

Testing Musical Traditions: For social and human development amongst Ga people in South-East Ghana

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the role of several genres of performance arts that were developed or adopted and maintained by the Ga people in Greater Accra in South-East Ghana. The purpose of these genres is to create solidarity, enhancing personal and group identity and assist in collective problem identification, decision making, and conflict resolution. The genres explored here are some of the traditional tools that have been used for centuries in Ga communities for self-help and social and human development. They have provided a platform to create debate and discussion, modify behaviour, expose injustice and celebrate success. The selection of these musical genres was the result of ethnographic interviews, observations, and insights from ethnomusicology literature carried out prior to the field-research here.

KEYWORDS

Culture; development; identity; conflict resolution; arts in development; ethnomusicology; participatory action-research; Ga; Asafo; Adesa; Kpashimo; Adaawe; Ga Mashie; Teshie; Kokrobite

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INTRODUCTION

Whilst working in several African countries, in various development roles, I have observed that the performance of music, songs, and dances, are much more than entertainment, not only connected to self and identity, but also provides social connectedness for the whole community.

In 2012 I undertook ethnographic research into the Ga people in South-East Ghana towards an MMus in Ethnomusicology. The research explored the role of music in the political, social and religious life, ideals and institutions of the Ga people. Due to their location in the capital, Accra, Ga people have been at the centre of a changing society from the arrival of Europeans in Ghana during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, through colonisation, independence, and currently globalisation. Given the dynamic nature of culture, I was curious to explore the extent to which Ga people have tenaciously maintained a musical communication process with a multitude of functions.

This article continues from, and draws on, the 2012 ethnographic research, with insights from ethnomusicology literature. With the assistance of an Artist International Development Fund (AIDF) grant from the Arts Council of England, and British Council, I was able to return to Accra in 2013 to carry out applied research. My aim was to observe how several forms of cultural expression continue to be used by the Ga people to create social and human development in contemporary Ga communities.

GHANA AND THE GA PEOPLE

Ghana is a stable country that celebrated independence from the United Kingdom in 1957. The total population is 25.90 million people (2013) and according to the World Bank development indicators Ghana has now achieved low to middle income status.¹ The economy is dependent on a few commodities (gold, cocoa, and more recently oil) for export earnings.²

My research is located in the urban Accra Plain, in southeast Ghana, which is the multi-cultural capital of the country, and the destination for many thousands of economic migrants from other parts of Ghana, and neighbouring countries. The Ga people inhabit six major settlements each with its own governance structure. Ga are not *one* group of people, but several migrant groups that have fused into one society, with a common language.³ Each of the six settlements represent a different lineage/clan of migrant settlers each with their own unique history and traditions maintained in the oral knowledge system.

Ga people celebrate two annual festivals, the first is the *Kpelejoo* Festival in Tema, which welcomes the spring fertility in March or April (Field, 1937). The second

¹http://data.worldbank.org/country/ghana#cp_wdi.

²African Development Bank. < <http://www.afdb.org/en/countries/west-africa/ghana/> > .

³The Ga people belong to the Ga-Dangme group of Kwa people who inhabit the Greater Accra region of present day Ghana. The Kwa people of Africa include the Ga-Dangme, Ewe, Akwapim, Fanti, Kwahu, and Akim and Ashanti (Osabu-Kle, 2008, p. 1).

annual festival is *Homowo*, held in each of the six major settlements on consecutive weekends throughout July and August. *Homowo* means ‘to laugh in the face of hunger’ and celebrates the harvest. Each community celebrates *Homowo* after observing a thirty-day ban on drumming and noise-making. Activities during the festival are to commemorate a great famine that is said to have killed many Ga people during their migration into the region (Osabu-Kle, 2008).

The purpose of this research was to observe the links between ‘traditional’ cultural expression and contemporary social and community development among the Ga people in their rapidly expanding urban environment.⁴ My use of the term ‘traditional’ music is defined by the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO), as “traditional cultural expression”.⁵

Ga, like other cultural groups in Ghana have a strong performance heritage that faced major challenges during the colonial period. This has left a “legacy of negative attitudes towards indigenous cultures and a wholesale denial of self-worth that undermines the acceptance of traditional performing arts along with the rituals and ceremonies associated with them” (Nii-Yartey, 2011, pp. 282-3).⁶

The government of Ghana supports and maintains Ghanaian performance heritage through the National Ensemble, which represents the nation’s dances with a choreographed collection of performances to represent a few modified dances of Ghana’s fifty plus ethnic groups. After independence, it was found necessary to create a National Ensemble as a touring troupe to represent Ghanaian cultural dance, nationally and internationally (Wiggins and Nketia, 2005, p. 69; Schramm, 2000, p. 342).

Dances observed in a village setting could not be replicated for the stage, “they had to be adjusted to a new performance practice”. As Katharina Schramm points out (2000, p. 345) in a local setting “no clear distinction could be drawn between performers and audience, and active community participation and improvisation were central features of the dances”. To suite mainly the urban audiences the dances were choreographed for a stage situation.⁷

In 2004 the The National Commission on Culture adopted Ghana’s first Cultural Policy.⁸ A European Development Fund (EDF) grant, provided by the European Union, contributes to the government of Ghana’s implementation of the Cultural Policy. National Dance and Theatre are state-supported, whilst a few independent drama and dance companies have survived [or fallen] largely on their own enterprise over the years.⁹

⁴ The term ‘traditional’ proved problematic as ‘postcolonial theorists have brought [...] attention to the invention of traditions’, during the colonial and post-colonial period. (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1992).

⁵ <www.wipo.int/freepublications/en/tk/913/wipo_pub_913.pdf> [Accessed May 2013] “A living body of knowledge that is ‘constantly recreated as traditional artists and practitioners bring fresh perspectives to their work, [...] sustained and passed on from generation to generation within a community, often forming part of its cultural or spiritual identity.”

