

Cover Page



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## 2. Collecting the corpus

This chapter describes the fieldwork during my stay in Benin. I will first describe the social context during the fieldwork and the political situation at the time. I will enter into the planning of the project and the preparations for the recording. The chapter continues with the actual collection of the corpus. Finally, I will describe the transcription and translation.

### 2.1. The social and political context of the fieldwork

The preparations and the recording of the corpus took place in 1975 and 1976. This section describes the traditional context in the rural communities in Benin at that time and the changes that the Marxist-Leninist revolution brought about.

#### The traditional context

In 1976, the economy of the rural areas in the south of Benin depended on the growing of crops of starchy staples like maize, peanuts, and plantain. Yam, cassava, and millet were brought in from the north of the country. People in the south grew all kinds of vegetables as well. Small husbandry was a common practice. People lived in dwellings where a number of families lived together. A village consisted of a number of larger and smaller compounds. The supply of electricity was exceptional, but oil lamps were common.

The chief of the village officially represented the central government, but in daily life, he shared his power with the priests and the diviners. In this way, power still had the characteristics of the former Kingdom of **Danxomè**. The power relations within the villages have been extensively described by Elwert-Kretschmer (Elwert-Kretschmer 1995).

The traditional religion and the practice of divination still played a crucial role in the life of the Fon people (Agboton 1997: 63). The many **vodun** and **vodunsi**, the priests and priestesses of the different gods, and the traditional chiefs and the **bokónò**, ‘diviners’, controlled the rural villages through the awe for gods and ancestors. They controlled the jurisdiction in the villages by ordering sanctions and by stipulating sacrifices. They alone decided the price that people had to pay to get protection against evil. Through this privilege, priests and diviners controlled the local economy and, which was even more important, their own income. They made huge profits through these usurious practices that prevented the efficient food production that a country requires for its stability. The French colonial rule and the post-colonial period did not change these deeply rooted habits. Libations and

sacrifices continued as usual to pacify the gods, in spite of the government's formal interdiction.

The south of Benin has two wet seasons, but the rainfall is structurally lower than in the neighbouring countries. In consequence, the shorter wet season often produces a very low yield or no yield at all. The rainfall has been systematically measured since 1921. The 'Projet d'Agro-Pédologie' of the UNDP analysed these data and produced maps and graphics of the rainfall data of Benin from 1921 until 1977. The performances were recorded in the wet season of 1976. Rainfall was reported low during that year and the villagers feared for their crops. The studies show exactly how little rain fell in 1976: the rain measurement was as low as 794,3 mm. The average rainfall is about 1200 mm/year (Aalders 1977 (a) and (b)). At the end of 1976, serious food shortages became apparent. The people in the rural areas believed that the gods showed their wrath, especially the god of fertility, the one whose name must not be spoken, the mighty **Sakpata**.

### **The political context**

In early 1975 life seemed peaceful. Life was slowly getting worse in terms of scarcity. In mid June 1975, the atmosphere became very tense and a period of curfews followed. Military roadblocks were set up on a regular basis, and the borders of the country were often closed. On Sunday, October 26, 1975, President Mathieu Kérékou changed the country's name from Dahomey to Benin. Five weeks later, on Monday, December 1, President Kérékou made a broadcasted statement in which he gave the country Benin the epithet 'People's Republic'. Radio Cotonou was renamed 'La Voix de la Révolution', the 'Voice of the Revolution'. A new flag was launched: it was green with a red star in the left upper corner. The meaning was clear. The colour green symbolized agriculture and the red star expressed the Marxist-Leninist state system. All of a sudden, I lived in a People's Republic. I still lived in the same house, in the same district called Patte d'Oie, with the same people around me, though everything around had changed. '**E húzú, dandàn, e húzú, dandàn**, prêt pour la Révolution et la lutte continue!' became the common way to say 'Hello'.<sup>21</sup>

What happened before? Right from its start on November 26, 1972, the Kérékou government proclaimed the destruction of the old regime, the political structure and power of the politicians of the past. It also announced the reorganization of the economic, cultural and social structure in order to free the country from foreign domination, and to erase corruption, extortion and nepotism.

