in attendance. Negligence in this ritual obligation is visited continuously with death in the family until the contract is honored again. *Fiasiqi* thus poses a grave threat to the survival of members of a family; it may even cause the extinction of a whole family. The severity of this form of atonement is enough to restrict, if not deter recourse to *fiasiqi*. It is an effective means of the ritual proscription of crime. (Fiawoo 1959:116–117)

While D. K. Fiawoo’s details varied slightly from how the practice was explained to me, relations among the individual, the family, and the spirits (*trɔ*) were basically the same. That is, “personal, social, and cosmic fields of Being” were considered to be inextricably woven together (Jackson and Karp 1990:23), so that the actions of one individual “may even cause the extinction of a whole family” (Fiawoo 1959a:117). The cultural logic and embodied experiences surrounding *trɔxɔviwo*, then, contained deep principles about being a person in Anlo ways, beginning with the fact that the *well-being* of “selves” (or biopsychic individuals) was integrally tied to the health and balanced nature of social and cosmic bodies.

While the example of *trɔxɔviwo* might be an extreme manifestation of this principle, it demonstrates how a person existed only in the sense of how they were related to other persons. If a person committed murder or theft (on the scale of *ga foɔi mawo*), penance did not end with any imagined boundaries around the individual, but plagued the lineage for eternity. In this way personhood was defined in part by intersubjectivity, by the connections among the body-self and sociofamilial conditions and spiritual concerns.

Moral knowing in Anlo contexts, therefore, was situated in the truthfulness of these principles, and this *knowing* was not simply a cognitive experience but was carried around at the level of sensation and emotion. As we saw in the young man's reflections about Tɔkɔ Atɔlia, people did not experience the fear and effects of something like *trɔxɔviwo* only at an intellectual level, but somatically and affectively retained this understanding and knowledge. This example of somatic modes of attending to straightness and truth (as an aspect of moral knowing among Anlo-speaking people) begins to demonstrate how bodies, selves, and others are ontologically and epistemologically interwoven.

TRɔNA ZUNA: SHAPE-SHIFTING AND
MYTHIC LEGENDS OF TɔGBUI TSALI

Fiagbedzi the teacher referred to Tɔgbui Tsali as "Jesus Christ of the Anlo people." Startled by this characterization, I asked Fiagbedzi to clarify what he meant. He explained that Tsali was a powerful person capable of miraculous and magical deeds and then recounted a famous story I had heard from other *mɔfiawo*. When Tsali was young and still under the tutelage of his father, Akplomada, a day came when Tsali's sense of his own power got the better of him. Akplomada regularly removed his intestines to cleanse and dry his internal organs as a method of keeping them healthy. During one of these routines, Akplomada handed the intestines to Tsali and asked his son to help dry them out. Thinking he could outwit his own father, Tsali changed himself into a hawk and flew up into the sky with the entrails.

Dismayed by the incorrigibility of his own son, Akplomada decided to teach the young boy a lesson. He knew the bird would have to land on a tree before eating the entrails, and he calculated that Tsali would choose the tallest perch around. Akplomada promptly shifted his own shape to that of a *vuti* (silk-cotton tree), and Tsali (in the form of a hawk) descended onto the highest branch of the disguised figure of Akplomada. Tsali placed the intestines across the bough, not knowing it was actually his father's arm. Akplomada immediately transformed back into his own shape, they both landed in a heap together on the ground, and Akplomada declared, "*Devie nenyɛ, nyemefia nuwo kata wo vɔ o: nyemefia vuzuzu wo o*" (If you're a child, I have not yet finished teaching you all things; I have not taught you how to change [or shape-shift] into a silk-cotton tree) (Mamattah 1976:328). Tsali's father wanted him to under-

stand that while Tsali had already acquired great prowess with the *am-lima* (magical powers) he had gained, Akplomada would always be superior to his son.

Tsali grew up to be what some call the greatest mystic in Anlo history. His use of herbs, magic, and spiritual healing were the basis of dozens of stories concerning his exploits. It is his shape-shifting abilities that interest me for what this indicates about somatic changeability and an associated philosophy or cultural logic concerning the tension between adaptability and essential form. Another famous story about Tsali focused on his role in the flight out of Njotsie—the Anlo migration story recounted earlier. After all the people had fled the walled city and footprints had been planted in the soil facing the gates (to suggest the city was under siege), Tsali supposedly turned himself into a small striped mouse so that he could crawl in and out of the footprints, leaving tiny traces of mouse tracks. This second level of deception created *etsɔ afo wo* (yesterday's old looking footprints) and was aimed at causing chaos for the Njotsie soldiers and guards.

Such legends abound of Tɔgbui Tsali's continual use of shape-shifting to accomplish magical feats. Referred to as *etsi anilima* (magic) or, more specifically, as *tro zu* (to turn, to change into, to become), he had the capability of altering his body or transforming his somatic construct as a means of accomplishing an end. In the process, however, he never lost his essence and always returned to the original form or shape of Tɔgbui Tsali. Shape-shifting, of course, can be found in the myths of many peoples. Nonetheless, I would like to suggest that tension between flexibility—even at the corporeal level—and maintaining some kind of ontological essence symbolizes an important dimension of Anlo sensibilities, especially in relation to personhood and identity. Two contrasting and complementary proverbs may further support this point.