⁶ Obono Ga Royal Drum & Talk Dance <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eG1Ggg-9h2o>>

⁷ Schramm, Katharina, covers this topic extensively in ‘The Politics of Dance: Changing Representations of the Nation in Ghana,

⁸ The Cultural Policy - <http://www.artsinafrica.com/uploads/2011/04/Ghana.pdf>

⁹ Akunu Dake, Cultural development consultant and Chief Executive of Heritage Development, Ghana. Commonwealth

There is little assistance for arts and culture in Ghana to support the grass root communities. Any community support comes through the Institute of Chieftaincy based in Kumasi.¹⁰ Therefore, any Chieftaincy dispute has a detrimental effect on community development.

ETHNOMUSICOLOGY

The study of music in the field of development is not a new idea. “Ethnomusicologists have repeatedly documented the special power of music for realising social identities and cultural subjectivities” (Turino, 2008, p. 2. Turino cites. e.g. Peria, 1985; Feld, 1988; Koskoff, 1989; Waterman, 1990; Turino, 1993; Stokes, 1994; Sugarman, 1997; Radano and Bohlman, 2000; Turino and Lea, 2004; Feldman, 2006; Buchana, 2006). Martin Stokes (1994; 1997, p. 12) found, during his studies of Ethnicity, Identity and Music, that social activities are “invariably communal activities that bring people together in specific alignments”. “Music of the social alignments can provide a powerful [...] experience in which social identity is literally ‘embodied’. The relationships which are activated through music might also involve the community as a whole”.

This notion of special links between music and identity are frequently offered to explain why “a particular social group, community, population, or nation cultivates [particular] musical practices” (ibid., p. 46).

“The child begins to learn the musical style of his culture as he acquires the language and the emotional patterns of his people. This style thus an important link between an individual and his culture, and later in life brings back to the adult unconscious and emotional texture of the world which formed his personality” (Lomax, 1959, p. 929).

These practices, as outlined by Alan Lomax are part of the emotional patterns that shape our early experiences and form an “important link between an individual and his culture” (ibid., p. 929). Such arguments are put “forward to explain why immigrant groups in large multi-cultural cities cling tenaciously to their ‘traditional’ music” – they are “maintaining group identity in a multi-ethnic society” (Allen and Groce, 1988, p. 4). A mechanism Alan Turley describes as “creating group solidarity” (Turley, 2005, p. 64).

Turley suggests that “the glue that holds societies together, from primitive to advanced societies, is social solidarity.” Events “create a group response, and these responses help to create group cohesion and solidarity because of the shared experience of the [event or] ceremony” (ibid.). Such solidarity can be observed during sporting events, in football stadiums, during demonstrations, ceremonies, festivals, or during arts activity when groups unite towards a common agenda. Some scholars call this type of cohesion “flow”, when during the act of participation, the ego, or self-awareness is lost whilst “integrating and uniting the members of a social group”

Spotlight on Ghana. <http://www.acpcultures.eu/upload/ocr_document/Commonwealth_Spotlight_Ghana.pdf>.

¹⁰ The Chieftaincy Institution is the custodian of the traditions and culture of the people of Ghana. Chiefs and their elders see to the daily lives of the people and ensure social and economic growth and the continuity of the customs and traditions of the people. <<http://www.mcta.gov.gh/about.html>>.

(Turino, 2008; Turner, 1982; Csikszentmihalyi, 1974; Schechner, 1985; Bateson, 1972).

A notable contributor to applied or public ethnomusicology methodology is the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire's dialogic process. Many scholars have, according to Rebecca Dirksen, "latched on to Freire's pedagogy privileging 'native' knowledge, educative action, and the dialogic process: a philosophy that resonates in the engaged and participatory action research (PAR) employed by, among others, Samuel Araújo and Angela Impey" (Dirksen, 2012, p. 12).

In order to share information, knowledge and trust, and to nurture the "right attitude in development projects, participation, is very important in any decision-making process for development" (Servaes, 2008, p. 21). Paulo Freire (2012, p. 76) refers to this as the right of all people to individually and collectively speak their word: "This is not the privilege of some few men, but the right of every man. Consequently, no one can say a true word alone—nor can he say it for another, in a prescriptive act which robs others of their words".

CULTURE IN DEVELOPMENT

I use the term Culture as officially defined by UNESCO at the World Conference on Cultural Policies, Mexico City, 06 August 1982 as follows:¹¹

"Culture [...] is [...] the whole complex of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features that characterise a society or social group. It includes not only arts and letters, but also modes of life, the fundamental rights of the human being, value systems, traditions, and beliefs."

As such, culture is never static as people have the ability to absorb new concepts of modernity, whilst adopting philosophies that fit with their moral values.

Ga society has undergone a dynamic cultural transformation due to colonial occupation and missionary activities from the fifteenth/sixteenth centuries until the mid-twentieth century, followed by neo-colonial development and the more recent 'mass commodification of the arts' and a global concept that attempts to "reduce cultural expression to a state of entertainment" (Gbolonyo, 2009, p. iv). However, as pointed out by Francois Matarasso (2001, Forward), "culture is far more than entertainment". In oral society the stories, songs and dances tell us about each other and ourselves, assisting in a process of understanding our "experiences, our hopes, desires and fears, [as we] build identity, that essential component of humanity and community." Development processes, asserts Matarasso, "which fail to recognize this, which simplistically divide people's resources from their aspirations, or their health from how they feel, struggle to produce lasting improvements in people's lives" (ibid.).

Culture in development asserts John Clammer:

¹¹ Cited from UNESCO - World Conference on Cultural Policies, Mexico City, 26 July - 6 August 1982
http://portal.unesco.org/culture/en/files/12762/11295421661mexico_en.pdf/mexico_en.pdf [Accessed 20 May 2013].

“does not simply involve politics, but more centrally cultural politics, which involves amongst other things the analysis of knowledge itself in the form of a kind of epistemology: the examination of the gendered and social basis of knowledge, of its class, ethnic and cultural biases, and of the fact that in many cultures knowledge is not confined to the cognitive alone, but includes the sensuous and the emotional, and, very significantly, the relationship between humans and nature” (Clammer, 2012, p. 7).