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<sup>21</sup> **E húzú, dandàn** means 'It obligatorily changes'.

On December 20, 1975, President Kérékou delivered a speech to conclude a conference of the supreme command, staff and executives inclusive. The title was clear: ‘Libérons-nous de l’état féodal’, meaning ‘Let us free ourselves from the feudal yoke’. The president aimed at the colonial and neo-colonial domination. It was clear that the president was serious about his aims because the conference took place in Abomey, once the capital of the Kingdom of **Danxomè**. The French colonial authorities had dethroned the king of Abomey. The president of Benin imposed his reforms right on the spot where the kings Guezo and Glele had assembled their thrones on the skulls of the defeated Yoruba kings. A more specific aspect of the president’s speech against feudalism was the suppression of the traditional religion and its social structures (Elwert-Kretschmer 1995: 104ff.).<sup>22</sup> This was particularly relevant for my project of recording traditional stories in the rural areas.

The power of the religion and its diviners in the rural areas was still enormous in the seventies of the last century (De Souza 1975). Actually, the witch doctors and the diviners controlled the villages, for they controlled finance and loans. They determined the total sum of the sacrifices that were required to pacify the gods, and as a result, they had the villagers literally in their power (Elwert-Kretschmer 1995: 104). Feeling strongly supported by the elections that he won on November 18 1975, President Kérékou and his administration imposed a decree that stated that the **vodun** cults and the ‘scientific Marxist-Leninist state system’ were incompatible. The administration aimed at breaking down the traditions and the power of the chiefs, the ‘**vodun** priests’ and the traditional doctors in the rural communities in the south of Benin. The administration prohibited ceremonial burials and initiation ceremonies. In the eyes of the Kérékou administration, the feudal structure of the rural areas impaired agricultural production. The administration considered that a sufficient and efficient food production would increase the strength of the economy and the stability of the society. The government used coercion to dismantle the traditions, and through them the power and influence of chiefs and priests.

The ‘La Voix de la Révolution’ radio broadcast and the **Ehuzu** newspaper were widely accusing the traditional priests and priestesses of homicide or murder from the beginning of April 1976. **Ehuzu** was the official publication of the ONEPI (Office National d’Edition de Presse et d’Imprimerie) of the Interior Ministry and the Cotonou Parquet. On April 14, 1976, **Ehuzu** published a striking and outspoken article (Ehuzu 1976, April 14: 4). The article reported the war on sorcerers and their practices in the Oueme province, and had the following title: ‘La lutte anti-féodale

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<sup>22</sup> Elwert-Kretschmer thoroughly discussed the background of this fight that lasted from 1975 until 1989.

dans sa phase active’, meaning ‘The war against anti-feudalism really started’. Until then, the administration had been unable to deal a severe blow to the power of the priests, although it hoped to achieve a waning of prestige. The witch-hunt had started.

In a major interview, published in November 1976 by *Afrique-Asie*, President Kérékou mentioned “une vigoureuse campagne nationale contre les forces qui subjuguèrent la paysannerie. Elles ont pour noms les féodaux, avec leurs cortèges de malfaiteurs professionnels et des criminels sournois que nous nommons dans notre pays, les sorciers. C’est également une manifestation palpable de la lutte des classes entre la féodalité et les masses populaires.” (*Afrique-Asie* 1976, 123, November 29: XII), meaning that there was ‘a vigorous national campaign against the forces that enslaved the peasantry. We call them the feudal landowners. Their processions of professional criminals and sly murderers are called sorcerers in our country. It is also a tangible manifestation of the class war between the feudal system and the masses’ (*Afrique-Asie* 1976, 123, November 29: XII).

