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The New Hip-life Beat: Rooted in Ga Drumming

by

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Preface

I first became interested in Ghana when I enrolled in the West African Music and Culture course that focused on Ghanaian drumming at Wesleyan University in 2005. My interest was purely musical, as I had been trying to extend my drumming ability in any direction that would challenge me enough. Seeing Abraham Adzenyah play the *atsimevu* was rhythmically baffling and ever since I have been hooked.

I started playing jazz drum set when I was nine, trombone when I was eleven, and guitar when I was thirteen. I had always been encouraged to play trombone, but I always knew that drumming was my strongest interest. During my first years at Wesleyan I was constantly looking for types of music that could challenge me rhythmically. Other styles of music taught at Wesleyan also challenged me, especially South Indian spoken percussion and *mrdangam*. I didn't get far with the *mrdangam* (the technique is incredibly challenging), but the Karnatak spoken percussion (solkattu) was very engaging and expanded my perception of rhythm. Still others like private drum set lessons, a course on *balafón* from West African Mandé music, Anthony Braxton's wild and experimental "Materials for Jazz and Improvisation" ensemble, Javanese Gamelan, and countless music theses produced by senior Wesleyan students all combined to broaden and enhance my musical ability and comprehension.

But it was Ghanaian drumming that gave me the most opportunity to play and learn more drumming techniques and rhythms. In Professor Abraham Adzenyah's West African Music and Culture course I started to learn the basic supporting parts and was further challenged by then Graduate Student Elikem Nyamuame, who is now

teaching the dance class that is in conjunction with Professor Adzenyah's drumming class. Elikem really provoked me to learn more, and I had a lot of opportunity to play with him outside of Wesleyan, performing at other universities in southern New England where he is in high demand to play the Ewe drumming he was raised with and has mastered. Ghanaian drumming was also the closest of all the drumming styles offered at Wesleyan to the jazz drumming I was raised with. For instance, the fast section of Kundun drumming has many jazz rhythms in it, and Professor Adzenyah often speaks of a jazz drummer's realization of that clear similarity. So after playing Ghanaian drums for two years, I decided to go see and experience it for myself.

During my time in Accra, Ghana in July and August of 2007, I was often at the University of Ghana at Legon, either taking lessons or drumming with the university's hired drummers for school dance classes, exchange program workshops, and dance company rehearsals. I attended and drummed for a number of social gatherings and life-cycle events with my teacher and housemate Francis Akotuah, a master drummer at the University of Ghana at Legon. We also traveled to the Volta Region where the Ewe people are located. Francis gets hired regularly to play for funerals all over the Greater Accra area because his Kpanlogo drumming is particularly spectacular. While he plays all the lead drums from all the ethnic groups in Ghana that have been performed at the University of Ghana, his specialty is in the Ga drumming and has been in Accra all his life. I decided early on that I should focus on the Ga drumming with him, as I could learn Ewe drumming from Elikem back at Wesleyan. The way he distinguishes so clearly between the slap-tone and the

open-tone drum is more spectacular than any percussive stroke I have ever seen. Francis produces these two tones, slap and open, more clearly than any other drummer I have heard. His sense of time is impeccable, and plays rhythms that would confuse even the best of drummers.

My time with him at these various funerals gave me a chance to see how the various Ga drumming pieces (Kpanlogo, Waka, and Gomé) are really played today. For instance, one of the supporting drums that used to be in Kpanlogo is now only played in Borborbor (originally from the Volta Region). This supporting pattern, which will be looked at in more detail when the rhythms of Kpanlogo are transcribed and explained, is still included in some Kpanlogo performances. It can be helpful to add it as a supporting part but it is not included in Kpanlogo performances by Ga drum ensembles in the Greater Accra area. The time I spent seeing and playing these different pieces gave me a valuable understanding of how these rhythms are presently performed.

While I was often drumming with various assortments of drummers based at the University of Ghana, hip-life still dominated the soundscape of Accra. Many drinking spots and side carts have sound systems to attract customers and they often play hip-life. I hardly ever heard beats that sounded American (the old school hip-life ala Reggie Rockstone) and it felt to me that every song was playing Kpanlogo. At the time I didn't know about Waka and Borborbor or about the older Kolomashie and Gomé.

I now realize this newer style of hip-life first came from the incorporation of the *Jama* beat, which is a Ga style beat that is most commonly played at football

(soccer) games. Hip-life producer J-Que (Jeff Quaye) claims credit for the first insertion of *Jama* into hip-life[1]. The supporting rhythms in *Jama* are very similar to Kpanlogo because many of the Ga supporting rhythms are shared by multiple drumming and dance pieces. These beats are used because they are so familiar, making hip-life much less foreign than it originally was when the New York-style beats were dropping on the airwaves in the early 1990's.

The recording that is included with this thesis is of Francis Akotuah playing the lead part of Kpanlogo accompanied by only the lead Kpanlogo bell pattern. It was my practice tape, using it throughout the day and to prepare for my own Kpanlogo performance at my thesis concert on April 6, 2008. In the recording of Francis it is very easy to hear his lead part, while in my performance it is likely that the lead part is muffled by the supporting parts. The house microphone did not likely get a balanced recording, but at least the supporting parts that I transcribe are in this recording. There are two main supporting drums that are only found in Kpanlogo, the two bell patterns, the *tamalin*, and the shaker.

Introduction

Many of today's hip-life songs infuse rhythmic elements of Ga drumming and dance songs and other local rhythms to produce pumping, electronic beats that are distinctly Ghanaian. The original hip-life used none of these Ghanaian elements, rapping over beats that sound incredibly similar to New York-based hip-hop. After Reggie Rockstone released two tracks rapping in Twi, one of the most widely spoken

[1] From an interview titled "An Interview with J-Que, Hiplife's Leading Producer" located at thehiplifecomplex.com.

Ghanaian languages, he crossed the boundary from American hip-hop to something Ghanaian, which eventually became hip-life. Many of the tracks on his first albums were rapped in English and sound so much like American rap it is tough to be sure that it is of Ghanaian origin. Today, in stark contrast to the Reggie Rockstone album, the majority of hip-life songs use Ghanaian rhythms in the creation of their beats. Hip-life rapper Kochoko of the Mobile Boys, one of the most prominent hip-life groups (Reggie Rockstone supports them financially and artistically), estimates that 90% of hip-life songs released and played today use definitively Ghanaian rhythms in the production of the beat[2].

The rhythms in this new style of hip-life are mostly from Ga drumming and dance music. Producer J-Que claims credit for introducing this new and now omnipotent style of hip-life, though many Ghanaians don't realize that he directly used *Jama* as inspiration for this style of beat[3]. Most of the supporting *Jama* parts come from Ga drumming and dance pieces. Many different Ga songs that are played today (Kpanlogo and Waka) have emerged from older songs (Kolomashie and Gomé) using some of the same supporting rhythms. Some of the supporting parts in Kpanlogo have come from these other older songs, while some are only played in Kpanlogo and still others have fallen out of use in Kpanlogo. The parts that are most shared between *Jama* and the Ga drumming pieces (such as the bell patterns) are most commonly applied to hip-life beats.

