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Transforming Traditional Music in the Midst of Contemporary Change: The Survival of Cultural Troupes in Accra, Ghana

by

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Introduction

My involvement with the West African drumming program at Wesleyan University under the direction of master drummer Abraham Adzenyah and a Ghanaian ethnomusicology graduate student, Elikem Nyamuame, inspired me to continue my drumming studies in Ghana.[1] In the spring of 2007, I traveled to Ghana on a School for International Training (SIT) program, where I was required to conduct an extensive independent field-based research project. While I originally intended to study Ghanaian drumming performance, after meeting with my faculty advisor at the University of Ghana, Legon, Professor Nathan Damptey, I decided to take on an additional project in which I would investigate the effects of tourism on neo-traditional performance groups in Accra, called cultural troupes.[2]

To establish some background information for my research, I visited the outdoor space in front of the University of Ghana after classes, where a cultural troupe called Agorsor practices. I wanted to know how tourism affects cultural troupes. Does it provide them with performance opportunities? Do they get paid well when playing for foreigners? Do Ghanaians attend their shows? I had already made friends and played with the members of Agorsor prior to the start of my research and they were happy to talk to me. I observed their practices for a few days and casually asked them questions during their breaks. To my delight, many musicians from other cultural troupes visited Agorsor's practices and I was able to talk with them as well.

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[1] Nyamuame is now an interim professor of West African Dance at Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT.

[2] Cultural troupes are neo-traditional drumming and dancing performance ensembles. In Accra, there are two main forms of cultural troupes: 1) cultural troupes that perform within the model of the National Dance Company; and 2) cultural troupes that compose and perform original compositions using traditional instruments. Both forms of cultural troupes rely heavily upon the legacy of the National Dance Company formed under President Kwame Nkrumah in the early 1960s. In chapters two and three I give more detailed descriptions of cultural troupes.

When I asked the cultural troupe members questions about tourism, it became clear that tourism was only an element of a much larger issue; the musicians explained that traditional music is being marginalized in cosmopolitan centers like Accra. The members of the cultural troupes were eager to tell me about their passionate frustration with the situation of traditional music in Ghana. As Kwame Wadada Kpongo of Agorsor told me, "We have little respect. People see us as disturbing; that we are just making noise, that our music is bogus."[3] When I mentioned the situation of traditional music in Ghana, many traditional musicians were quick to say, "We are suffering." Most of these musicians asserted that traditional music is being sidelined in favor of electronic musical genres in Ghana. As I got deeper into my research, I found information that reinforced their assertions. I formally and informally interviewed members of cultural troupes, employers of musicians, the events coordinators of performance venues, and patrons of music, all of whom corroborated the assertion that traditional music in Ghana is in trouble.[4]

In recent years, due to shifting cultural, political, and social climates, new technology, growing urban populations, and rapid globalization, Ghanaian musicians are in the process of developing new musical traditions that reflect and shape change in Ghana. This paper is an extension of my research in Ghana during the spring of 2007, and it evaluates the trends that have led to the current status of traditional music in urban Ghana. Through the analysis of four cultural troupes in Accra, I also explore the shifting dynamics of Ghanaian contemporary music and I present strategies that

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[3] Kpongo, Kwame Wadada. Personal Interview.11 Apr. 2007.

[4] The formal interviews are scheduled interviews that were recorded with pen and paper or on cassette tape, in which I compensated the interviewees for their time. By informal interviews, I am referring to a casual conversation.

Ghanaian musicians are employing to incorporate traditional music into a contemporary context.

In the Chapter One, I provide history and background information in order to contextualize the body of the paper. I define "traditional music" in the way in which the cultural troupes in Accra use it and I present information about the drumming that I discuss later in the paper. I also briefly evaluate the complexity of musical transmission in Ghana because it is essential to my discussion in Chapter Four of the historical development of foreign-influenced music in Ghana. In Chapter Two, I give a short description of the history of the Ghanaian National Dance Ensemble and expand upon my definition of traditional music in Ghana. In response to the changing dynamics of Ghanaian culture that developed during the period of Ghanaian independence from colonial rule, the directors of the National Dance Ensemble reformed traditional music, creating a formalized repertoire, designed to fit within their own contemporary context. This is important because Ghanaian musicians are currently in the process of re-evaluating the way in which traditional music is incorporated, responds to, and shapes contemporary music in Ghana. I also investigate the effects, both positive and negative, associated with the National Dance Ensemble's revision of traditional music.

In Chapter Three, I explore the problems that cultural troupes in Accra face through the testimonies of four cultural troupes based in Accra. The members of the ensembles explain the typical problems that afflict most cultural troupes. They also express why they feel that traditional music is being marginalized and what could be done to help ameliorate some of the problems that they face. In Chapter Four, I

explore various neo-traditional recreational and popular musical styles to suggest that traditional forms are not static and are constantly and have always been reinterpreted to fit within a contemporary context. In Chapter Five, I investigate some of the political, technological, and social variables that, together, have led to the replacement of live band music with the vast integration of solo electronic performance and recorded music in urban Ghana. I also explain how this shift in musical performance facilitated the rise of hiplife, a form of Ghanaian hip hop that is performed in local languages. In the final chapter, I discuss strategies that musicians are taking to preserve traditional music by integrating it into the current contemporary musical and cultural vocabulary, in which it must both shape and respond to globalization, new technology, and cultural and social change.

Chapter 1: Setting the Stage and Definition of Terminology

Tradition

For the purpose of this paper, I define the word "tradition" in the way that musicians in cultural troupes in Accra use it. I observed that many members of cultural troupes differentiate between what I call "historically traditional" and "neo-traditional" music. As the members of Agorsor explained, music "in the village," which is native to individual ethnic groups, is very different from the repertoires of cultural troupes.[5] Ghanaians primarily use "historically traditional" music in ceremonies and rituals that have existed for centuries and are associated with specific Ghanaian ethnic groups. "Neo-traditional" music generally refers to historically traditional music that Ghanaian musicians have revised for recreational purposes, or have composed using historically traditional instruments. Neo-traditional music often incorporates influences from other African countries, non-African music, and Ghanaian popular music.

Despite my terminological distinction, the musicians refer to manifestations of both forms of music as "traditional." The members of cultural troupes call any music that is composed or performed using traditional instruments and rhythms, whether it is historically traditional or neo-traditional, "traditional." Although the members of cultural troupes do not perform in the cultural contexts of the traditions native to their own ethnic groups, they identify as traditional musicians. Thus, for the purpose of this paper, the term "traditional music" refers primarily to the music of neo-traditional

[5] Agorsor Cultural Troupe. Personal Interview. 11 Apr. 2007.

performance ensembles. I will expand on this definition of traditional music in Chapter Two.