Clammer advocates a “listening approach: the hearing of stories, the respecting of indigenous narratives, the recovery of forgotten voices and of many suppressed histories” (ibid., p. 9). The engagement with culture in development as a process is not about the Western notion of culture as entertainment, mass media or digital technology, but more essentially as “cultural studies, postcolonial studies, globalisation theory, feminist theory, social theory and developments within marginalised branches of cultural sociology such as sociology of the arts” (ibid.).

DEVELOPMENT

As Julius Nyerere argues in his book *Man and Development*:

“Development brings freedom, provided it is development of people. But people cannot be developed; they can only develop themselves [...], He develops himself by making his own decisions [...] and his own full participation – as an equal – in the life of the community he lives in” (Nyerere, 1974, p. 4).

Development is dependent on a process of communication, that is more than the diffusion of information. “Put simply, development programmes cannot produce change without an ongoing, culturally and socially relevant communication dialogue among development providers and clientele, and within the recipient group itself” (Servaes, 2008, p. 15). In the world of development policy, “buzzwords play an important part in framing solutions” (Cornwall and Brock, 2005). Words such as ‘empowerment’, ‘participation’ and ‘behaviour change’ are commonly used to frame a development policy or programme. But whose behaviour needs to change? Who decides what needs to be changed? Why? And on whose authority?

I define ‘development’ as a bottom-up process of self-development within a community, who participate, and utilises community “dialogue that leads to collective problem identification, decision making and community-based implementation of solutions to local development issues” (Servaes, 2008, p. 15). Communication and community participation are explored through this research by observing how music, and musicians, communicate with their communities, and how they could be assisted to maintain a traditional structure (if found to exist) that generates community-driven social and human development.

Human development focuses on the improvement of people’s lives giving people more freedom and opportunities to live lives they value. Therefore, the notion of human development must expand the richness of human life and needs, as seen necessary in the communities.

The United Nations has developed the Human Development Index (HDI) to measure a set of prescribed standards of development, one country against the other. By tracking these statistics on a country-by-country basis the index measures the development progress in different countries.¹²

For many groups of people, particularly in urban centres the notion of freedom and values are bound within the constraints of urban development. In the field, I found many people who had a vision for urban development, but every vision had an agenda behind it originating outside the community.

Nii-Yartey, the leading Ga scholar on cultural activities pointed out:

“When you are consulting the community the people with whom you consult must understand where you’re coming from. Their level of thinking about development should match yours; if you are to have any kind of meaningful communication, it comes down to [...] finding a consultation system that learns about how [people] think, what they think, and how they do things” (Int. WS750110).

Nii-Yartey, outlined the financial problems associated with development in urban Accra. “What we are going through now,’ he said, is ‘we want money from you, not tools to clean the gutters” (Int. WS750109/10).

“The affluent countries are not worried for material things, people are looking for humanity, we have too much of the humanity, and we don’t have the material things. So here is a conflict, and that’s why it comes to deceiving. Their (Ga people) gutters are choked with plastic, giving them malaria, dysentery, typhoid and cholera, but they don’t think that the gutters are the problem, they think that the problem is that they don’t have money” (Int. WS750109/10).

I searched to find an NGO working in Ga communities, using cultural expression or participatory action research (PAR) to engage with the communities. I was not able to find such development or PAR at work in Ga communities.

During my interview, Nii-Yartey stressed the need for community consultation:

“If I am bringing what I call development to your home, it is generally agreed that I will come and ask you. They come inside your house, and they bring with them their own perspectives, some of which might merge with yours and much may be in competition to what you believe in practicing in your own home. So people come, they have NGO’s, they have money and they say we have come to build new houses” (Int. WS750109/10).

Ga philosophy includes an acceptance of people to come amongst them, asserted Nii-Yartey, “we say ‘*Ablekuma aba kuma wo*’, may strangers come to settle among us, we welcomed people with open arms” (Int. WS750109/10). However:

“Right now the dynamism has shifted. It’s a two-prong change. The first is the philosophy or the world view of the people and secondly it’s the kinds of people who have come amongst us, including the mind with which these people have come. The

¹² <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/human-development-index-hdi>

values that these people have brought to the domain of the Ga people have all sought to create a different culture for the Ga”.

These different strands, stressed Nii-Yartey, “are the major issues for the agenda of any serious researcher” (Int. WS750109/10).

SUMMARY OF ORIGINAL RESEARCH

My field research in 2012 had focused on Ga people whose territory consists of approximately fifty kilometres (east-west) along the Atlantic coast, from Lamgba in the West to Tema Newtown in the East. Ga ‘traditional land’ (as they see it) stretches northwards by approximately 40 kilometres to the foot of the Akuapem hills. In 1982, the entire area was incorporated into the Greater-Accra Region and occupies a total land surface of 3,245 square kilometres.

According to the Ghana government population index, the population of Accra was 4,010,054 in 2010, accounting for 15.4 per cent of the total population of Ghana.¹³ Ga-Dangme are mixed groups of people, who migrated into the Accra plain during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. In 2012 Ga-Dangme made up 7.4% of Ghana’s total population, largely concentrated in the Greater Accra Region. The Dangme (Adanme) include the people of Krobo, Ningo, Kpone and Prampram in the east of the Accra Plain. Whilst the Ga people occupy six major coastal settlements including (west to east) Ga Mashie (central Accra), Osu, La, Teshie, Nungua and Tema, in the east of the region.