Other Ghanaian rhythmic styles have been used in hip-life and function in a 6/8 time signature. Some of the rhythms used in this style are Fontomfrom and the fast

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[2] See Jesse Shipley's DVD titled "Living the Hiplife".
[3] Interview with J-Que at thehiplifecomplex.com.

section of Kundun. Obour, who has been credited as one of the first artists to actively use Ghanaian and particularly Ga style beats, used a combination of the rhythms Agbadza and Adaha[4]. Producer J-Que supports using still other styles like Adowa[5]. These songs are very pulse-heavy; meaning the gravity of the beat is angled toward the pulse. The recent hip-life hit "Ei Alhaji" by Jeff Bogologo has many recognizable Ghanaian drumming rhythms, with a 6/8, Agbadza style bell pattern and supporting drum part that are sampled in the song. The singer even speaks a rhythm with percussive syllables that seem to emulate the syllables played on a Ghanaian lead drum.

The number of songs using these 6/8 grooves is vastly smaller than the number using the Ga style beats. Kpanlogo, Waka, Borborbor, and other Ga pieces are very familiar to people in Accra because they are played at various social functions, life-cycle celebrations, and other gatherings. This style has come to dominate contemporary hip-life, which is why Kpanlogo can sound so similar to this new hip-life.

Chapter One

Leading to the Creation of Hip-Life

Before Hip-Life

The emergence of the youth's hip-life culture is similar to the rise of Kpanlogo drumming, dancing, and singing in the early 1960's with its popularity base in the youth. In both instances, the elders shunned lewd gestures in the dance, with Kpanlogo's very clear hand gestures and hip-life's "bump and grind". Much of

[4] Shipley, J. "Living the Hiplife"
[5] Interview with J-Que at thehiplifecomplex.com.

Kpanlogo's derivation is also from American music, with rock and roll supplying much of the creative inspiration for the dancing. Kpanlogo was so outrageous to the older Ghanaians that it was banned from being performed for a time and was only allowed after President Kwame Nkrumah approved it after given a private performance[6]. After the government approved Kpanlogo it continued to grow in popularity with Kpanlogo troupes sprouting up from every part of the Greater Accra area.

After Nkrumah was overthrown in 1967, there was a significant decrease in governmental support for cultural troupes[7]. The Ghana National Dance Company lost a lot of financial support, and many Kpanlogo troupes had to fold. It got even worse when Ex-President Jerry John Rawlings seized power in 1979 and again in 1981. In 1981, a curfew was instigated between 6 PM and 6 AM, which caused the vast majority of cultural troupes to close because there was no time to rehearse or perform[8]. The disruption of cultural troupes' livelihoods was finally over in 1996 when democracy was re-established and free speech ascertained. It was in this time period that the youth was able to learn and communicate through the hip-life revolution.

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[6] See Sonja Rentik's thesis titled "Kpanlogo: Conflicts, Identity Crisis and Enjoyment in a Ga Drum Dance".
[7] Personal communication with Abraham Adzenyah at Wesleyan University.
[8] From an interview with John Collins in J. Shipley's "Living the Hiplife" documentary.

Hip-Life's Beginning

The start of the whole hip-life movement was the release of Reggie Rockstone's album "Makaa Maka" in 1994. A visiting producer from New York, Rab "The International" Bakari, produced the beats for the album at Groove Records near Accra. The beats are in the same vein of hip-hop from New York that was being played in the early 1990's. Some tracks on "Makaa Maka" sound like the upbeat style of N.W.A. (with Dr. Dre and Ice Cub) and Funkmaster Flex while others have the laidback grooves of Wu-Tang Clan (with GZA, RZA, Ghostface Killah, Ol' Dirty Bastard, and others) and B.I.G.

According to Rab Bakari, he met Reggie Rockstone at a club in Accra where Reggie was rapping in English over a Fugees instrumental. Due to Reggie's western background, (born and raised in London and lived in the U.S. for two years), Bakari couldn't detect any remnant of a Ghanaian accent making him sound much more legitimate than other local Ghanaian rappers. He also heard Reggie rap in Twi, which was the only clear sign that Reggie was in fact Ghanaian. Bakari offered to make beats for him, telling him he didn't have any equipment but could make a beat if he could borrow some. That night, they went to Groove Records and started working on "Makaa Maka". The two tracks rapped in Twi on that album sparked the whole hip-life movement[9].

Hip-life excited the youth because hip-hop was finally becoming Ghanaian. Yet the beats that were being played, such as the ones Rab Bakari made for "Makaa Maka", were still lacking significant Ghanaian influence. Some bits and pieces of

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[9] Interview with Rab "The International" Bakarin on J. Shipley's "Living the Hiplife".

Ghanaian music were added in the early stages, but it wasn't until producers like J-Que and artists like Obour pumped beats that emulated Ga drumming and dance music that hip-life became noticeably different from American hip-hop. Until the beat changed from the classic "boom bap" of American rap to the Ga-style, *Jama*-inspired beat, Reggie Rockstone's pure American-style hip-hop beat was king.

American Hip-Hop: The Youth's Revolution

Before this founding father of hip-life gained popularity with the youth of Ghana, American hip-hop laid the groundwork for the hip-life cultural revolution. Hip-hop culture was what the youth adopted and identified with. From the clubs of Accra to house parties all over Ghana, American hip-hop was the best beat to play to get people moving. Young Ghanaians identified with rappers from New York and started to dress, speak, and act like their American idols.

The adoption of hip-hop style fashion is the most readily noticeable piece taken from American hip-hop. Blingin' gold chains, baggy blue jeans, Timberland boots, white Adidas sneakers, athletic jerseys and baseball caps (with unbent brims) are just a few that Ghanaians have taken from the hip-hop wardrobe. One of the most popular hip-life groups today called V.I.P. always wear matching jerseys with their names on the back.

When I was in Ghana I happened to have some boots that looked a lot like the classic Timberland boots. Quite a few Ghanaians told me that I "have the proper boot", meaning I have the fashionable hip-hop inspired boots. Jeans have become very popular, especially in areas moderately wealthy areas. Once again taking the

cue from the U.S., some young women purposely reveal their underwear at their waists. When someone informs her that she is not covering up properly she will say "I'm Aware", which is from a popular hip-life song that originally influenced this behavior. This lewd behavior was indeed sparked by a hip-life song, but the trend was definitely passed from the U.S. According to Professor John Collins, the leading hip-life artists "dress in the baggy suits and untied shoes of US rap artists and present in their Twi and Ga lyrics a ' macho' and even misogynous view of love"[10]. Some songs are banned from the radio for encouraging such behavior and as a result, as stated by journalist William Asiedu, "make good sales throughout the country…and become instant hits and chart busters"[11].