Background on Drumming

The drumming and dancing that is discussed in this paper primarily refers to neo-traditional adaptations of historically traditional rhythms and/or instruments from many different ethnic groups in Ghana.[6] The instruments and repertoires represented in cultural troupes in Accra come primarily, although not exclusively, from the Ashanti, Dagomba, Ewe, Fante, Ga, Lobi and Dagbara groups.[7] Most ethnic groups in Ghana have their own unique repertoire and ensembles. The ensembles discussed in this paper are based in the cosmopolitan setting of Accra and are eclectic and multi-ethnic in their membership, repertoire, and instrumentation. Some cultural troupes perform a repertoire that the National Dance Ensemble created, which includes a variety of formalized adaptations of the historically traditional dances from many Ghanaian ethnic groups. Others use historically traditional instruments and rhythms from the different ethnic groups and combine them to compose new music.

Complexity of Musical Transmission in Ghana

While a thorough examination of the complexity of musical transmission in Ghana is beyond the reach of this paper, it is important to briefly discuss it in order to contextualize the historical development of both traditional and contemporary music in Ghana. A musical instrument, idea, or system might be native to a specific group of

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[6] I use the term *ethnic groups* to describe the various identity groups that are organized around language, predominate in specific regions of Ghana, believe in a particular traditional cosmology, and practice their own unique cultural traditions.

[7] For more information about the drumming of specific ethnic groups, refer to David Locke's books in the bibliography.

people but is not limited to that group. A particular ethnic group may have internalized an instrument or musical practice into their historically traditional vocabulary and repertoire and developed it on a high level that other groups have not. However, this does not mean that people from other ethnic groups or geographical locations cannot be influenced by these musical instruments and practices and internalize them into their own musical repertoire and identity. In West Africa, musical identity exists on many different levels, including, but not limited to, the international level, the nation state, region, ethnic group, and ethnic subgroup. Thus, it is problematic to assign the origins of musical instruments, systems, and ideas to a specific geographical or ethnic border in a post-colonial context, although many instruments are indeed recognized as originating with specific ethnic groups.

The xylophone gyil, for example, illustrates the complexity of musical identity and musical transmission in Ghana. The gyil is a Ghanaian instrument, native to the Upper West region of Ghana, an area that encompasses the Dagbara and Lobi ethnic groups. These ethnic groups are composed of even smaller ethnic subgroups. Although the Dagbara and Lobi people have developed the gyil on a high level for their own local use, gyil performance has been developed in regional, national, and international contexts as well. For example, multiethnic cultural troupes in the Greater Accra Region incorporate the gyil into contemporary compositions that use instruments from all over Ghana. Also, at the University of Ghana, Legon, located in the Greater Accra Region, Ghanaian students from every ethnic group and international students have studied traditional gyil performance outside of the

Dagbara and Lobi cultural context for decades under the direction of gyil master Kakraba Lobi.[8]

On a national level, the Ghanaian National Dance Ensemble has incorporated the gyil into their repertoire. The national stature of this group has assured gyil music a Ghanaian national identity; it can now be referred to as "Ghanaian music." The gyil also reaches far beyond the borders of Ghana. It has become an international instrument because musicians like Kakraba Lobi have incorporated it "into environments beyond [their] ethnic cultures." Lobi was an "international artist as well as a practitioner of his traditional ethnic music system" and fused "traditional music with other ethnic and international styles and influences."[9] This exposed the gyil to an international audience, and as a result, students at a place like Wesleyan University, in the United States, have the opportunity to study the gyil and incorporate it into their own musical vocabulary.

The various innovations of gyil performance in different settings, from those of Dagbara and Lobi performance, to cultural troupes in Accra, the Ghanaian University setting, the National Dance Ensemble, and abroad, all affect innovation in the use of the instrument. Upon his return to the Upper West region of Ghana, Kakraba Lobi's incorporation of other styles of music into the gyil vocabulary inspired new innovations in the historical Dagbara and Lobi music. Similarly, when introduced abroad, many different groups have adopted the gyil to fit within their

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[8] Kakraba Lobi was one of the greatest Ghanaian gyil musicians to ever live. He was well versed in his native traditional repertoire, but was able to fuse the gyil with other Ghanaian and international ethnic traditions. Regrettably, Kakraba Lobi passed away in 2007. His son SK Lobi continues his father's legacy and is a well-recognized gyil player in Ghana. He is also a member of a cultural troupe called Hewale Sounds.

[9] Hoggard, Jay. "Marimba and Vibraphone in African and African-American Music." MA Thesis. Wesleyan Univ., 1991. 26.

musical identities. This new interpretation of gyil music, in turn, can return to Ghana and affect gyil performance in Ghana. For instance, the release of American rap in Ghana that samples African xylophone music might inspire hiplife artists to sample the gyil in their music, resulting in gyil musicians recording hip hop or hiplife music.

This brief description of the complexity of the musical transmission of the gyil is only a glimpse of the countless influences, adaptations, developments, and extensions of historically traditional Dagbara and Lobi gyil music. Individual musical forms are composed of intricate webs of influences during different time periods, all of which contribute to the idioms and nuances of a specific music. An awareness of the complexity of musical transmission in Ghana is important for understanding that no form of Ghanaian music develops in isolation; rather, all forms, traditional and contemporary, are intimately related and influence each other.

Chapter 2: The Ghanaian National Dance Company

Under British colonial rule, educated Ghanaians considered traditional music to be primitive, useless, and Satanist and associated it with uneducated bush-people. Most Ghanaians placed a tremendous emphasis on the importance of formal education and overwhelmingly adopted various forms of Christianity.[10] Abraham Adzenyah, an original member of the Ghanaian National Dance Company, explained that the opposition to traditional music was intense.[11] In schools, teachers caned children for participating in traditional drumming because they considered it to be "disobedient" behavior. The strong stigma associated with the traditional arts meant that students who were caught drumming were often expelled and blacklisted from admission to other schools.[12]

During the process of Ghana's transition to independence in 1957, President Kwame Nkrumah strove to fight the Ghanaian colonial mentality that opposed the traditional arts so vehemently and that had caused many Ghanaians to reject their ethnic traditions. He believed passionately in reinventing a strong national and African identity, which had been lost and felt that this must be achieved through the formalization and cultivation of traditional art forms.[13] As part of this movement, Nkrumah created the Institute of African Studies at the University of Ghana, Legon

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[10] Adzenyah, Abraham. Personal interview. 27 Mar. 2008.
[11] Adzenyah was one of the first Ghanaians to teach West African drumming in an American university. His resume is extensive and he has been a member of the Wesleyan University music faculty since 1969.
[12] Adzenyah, 27 Mar. 2008.
[13] ibid.; Hirt-Manheimer, Isaac. "Understanding "Fast Agbekor" : A History of Ghana's National Dance Company and an Analysis of Its Repertory." MA Thesis. Wesleyan Univ., 2004, 19.

under the directorship of J. H. Kwabena Nketia and Ivor Wilks. The National Dance Ensemble was developed as the resident group of the Institute of African Studies.[14]