The witch-hunt lasted at least until the first months of 1977. The president aimed at a crushing defeat of the witch doctors: “la dérouté des sorciers”. He addressed the leading witch doctors at a summit meeting in the presidential palace: “Vous, les féticheurs, êtes à l’origine de la sorcellerie et de ses maléfices” – ‘Sorcery and its evil spells have its origins in you, the witch doctors.’ (*Afrique-Asie* 1976, 123, November 29: XXIV). Several months later, in May 1977, the concept of the new Constitution of 1977 showed the following article (Article 134): “Les citoyens de la République Populaire du Bénin ont la liberté de pratiquer une religion. Ils ont la liberté de ne pas pratiquer de religion.” – ‘The citizens of the People’s Republic of Benin are free to practice their religion. They are also free not to do so.’ (Ehuzu 1977, May 23: 6).

With the benefit of hindsight of the Constitution of 1977, the government was not concerned about religion itself; the ban was meant to take a firm grip on the country, its inhabitants and its food production.

The reform of the rural administration as well as the witch-hunt of 1976 seriously influenced my project. It caused several interruptions of the performance events (see 2.4.). Moreover, I am convinced that the choice of the stories that the performers told was influenced by the political context.

## **2.2. Planning and organisation of the project**

At the end of 1975, no expatriate could freely travel in Benin without the official authorization of the Beninese government. It was clear that I needed an ‘ordre de mission’ that stated that I had the official authorization of the Beninese government

to record Fongbe oral tradition. It took several months before I got an introduction to the National Language Commission, the ‘Commission Nationale de Linguistique’ (CNL) and its members. Several members of this commission supported my project in many ways. It also helped that I was fluent in French, the official language in Benin. In the beginning of December 1975, I went to Porto-Novo to the Ministry of National Education to pay a visit to the Director General, Pierre Claver Okoudjou. Thereafter I called on the National Language Commission. They received the project of collecting Fongbe verbal art with enthusiasm. Neither the ministry nor the commission had the means or the people to carry out such a project. The CNL proposed that I first applied for an official authorization and that they would support my request for an ‘ordre de mission’ of the Interior Ministry where national security resorted.<sup>23</sup> On December 21, 1975, I sent a request for a formal authorization to collect and record Fongbe verbal art to the Director General of the Ministry of National Education and received a positive answer, dated January 6, 1976. I got the authorization to visit the following cities and their surroundings: Lokossa, Ouidah, Allada, Abomey and Cotonou. The permit required that I contacted the National Language Commission each time before travelling. The Secretary General of the National Language Commission, Marc Laurent Hazoumé, supported my request to the Interior Ministry for the security clearance to travel. This Ministry controlled security and national orientation and reported directly to the President. Wednesday morning, March 3, I drove to Porto-Novo, for a personal meeting with the Interior and Security Minister Martin Dohou Azonhiho. Born a native Fongbe speaker and apparently interested in verbal art, he was curious to meet the *yovo*, the white person, who was interested in the culture of his own ethnic group. He signed the mission order and wished me success on my travels and research. Copies of the authorization were sent to the ‘Direction de la Police pour les Etrangers’ and the prefects of the provinces Atlantique, Mono and Zou. I was the last foreigner who got security clearance and an ‘ordre de mission’ to travel in three provinces to do research for many years to come. It was also the first time that I saw an official Beninese paper that ended with the following formal greeting: ‘Prêt pour la Révolution. La lutte continue.’

### 2.3. Preparing for the recording sessions

The preparations for the recording sessions lasted until spring 1976. I took a keen interest in the rural areas in the neighbourhood of Cotonou and I visited local and regional markets. I got twice an invitation to be at a ceremony in the village of Gbgamey that is situated north of Cotonou. This happened at the yearly ‘cérémonie des revenants’, as well as on the occasion of the rare ceremony for a new chief that

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<sup>23</sup> I was advised to pay the storytellers a token amount and to accept the story as a gift.

was held once in about twenty years. I became more and more fascinated by the verbal art of the Fon people, its entertainment and educational aspects. I formulated the objective of my fieldwork as follows: I would appreciate to assist to the storytelling sessions for children. I wanted to record the stories that they felt important at the current time. I would like to record the stories *in situ*, when the storytellers addressed their audience.<sup>24</sup>

I started learning Fongbe in the summer of 1975. My teacher Désiré Vigan was about my age. He was trained at a Roman Catholic seminary and studied accountancy at that time. I continued to take lessons until the recording of the stories started.