Speech patterns and phrases have also been adopted from American hip-hop. While these speech patterns have not made their way deeply into common conversational speech in Ghana, there is room for the use of hip-hop linguistics in Ghana because pidgin English is spoken, remnants from the British colonizers. Hip-hop phrases used by the youth hip-lifers include "nahmean?" (a shortened version of "know what I mean?), "chillin'", and "yes I" (a phrase from the rastas of Jamaica that entered the growing Pan-African hip-hop vernacular) have infiltrated the speech patterns of young Ghanaians. Others have been created from the titles of popular hip-life songs. For instance, the "I'm Aware" phrase came out of a hip-life song. The development of linguistic slang in Ghana is heavily influenced by hip-life.

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[10] See Collins, John "African Musical Symbolism in Contemporary Perspective"
[11] Quoted by Collins in the same, above article.

Political Power and Commercial Viability of Hip-Life

The most powerful aspect of hip-life is the way it makes the young Ghanaians act. There are two main ways hip-life move people to action: political and commercial. Most political hip-life songs are promoting some part of the hip-life revolution. It can range from speaking out against corrupt politicians to promoting gangster life (violence, drugs, fast cars, prostitutes). Hip-life can also be used by politicians themselves to promote their party or an upcoming election, trying to gain popularity with the youth that make up a large percentage of the electorate. Political messages both for and against the establishment are made so much more credible and popular through hip-life.

The heart of hip-hop is out of the ghetto, where the system of oppression hits the hardest. Hip-hop is about rising out of the gloomy depths of the gutters and becoming a successful person, though many of the routes offered by rappers to success often end in tragedy. Yet, with the spread of the radio, the voices reverberating from the ghettos of New York can inspire listeners in the ghettos of Accra. Reggie Rockstone's business manager and former Black Panther Dhoruba Bin Wahad declares, "globalization has made the whole world a ghetto and hip-hop has spread to every ghetto in the world"[12]. Hip-life allows for people who have no voice in society to identify with others who have gone through the same suffering. It allows the people to express the hardships in their own life. Hip-life artists who have been forced to go underground with their message are often overtly political, attacking the established parties and politicians, which can bring a lot of trouble if you criticize the

[12] Interview with Dhoruba Bin Wahad on J. Shipley's "Living the Hiplife".

wrong people.

Hip-life artist Sidney, formerly of the group Nananum (meaning the chiefs), had one of his songs bought by the New Patriotic Party, one of the most powerful political parties in Ghana, after his song gained popularity. The song, "Scent No", is about personal hygiene, and one part he mentions a person with the title "Honorable" taking off shoes and having a bad scent from his feet. A Member of Parliament ended up taking Sidney to court because he felt it was disrespectful just because his title is also "Honorable". The case ended up failing and amid the controversy the song gained a boatload of popularity[13]. The NPP jumped on the bandwagon and paid Sidney to use the song in the 2004 election, which the NPP won and President John Agyekum Kuffuor was re-elected[14]. Ghana's leading political parties have recognized the political power of hip-life and now use it to as an effective means to communicate political messages to the youth.

The second message that is being increasingly pushed through hip-life songs is commercial, encouraging consumption and the spending of money. American hip-hop has a similar antithetical dichotomy, with gangster rappers who rebel against 'the man' and 'the system' continuing to plug Prada, Versace, Cadillac, Timberland, and any other willing company in their lyrics.

Big-time companies also try to make money and improve their business in Ghana. Guinness, which is likely the most popular foreign beverage provider serving the strongest of beers and as well as a well-liked malt drink, paid Reggie Rockstone a

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[13] Interview with Sidney on J. Shipley's "Living the Hiplife".
[14] From article by Asamoah-Baidoo, A. titled "Sidney's 'African Money' Can't Win Elections".

good sum to use him on billboards and on a TV commercial. Reggie understands very well that money will only lead you to a more corrupt way of life, so he has stayed clear from most advertisements, but his rationale for signing on to this one is that the TV commercial promotes safe drinking, using his song "Keep Your Eyes on the Road"[15].

While Reggie gained respect for Guinness for following his vision to convey a positive message in the advertisement, he lost all respect for Nestlé after an incident in 2004. Nestlé's most popular product in Ghana, the instant coffee called Nescafé (practically the only coffee sold in Ghana), sponsored a national hip-life competition in 2004. The prize consisted of a 1-year contract to lease a house, a car, and a few other impressive prizes, which made it a very big deal for the hip-life scene. Reggie Rockstone's most prominent rap group, Mobile Boys, entered the competition and easily won over the crowd. Another group called Praye ended up winning the competition, to the dismay of the crowd. Later it was revealed that someone had heard, before the competition, that Nestlé had in fact already decided who the winner would be. Reggie was upset that no one had told him because he would have never attended the competition and may have even removed the group from the competition. Oddly enough, Mobile Boys would later make an advertisement for Nescafé[16]!

In a developing but still third world country like Ghana, advertisements are a huge source of income for all popular artists. Francis Akotuah, my drumming teacher

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[15] Interview with R. Rockstone on J. Shipley's "Living the Hiplife".
[16] Interview with the Mobile Boys and Reggie Rockstone on J. Shipley's "Living the Hiplife".

in Ghana, and Elikem Nyamuame, my teacher and advisor here at Wesleyan University, drummed for a commercial for the very popular Ghanaian company Fanmilk Limited, which makes a variety of popular, cheap products like FanIce (ice cream) and Tampico (fruit drink). For artists in Ghana, these commercials are not steady income but are very helpful to pay the bills. These companies are not interested in supporting Ghanaians, only in spending just enough money to make a profit from the advertising.

On Professor Jesse Shipley's DVD "Living the Hiplife" (cited often in this paper), Reggie Rockstone and other hip-life artists intimately share how much suffering they go through even though they are considered to be superstars. For instance, the electric system turns off a section of the grid for 6 hours every three days (at least that was the rate in July of 2007). "Light off", as they call it, affects all the people including the rich and talented superstars equally. Francis Akotuah would often speak of his frustration with it. Both he and Reggie fall into the category of master or patron or godfather, meaning they financially and artistically support others, with Francis teaching his drumming skill to other young Ghanaians and Reggie producing and packaging his hip-life groups. They are respected like chiefs but live in a place where every day is a struggle for all. In American hip-hop these advertisements mean bigger cars, more houses, more 0's at the end of the check…while in Ghana it is an irresistible supplement to unfairly low wages in order to support others as a patron.

More discreet but still powerful forms of advertisement include the popularization of certain brands through hip-life lyrics. For instance, the rising car

culture has led to hip-life's off-hand endorsement of Mercedes Benz cars, driving them in music videos and casually referring to their rides as Benzes of ML's. At many side-of-the-road street vendors they now have shiny, flashy and sometimes spinning hubcaps, as well as other car add-ons. The capitalist power of hip-life to drive the youth to consider certain brands, products, and styles create a driving economic force that gives hip-life viable commercial power.