Each of these six towns has a traditional governance structure that represents the original lineage or clan groups of the migrant people who arrived from various locations in the fifteenth or sixteenth centuries.¹⁴

In Ga traditional communities the basic unit is the ‘*we*’ (a house or dynasty), an ancestral house to which all those who trace descent through the male line of a common ancestor belong. Ga culture is polygamous, so the family unit comprises of a husband, one or more wives and their children. On marriage, a woman remains a member of her birth clan or ‘*we*’. Traditionally, men continue to live in their birth ‘*we*’ with their brothers, and male adolescent children. Women and children (together with prepubescent boys) live in a women’s household, often the house of their own clan or an annex of their husband’s clan house.¹⁵ As clan or ‘*we*’ family members increased, an annex would be built close to the original ‘*we*’, increasing the housing capacity (Odeti, 2008). A collection of clan houses, form quarters, ‘*akutsei*’, building communities based on a collection of ‘*wei*’ (plural of ‘*we*’), all affiliated to the original settlers. From these clan houses, the governance structure of the ‘Traditional Councils’ are formulated, notably consisting of Chief (selected by rotation by the heads of the various clans) *Wulomo* (priest), the heads (elders) of the various houses, professional groups notably the heads of farming, *Okwaafoiatse*,

¹³ <http://www.ghana.gov.gh/index.php/about-ghana/regions/greater-accra>

¹⁴ According to some legends Ga people migrated from Nigeria, others that they were part of Israel that migrated southward through present day Uganda, then along the Congo River, westward through Camerouns, Nigeria, Benin, Togo and finally to Greater Accra, amongst lineage elders of the various quarters, and clans in various towns (Osabu-Kle, 2008).

¹⁵ This has resulted in a large percentage of women headed households in low income communities.

fishing, *Woleiatse*, clan captains, *asafoiatsemei* (warrior), and *asafoianyemei* (female warrior), govern the traditional areas. This system has recently experienced difficulties due to succession disputes amongst lineage elders of the various quarters, and clans in various towns (Osabu-Kle, 2008, p. 4).

Ga believe that land and property belong to both the living and their ancestors, and they maintain the family shrines, gods, ancestors, and graves within their inner compounds. The system forms the socio-political structure “grounded in lineage systems, based on the ritual obligations between members of the same extended lineage or clan, who are all descended from a common ancestor” (Collins, 2004, pp. 155-6). In Ga Mashie, the maintenance of the ‘*wei*’ system is experiencing pressures due to overcrowding and redevelopment housing schemes.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Ga people maintain their knowledge “not housed in libraries, but stored in the memories of human beings who pass down the history, stories, religious knowledge, prayers, rituals, and the moral values of society without recourse to written records” (Bourgault, 2003, p. 109). This knowledge is most often transmitted during social interaction through traditional cultural expression. My methodology was not designed to document the knowledge, but to observe how it was expressed and received by the community during social interaction.

To assist in the development of a methodology my questions for the research were:

How is communal knowledge embedded in song narratives, music, dance and performance used in a process of communication for participatory action towards social and human development in Ga societies?

How are the development priorities of local people addressed, and heard?

These questions ran throughout the research that engaged with musicians, community leaders (elders and heads of professional organisations), from the different Ga traditional councils and quarters, scholars, and elders.

I found unstructured interviews in the form of recorded conversations between participants, the most appropriate method of data-collection.

My primary contacts were made during the earlier period of field-research on the Ga people and they included Ga elders and musicians; David Nii Amoo, Artistic Director at the National Dance Ensemble Accra; Professor Nii-Yartey, Director of Dance at the School of Performing Arts, University of Ghana, Legon, Accra; additionally, the members of Ga traditional councils including Chief Nii Kweikuma IV of the Anumansa Division Jamestown (Ga Mashie) and Asafoatse Aboadoni (warrior) from the Teshie Traditional Council; Ga master musician Mustapha Tettey-Addy, and Koriko Nununu, leader of the Korkrobite community Adaawe (or Adaiwee) ensemble.

All my contacts were selected as key members of Ga traditional society and structure.

BACKGROUND TO RESEARCH

During my initial research (2012), I took advice during interviews with senior elders in Ga communities, one of which was Chief Nii Kweikuma IV in the British Jamestown quarter of Ga Mashie who outlined the social music of the Ga people that he believed relevant for social and community development:

“we have songs, that will spur you on, with a message that is about coming together for a common agenda, songs that strengthen the bonding [...] to overcome an obstacle so it gives you an idea of unity. Of course unity is strength. If there is dissension in the community there will be no development, the moment there is unity in the community then there is development” (Int. WS750038).

During research, and as a result of this statement, the theme of ‘unity’ was discussed during conversations with and between my key contacts, and it was agreed that ‘unity’ was an essential component of community development.

In contemporary society, the Ga people and the different clans live in a diverse range of geographic locations within close proximity along the Atlantic coast. Colonisation, urbanisation and globalisation have had diverse influences on the different communities.

I was able to carry out this field-research in three locations inhabited by the Ga people. The first of these was Kokrobite, a very small fishing village, to the west of Ga territory, which in the past two decades has become a major tourist destination. The second was Ga Mashie, in central Accra, which had been the colonial capital of the British Gold Coast (1877-1957), and is now the capital city of Ghana. Ga Mashie sits alongside the fishing harbour which was utilised by the colonisers as a commercial harbour. The third location was Teshie, a coastal fishing community to the east of Accra.

Ga musicians, dancers, and my key Ga contacts recommended the social genres and interactions that I observed. One of my key contacts was Nii Amoo (Director of the National Dance Ensemble), a family member of a key Jamestown ‘*we*’, who initiated a Ga performance in the street amongst the Ga Mashie community. A further key culture-bearer was *Asafoatse* Aboadoni, who held the respected position of warrior in the Teshie, Traditional Council. Additionally, Mustapha Tettey Addy, Ga elder master musician, recommended cultural expression that he considered to be potent tools for development. Using the approach of ‘listening’, as set out by Clammer, (2012, p. 9) I engaged in conversations and unstructured interviews with these three important contacts.