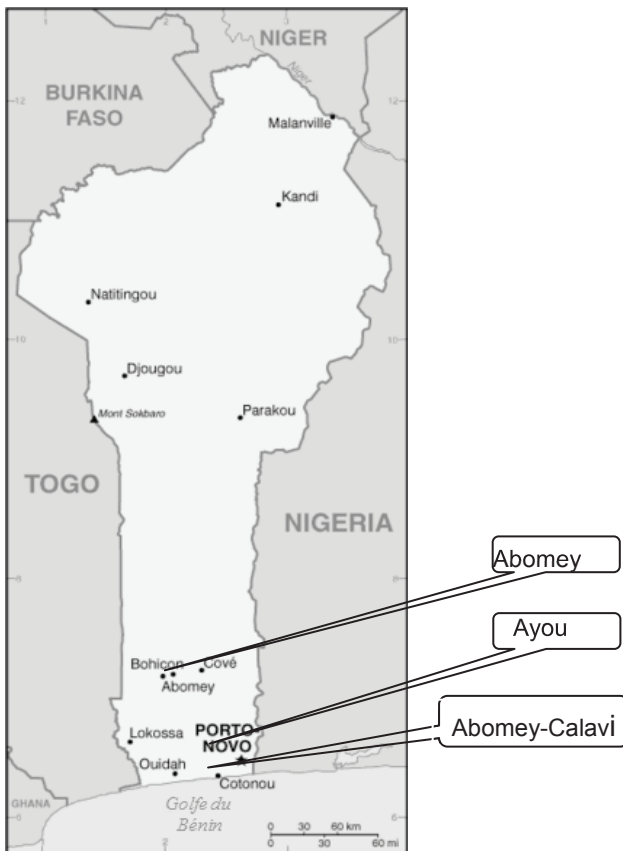


Figure 1 Map of Benin, West Africa

<sup>24</sup> The map of Benin was downloaded from [www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org) 2008-02-02.

at the end of March 1976. Désiré Vigan assisted me in transcribing and translating the recorded stories afterwards. I left the People's Republic of Benin in September 1977 with a corpus of 37 transcribed and translated texts.

### **Collecting the stories**

The Secretary General of the National Language Commission told me that storytelling was a regular pastime of his childhood. The habit of storytelling had disappeared from the cities since the fifties of the last century. Storytelling was now fast disappearing from the rural areas too. Still, there were highly appreciated storytellers who delivered their art. The Language Commission strongly advised against doing fieldwork in Ouidah because of the huge Brazilian influence caused by the descendants of former slaves who had returned to their homeland (Verger 1968: 606ff.).

I recorded Fongbe verbal art stories in three villages in the South of Benin during the months April to June in 1976: Ayou, Abomey-Calavi and Abomey. The aim of the fieldwork was to collect Fongbe texts that transmitted the essential cultural and educational values from generation to generation. I chose the sites following the recommendations of the Beninese National Language Commission. Abomey, the capital of the former kingdom, is at 140 km north of the port of Cotonou. Abomey-Calavi is close to the lagoon and was a port in the past. It was also the place where many families originating from Abomey settled; hence the name Abomey-Calavi. Abomey-Calavi is a large and extended village that consists of several nuclei. Ayou is situated 50 kilometres north of Cotonou on the plateau of Allada. The inhabitants live in an isolated area. They speak **Ayizogbe**, a related variety of Fongbe. Their verbal art cherishes the 'myths of the hunter' (Mondjannagni 1977: 88).

### **The organisation of the event**

In 1976, the recording of storytelling sessions was a special event that required a lengthy and thorough organization per village. Especially as a foreigner, I had to be invited as a guest in order to witness a storytelling session. Three assistants gave me considerable support to prepare the recording sessions in each of the villages. All three assistants were born at the site in question: Antoine Togbehazon originated from Ayou, Désiré Vigan grew up in Abomey-Calavi and Julien Tokoudagba came from Abomey. They all were about my age, about thirty years old. They still remembered that storytelling often happened when they were four years old, but they had forgotten most of the stories.