With the National Dance Ensemble, Nketia, and choreographer/co-director, Albert Maware Opoku adapted and revised historically traditional music to fit within the changing contemporary context of Ghanaian culture. Together, they created a formalized and institutionalized repertoire of historically traditional music and dance. Nketia and Opoku were left with a difficult undertaking: to create a Ghanaian national culture that fairly represented Ghana's various ethnic groups, and to present their culture in a way that meaningfully preserved tradition within a contemporary context.[15] Nketia believed that unless the National Dance Company's repertoire was carefully and thoughtfully developed, its performances could easily "degenerate into cultural shows remarkable only for their quaintness… no better understood by their own people than by outsiders who found titillation in exoticism."[16] His major concern was the inevitable "conflicts between the traditional values that inspire the arts as community expression and the new outlook, which sees the arts in relation to economic, social, and political development."[17] With this tension in mind, Nketia and Opoku carefully adapted the dances to fit in the contemporary theatre setting. The directors cut many dances in length, reduced the number of dancers, and incorporated new rhythms and movements.[18] Although some groups complained that the dances

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[14] The National Dance Company was officially inaugurated in 1965 and was given the name "Ghana Dance Ensemble." In this paper, I use the terms National Dance Ensemble and National Dance Company interchangeably.
[15] Hirt-Manheimer, 30.
[16] Nketia July 1987: 85, Nketia in Hirt-Manheimer, 30.
[17] Nketia 1970:12, Nketia in Hirt-Manheimer, 30.
[18] Hirt-Manheimer, 40-50.

were not true to their original form, many Ghanaians were pleased with, and took pride in the outcome.[19]

The National Dance Ensemble's institutionalization and modernization of historically traditional dance and drumming is one of the most significant influences and inspirations for the formation of the many private cultural troupes in Accra that have developed since it was created.[20] When the National Dance Ensemble began touring within Africa and in Europe and the United States, many Ghanaian musicians copied them; they thought that it would bring them fame and fortune and would grant them visas to travel abroad.[21] Thus, many musicians formed their own cultural troupes that performed the National Dance Ensemble's exact repertoire. Numerous musicians saw these groups as their ticket out of Ghana and intended to start new lives in Europe and the U.S. In fact, so many musicians have overstayed the limit of their visas that, currently, it is nearly impossible for Ghanaian artists to get visas to the U.S. Many musicians and dancers, however, join cultural troupes because they are legitimately interested in the music.[22] Both private cultural troupes and the National Dance Ensemble celebrate Ghanaian traditional music, however, in some cases, they challenge the specificity of the use of the music.

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[19] Hirt-Manheimer, 45.

[20] Cultural troupes are also influenced by many other sources. For example, individual ethnic groups in Ghana have had recreational performance groups for over a century. There is also a rich tradition of traveling musical theatre troupes that combine Western and historically traditional music, Ghanaian dance, storytelling, and drama, called concert parties. Cultural troupes draw various elements of their performance aesthetic and ideas for the formation of their music from these influences. Also, the establishment of a tourist industry in Ghana during the 1990s greatly influenced the formation of cultural troupes. Tourists wanted to see "authentic" Ghanaian music while in Ghana. The new market for traditional music, inspired Ghanaian musicians to perform institutionalized traditional music in the form of a private performance group. The tourist industry in Ghana is relatively weak and although it is responsible for much of the demand for cultural troupes, it currently does not create enough opportunities for any of the groups to generate significant income.

[21] Adzenyah, March 27, 2008.

[22] Hirt-Manheimer, Isaac. Personal Interview. 28 Mar. 2008.; Nyamuame, Elikem. Personal Interview. 28 Mar. 2008.

Levels of Traditional Music

With the National Dance Ensemble, Nketia and Opoku created a new definition for Ghanaian traditional music. Although their repertoire was eventually recognized as a legitimate form of traditional music, it did not fully represent the unique musical practices of individual Ghanaian ethnic groups. The music was decontextualized from the specific rituals and ceremonies that play important roles in each ethnic group's society.[23] The National Dance Ensemble's repertoire was a form of neo-traditional music that was essential for creating a Ghanaian national identity, but in the process of adaptation for a contemporary theatre setting, the integrity of the original dances was often lost.

Groups that perform the National Dance Ensemble's repertoire learn rhythms and movements from cultures that are not their own, without studying the significance of the music they perform. They can play the rhythms but do not connect them to language, nor do they understand the specific contexts in which the dances are performed in a given ethnic group's ceremonies.[24] Therefore, the meanings of dances change significantly when members of other ethnic groups played them. Adzenyah expresses that Ghanaian drumming is deeply connected to language; in a traditional, local context, drums rhythms have direct linguistic translations. He explains that he once saw a Dagomba master drummer play dono and a man came running to give him money.[25] The master drummer had used the drum to praise the man's father; language is so deeply ingrained in the vocabulary of the drumming that

[23] Nyamuame, 29 Apr. 2008.
[24] ibid.
[25] The dono is an hourglass-shaped talking drum, native to the northern regions of Ghana.

the man understood the words spoken through the drum.[26] Within the repertoire of the National Dance Ensemble, the linguistic connection is largely lost. Moreover, the function of the dances change fundamentally in the National Dance Ensemble's formalized setting. The Ashanti Kete dance, for example, which traditionally can be performed only in the presence of the Ashanti Paramount Chief, is now performed on stage for tourists.[27] Adzenyah explains that the performance of historically traditional music has become so confused that he once saw a performer speaking in the Ga language, but pouring libations in the style of an Ewe priest.[28]

Another unintended problematic consequence of this repertoire is that, in some cases, it causes Ghanaians to reject the legitimacy of the original forms. For example, Nyamuame explains that not all university students came from backgrounds where they had been forced to abandon traditional arts under colonial rule and some were well versed in drumming and dance. However, at the university, when they performed the rhythms and dance movements that they learned from their elders, they were told that they were doing so incorrectly and that they needed to adhere to the repertoire that the National Dance Ensemble formalized.[29] In some cases, this has harmed historically traditional music by threatening its continuation.

Despite these negative circumstances, the repertoire that the National Dance Ensemble created is not *bad* nor does it lack value; it responded to and shaped the changing cultural and political dynamics during the aftermath of colonial

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[26] Adzenyah, 27 Mar. 2008.
[27] Nyamuame, 28 Mar. 2008.
[28] 27 Mar. 2008.
[29] Nyamuame explains that in the Volta region, Yoruba speakers, the group from which the southern Ewe dance, Gahu, is believed to originate, taught him how to dance Gahu. When he was at Legon, he danced Gahu as he had learned it in the Volta region and his instructor scolded him for dancing incorrectly (28 Mar. 2008); Hirt-Manheimer, 28 Mar. 2008, Nyamuame, 28 Mar. 2008.

independence. Ghanaians have come to accept it as a legitimate form of traditional music. It is inevitable that historically traditional music will lose its specificity in any effort to adapt it to fit within a contemporary context. Reformation and adaptation of traditional music to respond to and shape the contemporary reality of Ghana is part of a continuous process that is essential to the progression of culture. I will discuss this in more depth in Chapter Four. Currently, due to vast cultural and social change, overwhelming access to new technology, and globalization, Ghanaian musicians are working to create new formats for traditional music. Just as the National Dance Ensemble replaced and/or adapted historically traditional music, the National Dance Ensemble's repertoire can be replaced and/or adapted. Currently, cultural troupes are struggling to respond to these changing dynamics and to find their niche in the shifting musical landscape.