MUSIC IN CULTURE AND DEVELOPMENT

Although literacy at primary level is promoted by Ghana’s Government and NGOs as a millennium development goal (MDG),¹⁶ literacy remains low in many Ga low income communities. I was as to engage across the generations where oral

¹⁶ English is the language of education in Ghana.

communication in Ga Language is the most effective form of engagement and resonates across the generations.¹⁷

During an interview, Mustapha Tettey Addy described what he considers to be a potent tool for development; as the Ga women's ensembles called *Adaawe* or *Adaiwee*. These women come together in the evenings, and share information that they have discovered during the day about the activities of people in the community. On this theme, they create songs based on their findings. Addy describes this form of social commentary on community and individuals as 'a powerful medium to keep the communities in order' (Int. WS750050). The women are not shy to expose any issue that they have discovered. Community members prefer not to have their behaviour aired in public during the weekly *Adaawe* performance, therefore *Adaawe* helps to moderate behaviour.

Nii Amoo recommended the Ga social drama genre, *Adesa*, which has been preserved in the community, and is most often seen at celebrations or funerals. The storyteller, singers, musicians and dancers engage with the audience who become part of the performance. The performance begins with songs that call everyone in the community to participate, as young and old have an equal role to play. The drama begins with a call for anyone who has a story to tell to come forward. The story is constantly interrupted by musicians, singers or dancers who claim that the storyteller is lying, claiming, 'I was there that day'. This diverts the drama to take several themes or issues that can run simultaneously throughout the story.

An additional activity was recommended by *Asafoatse* Aboadoni, who leads the *Kpa* groups in Teshie. The role of *Asafoatse* is traditionally, and in contemporary society, the warrior leader in the Traditional Councils. *Kpa* musical groups were formerly known as *Asafo*, and represent each clan or quarters of the town. Their traditional role was to represent their quarter during war, with battle cries and songs. The women had an equal role to play in the form of *Adowa* Groups (Hampton, 1978, p. 41; Field, 1937).¹⁸

In contemporary society, Aboadoni told me that songs are written and performed during the Ga annual *Homowo* festival called *Kpashimo* songs. These are composed to expose wrongs or celebrate success with the intention of moderating behaviour for the better (Int. WS750062). In Teshie, every quarter of the town has a *Kpa* group. One of the functions of the group, is to express community concerns, by raising community-awareness in the lyrics of *Kpashimo* songs, during the *Homowo* Festival. However, the *Kpa* groups have a further function, which is to address social issues in the communities.

The *Kpa* groups use two musical types:

¹⁷ Ga is a member of the Kwa branch of Niger-Congo languages.

¹⁸ According to Barbara Hampton, *adowa* was once the name of a company of women, who were auxiliary to the *asafo*, and 'the *adowa* is regarded as the women's *asafo*.' The songs are said to be used as moral support for *asafo* activity and most scholars agree that *adowa* is the women's *afaso* and was adopted by Ga women. (Hampton, 1978, p. 41).

1. *Mbraku* never changes. It is a chanting-type song/rhythm. Used during social or ceremonial functions to express oral history or events in traditional society.
2. *Kpafio* is the type used to create *Kpashimo* songs that expose or promote community members and issues.

Aboadoni told me that the groups have songs about many issues using the singing-style *Kpafio*, including songs to raise awareness about issues such as HIV/AIDS. *Kpafio* is the musical style used to create *Kpashimo* songs, as well as addressing other issues of community concern. *Kpa* groups continue a long tradition of singing songs for community communication, behaviour and solidarity.

During my 2012 field-research, I had observed a similar tradition to *Kpashimo* in Tema, during the *Kpeledzoo* festival. The *Kpeledzoo* Festival celebrates the spring fertility with ritual celebrations for human, plant and animal fertility. *Kpelejo* groups are active and representative of each quarter of the town in Tema (Field, 1937). The *Kpelejo* groups I observed in Tema sang about their chieftaincy dispute that had recently been resolved; a group of fishermen complained in another song that the fisherman's union was taking bribes when they purchase fuel from them for the fishing canoes. They also brought attention to the stool that had been stolen by Ewe fishermen.¹⁹

FIELD OBSERVATIONS

Adaawe in Kokrobite

In April 2013, I met the *Adaawe* ensemble in Kokrobite, and interviewed Korkor Nunu the leader of the group (Int. WS750089/91). The group had never been formally constituted, and their activities had been informal. Nunu told me that the group had stopped their community activities, although they sometimes perform at funerals. When I asked her why, she said that they no longer had the time. As the conversation progressed, it transpired that the main reason was a lack of finance to support the group.

In the past, the group had performed weekly at the African Academy of Music and Arts (AAMA) owned by Addy. AAMA was built with private finance and no support from the government. The Academy had been the first to initiate support for the renewal, teaching, maintenance, and/or survival of Ghanaian ethnic specific musical culture. The Academy had been a Sunday afternoon venue frequented by chiefs, elders, diplomats, government officials, MPs, tourists, as well as students. During these afternoons *Adaawe* was one of the performance genres, and Nunu's group had been paid for their weekly performances. It emerged, that to survive, the group needed a more formal economic structure. Nunu confessed that she had a hard time bringing the women together as "they don't want to do it for free anymore," and she had no financial support to pay the women's expenses, or provide refreshments (Int. WS750089/91).

¹⁹ The stool is equivalent to the throne occupied by a sovereign. The account mentioned was from oral history.

Adaawe songs and performances have any text based on the activities of the community and the findings of the *Adaawe* group members. *Adaawe* groups are expected to expose domestic issues in the community and they are not afraid to address domestic conflict and/or violence. In the past the groups had not expected any financial reward for their participation, which had been informal and community based.

I did not observe *Adaawe* in the village of Kokrobitie, although the group performed in Addy's garden.²⁰ The group consisted of five older women, who sang and danced enthusiastically to some of the songs from their repertoire, whilst Nunu played the finger castanet to mark the time. The women were excited to see the video I had taken, and played back to them as instant feedback, and they positively discussed holding weekly rehearsals. Addy offered them the facilities of the Academy dance or drama studio, although I understand they declined due to a lack of financial support.