The assistants made all the necessary arrangements to organize the visit of a foreigner who wished to record Fongbe stories. Telecommunication was scarce in the rural areas outside the capital Porto-Novo, and the cities of Cotonou, Abomey



and Ouidah. The usual way to communicate was to send a message by a fortuitous messenger. The three assistants asked a friend who travelled up North to deliver a message on my behalf in their native village. They subsequently took care of everything. After the arrangement of an appointment, I was welcome to attend a storytelling session. One of the assistants always accompanied me when visiting the villages.

#### **2.4. The actual recordings of the corpus**

The following section chronologically describes the recordings at the three sites Ayou, Abomey-Calavi and Abomey. The hosts left nothing to coincidence. Each session of storytelling was carefully prepared, including the seating of the performer, the guest and her assistant and the audience. My hosts told me that the stories that I asked for, the stories of Fon heritage that aimed at children's education were called **hwènùxó**.

Experienced storytellers were willing to perform the stories. They chose themselves the stories that they wanted to perform. The majority of the storytellers of the corpus were women. None of the storytellers exactly knew their year of birth and estimated it by relating it to an important event that had happened in their village at the time of their birth. The storytellers spoke Fongbe, although sometimes they used Gungbe or Nagogbe words, in particular in the songs that accompanied some of the stories. The two storytellers in Ayou spoke **Ayizogbe**, a Gbelanguage that has some Yoruba features. They were the only storytellers who were literate in French. The members of the National Language Commission assured me that **Ayizogbe** belonged to the speech community of the Fongbe.<sup>25</sup> The other 13 storytellers told me that they did not need writing or reading because they had a good memory.

#### **The Ayou recordings**

Monday, April 12, I started recording stories with a pilot session in Ayou. The idea of the pilot was to test the equipment, and to find an optimal arrangement of the recorder and microphone. The local authorities gave me permission to start recording after they urged me to look at ten women who were chained up one to another. They told me that these women were witches, 'sorcières'. Some moments later, to my surprise, I ran into two of the village's **vodunsi**, 'fetish priestesses', meaning literally 'wives of the **vodun**', who walked freely. I noticed that these women were highly regarded by the villagers. Then we sat together with my hosts in front of a hut, under a roof made from dried palm leaves. I met Cece and Louis

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<sup>25</sup> Quite to the contrary, Capo considers the language a Phla-Phera lect (Capo 1991: 1, 2, 5).

Klikpo who were good-humoured septuagenarians and famous storytellers. The Klikpo brothers were traditional doctors. They had written a pharmacopoeia about the local herbs and medicines that they used. These two storytellers had prepared their performance before my arrival at the village. They had made a list – in French – of the stories that they wanted to tell. They told eight stories in three sessions. The third Klikpo brother Germain was present amongst the audience.

The second time I arrived in Ayou I watched a ceremony of the **vodunsi** who left the convent or ‘thicket’ at the occasion of the achieved initiation of young novices.<sup>26</sup> The wet season had begun; the ceremony was in honour of the one whose name must not be spoken, **Sakpata**, the god of rain and fertility. The second and third recording sessions in Ayou took place inside a hut. Five out of the eight Ayou texts were trickster stories about **Yògbó**. I strongly suspect that the choice to tell the comic trickster stories coincided with the political situation in the village.

### **The Abomey-Calavi recordings**

In May 1976, I went for the first time to Abomey-Calavi, a forty minutes’ drive from Cotonou. My Fongbe teacher Désiré Vigan was born in Abomey-Calavi; he came along as language consultant. We arrived at 6 PM and stayed until 9 PM at the Zomagba compound. The storytelling took place in the hut of Clémentine Zomagba, one of the storytellers. The early evening traditionally was the part of the day that they told stories in Abomey-Calavi. The storytellers were enthusiastic performers, once they got used to the cassette recorder and the microphone. I explained the recording technique and they enjoyed hearing their own voices. However, they did not allow me to take pictures, explaining that they feared that I should take a part of their soul with me. They explained to me that one could not join the ancestors with a broken soul. Four women and six children attended the performances of four stories.