Chapter 3: Cultural Troupes in Trouble

There are primarily two forms of cultural troupes in Accra: those that copy the repertoire of the National Dance Ensemble and those that compose original material using traditional instruments.[30] Whereas many cultural troupes perform the National Dance Ensemble's repertoire, which has not changed significantly for nearly fifty years, other cultural troupes that compose original pieces are developing "new modes of artistic expression using traditional techniques and media to reflect the current times."[31] This second form of cultural troupe simultaneously uses instruments and rhythms from many different regions of Ghana. For example, a given composition might include a gyil (xylophone) from the Dagbara and Lobi people, kpanlogo drums and a gome drum from the Ga people, and gankogui (bell) and axatse (rattle) from the Ewe people.

Both forms of cultural troupes complain that they are suffering financially. The adoption of foreign cultural practices and values as well as music that is highly influenced by foreign imports makes it difficult for neo-traditional music to compete in the music scene in Accra. Some cultural troupes express that their music is quickly dying out. It has become largely unpopular and is mostly sponsored by foreigners who want to experience what they consider to be "authentic" Ghanaian music while in Ghana. Cultural troupes accept the foreign sponsorship of their music, but as one

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[30] Not all cultural troupes that perform in the model of the National Dance Ensemble are disconnected from original forms of tradition; the members of some groups are highly experienced practitioners of their native ethnic traditions. For example, the members of Agorsor are originally from the Volta Region, where their elders taught them the traditional Ewe music system as children. Many members of other cultural troupes that do not perform the National Dance Ensemble's repertoire are also masters of their own ethnic music. SK Lobi, Kakraba Lobi's son and a member of Hewale Sounds, is well versed in historically traditional Lobi gyil performance. Also, Hirt-Manheimer explained that there are cultural troupes in some areas of Ghana that share a common ethnicity and study and reform their own historically traditional repertoire (28 Mar. 2008).

[31] Hirt-Manheimer, 16.

musician warns "if we [Ghanaians] aren't careful, we will get to the point where foreigners will be teaching us our own culture."[32] Along with issues of popularity and marketability, the economic framework of the music industry in Ghana limits the opportunities for large musical groups to succeed.

This chapter investigates case studies of four cultural troupes in Accra; two groups are in the model of the National Dance Ensemble and two groups compose original material using historically traditional instruments. Within each category, I have identified two subcategories: economically successful and economically unsuccessful. Economic success is determined by the average number of performances each group has on an annual basis, the amount they are paid per performance, and the number of performances they have had abroad.[33] Musicians expressed that a group that could finance their own promotion and/or subsist from the income they generate from performing is considered economically successful, yet even the most successful groups struggle financially. They cannot afford new instruments and rarely earn more than enough to feed their families. Although the groups perform different material, their financial struggles are similar. The following is a brief description of the four cultural troupes.[34]

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[32] Botri, Dela. Personal Interview. 17 Apr. 2007.

[33] Although the cultural troupes did not classify themselves using the terms economically successful or unsuccessful, there was a general consensus of the meaning of success and they used these criteria to evaluate their own and other groups' success.

[34] I ascertained information about cultural troupes in my fieldwork, conducting both formal and informal interviews of the four cultural troupes, managers at venues that employ cultural troupes, and sponsors of the traditional arts in Accra. I also practiced and performed with Sogo Traditional African Dance and Music Ltd., studied privately with master drummer, Frances Akoutouah, and attended regular performances of cultural troupes.

Cultural Troupe Case Studies

	Cultural Troupes Who Compose New Pieces Using Traditional Instruments	National Dance Company Model
Not Economically Successful	Agorsor	Dzanyano
Economicly Successful	The Hewale Sounds	Sogo African Dance and Music Ltd.

Figure 1: Classification of four cultural troupes active in Accra

Agorsor

Agorsor is a group of six men in their early twenties who practice in front of the University of Ghana, Legon. They compose original pieces using traditional instruments including kpanlogo drums, the gome drum, gyil (xylophone), atenteben (flute), gankogui (bell), and axatse (rattle). The members of Agorsor define themselves as economically unsuccessful. The group typically earns between 100 and 150 cedis per performance.[35] As I discuss later in this chapter, hiplife artists make considerably more than cultural troupes. On average, Agorsor performs once every six to eight weeks and has never performed abroad. The group maintains an intense practice regimen practicing five days per week for five hours each day. While its members subsist primarily on their income from performing, Kwame Wadada Kpongo explains, "We feed ourselves through our instruments. When it is not time for rehearsal and someone offers you a small job and we take it because sometimes

[35] 0.97 Cedi = $1 USD (10 Apr. 2008).

there is no performance for two or more months. We are also artists and carve, tie and dye, and batik.[36] We share our money. Our parents also help us a little bit."[37] They explained that they do not have formal occupations other than practicing and performing with Agorsor. The group performs at many different types of functions, including weddings, conferences, naming ceremonies, parties, concerts, luncheons, and government events, and at venues such as the Alliance Française and five-star hotels in Accra like the Labadie Beach Resort, LaPalm Royale, The Golden Tulip, and Novotel.[38]

Hewale Sounds

Dela Botri formed Hewale Sounds in 1996 as an extension of the Pan African Orchestra.[39] From 1996 to 2004, Hewale Sounds was the resident group at the National center for African Music and Dance at the University of Ghana, Legon, which was under the directorship of emeritus professor J. H. Kwabena Nketia.[40] During this time they practiced for eight hours per day, five days a week. Due to a

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[36] Tie and Dye and Batik are forms of African cloth printing.
[37] 11 Apr. 2007.
[38] 11 Apr. 2007.
[39] "The Pan African Orchestra was founded by Nana Danso Abiam, in March 1988, in Kokomlemle, Accra, Ghana. Abiam was previously director / conductor of the Ghana National Symphony Orchestra (1985-88) and lectured atenteben (flute) music in the B.A. (Hons.) African Music Program at the Music Department of the School of Performing Arts, University of Ghana, Legon (1979 - 85). The orchestra is a large ensemble of traditional and neo-traditional instruments, selected from established musical cultures in Africa, including the Shona mbira culture of Zimbabwe, the Manding kora culture of Senegal, Gambia and Mali, the Chopi timbila culture of Mozambique, among others. The aims of the orchestra are to establish a classical African orchestra of the highest artistic standard. To evolve a new style of symphonic music from the wealth of musical raw material bequeathed to us via tradition, to develop new mechanisms of orchestrating music for traditional and neo traditional instruments, and to develop a conservatory program in the area of African music performance. The concept draws inspiration from the Pan African ethos, to eliminate all artificial boundaries within the African continent, leading to the creation of a united Africa. It stemmed from a research project that Abiam undertook at the Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, into the acoustics of a range of melodic and non-melodic instruments, i.e. their idiom, range, compass, tuning, loudness, limitations, timbre, construction and playing mechanism" (Quoted from http://panafricanorchestra.org/).
[40] Botri, 17 Apr. 2007.

lack of funding at the National Center for African Music and Dance, Hewale Sounds lost their residency in 2004. They were forced to move to the W.E.B Dubois Center, located in the Airport Residential Area of Accra, where they currently practice for four hours, twice a week.[41] The group consists of twelve male musicians, their ages ranging from early twenties to mid-thirties. Hewale Sounds composes original music using traditional instruments, including kpanlogo drums, the gome drum, gyil (xylophone), atenteben (flute), gankogui (bell), and axatse (rattle).