Chapter Two

Roots of The New Hip-Life Rhythms in Kpanlogo and Ga Drumming

Kpanlogo is a drumming and dance piece performed by the *Gas* in the Greater Accra region. It was born out of a drumming and dancing reaction to hearing American rock and roll and high-life. Some Kpanlogo supporting parts were derived from other, older drumming pieces. The three drumming pieces that Kpanlogo is rooted in are Kolomashie, Ogé, and Gomé. The supporting parts that are shared by all of these Ga drumming and dance pieces are the most commonly used rhythms in this new hip-life style. There are also two supporting drum parts that are unique to Kpanlogo, never played in Waka, Borborbor, or other Ga pieces.

Many pre-set patterns are played by the lead Kpanlogo drummer and are on the recording accompanying this thesis. The recording is of Francis Akotuah playing the lead Kpanlogo part with only the bell accompanying him. All of the rhythms transcribed for the lead part are found in this recording. Many other patterns can be played by the lead Kpanlogo drummer, including improvised passages (because of the

free nature of Kpanlogo), but these particular ones were taught to me at Legon by Francis Akotuah in July of 2007.

Supporting Kpanlogo Parts

The rhythms played today by the supporting drummers in the Kpanlogo ensemble define the contemporary Kpanlogo beat. The two main supporting drumming parts fit intimately with the lead part and are only played in Kpanlogo. The other supporting parts are played in various other Ga drumming pieces of the past and present. Many of these rhythms are directly transplanted from these other Ga pieces, such as the *tamalin* part from Kolomashie. Other Ga pieces provided other forms of inspiration as with Ogé, which does not have any Kpanlogo rhythms in it but is still the main inspiration for the slow part of Kpanlogo[17].

The main Kpanlogo bell, called a *nono* in Ga drumming (but today often played on the Ewe *gankogui* because of its universal use), plays the classic 3/2 'clave' that was introduced to the U.S. by guitarist Bo' Diddley. The bell pattern can be transcribed as:

Kpanlogo can be felt in either a 2/4 or 4/4 time signature, but I am writing all supporting parts in 4/4 because the supporting patterns are in a four beat loop. The lead bell pattern is polyrhythmic when combined with the pulse, which is each downbeat (1, 2, 3, and 4). The first stroke lines up with the pulse, the next just before

[17] See Rentik, S. "Kpanlogo: Conflicts, Identity Crisis and Enjoyment in a Ga Drum Dance".

(one sixteenth note before), and the third exactly in between on the 'and of two'. In this way, the bell player locks in the whole ensemble to the pulse by playing both with the pulse (four and one) and in between the beat elsewhere in the pattern. This bell part is a very common one, and is played in Kolomashie, Ogé, Gomé, Waka, Borborbor, and many other rhythms. Since this lead bell pattern is the most important in both holding the ensemble together and giving the lead drummer a time-keeping polyrhythmic metronome it must have been relatively easy to adapt the lead and supporting rhythms to the emerging Kpanlogo.

The second bell pattern is not as crucial but it gives an offbeat pulse that solidifies the Kpanlogo beat. This pattern, in 4/4, is:

This bell pattern functions as a support to the piece rather than a time-keeping leader like the lead bell pattern. The bell pattern comes from Waka, another Ga drumming piece that is played as a processional[18]. As with many of these supporting parts, they are added and removed depending on the popular evolution of the piece.

This supporting bell pattern mimics an offbeat supporting drum pattern that is not unique to Kpanlogo but can be played with it and can be transcribed as:

The solid notes are the normal "open" tone and the crossed notes are dampened, muted tones. The supporting bell pattern is audible for the same duration of time as this supporting drum pattern, only without the re-articulation of the sixteenth note.

[18] Personal communication with Elikem Nyamuame.

The bell is allowed to ring for the whole eighth note duration and muted precisely on the downbeat. This offbeat supporting drum pattern was played in the older versions of Kpanlogo and can now only be contemporarily found in Accra in Borborbor[19]. A slightly altered version was played in Kolomashie, only instead of switching between mute and open strokes every beat they switch every two beats (still the same rhythm)[20].

The lead Kpanlogo drummer also plays this offbeat pattern with high-pitched resting slaps in between patterns to dictate the time. While the lead bell pattern may be what holds everyone together, the lead drummer is the one who gives the bell pattern the tempo. Many Ghanaian drumming pieces, including Kpanlogo, speed up in tempo over the course of the piece so the lead drummer must take rhythmic control of the piece and push the bell player to speed up playing on the front of the beat. The best master drummers can easily communicate the new, increasing tempo, and make a smooth transition to the faster speed. In the accompanying recording Mr. Akotuah increases the tempo at various convenient points, especially in the third of the break patterns transcribed later. The offbeat slapping in the Kpanlogo lead drumming gives him the ability to increase the tempo at his own will even when he doesn't play a break pattern.

The most crucial supporting drum pattern played in contemporary Kpanlogo drumming is the deepest toned of the supporting drums. With the bass tone (flat hand

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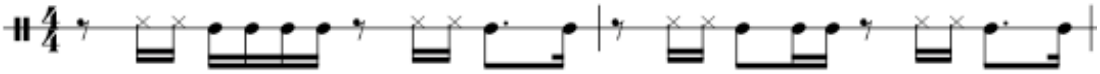
[19] Personal communication with Francis Akotuah and Gavin Webb. Both are drummers for the Students for International Training program in Ghana.
[20] Personal communication with Elikem Nyamuame.

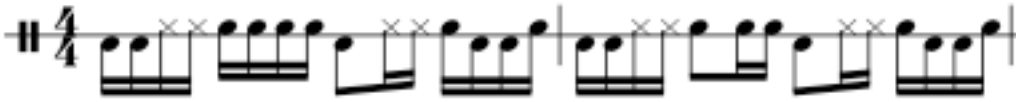
hits the center of the drum) below the line and the open tone above the line it is written as:

The open tones are the most projecting part of the rhythm, and most Kpanlogo drummer would add in slaps on the offbeat sixteenth notes of beats one, two, and three. This deepest toned supporting drum is undoubtedly the most important supporting drum pattern in Kpanlogo because it fits tightly in between and around the lead drummer's rhythm. The lead drummer is free to play anything he wishes because Kpanlogo is a musical arena where the lead drummer can show his mastery over the drum and play incredibly intricate rhythms. Yet, when the lead drummer is not cutting through the rest of the ensemble with these complex passages, he has a pattern that is almost always played during the usual Kpanlogo groove, which specifically happens within beat four. The lead drummer, besides playing the pattern within beat four, will often play a passage within beat two during the groove (when he is not playing an improvised or long passage). The following are two ways the lead Kpanlogo drummer might play the usual groove, with the crossed notes as the off-beat slap tones (bass tones are removed for a more clear transcription):



The lead plays other filling material, as well as long passages that are often accompanied with songs and chants. The simpler patterns that have the open strokes fitting within beats two and four fit intimately with the deep, lead supporting drum

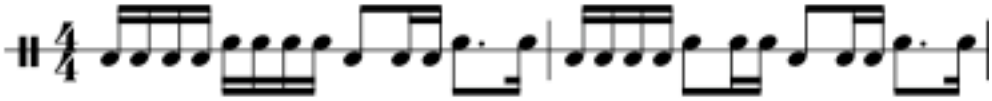
part. The two parts are transcribed below (lead on top, supporting on bottom) to show this adjacency, with the bass tones of both drums removed for convenience:



This supporting pattern is by far the most crucial drumming part because it frames this repeated part of the lead drum's rhythm so exactly.