The second session in Abomey-Calavi started also at 6 PM. This time there was some food: grilled sardines and **wǎ** – the typical West African ‘porridge’ made of cornmeal. After the meal, a number of women put bits of **wǎ** on the small calabashes that stood in front of several statuettes in a hut that was a place of worship. The statuettes presented twins and children with an umbilical hernia. The **wǎ** was a sacrifice to the children that had passed away. The storytelling started right after the offering worship. We moved to the compound of Zomagba to attend the performances. We sat outside, in front of the rectangular hut. Six women, four men and seven children were present. The storytelling went on until the youngest children fell asleep. By then it was past 9 PM. Two men and one woman told four stories in total.

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<sup>26</sup> Officially, these ceremonies were prohibited since 1975.

In the beginning of June, I drove to Abomey-Calavi for a third visit. When we wanted to start the recording session, the Mayor and the newly appointed Revolutionary Delegate, intruded in the hut, whereupon the audience left. The Mayor welcomed me and invited me to accompany him into his office to get the recordings done. This session widely differed from the preceding sessions. The audience consisted of only two persons, the Mayor and the Revolutionary Delegate. The storyteller was a young man who originated from Ayou. He performed three stories that were clearly intended to provoke the authorities. At first they marvelled at the topic of sexual harassment instigated by women (AC 9, AC 11). Then they got angry. The performer did not use the introductory formula of a story, but started with 'long ago' and 'this is about the hunter'. During this session, the language consultant refused to explain what exactly was going on. The Revolutionary Delegate got very angry with the last two of the texts, for he thought that they were offensive. He stopped the storyteller and the recording. My consultant and I left the Mayor and the Delegate. Without saying a word, we went to the compound of the Zomagba clan where the session continued privately. All present were nervous, for the intrusion of the authorities had been frightening, though we acted as if it was a hilarious laughingstock.

The fourth and last session in Abomey-Calavi took place a few days later, again at the Zomagba compound. We sat inside the hut, though the weather was nice. Only women storytellers attended this session. The audience consisted of six women and seven children. The situation had clearly changed since April 14, when sorcerers of both sexes were widely accused of homicide or murder.

### **The Abomey recordings**

I arrived at 9.30 AM in Porto-Novo at the National Language Commission (CNL) on June 14 to pick up Julien Tokoudagba. I was happy that he would accompany me as a language consultant to Abomey, once the capital of the Kingdom of **Danxomè**, where he was born. I had not given notice of my arrival to the Community Councillors of Abomey, still remembering my experience with the Mayor of Abomey-Calavi. I hoped that I could avoid a repetition of the censored session in Abomey-Calavi.

On our arrival in Abomey, the first thing to do was to inform the District Chief. I was to show him the authorization of Interior Minister Azanhiho. When I eventually got to see him, he formally informed me that I needed his official authorization in writing to visit the three communes of Abomey. In view of the authorization that I had, he had no right to refuse, but I thought it unwise to quarrel with the District Chief. I needed his cooperation. I was to get the authorization to travel to the three communes of Abomey the next morning.

I got the authorization of the District Chief the next morning indeed. Nevertheless, his authorization was not sufficient. The Revolutionary Delegates from the three communes of Abomey, when shown the formal authorization, informed me that they wanted to censor the recording session. They asked me to come back in a few weeks so that they could arrange things. This specimen of bureaucracy shocked my language consultant and me. Actually, being a member of the National Language Commission, he was involved in the project from the very beginning. He invited me to visit his family. We got into the car and drove away. However, three black Peugeot cars, typical government cars, followed us. It took more than half an hour to lose the officials that pursued us. Finally, we arrived at the compound of the Tokoudagba family without anyone on our tail. They agreed to a storytelling session.