They are one of the most financially secure and well-known neo-traditional musical groups in Accra. In 2006, they had over 50 performances and they have toured the U.S., Europe, South Africa, and the Middle East. On average, the group earns between 400 and 500 cedis per performance. The members of Hewale Sounds are not employed outside of the group; they rely solely on the money they earn from performing to support their families. Hewale Sounds performs at government functions, conferences, parties, concerts, five-star hotels in Accra like the Labadie Beach Resort, LaPalm Royale, The Golden Tulip, and Novotel, and the Alliance Française. They also play for institutions like SIT and for private foreign government parties and events.[42]

Dzanyamo

In 1996, Kwame Edward Dogbe formed Dzanyamo, a cultural troupe that is the resident group of Elephants on Moon, a Spanish-run NGO located near Kotobabi Junction in Newtown, Accra. The group consists of twenty male and female dancers and drummers who range in age from early teens to mid-thirties. Although they

[41] ibid.
[42] ibid.

composed an educational piece to promote HIV/AIDS awareness, the group primarily performs a repertoire similar to that formalized by the original National Dance Ensemble. They perform dances from many different regions using instruments indigenous to those regions. Dzanyamo practices three days each week for two hours and performs twice per month on average. The group is not economically successful, and therefore, its adult members must hold fulltime jobs. Many of them teach private music lessons in schools where they are able to recruit talented teen musicians and dancers. On average, the group earns 100 to 150 cedis per performance. However, some performances pay little or nothing. Unlike many groups, Dzanyamo performs at funerals, which often do not pay. Although they have received invitations to perform abroad in Europe, they have never found the sponsorship to travel. Because sponsorship is difficult to find and promotion is nearly impossible without finances, the group initially tried to promote itself by playing for no charge at funerals, but, as a result, people expect them to continue to play for free. The group also performs at venues like the Alliance Française, the National Theatre, and hotels including Novotel, The Golden Tulip, Shangri La, and La Palm Royal.[43]

Sogo African Traditional Dance and Music, Ltd.

Sponsor Isaac Joe Opaye founded Sogo African Traditional Dance and Music, located at Nima Junction in Newtown, Accra. The group has a managerial office, a storage house for instruments and costumes, and a practice space. Opaye owns and runs the office and the house but borrows the practice space from a Christian private school. The group has seventeen members, both male and female, ranging from age

[43] Dogbe, Kwame Edward. Personal Interview. 18 Apr. 2007.

nine to age forty-five. Sogo performs a repertoire similar to that of the National Dance Ensemble but also incorporates Nigerian and Senegalese dances to their program. An office manager and camera technician assist the group in organizing performances and promotional tools. Sogo practices for three hours each weekday afternoon so that its younger members can practice after school. In addition, senior drummers and dancers hold sectional rehearsals and mentor the younger members, many of whom they train to become expert drummers and dancers. The majority of the senior members have been with the group since it was first formed and the members in their early twenties have grown up as part of the group.

Due in large part to their strong sponsorship, Sogo is economically sound. Opaye takes care of the members' finances and pays for many of their expenses such as food, instruments, costumes, travel abroad, and transport. On average, Sogo performs five times per month, earns between 400 and 500 cedis per performance and has traveled to Italy multiple times, where they perform in international dance festivals. Despite their economic achievement, the members are not able to live off the money that they generate by performing. Most of the earnings go towards the promotion of the ensemble. Opaye compensates the members fairly by paying for their practice space, instruments, costumes, and storage. However, the majority of the adult members have full time jobs teaching traditional music and dancing in private schools. They are thus able to train and recruit incredibly talented youth drummers and dancers for the group.[44]

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[44]Sadzi, Bernard. Personal Interview. 25 Apr. 2007; Clottey, Raymond. Personal Interview. 25 Apr. 2007; Opyae, Isaac Joe. Personal Interview. 27 Apr. 2007.

Problems Facing Cultural Troupes in Accra

In interviews, the members of all four cultural troupes articulated that they were frustrated with the situation of traditional music in Ghana. Kwame Wadada Kpongo of Agorsor explains that the appreciation for traditional music in Ghana is "very, very low. It has little respect." To most Ghanaians cultural troupes are only "disturbing and making noise. We [the members of Agorsor] are like disciples. We don't mind [don't pay attention to the scrutiny]. We just want to keep performing and preserving tradition because we know that it is the right thing to do."[45] Kpongo asserts that "some people really love traditional music but it is maybe only five percent of the population." Ghanaians "are adopting the Western influence which is coming in now. The people who play [traditional] instruments are seen as Satan or unworthy people. In Ghana we respect Christians and everything Christian is Western. I am not saying that Western instruments are bad but if they could also introduce the African instruments in the church, it will help, but they preach and say that our instruments are bogus."[46] The members of Agorsor affirm that they have the utmost respect for Christians and Christianity in Ghana, but they feel that such strong foreign influence is a serious threat to the continuation of traditional music. Other groups also identify foreign influence as a major problem. However, they do not link this to Christianity as the majority of the drummers and dancers in other groups are Christian. Of the four groups, Agorsor is the only ensemble that is completely composed of non-Christians, who openly expressed that they practice traditional religion.

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[45] 11 Apr. 2007.
[46] ibid.