The second most important supporting drum part in Kpanlogo is tuned higher than the previous supporting part but always lower than the lead (the lead Kpanlogo is always the highest in pitch) and can be written as (bass tone below the line, open above the line, crossed notes are slaps):

This supporting part has also has an intimate interplay with the lead Kpanlogo part. Only the open tones of both drums are transcribed, with the lead on top and supporting on the bottom:

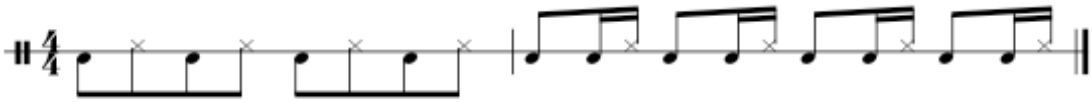


Other patterns that the lead drummer plays may not fit exactly within beat two and four like the above example, but often the interplay is there.

The pattern on the *tamalin*, a frame drum, is not always included in the contemporary Kpanlogo ensemble but can be freely added. The pattern usually played is this downbeat-oriented pattern, with the crossed notes as the muted hits:

This *tamalin* part is played similarly in Kolomashie and is also a reflection of the pounding Gomé, a large box, frame drum and also the name of a drumming and dance piece. The Gomé is similar to the *tamalin* except the wood frame surrounding the skin is extended to make it a full box that can be sat upon, similar to the Cuban cajone. The pitch is changed by pressing the back of the heel against the skin of the drum, moving up and down to get a different pitch. This higher muted tone is achieved to a lesser extent on the *tamalin* by rest-slapping the skin of the *tamalin*.

The shakers are the last of the supporting parts in Kpanlogo. Two shaker patterns were commonly played in Kpanlogo, with the solid note as the downward hit on the thigh and the crossed note as upstroke on the hand:



The first part was the one I was typically assigned to play when playing with drummers from the University of Ghana at Legon. Shaker patterns are very similar in Ghanaian drumming pieces from all over Ghana that are in 2/4 or 4/4 time signature. The emphasis on the upbeat keeps the momentum of the beat going, with the high pitched rattles piercing through the wall of sound booming from the drums.

The last (but far from least) of the supporting patterns comes from the clapping of anyone without a drum, including the audience and the dancers. The claps fall on beats four and one, while the hands are thrown forward on beats two and three. The whole routine can be written as:

Often Kpanlogo performances start with everyone clapping on beats four and one, only being accompanied by the bell patterns. Since the lead bell lines up precisely with the handclaps on beats four and one it allows for the audience to synch up with the drummers. Here is the lead bell pattern with the handclaps:

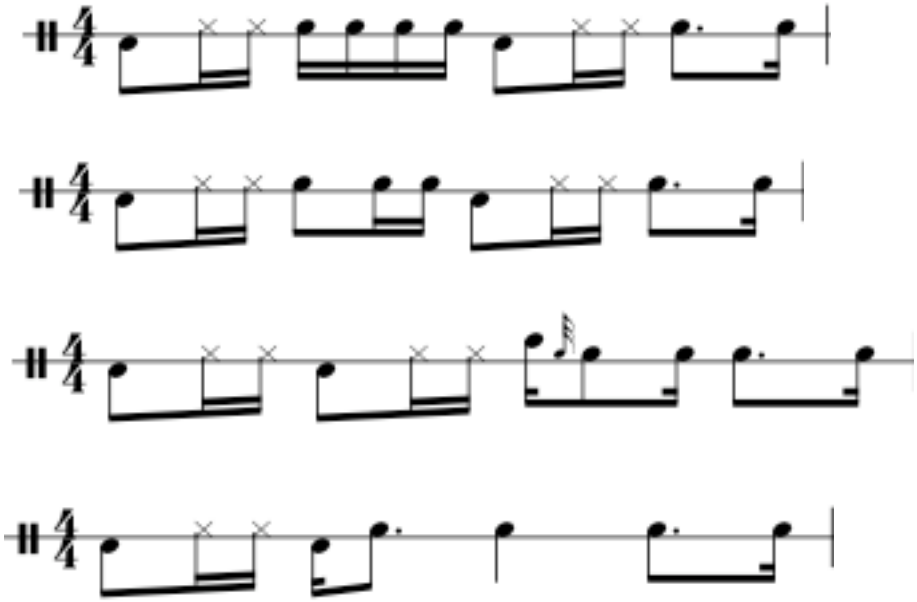
This handclap brings everyone, including the audience and the dancers, into making music and unites them with the drummers to form a unified ensemble.

This unity gives support to the lead Kpanlogo drummer, letting him cut through supporting rhythms to bring the rhythmic fire. Some of these cutting rhythms are transcribed here but there are many more, including improvised passages. There are also break passages that the lead drummer plays, and most of these correspond with the movements made by the dancers.

Lead Kpanlogo Drum Patterns

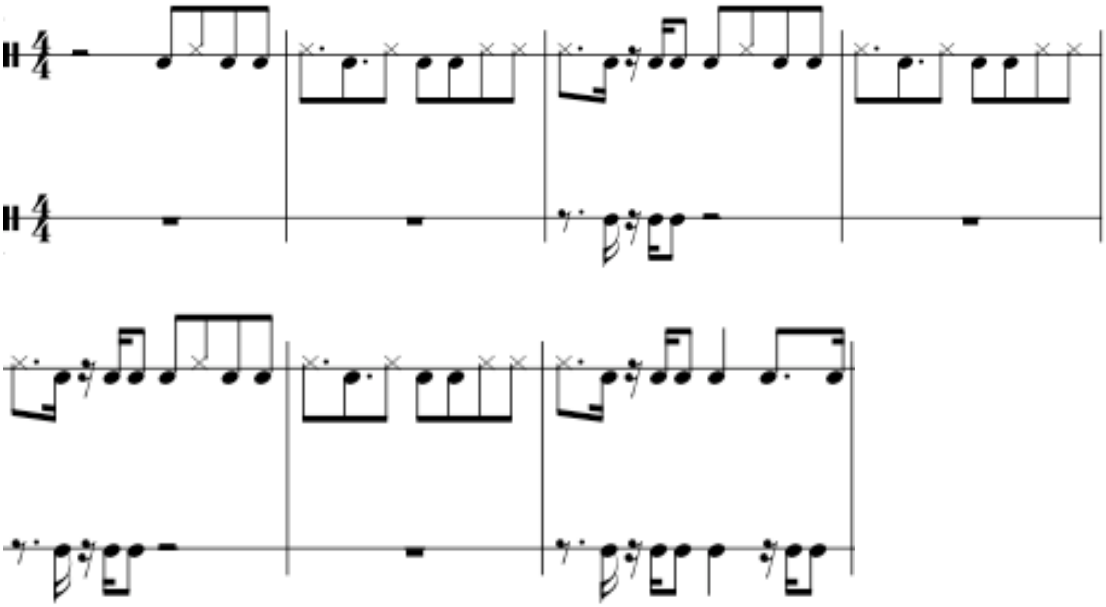
In Kpanlogo there is an array of short rhythmic patterns placed effortlessly within the groove of the Kpanlogo beat. There is also an assortment of break patterns that correspond to dance sequences and passages of Ga songs and chants. The previously transcribed lead parts were of the first variety, which flow into the Kpanlogo groove. With crossed notes as slap-rest tones, notes under the line as bass