One day early in our fieldwork when my husband was complaining about the taste and texture of the Anlo staple food called *akple* (a dough made from ground cassava and corn), Adzoa Kokui (who delighted in abusing and joking with my husband) instructed him with a proverb: *Ne neyi akpɔkplɔwo fe dume eye wotsyɔ akɔ la, wo ha natsyɔ akɔ*. My husband (whose facility with the Ewe language was negligible) asked me to translate what it was that she was haranguing him about that day. Even when Adzoa repeated the phrase I wasn't able to fully comprehend what she said, but I recognized the word for "roads" and heard something about "if you go to their town," but the rest of her sentence was lost on me. Sounding suspiciously like a proverb, I looked in Dzobo's (1975:21)

book for something about toads and found the saying, "If you visit the village of the toads and you find them squatting, you must squat too." Confirming with Adzoa Kokui that this was indeed the advice she had delivered to my husband, I then found myself reflecting on the fact that while his complaint had to do with food (hence, the sensation of taste), the saying drew on the image of altering one's body posture as a symbol of adaptability.

If we take proverbs to be illustrative of certain facets of cultural logic and habitus, this one certainly not only indicates that you should be able and willing to squat or alter your form when required but also displays a strong value concerning flexibility. Adaptability when dealing with other cultural or ethnic groups was a character trait I heard many Anlo-speaking people discuss as something they prided themselves on exhibiting. Since this was not a comparative study, I do not have any information to suggest whether Anlo speakers as a group were actually more or less flexible than other Ghanaians, but they definitely perceived themselves to be an adaptable people (both as individuals and as a group). In another non-Anlo, but Ewe-speaking context, Ewe personhood has been described as involving "practices of camouflage" that take part in "a larger aesthetic of masking and changing identities, and in Ewe selfhood it is 'masks all the way down.' Such masks, costumes, camouflage, and make-up are not indications of artificiality but rather of diverse dimensions of agency" (Rosenthal 1998:81). Changeability, or a "chameleon capacity," was a characteristic perhaps more widespread than just among Anlo people, possibly marking Ewe personhood more generally.

But specifically in terms of what I am referring to as Anlo forms of being-in-the-world, adaptability was a theme I encountered in many contexts, and it relates back to the description in chapter 5 of the practice of flexing a baby's joints so as to make her into a flexible, supple person. However, while the proverb emphasized adjusting to the ways of others, doing things as others did them even at the level of attending to alternate somatic modes (squatting with those whose habit was to squat), the proverb did not suggest that one's essence, then, somehow became that of a toad.

In perusing Dzobo's extensive record of Ewe proverbs, I noted a second saying that seemed to indicate a notion of limitations on completely shifting one's shape: *Siande titi ŋui de ko ŋu, mezuŋ zi o* (If a black antelope rubs herself against an anthill, she does not become a deer as a result) (Dzobo 1975:149). After discussing this with several Anlo speak-

ers, I learned that it was not a phrase commonly used in the southern area since antelope and deer were creatures of the woods and not typically found living in the terrain of the Anlo homeland. Several *mɔfiawo* suggested that it was probably recorded among Ewe speakers near Ho but that the logic was still definitely applicable in Anlo contexts. The proverb demonstrated that if you were a black antelope, no matter how much brown color you rubbed upon yourself (from the anthill), you would not become a deer as a result. You could change your color to be like the deer, or alter your shape when among toads, but that did not erase the essence of who you really were. As often as Tɔgbui Tsali transformed himself into another shape, he always returned to his original form of Tsali. The two proverbs illustrated a cultural logic that embraced tensions between essentials and changeability, between self-acceptance and willingness to adjust to others. And both proverbs drew on imagery of somatic or sensate aspects of being to symbolize the lessons on identity they aimed to teach.

“Not stable, being is highly changeable, always in transformation.” These are words written to describe an Ewe philosophy of personhood (Rosenthal 1998:174) but could equally be applied to Tɔgbui Tsali and all that he represents specifically in Anlo-land. This theme of essence and changeability, then, is present in other Ewe contexts as well. In a wider sense there seems to be a tension between an “essence of Eweness” and the “constant absorption of things-supposedly-not-Ewe by Ewe people, their implicit refusal of essence and of identity” (Rosenthal 1998:29). Regarding Ewe personhood in general others have commented on a “radical indeterminacy of the person” (Rosenthal 1998:174), which further underscores the account I have given of specifically Anlo people in a large Ewe cultural complex.

Many Anlo-speaking people believe deeply that there is something essential about being a person in Anlo ways. Many Anlo speakers migrate to other regions of Ghana, West Africa, and throughout the world, and they pride themselves on adaptability such that if they *visit the village of the toads*, they attend to *squatting*. But even when living in another cultural setting, Anlo persons usually carry (in their being) the essence of Anlo: they carry the complex sensations of *seselelame*, they carry the embodied paradoxes of *ɲlɔ*, they carry the memory of criminals buried alive at Tɔkɔ Atɔlia, they carry embodiment of the story of escape from Nɔt-sie, and they carry the knowledge of the shape-shifting abilities of their mythical ancestor Tɔgbui Tsali. While this is but a brief and cursory look

at Anlo forms of being-in-the-world, it begins to illustrate linkages between cultural models and the social experience of the individual, for many Anlo speakers believe that maintenance of these forms (these memories, morals, logics, and ways of being-in-the-world) are essential to their personal and collective identity and well-being.

The next chapter will turn to an examination of Anlo rituals that reinforce the somatic mode and philosophical notion of balance. But it will begin with an exploration of the meaning and significance of the phrase *Meɖu dze o* (You've not eaten salt), which bemoans the tragic state of an Anlo person who does not know or cannot make use of such *thematized aspects of the world* as *ɲɔ*, *Tɔkɔ Atɔlia*, *ga foɖi mawo*, *Tɔgbui Tsali*, and so forth. *Meɖu dze o* (You don't eat salt) represents another emic theme that many older *mɔfiawo* insisted I record as an Anlo way of referring to those who do not know their own language, history, and culture.

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