Early next morning I arrived at the Tokoudagba's compound. **Nage Tokoudagba**, an 81-year-old woman told four stories. She was the most remarkable performer I ever met. She started the first story that she told with a brief introduction of herself, when the consultant invited her to do so. She had a very low jazzy voice, and performed one story that was actually a long song in between a spoken prologue and an epilogue (A 3). She sang like singing the blues and accompanied herself by drumming on her flat old woman's breasts, often on the left side of her body (A 3).<sup>27</sup> Two of the performer's stories were similar to those told in Abomey-Calavi. To my amazement, the adults sent children out of the dwelling during the performance of the first four texts. The children in Abomey-Calavi had attended the performances of similar stories! After she finished the fourth story, the children joined the session. Then they told five more stories, though in very brief versions compared to the length of the stories that the performers told in the two other villages. Two youngsters told the last two stories. A four-year-old girl recited a dilemma tale and a ten-year-old boy performed a **Yɔgbó** trickster story while the audience helped him to tell the story, and heartily encouraged him.

That same afternoon Julien Tokoudagba unexpectedly came by to see me. He was deeply worried and asked me to accompany him to the centre of Abomey where one of his aunts stood on trial for having poisoned two children. We drove to a small square where I parked my car. There stood some 20 people down the road waiting for the inevitable things to come. They made sure that they would protect me, come what may. They kept their promise by putting me literally standing in their midst. They pressed my back against an enormous iroko tree and convinced me that one could hardly see me. The accused woman came out of a hut; two men accompanied her. The poor woman's face was ashen. She gazed at the people present without

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<sup>27</sup> Maupoil and Konrad both also reported this combination of singing and drumming: **xo akɔ**, meaning 'drumming the breasts' (Maupoil 1988: 28, Konrad 1985: 16).

seeing them. The trial started with a few remarks that the accused had to answer only by yes and no. She incriminated herself by coercion. Yes, she had given a medicine to both of the children and yes, they had died. The Revolutionary Delegates immediately, and without hesitation, concluded that she had confessed her crimes. The sentence for her was to die from dehydration. She went back into the small hut on the square. Later, I heard that she died after two days.

The summary conviction that I witnessed in Abomey meant the end of my recording sessions. I realized that I would not pay another call to one of the villages.

## **2.5. Transcription and translation**

The corpus consists of thirty-seven recorded Fongbe stories.<sup>28</sup> The size of the corpus is about 57 000 words. I transcribed the recordings into written Fongbe in 1976 and 1977, while living in Benin. I used the official Beninese spelling of 1975 for the transcription of the stories.<sup>29</sup> At the same time, I translated the recordings and their transcriptions into a literal French version (gloss level). My language consultant Désiré Vigan assisted me in working on the stories from Abomey-Calavi and Abomey during three or four mornings a week. Philippe Honsoun, who grew up in Ayou helped me working on five of the Ayou stories. The only dictionary available at the time was the one written by Segurola.

Unfortunately, the recordings of seven transcribed texts disappeared after the transcription (AC 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11). I copied the remaining 31 records on audiotapes in 1977, and again in 1980.

In the years following the fieldwork in Benin, I checked upon the transcriptions and the French translations of the stories. However, I had to work for a living. This forced me to store the tapes and the manuscripts in a metal case in a vault. That was back in 1981. I resumed a study of the Fongbe texts in 2004. I typed out the Fongbe transcriptions and the French translation in glosses before translating the texts into English.

I digitized the original audio sound recordings in 2007. I analysed the recordings with 'Praat', the software programme by Paul Boersma and David Weenink ([www.praat.org](http://www.praat.org) or [www.fon.hum.uva.nl/praat/](http://www.fon.hum.uva.nl/praat/)). The digitized wave files increased the options of checking the transcriptions. Overall, the transcriptions proved to be appropriate. However, it enabled me to review the discrepancy between the records

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<sup>28</sup> I used a portable automatic cassette recorder for recording and transcribing the stories: Philips N 2206, N 2208.

<sup>29</sup> At first, Désiré Vigan refused to transcribe the remarks from the audience, in vain trying to convince me that the audience's interference was odd.

and the original transcripts and to add a lot of small corrections and delicate nuances in the course of my analysis. I corrected several fragments that Désiré Vigan had added to the text to clarify omissions by the performer. Digitization also allowed me to do a quantitative analysis of the utterances and the pauses.