Other ethnic groups share similar genres, like the Akan women's *Nnwonkoro* groups and the Dagomba women's music *Tora*, *Adaawe* can attract and hold the interest of large audiences because they employ an oral medium and use the locally understood language. *Adaawe* groups could be the centre of many development communications, as "the groups can attract and hold the interest of large audiences because they employ the oral medium and the local language. As educational tools, they involve non-literate groups both as audiences and as performers, people who are usually not well-catered to by modern communication and education systems that operate in a foreign language" (Anyidoho, 1994, p. 151).

Adesa in Jamestown, Ga Mashie

Adesa is a people-centred social drama activity that bridges several disciplines across the performing arts, providing the opportunity to stretch boundaries, and create participatory works with multiple functions. The elder *Adesa* group I observed in Jamestown, Ga Mashie, are the custodians of an art-form that, like *Adaawe*, is possibly disappearing.

The event I observed was held on the street in Jamestown adjacent to the house of the *Wulomo* (priest). Nii Amoo told me that the Ga believe that they need to invite the gods to enjoy and bless the activities and the performance area. In Jamestown (Ga Mashie) I observed the *Wulomo*, Numo Abodai, pouring libation for the gods and ancestors in return for blessing the event. The *Wulomo* makes the site an ethical and sacred place, an activity that Kofi Agawu (2003, p. 206) describes as "upholding the highest ethical standards".

The *Adesa* group I observed during field-research, consisted of one man playing the *Apentemma* drum, an older lady keeping the timing with a banana bell; additionally, five women playing calabash rattles and collectively ten women sang in call-and-response mode.

²⁰ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VXRCG-Q_BB4

Nii Amoo explained that the opening song was created for *Adesa* and is passed from mother-to-daughter. The song signals the group to perform whatever they have prepared for the occasion. It also tells the community to gather and that even though they are old ladies, they should not be underestimated, because they play a role for the younger people to learn from.

Opening song *Adesa* group:

We are women, we are old women, but we are very strong;
We only move forward; we never go backwards;
We sing in unity we speak many languages;
The devil is not here;
The devil is not wanted here;
The devil has no place in our midst;
We sing praises to the Almighty for this event;
We are women, we are very strong. We are very, very strong.
3x.

Adesa Story One

The first story ‘Cleaning-up Jamestown’, was told by Mustapha Tettey Addy, and addressed his own issues with the community. He tells a story of how as a boy he had played in Jamestown’s clean streets, which he described as beautiful. He draws on the tradition of respect for the elders and expresses disappointment in seeing Jamestown today, saying how angry the ancestors would be if they could see contemporary Jamestown. The story finishes with a challenge to those gathered:

“How can we reform this? How should we change this?
Can we go back into the past - when we want to march forward?”
2x.

I noted Addy’s challenge asked questions rather than informing solutions, as is typical in community development formats.

When the singer, dancers or audience member interrupted the story they shouted ‘I was there that day’, after which the musicians would play and sing a song that they made up for the occasion. Dance would take the form of mime and/or ridicule of the storyteller. At the end of the song, the singer would shout ‘continue your story’.

Adesa Story Two

Nii Amoo told a moral tale during a second story that involved betrayal, and emphasised how moral codes should be observed. A mythical eagle assists an old woman villager (in return for a promise) by mending her wounded leg, and transforming her broken down village. When the promise is broken, the village and the old woman’s leg is plunged into its former decaying state.

Observation provided insight into the communicative qualities of the performance, and the presentation demonstrated “musical traditions [that] do not consist only of repertoire, but also of a body of oral knowledge” (Nketia, 2005, p. 25). From this body of knowledge Nii Amoo provided a cultural interpretation, which made it

apparent that knowing the language is not sufficient to understanding the narrative, or interpreting the cultural value.

During my interview with Chief Nii Kweikuma IV of Jamestown (Int. WS750038), he outlined how “folkloric music, contains caution in our own typically traditional way and how civilisation has effected what we already have in place.” This was demonstrated during the singing and dancing interludes of the presentation, and reinforced the chief’s statement: when the old women say “even though they are old, they have a role to play, for the younger ones to learn from”. Additionally, they advised the young women, “why crack a turtle when a snail will do,” cautioning the “youth about what they should be careful of”. Later the group brings attention to *Ataa Asharley* (a common used boy’s name is used hypothetically) who is suspected of rape, (in an area with a high incidence of youth pregnancy) they say “come and take your share of the responsibility” and cautions the girls to take good care of themselves.

Another *Adesa* song was a caution of how the fruits of your labour can be enjoyed by theft. Additionally, a song provides advice that it’s better to check what people say, by saying ‘*Abele Baa ee*’ that means, when you check it out and you look inside, you will find there is no substance to what is being said, only empty promises.

Adesa is a complex art form where the performers and audience are equally engaged creatively, and the genre adheres to traditionally established formulas. The subject of the story can move to another issue or caution during interludes, and songs can intervene during a sad tale to introduce hilarious songs or dances.

Kpa Groups in Teshie

At an initial and informal meeting, in late July 2013 I met with eight of the ten *Kpa* groups in a Teshie community centre.²¹ Each group represented a different quarter or clan group of the town. The meeting was held on a Tuesday, which is the day the Ga close the sea for fishing.²² Most of those who attended the meeting were fishermen. The groups told me they have two different traditional musical styles. The first is *Mbraku*, described as ‘chanting-songs similar to rap,’ and secondly *Kpafio* is used to create *Kpashimo* songs during *Homowo*. They told me *Mbraku* ‘songs are traditional and do not change’. The groups use this musical type to sing the oral histories, warrior songs and songs of solidarity amongst the community. I asked them for a demonstration of this chanting, and the groups sang with a call-and-response pattern.

Aboadoni told me:

This [song] came about in the early 80s. Somebody bought a trawler and they were going to commission it at Tema. They invited a whole lot of people who didn’t appreciate the traditional. But before the day, somebody warned the owner of the trawler not to commission it, or to postpone the commissioning. Unfortunately, on the day the trawler was commissioned it sank and many people died (WS750062).