Dela Botri of the Hewale Sounds explains that all over Africa, but "especially in Ghana, people do not have respect for traditional African instruments or music."[47] Botri believes strongly in cultural exchange and supports collaborative efforts between traditional musicians, hiplife artists, and even foreign musicians. He does, however, believe that Ghanaians are forgetting their culture. Botri explains that the process of cultural exchange "doesn't mean that you have to forget your culture, you have to keep your culture and learn something from" another. According to Botri, the fundamental problem is that Ghanaians are not holding on to their culture in the process of exchange. He asserts that it is important to play foreign music in Ghana but that it is imperative to also "play [traditional] music for the Ghanaians to listen because it maintains a balance. If you keep on playing foreign music without playing traditional Ghanaian music and it is all that the children in Ghana know, then if we are not careful, people from outside will come to teach us our own culture."[48] Kwame Edward Dogbe of Dzanyamo also shares a similar concern. He explains that "drumming and dancing is old news and people don't fancy it any longer. Western influence is pulling people away from it."[49]

In addition to the problem of "Western" influence, the groups all articulate that the Ghanaian government does little to support the traditional arts. Dela Botri complains that as a musician, he alone does "not have the power" to promote traditional music in Ghana and thus ensure that Ghanaians do not forget their culture. He feels that "this is a responsibility of the authorities. I don't have the power. I'm not a minister, MP, or assemblyman… nobody. I am only a musician in Ghana,

[47] 17 Apr. 2007.
[48] ibid.
[49] 18 Apr. 2007.

standing for Africa."[50] Yaw Bejire of Agorsor asserts that Ghanaian leaders are "not helping us at all; we the traditional musicians are at the back, they don't think about us. The most painful part is that whenever there is a tourist or someone like the American President comes to Ghana, they hire traditional groups but when it gets to those big shows for Ghanaians, they won't call us, they call hiplife artists."[51] Similarly, Kwame Edward Dogbe of Dzanyamo believes that if the ministries were to organize festivals for traditional music, it would spread awareness and appreciation but they "don't support it," and in turn, "they don't organize festivals."[52] Isaac Joe Opaye of Sogo shares a similar sentiment and complains that there are festivals all over the world where traditional Ghanaian music is appreciated but not in their own country.[53]

The members of these groups explain that increased governmental support would help traditional musicians tremendously. Because of a lack of local sponsorship, traditional Ghanaian musicians cannot compete in an international market. Other West African governments support their own musics, and therefore have world famous traditional musicians. Ghana, however, has few internationally recognized masters. Dela Botri says that people should ask Ghanaians to name "a musician from Ghana that everybody can identify in the world," because they will not have an answer.[54]

The government could provide tremendous support by making small changes that require little funding. For example, Botri expresses that "if they can come in and

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[50] 17 Apr. 2007.
[51] 11 Apr. 2007.
[52] 18 Apr. 2007.
[53] 27 Apr. 2007.
[54] 17 Apr. 2007.

say every school in Ghana should learn traditional instruments by force and they have to add it as a subject, the students will learn it. Because the ministry of education has brought a system to the society, the students will have to study it and they will learn the value of it. That is very, very important because they don't teach this kind of music in school at all."[55] He also explains that he "introduced atenteben to five or six schools some years ago in 1999. In one school I had six solid atenteben players. One of those boys now plays in Hewale Sounds."[56] The groups have successfully recruited students into their ensembles; two of Sogo's best dancers are nine years old. By introducing traditional music to students, the government could do a lot to build appreciation for it among the Ghanaian youth and thus assure that it is not overlooked as new cultural forms develop.[57]

There are very few organizations in Ghana, private or public, that support and promote the traditional arts; of the handful that exist, most are sponsored by foreign money. The Alliance Française is one of, if not the only, organization in Ghana that has provided a longstanding platform for the promotion of Ghanaian traditional music.[58] The French Embassy founded and continues to fund the Alliance Française and built it to serve as a French language school and a center for cultural exchange. Cephas Sackitey has been the Cultural Activities Coordinator and the head of coordinating cultural programming at the Alliance Française since February of 2001. He organizes weekly Wednesday evening cultural programs during which artists from different cultural backgrounds perform. Slots for Ghanaian cultural troupes are

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[55] ibid.
[56] Atenteben is a type traditional bamboo flute; ibid.
[57] Traditional music is rarely taught in schools in Accra and is almost exclusive to private schools.
[58] Sackitey, Cephas. Personal Interview. 19 Apr. 2007.

reserved biweekly, ensuring consistent (neo) traditional Ghanaian performances. The Alliance Française not only provides them with a place to perform but also promotes the groups. It has funding to print brochures and fliers with a list of the performance calendar, which means that they post the groups' names all over Accra. Also, the performances expose the groups to people who will potentially hire them in the future, and they are important for networking with other organizations.

Moreover, weekly performances also serve as showcases for potential employers because many important people, such as foreign ambassadors, attend the shows. As Sackitey explains "you never know who will be coming through."[59] This kind of exposure spurs invitations to perform at foreign embassies in Ghana, at other Francophone centers in West Africa, and even abroad in the Middle East, Europe, and the United States. Some nightclubs, restaurants, and hotels such as the Ghanaian Village at La Palm Royale Hotel are trying to copy the Alliance Française by scheduling regular cultural programs.[60] However, they are primarily concerned with the entertainment aspect of the program and are not doing much to promote traditional music as a respected art form, or to connect the performers with potential employers.

The Alliance Française is also a locus for creativity and a place of gathering for traditional musicians. Musicians from many groups come to support their friends who are performing. Often the members of other groups will play a couple of numbers or dance with the performers hired for the evening. Other venues do not

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[59] ibid.

[60] The Ghanaian Village is an outdoor restaurant and bar that caters to tourists. It was built to resemble a circular thatched hut to seem "authentically Ghanaian," and unlike the other restaurants at the hotel, it serves Ghanaian cuisine.

create an environment where musicians can take pleasure in each other's music and learn from one another. Sackitey notes that the Alliance Française is a place for the musicians' enjoyment as well as the audiences'.[61]

If the Ghanaian government were to sponsor an organization similar to the Alliance Française, it would help alleviate some of the problems for traditional music. However, the efforts made with the intent to create a platform truly devoted to the promotion and development of the traditional arts in Ghana comes from foreign interest and money. Despite the sponsorship of the Alliance Française, it is primarily foreigners and tourists who attend the weekly performances. Few Ghanaians who are not musicians show interest in or attend the events. While sponsorship is incredibly important for the success of traditional music, it alone cannot mitigate a general lack of Ghanaian interest in the art form. This could potentially change if the sponsorship came from the Ghanaian government instead of foreign sources because it would show that interest was coming from within Ghana rather than from a foreign embassy.

Traditional Music in Rural Villages

While it is not the focus of this paper, it is important to comment on the ways in which the changing cultural climate in Ghana affects traditional music in rural villages. Although I did not study this directly, I will explain what I observed while living in rural villages in different regions. The directors of my program, Olayemi Tinoye and Gavin Web, an ethnomusicology PhD candidate at the University of Ghana, Legon, explained that the level to which traditional music is integrated in village society varies from region to region. When I visited villages in three different

[61] 19 Apr. 2007.

regions, the Ashanti, Volta, and Eastern regions, my directors' explanation was consistent with what I observed. I noticed that in some villages, traditional music is part of daily life whereas it is hardly present in others. For example, in Klikor, a village in the Volta Region, one can hear drumming almost anywhere during the morning and the evening. In Kunsu, Mankranso, and Domeabra, villages in the Ashanti region, however, there is hardly any drumming and dancing. During a two-week stay in Kunsu, I searched for a drum teacher; there was not a single drummer in the village nor in any of the three nearby villages in which my colleagues stayed. I did meet a drum carver who was passing through Kunsu to collect timber so that he could return to the arts center in Kumasi, the capital city of the Ashanti Region, where he sells drums to tourists. Whereas in Klikor drumming pours out of the shrines, in Kunsu, hiplife and burgher highlife blare from bars and local shops.[62] In Krobo-Odumase, the capital of the Eastern Region, I noticed that the integration of traditional music was somewhere in-between that of Klikor and Kunsu.[63] While there was a strong presence of electronic music in bars and shops, it was clear that traditional music is incredibly important for various ceremonies, such as the female puberty rite called *Depot*. It seems that in some rural areas, traditional music faces circumstances similar to those in urban areas, but in many rural villages, it does not experience the same problems. Although people in many rural villages have

[62] Highlife is a form of popular music that combines traditional and recreational Ghanaian music with foreign influences, including rock and roll, jazz, Caribbean music, and many others. Burgher highlife is an electronic form of highlife music that uses the synthesizer heavily. Expatriate Ghanaians created burgher highlife in Germany during the late 1980s and early 1990s and subsequently re-introduced it to Ghana, where it has become extremely popular.