tones, notes directly above the line as open notes, and notes a few ledger lines up as the piercing slap tone these parts and some others can be transcribed as:



The sequence of these short patterns is completely up to the lead drummer because they do not require direct correspondence with the dancers. There are plenty of other patterns I witnessed being played by Francis Akotuah and other Kpanlogo drummers, but these passages are the ones that include the pattern on beat four (dotted eighth note, sixteenth note) to flow seamlessly with the deep, main supporting part.

These groove-oriented patterns are more flexibly used in Kpanlogo at the discretion of the lead drummer, while the break patterns are constructed in whole passages and cannot be altered. The first of these break patterns is what starts the entire Kpanlogo piece, and is written so that beat one lines up with the first stroke of the lead bell pattern. The top line is the lead drum and the bottom line is all the supporting drums, with the crossed notes of the lead drum as a particularly sharp slap that is produced by pressing the skin with the left hand while making slap tone with the right:

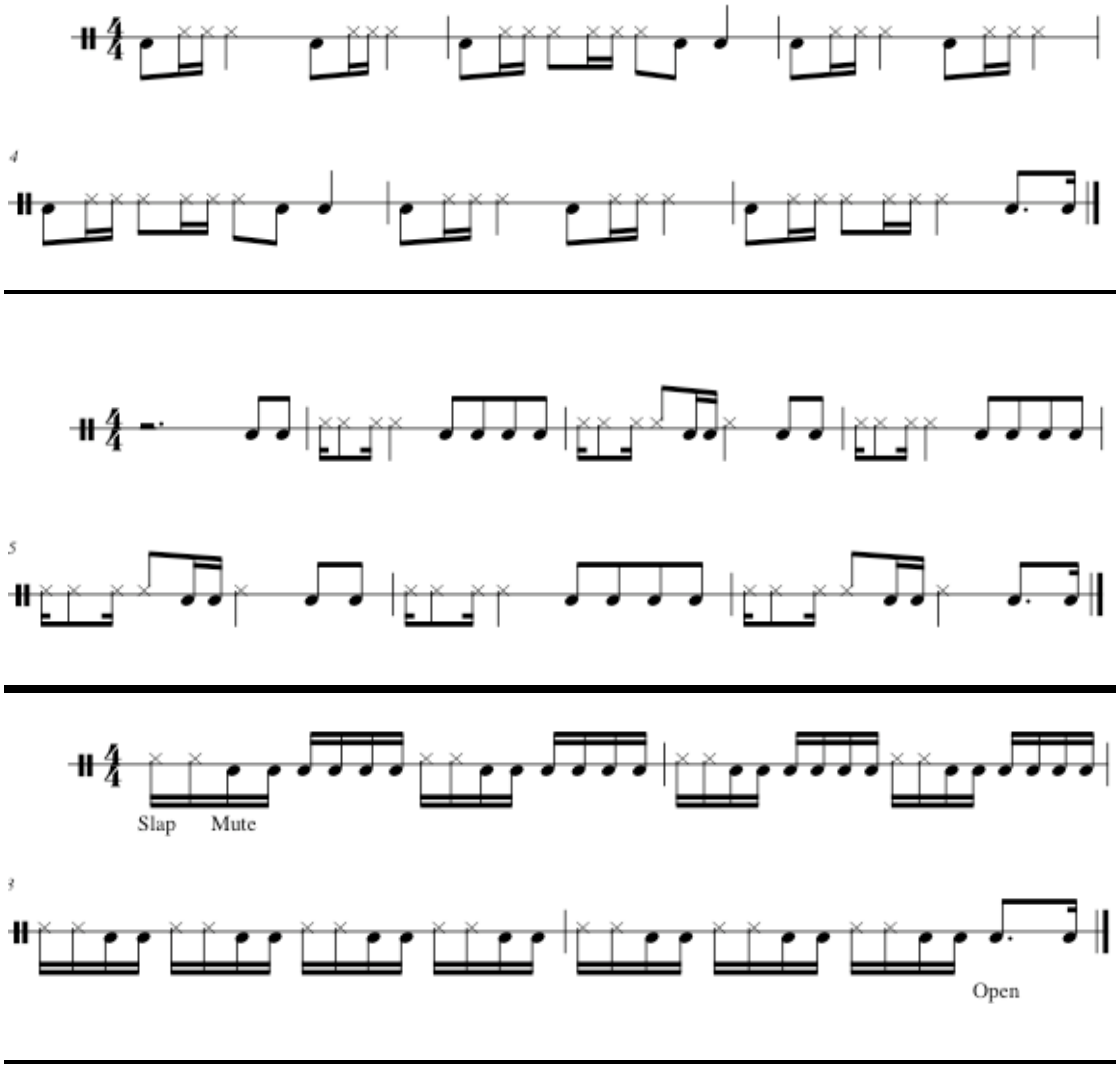


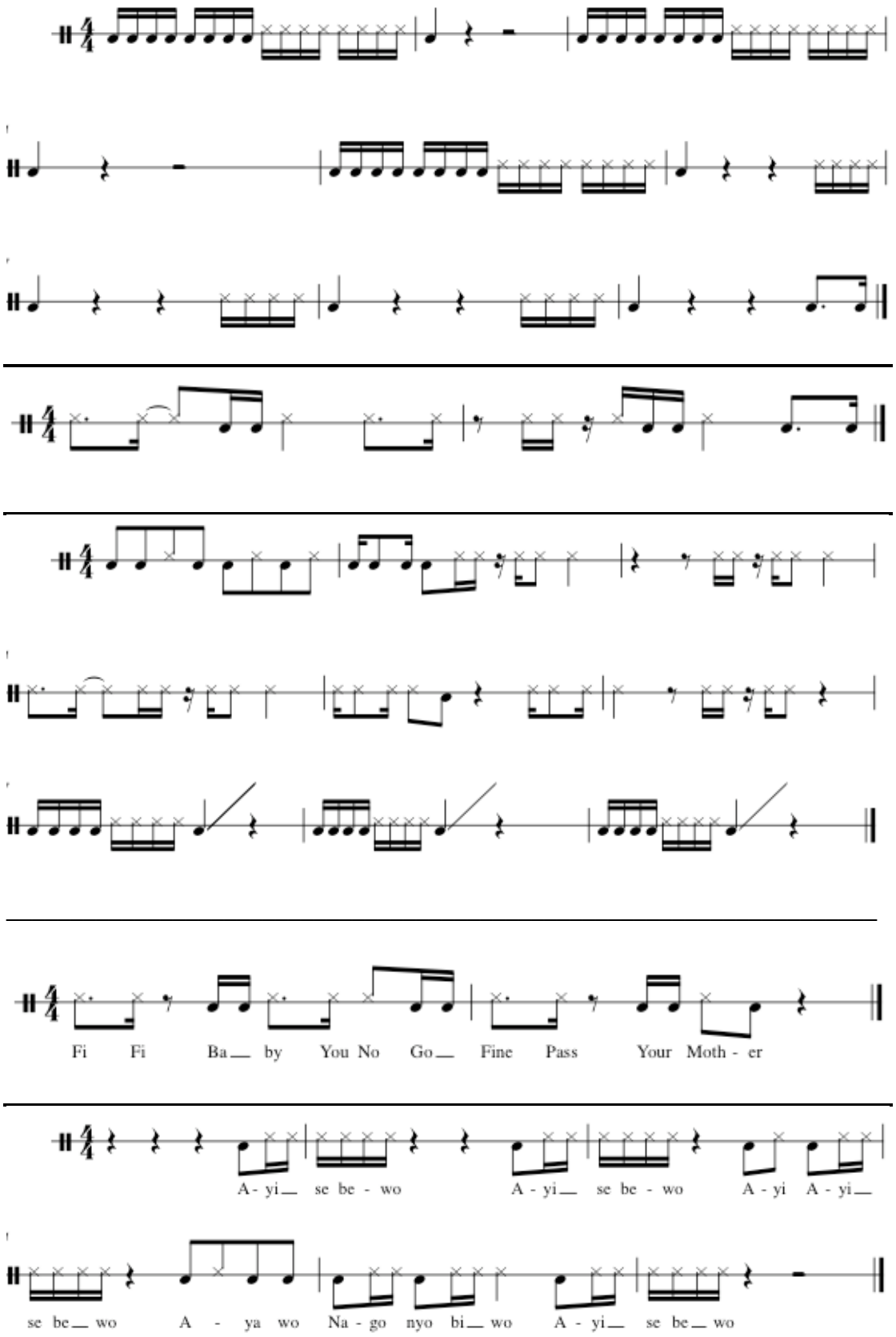
The fourth beat brings the other Kpanlogo supporting drums in to start the piece. The main supporting part is transcribed above for that fourth beat in the last measure, while the rest of the intro is played the same way by the other supporting drums. This intro, as well as all the other lead parts transcribed, can be found on the recording of Francis Akotuah. It can also be found in my thesis concert from April 6th, 2008, where I used this intro both to bring in the traditional Kpanlogo drumming performance as well as for the intro to a funk song I named "Kpanlogo Kparty", inspired by the old LP recording of Kpanlogo called "Kpanlogo Party"[21].

Other patterns do not require a response from the supporting drums. The lead drummer would insert these patterns while the supporting drums continue with their supporting parts. Some of the patterns I was taught were shorter (two four-beat measures) and would always be repeated three times (to create a twenty-four beat

[21] From the LP "Kpanlogo Party" by Oboade with Mustapha Tettey Addy.

phrase) while others are long, whole passages that would only be played once. The patterns that are thrice repeated are written in that manner and are toward the top:




Fi Fi Ba__ by You No Go__ Fine Pass Your Moth - er
A - yi__ se be - wo A - yi__ se be - wo A - yi A - yi__
se be__ wo A - ya wo Na - go nyo bi__ wo A - yi__ se be__ wo

The only universally common aspect to all of these break patterns is the ending on beat four of the last four beat cycle in the pattern with the same dotted eighth and sixteenth-note sequence. While the previous, shorter, groove-oriented patterns end with this every four-beat cycle, these break patterns end with it only the last of the four-beat cycles in the passage.