²¹ The meeting was held on a Tuesday as Teshie is fishing community, and Tuesday is the sea god’s Sabbath day, therefore the sea is closed for fishing.

²² To honour the gods.

The sub-text is that the people who uphold ‘traditions’ and are in contact with the gods and ancestors had received messages from them. During the demonstration, they sang this song using the musical style *Mbraku* by call-and-response. Some of the singers added percussion to mark the time by stamping, clapping, and clicking their fingers, which became more forceful as the song progressed to demonstrate the solidarity and the feelings of the groups.

After this demonstration, Aboadoni asked the groups if they could write a song to include the theme of ‘unity’ and perform it the following Sunday at a presentation. Immediately the groups unanimously decided that they would like to tackle the chieftaincy dispute. It was quite obvious that their most pressing development issue, was the chieftaincy and leadership. After a short discussion in Ga language interpreted by Aboadoni, they agreed that if they sang about the chieftaincy they would include unity.

The presentation was held outside the Teshie community centre. It was not a competition; there were no judges, and the event was not advertised. The audience came from the various quarters of the town, with the *Kpa* group that represented their quarter. The songs they presented use the singing-style *Kpafio* and most of the songs started in pentatonic and progressed to diatonic.

Observation:

The groups carry mascots or aesthetic symbols that are visual communication devices linked to Ga oral tradition and West African mythology. The songs on the theme of ‘unity’ represented a diverse range of interpretations. These ranged from colonisation, independence, current political national issues, moral issues (as Ga see them), and the oral history and mythology of the Ga-Dangme, which represents, in effect, the identity of grass-roots ordinary people.

The activity generated community solidarity, despite Teshie having a long-standing (30 year) chieftaincy dispute.²³ The songs were borrowed from an existing song tradition that the community expects to deal with concerns and relationships in Teshie, and the larger world in which Teshie is situated. By using musical genres embedded in *Kpa* musical practice, the groups demonstrated that their own ‘traditions’ are alive in the present.

The groups used the narrative of the songs and their visual symbols as a method to tell their stories, and the action of dance or stamping demonstrated their everyday frustrations. The groups used call-and-response in the songs to organise participation, and those wanting to participate could take on additional roles such as dancing, singing response, and playing percussion parts. Everyone could participate and take part at their own level of ability, which they demonstrated across the generations. These acts of participation allowed me to observe the qualities and potential of the

²³ Teshie has been without a chief (leader) for thirty years created by disputes between the elders of the clans who elect a chief in rotation. Several violent clashes have recently been seen when an elder family has attempted to enthrone a chief without the agreement of the other clans.

Kpa groups to communicate, create solidarity, express their feelings and strengthen community bonding and identity.

Additionally, the presentation provided evidence that the groups are strongly connected to their community quarters, and have the power to create solidarity and cohesion with the full participation of, and within, their communities.²⁴

***Kpa* Groups and their songs on the theme of unity**

Group name: 'Six'

The group name 'Six' honours the six leaders united in the struggle towards Ghana's independence:²⁵ the group consists of young boys and men.

The song told the story of the colonisation, and the material trade in gold. They recounted the liberation and the struggle, expressing the view that they need inter-generational unity, which referred to the chieftaincy dispute. The group moved and danced in a stamping motion collectively, expressing solidarity and 'flow'.

The song starts out pentatonic and progresses to diatonic.

Group name: '*Ghana*'

The group are young men with two female members, using the symbol of Ghana's national eagle as a mascot. They presented under a national flag, and demonstrated solidarity in the view that they need a king/chief in Teshie. The song starts out pentatonic and progresses to diatonic.

Group name: '*Paa Jah Labour*'

The group are older men with a studio-produced CD of the songs they presented. The group had at some point received sponsorship from American Airways, as certified on the certificate they showed me during the event. The colours of their flag and clothing promote the USA and American Airlines. Their mascot was an American Airline plane covered in the *nyanyara* vine leaf, a traditional Ga symbol around the time of *Homowo*.

Group name: '*Tafo Ye Feo*'

The group were made up of a mixed age-range and utilised water-bottles containing rice as percussion devices. The mythical Kwaku *Ananse* is referred to in the song as a possible means to achieve unity, the song asked *Ananse* to cast his magic in establishing a King for Teshie.²⁶ The group members gesticulate and use mime during the presentation.

²⁴ <https://youtu.be/DRUJxRrs1CI>

²⁵ The Big Six were six leaders of the United Gold Coast Convention (UGCC), the leading political party in the British colony of the Gold Coast.

²⁶ Stories about a spider-god, Anansi or Ananse, are told and maintained in oral tradition in Ghana. The stories often reinforce the values of the community and mythology of West Africa.

The song was diatonic, call-and-response in two groups - adult males/women and children, in unison.

Group name: '*Mind You*'

The group arrived in the company of children and young people from their quarter dancing and stamping in solidarity.

The group was made up of adult males and use call-and-response to create participation, keeping time with the finger castanet. Again, they gesticulate and mimed.

The group have the *Sankofa* mascot as a symbol, reminding us from oral tradition,²⁷ not to be afraid to go back and reclaim what we may have left behind. The song uses call-&-response, unison, pentatonic, then diatonic.

Group name: '*Greece*'

The group have a wooden carved mascot of a hand (one finger pointing upwards) holding an egg, a symbol often found at the top of a linguist staff (held by the chief's spokesman) in Ghana. It means 'power held in one hand is not safe'.²⁸ The song narrative records disunity. It does not reference Teshie, apart from mentioning the elders who, it says, 'are letting us down'. Therefore, it might be assumed that the song refers to the king/chieftaincy dispute in Teshie.

The singing was in Unison, using the diatonic scale.

Group name: '*Ananse*'

The group mascot was an impressive spider's web to represent the mythical spider *Ananse*, the web held several spiders within. The group were accompanied by an extremely large intergenerational community.