[63] Although Krobo-Odumase it is the capital of the Eastern Region, it is not an urban center like Accra or Kumasi, rather, it is a small town.

integrated electronic music into their culture, it does not appear that traditional music is "dying out."

Financial Problems

As a result of the economic framework of the entertainment industry and the mass popularity of hiplife, the performance opportunities for traditional musicians have decreased significantly in recent years.[64] While cultural troupes and highlife bands have many members and expensive instruments, hiplife musicians usually perform as solo acts and can lip-synch or rap/sing over a recording. Bars, hotels, and clubs prefer to hire solo performers because they are less expensive, meaning that there are fewer opportunities for large groups to perform.[65] Even for a small cultural troupe like Agorsor, which has six members, the earnings per member are significantly less than a solo performer. This means that each musician is paid an average of 20 cedis; however, for most groups, performances are not consistent, meaning that a group can have as many as four performances in one month and as few as one performance in six months or even a year. Whereas Agorsor earns between 100 and 150 cedis per performance, hiplife artists can charge as little as 50 cedis per performance. While Agorsor has only six members, other groups have over 20 members and the individual group members take home next to nothing.

Hotel management staff responsible for hiring entertainers, such as Jackie Senoo, the Assistant Sales Manager at the Golden Tulip Hotel and Frances Adzraku, the Assistant Head of Marketing and Special Events at Shangri-La Hotel, explain that

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[64] Webb, Gavin. Personal Interview. 10 Apr. 2007.
[65] Senoo, Jackie. Personal Interview. 11 Apr. 2007; Adzraku, Frances. Personal Interview.16 Apr. 2007.

they rarely hire cultural troupes. They described that over the past few years, the clientele of hotels has become more business oriented. Most of the customers are international business people who are not visiting Ghana for recreational purposes. As Senoo explains, dancing and drumming is too "disturbing for serious business conversation," thus they are more inclined to hire musicians who play "cool" music, such as highlife, jazz, and classical.[66] La Palm Royal Hotel, although it does target many businesspeople, also serves as a family-oriented resort that attracts tourists. It is no surprise that La Palm is one of the few hotels that has not cancelled regularly scheduled cultural programming; tourists want to see what they consider to be "authentic" Ghanaian music when they visit Ghana, and the hotel is in the business of pleasing tourists. With the exception of Saturday and Sunday performances at La Palm Royal's Ghanaian Village, many hotels like the Golden Tulip, La Badie Beach, and Shangri-La, that used to have consistent weekly slots for cultural troupes, have cancelled their cultural programs. This drastically cuts the performance opportunities for many cultural troupes and means that groups that once relied on regular performances at a given hotel no longer have a consistent performance calendar. This follows the general trend of decreasing performing opportunities for traditional musicians.

Moreover, the cost of transportation is much higher for a cultural troupe than for a solo performer. Solo musicians usually make between 50 and 70 cedis, thus a transportation fee of 10 cedis is not a major blow to their earnings. Agorsor, which has six members, has to charter multiple taxis both to and from the performance in order to transport their instruments and group members. This can amount to 10 cedis

[66] 11 Apr. 2007.

or more in each direction.[67] When they make only 100 cedis per performance, 20 cedis lost to transport is a huge dent in their earnings. Larger groups like Sogo and Dzanyamo are forced to charter a tro tro (a small bus) and the transportation fee is astronomical in relation to the earnings of individual group members.

Although the following figures are not exact, it is valuable to compare the earnings of the individual performers of large groups to the earnings of a solo performer. Even in a small group like Agorsor, which has only six members, the individual members make a fraction of that which solo performers earn. If Agorsor is paid 100 cedis for a performance, and transportation costs 20 cedis, the group is left with 80 cedis and each performer earns 13.33 cedis. For a solo artist who makes between 50 and 70 cedis, subtracting 10 cedis for transport still leaves the musician with total earnings between 40 and 60 cedis. The solo artists makes between three and four and one half times that of the members of a small cultural troupe like Agorsor. Even before transportation costs are subtracted, a twenty-person cultural troupe that is paid 100 cedis for a given performance can only allot five cedis per performer. A solo performer makes between eight and 12 times the amount that a member of a large cultural troupe earns in a given performance, before transportation costs. Thus, it is no surprise that venues featuring live performers are more likely to hire solo performers because they are cheaper than large groups.

For most groups, a lack of significant sponsorship serves as an enormous problem. For cultural troupes that have sponsorship, it is not enough, and the groups that have no sponsorship are in serious financial binds. Hewale Sounds is in one of the best positions of any cultural troupe in Accra. They play up to 50 performances a

[67] Agorsor, 11 Apr. 2007.

year, charge between 300 and 500 cedis per performance (100 to one 150 cedis is standard pay for most groups), play for presidential functions, and have performed abroad on multiple occasions.[68] Despite their success, they suffer from lack of sponsorship. As mentioned earlier, Hewale Sounds used to be the resident group at the International Centre for African Music and Dance at the University of Ghana, Legon, which is sponsored by the Ford Foundation. However, after eight years (1996-2004), the Ford Foundation cut the funds given to the International Centre for African Music and Dance; the Ford Foundation discontinued Hewale Sounds' sponsorship which forced them to move. As a result, they must sacrifice most of their practice time because they cannot afford transportation to and from the new location.

Even groups that receive sponsorship, like Sogo, do not generate significant income to support each member. Sogo uses the money they generate for promotion, maintenance of facilities, and equipment (drums and costumes). Most groups receive no sponsorship at all and thus face serious difficulty in promoting themselves, finding practice space, purchasing instruments, and even having enough money to eat.[69]

Sponsorship can also result in exploitation of the groups and as Botri and Dogbe assert, cultural troupes need to be wary of the sponsors' intentions.[70] For example, in 2000, the organizer of an international cultural festival invited Dzanyamo to perform at an event in Italy. After a strenuous search, Dzanyamo found a sponsor who agreed to pay for all of the expenses for their trip. The sponsor pulled out at the last minute, and stranded the group who had already committed to the festival. This ruined a huge opportunity for promotion and hurt the potential for future invitations.