Some of these pattern also have words written under them at the appropriate point in the rhythm. They usually switch between playing the rhythm on the drum alone and then speaking or chanting the words without the lead drum. The Kpanlogo drum doesn't exactly "talk" in the same way the *atumpan* (Ashanti), *lunna* popularly called *donno* (Dagbamba), or *atsimevu* (Ewe), but these passages do translate meaning, especially when they are reinforced by chanting the words immediately afterward.

The last significant segment I learned is the call to the drummers to end the whole piece:

This can be played at practically any time, and functions as a cut-off for the whole ensemble. These lead drum passages are not noticeably included in hip-life, yet its valuable to understand the way Kpanlogo is played in today's era. The supporting rhythms most shared by Ga drumming and dance pieces, which include the bell, shaker, *tamalin*, and the off-beat supporting drum part (found now in Borborbor) are incorporated into hip-life as a way to spice up the hip-life music in a way that is

distinctly Ghanaian yet contemporary, which is a challenge for many hip-life producers.

Chapter Three

Kpanlogo and American Hip-Hop Rhythms in the New Hip-Life

The influence of rhythms from Ga drum and dance music, with many of these rhythms found in Kpanlogo supporting parts, continues to shape hip-life as it evolves from American hip-hop. While there are some notable exceptions, the majority of today's hip-life songs are infused with the rhythms of Kpanlogo, Waka, and other Ga drumming. At the popular website GhanaWeb.com, the hiplife video section has 122 playable music videos and 80 of them have at least one distinct feature from the supporting Ga drumming parts, with most of these songs combining a great variety of supporting parts[22]. The other styles were an eclectic mix of American Hip-Hop, Jamaican Reggae, Caribbean, and a few groundbreaking original songs. These are popularly considered hip-life even though they are so reminiscent of other genres. They are only identifiable as hip-life because the languages used are Ghanaian. There are also a few songs that are in 6/8 time, with rhythms inspired by Ghanaian pieces like Fontomfrom and the 2nd half of Kundun. Yet the biggest influence of Ghanaian music on hip-life is from the Ga drumming music, especially the most popularly known, Kpanlogo. To break down the magnitude of this effect this chapter looks at each instrument group in hip-hop and hip-life beats and how Ga drumming has shaped the majority of hip-life songs.

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[22] See the hip-life video section at http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/audio/clips.php?cat=0.

Snare and Clap

The snare drum and clap serve to steady the beat, giving the listener a precise cornerstone to anchor the rest of the beat. In hip-hop the snare or clap sound is almost always on beats two and four. There are some exceptions; some beats shift one of the snare's cracks back or forward a half beat, giving the beat a very off-centered and "popping" feeling. These are not very common and have mostly only been used in krunk and club jams that are designed to move you to a particular dance.