The song asserts that it is only dialogue that brings unity, and that Nkrumah was able to unite Teshie (the song was clearly about Teshie and the need for dialogue to bring about unity). The audience join in by singing, dancing, and stamping in solidarity with the narrative's message. The participatory nature of this presentation showed complete solidarity between all who participated, with the musicians, united in the message of the narrative. The scene reinforced Turley's assertion that "the glue that holds societies together from primitive to advanced societies, is social solidarity" (Turley, 2005, p. 64).

The call was by one singer, with the response in unison with the participation of the entire audience. Initially, the group used the pentatonic and again progress into the diatonic.

²⁷ Visually and symbolically, "Sankofa" is expressed as a mythic bird that flies forward while looking backward with an egg (symbolizing the future) in its mouth.

²⁸ N. K. Dzobo (2010) African Symbols and Proverbs as Source of Knowledge and Truth, Ch. 5. <www.crvp.org/book/Series02/II-1/chapter_iv.htm> [Accessed 13 November 2013]

Group name: '*Azinkotoku*'

A stool was used, symbolically of the chieftaincy stool. However, this is a primary school chair painted red.

The group were mainly young people with an elder leader and they presented (what was at the time) a current political issue in Ghana. The song featured the president John Mahama and the opposition leader, Nana Akufo Addo, who were involved in long running high-court case, alleging the president's malpractice during the 2012 elections. At the time of the presentation, the jury were deliberating the verdict, and it was a very tense time in Accra.

Group name: '*Korley Woku*'

The group arrive with a large community support (over a thousand men, women and children) to join the ever-swelling crowd, and their song recalled oral history, and the origins of Ga-Dangme: 'We are from Israel we have to come together as one'. King Tackie Tawiah III (the Paramount chief of Ga Mashie) is featured in the song. He had died in London in December 2012: it was announced in January 2013. The song emphasises that 'The stool belongs to the Ga, and the Ga are from Israel'.²⁹

Group name: '*Kane*'

Again, the group have a large following with them. The song referred to Ghana as a peaceful country, and they fear what is coming (this may be a reference to the high-court case described in the song by '*Azinkotoku*' above). They say that the people of Ghana should be one.

Comment

In all ten songs the groups address the issues that were important to them. They did not subvert the 'unity' theme to address the chieftaincy dispute; when they addressed it they did so directly. Overall the songs demonstrate that Teshie people want cohesion, dialogue and stability. These songs represent the feelings of the communities who turned out to support their groups and to participate. The *Kpa* groups demonstrate their ability to engage communities in dialogue in a culturally appropriate manner. From the range of songs and performances, we are able to identify the common objectives of the community. Through the groups working collaboratively and representing their communities, issues might be addressed, and solutions might be found.

The event drew extremely large crowds, and order was maintained throughout by elders (men and women) who commanded the respect of the community.

The presentation was not part of the *Homowo* festival, but was presented during the pre-*Homowo* 30-day ban on drumming and noise making.³⁰

²⁹ Some oral accounts narrate that the Ga started their migration from what is now Israel, and some ritual during the Homowo Festival commemorate this.

³⁰ Prior to the Homowo celebration, each town traditional council calls a ban on drumming and noise-making for a

CONCLUSION

My own training and experience have always involved dealing directly with people, as opposed (for example) to studying theories and histories. This research of ‘testing musical traditions’ for community development has a subject only because the structure of Ga institutions, customs and beliefs, although stemming from the past, are alive in the present despite all the stresses of modernity, change and ‘development’.

During a short period of field-research the study attempts to explore and assess the different ways in which cultural continuity is manifested amongst Ga communities, by looking at different ways cultural expression integrates and communicates knowledge and ideas. It became clear that rights, citizenship and accountability were locked within a complex web of community relationships based on tradition and trust.

My questions were answered during the research; How is communal knowledge embedded in song narratives, music, dance and performance used in a process of communication for participatory action towards social and human development in Ga societies? Whilst additionally in Teshie, the question ‘how are the development priorities of local people addressed, and heard?’ was satisfactorily answered, although more questions emerged. Each of the performance types that I was able to observe deserves a more rigorous investigation.

Research identified several performance genres in active and continuing use in Ga communities for social and religious purposes. *Adaawe* (women’s groups) comment on community activities and exposes wrongs (as seen by Ga people). *Kpa* groups are tightly associated with their community, and their *Kpashimo* activities are designed, amongst other things, to represent the views of their clan and influence behaviour. Additionally, *Adesa* includes storytelling interspersed with song and talking dance, all of which can address various aspects of community development; health and education, social cohesion, governance structure, dispute resolution and practical projects in the environment.

Although these performance genres could be used as tools by NGOs, this research looks at how traditions can be used during PAR to build strong, solid, self-reliant communities. My research aimed to find methods of development that utilise community “dialogue that leads to collective problem identification, decision making and community-based implementation of solutions to local development issues” (Servaes, 2008, p. 15). Although the development issues in Ga communities are clearly multi-dimensional they are not addressed in this research.

As demonstrated, the performance events have the power to involve participation, and participation is essential for community development, in order to draw people

period of thirty days. This throws the areas into complete silence and is a rule also observed by everyone, including the many recently established churches in the Accra plain. According to Samuel Nortey (2012) - The concept of this thirty-day ban on drumming and noise making is biblical. According to the various priests of the Ga, the book of Habakkuk 2: 20 in the Old Testament states “The Lord is in his Holy Temple, Let all the earth keep silence before him” (Crossway Bibles, 2001, cited in Nortey, 2012, p. 11).

together in a decision making process. People can discuss right and wrong behaviour as well as customs and traditions that enhance social order and stability. Through such conversations and critical assessment, customs and cultural norms could be used as the ground on which Ga stand to decide how they may want to make improvements in their lives or environments.

By working through PAR and oral knowledge systems, researchers and development agencies must invest the necessary time and energy required, to listen deeply, and to understand the ways in which people use their oral knowledge to make sense of their day-to-day situations.

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