In hip-life, one of the most unmistakable influences from Ga drumming and dance music is the handclap on beats four and one. As transcribed in the Kpanlogo section, these handclaps line up exactly with the lead Kpanlogo bell. Beats four and one are the only downbeats the lead bell plays. These handclaps serve to cement the whole beat and bring unity between the listeners and the beat.

Another aspect of Kpanlogo seen in many hip-life beats is the way the kick drum and the snare replicate the syncopation of the lead Kpanlogo bell. Instead of just playing the bell pattern, the kick and snare work together to get the same rhythm. The beat is approximated to hip-hop, which typically has the snare hitting on two and four. Hip-life songs using this bell pattern put the snare sound as close to two and four as possible, only moving the snare on second beat to the and of one, as transcribed here:

Hip-hop is still undeniably the most powerful inspiration for hip-life, yet the rhythms that Ghanaian producers use are greatly inspired by Jama, Kpanlogo, and other forms of Ga music.

Hi-Hat, Bell and Shaker

The hi-hat sound is taken originally from drum set and applied to hip-hop and now hip-life. In hip-hop it serves as a high-pitched time-keeper, with the frequency ranging from only playing the quarter note pulses to a string of repeating eighth notes to a flurry of intricate rhythms that can spice up a hook or chorus with a burst of energy.

Hip-life uses the hi-hat sound in a similar time-keeping function but does not stress the more intricate uses such as in the highly syncopated off-beat grooves in American South-style hip-hop. Patterns from the Kpanlogo bell and shaker parts (as well as the highest pitch supporting part that is now common in Borborbor) are played with the hi-hat sound. Often the bell patterns are actually sampled and used on the track. In songs that use the lead Kpanlogo bell pattern as basis for the kick, snare, and bass line the supporting bell pattern is often played in order to play the combination of the two rhythms, and vice versa. The hi-hat sound particularly uses rhythm from the shaker patterns, with the two upbeat sixteenth notes being the most ubiquitous hi-hat pattern in hip-life.

Kick Drum and Bass Line

The “boom bap” beat of New York-style hip-hop, the founding beat for Reggie Rockstone and other early hip-life artists, is far different from the new Ga-influenced hip-life beat. The focus of almost all American hip-hop beats is on beats

two and four. The kick drum and bass lines are designed to weave around these offbeat hits.

In the new Ga style of hip-life, the 3/2 polyrhythm of the Kpanlogo bell part (the "clave") is often emphasized in the kick and bass parts. Other rhythms are used also but the Ga style is supported strongly. The kick and bass can range from rhythmically emulating the lead bell pattern to the downbeat *tamalin* part to the "four-one" handclap. Since there are so many different sounds a hip-life producer has at his disposal he can more freely alter and interweave supporting parts. The kick drum and bass line affect the gravity of the piece and are now often used in a way to support the Ga style of hip-life.

Synthesizer

The wide use of synthesizers in American hip-hop made it a popular effect in hip-life. Many of the instruments hip-life producers use in the beats they produce are actually of synthetic origin, but the sound of the synthesizer that is not trying to emulate a drum noise and is clearly electronic is the sound that hip-life utilizes to great effect. In hip-hop, since much of the beat is drumming and rapping, which do not imbue a pitch, the synthesizer often takes over the melodic and harmonic dynamics of the song. Hip-life songs similarly use synthesizer to dominate the pitch of the song. Palm-wine guitar riffs, xylophone harmonies, and flute melodies are all used on the synthesizer in hip-life songs.

Sampling

Sampling whole passages and inserting them into a beat allows producers to insert a more natural, musical part that is unable to be reproduced to the same effect

synthetically. Recorded music from any place or culture can be added to the beat. Producer J-Que samples of recordings he makes of instruments from all over Africa[23]. With sampling, hip-life can make the electronic beats sound more musical and natural by inserting traditional drumming, xylophone music, brass bands, and any other music the produces wants to sample. Most commonly sampled in the new Ga-style hip-life are the bell patterns, though they are also synthetically played. Supporting drums are also sampled but tend to not cut through as much as the bell patterns. The kick drum and bass lines are the dominant low tones, leaving very little sonic space for the supporting drums.

Vocal Effects

One last effect that hip-life has adopted from hip-hop is the use of a vocal effect that produces an electronic pitch that matches the voice. Cher was the first one to really gain attention for using the effect, and today it is used all over American hip-hop. The most popular contemporary American artist to use it is T-Pain, whose voice is almost completely dominated by this vocal effect.

The effect is used extensively in hip-life and seems to go completely under the radar of most listeners. A unique use of it is on a track on the same CD that "Ei Al haji" is on. The track has a sampled recording of a baby crying, but then uses the vocal effect to make a melody out of it. It is very difficult to tell that it is a baby crying at first because it is sampled so melodically. Most hip-life songs don't use it in this bizarre way, and rather use it as a way to improve the sound of the vocals.

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[23] Interview with J-Que at thehiplifecomplex.com.

Conclusion

Ghanaian hip-life has emerged from its American hip-hop roots into a more authentic style. The addition of Ghanaian rhythms, particularly ones from the popular Ga hand-drumming, has led many who initially resisted the foreign invasion of American hip-hop to accept hip-life as a popular art form that can actually promote Ghanaian culture. Culturally, hip-life has a long way to go before it can overcome some of the more negative aspects of hip-hop culture. Yet, the future for a positive hip-life lies in the quality of the messages communicated through rap lyrics. Hip-life has given a voice to the youth, who are given no choice but to feel frustrated by the hardships they face every day.

The poverty that grips Africa is not as unsolvable as some U.S. newspapers and news sources have described, but it is completely true that poverty is endemic. It would be wrong to try to solve their problems by sending U.S. dollars and U.S. food aid…it does nothing for the development of Ghana's infrastructure. The most expensive place to buy food is the gas station, which is symptomatic of an economy in trouble. These gas stations sell food and alcohol at prices similar to the U.S., and only the richest Ghanaians can actually shop there. Compare that to America, where gas stations sell the cheapest, most processed food imaginable. Ghanaians needs investment and infrastructure, and it is hard to do that when the ideas of the youth are not expressed. As long as hip-life remains an arena where political and social issues can be raised and discussed it will play a part in solving these problems.

While hip-life may seem silly to many, lewd to the elders, and foreign to some Ghanaians, it is still the mouthpiece of the youth and therefore plays a very important

role in shaping contemporary Ghanaian style. With the use of Ga drumming and dance rhythms in today's style of hip-life, emerging from the original American, New York-influenced beats, hip-life has been given a sound that Ghanaians recognize and identify with. Other Ghanaian rhythms have also been increasingly added into the hip-life beat, but the Jama-inspired beat, sharing many supporting parts with Kpanlogo and other Ga pieces, is the hot beat right now and will continue to enjoy success because of its popular familiarity.

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