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[68] Botri, 17 Apr. 2007.
[69] Agorsor, 11 Apr. 2007; Botri, 17 Apr. 2007; Dogbe, 18 Apr. 2007.
[70] Botri, 17 Apr. 2007; Dogbe, 18 Apr. 2007.

This forced Dzanyamo to cancel their appearance at the festival only weeks before it took place, which made the group seem unreliable to the event organizer.[71] Similarly, Hewale Sounds received $3,000 from an American sponsor to record an album in 1999.[72] When it came time to distribute the recording, the sponsor refused to sign a contract, stating that he would split the profit of the record sales equally with the group. Instead, he exploited Hewale Sounds by selling the recording in the United States, collecting all of the profit.[73] Sponsorship is no guarantee for success and, in some cases, can actually hurt the group.

[71] Dogbe, 18 Apr. 2007.
[72] Botri, 17 Apr. 2007.
[73] ibid.

Chapter 4: Foreign Influence in Ghanaian Recreational Music

Ghanaians have always adapted and reformed traditional musical practices in response to the changing dynamics of their culture. Before a colonial presence, Ghanaians incorporated influences from neighboring or nearby African ethnic groups. As contact with non-Africans increased in the 19th century, so did foreign influences in Ghanaian music. Foreigners introduced new influences, technologies, and ideas, and in turn, musicians incorporated the new influences into their music, thus reflecting their contemporary cultural existence. As a result, Ghanaians have Africanized foreign musics and foreign styles have influenced both popular and traditional Ghanaian music.[74] Therefore, the incorporation and mass popularity of foreign-influenced musical styles in Ghana is not a new phenomenon. Since the earliest contact with outsiders, Ghanaian youth have fused foreign influences with elements of traditional music to form new recreational and popular styles.

Today, this is most obvious in Ghanaian popular music, but it has also had a tremendous effect on traditional music. For over a century, foreign-influenced music has been overwhelmingly popular in Ghana and Ghanaians have been fusing foreign-influenced performance styles, rhythms, and instruments with traditional music.[75] Collins (2002) explains that during the late 19th century "brass-band music called ahada became very popular with musicians in the Fante areas of Ghana; within a short time, the whole of the south of Ghana was swinging to this music."[76] The Akan people adapted the brass band music to local drums and voice and created an

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[74] Collins (2002), 68.
[75] Collins (2002), 60-61.
[76] Collins (1992), 18. The Fante people are of the Central Region of Ghana and are a subgroup of the Akan people.

extensive repertoire, called Konkoma music, that fused traditional rhythms and instruments with brass band idioms.[77]

Similar developments in recreational and popular music occurred all over Ghana throughout the 20th century. In the 1930's the Dagbon people created simpa, a drum and dance music that combines influences of traditional Dagomba and Hausa music, highlife, and neo-folk music like gome.[78] Following the trend of contemporary developments in Ghanaian music, Simpa changed continuously throughout its era of popularity, "incorporating Western pop styles, and adopting new messages relevant to current trends in Dagomba society."[79] Similarly, in the 1960s the Ga people developed the Kpanlogo dance.[80] The composer of Kpanlogo, Otoo Lincoln, explains that the dance, created around 1962, was influenced by *oge* music from Liberia (which was very popular in the 1950's), highlife dances, *oge* dances, and rock and roll dances.[81] Kpanlogo caused a huge controversy because older generations felt that pelvic thrusts used in the dance were sexually suggestive and thus inappropriate.[82] The police frequently arrested the Ga drumming and dance ensembles that performed the dance until 1965, when fifty Kpanlogo groups organized a public display for the elders in Black Star Square in Accra.[83] After the rally, President Nkrumah and other members of the ruling government, the Convention People's Party (CPP), approved of the dance and deemed it to be a legitimate cultural music.[84] Since this time, the

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[77] Falola and Salm (2000), 177.
[78] Falola and Salm (2000), 180. The Dagomba people are of the Northern Region of Ghana.
[79] ibid.
[80] The Ga people are a prominent Ghanaian ethnic group native to the Greater Accra Region in southern costal Ghana.
[81] Collins (1992), 44.
[82] Collins (2002), 68.
[83] ibid.
[84] ibid.

Kpanlogo dance has become a cultural icon for Ghanaians and has been readily incorporated in performances organized by government organizations such as the National Dance Ensemble, the Dance Ensemble of the School of Performing Arts at the University of Ghana, and the Ghana Arts Council.[85] Although older generations have opposed new adaptations of traditional styles and performance, the youth always develop and recreate their music in a way that reflects the current time.

Continuing through the second half of the 20th century, foreign popular music styles were highly fashionable among the Ghanaian youth and shaped the development of Ghanaian music. In the 1960s and 70s, Ghanaians adopted many of the pop fashions and pop stars from abroad. They borrowed from the rock music of the "hippie" generation, "African-American soul and Motown music that projected a message of black pride," techno-pop, rap, and ragga.[86] In Africanizing these influences, Ghanaians formed "rock, Latin rock, Afro-rock, and Afro-beat bands."[87]

Today, Ghana is more fully globalized than in earlier periods when these other musical styles were developed, thus giving new styles like hiplife a new set of tools for production and distribution and a new array of political and social circumstances to which they can both respond and influence. Although the current circumstances for cultural transformation are different than during earlier periods, hiplife is similar to the other musical forms that foreign styles have influenced. As Christopher Waterman explains in his book *Juju: A Social History and Ethnography of an African Popular Music*, "the peoples' arts represent what people do in fact think, believe and aspire to. Their ideology is forged in specific social-historical circumstances and takes specific

[85] ibid.
[86] Collins (2002), 66-67. Ragga is an electronic subgenre of reggae and dancehall music.
[87] Collins (2002), 67.

forms."[88] Like highlife, Afro-rock, and Afro-beat, hiplife reflects the current contemporary reality of Ghanaian society. Currently, with widespread internet, television, and radio, foreign influences come faster than ever before, with easier access. Hiplife speaks to the social issues surrounding a quickly growing young urban population shaped by globalization and expanding consumerism.

The following chapter explores how public entertainment and the music industry shifted from favoring live bands to almost exclusively favoring electronic performance. The disappearance of live bands and the quick and overwhelming change to mediated electronic performance styles, such as hiplife, affects cultural troupes adversely. As a form of live band, cultural troupes have great difficulty finding their niche in the contemporary musical performance conditions.

[88] Barber, (1987:8) in Waterman (1990), 5.

Chapter 5: The Decline of Live Bands

As Shipley (forth.) explains in "The Birth of Ghanaian Hiplife: From Black Styles to Proverbial Speech in African Hip Hop," the shift away from live bands, which set the stage for the development and success of hiplife, relies on many factors, including shifting political dynamics, introduction of new technology, and an emerging urban youth culture.[89] Under President Jerry John Rawlings' rule in the early 1980s, the government mandated a curfew banning activity from six pm to six am. This curtailed the "vibrant nightlife, the live music scene, and traveling theatre and musical groups that toured the country."[90] In response to this, many musicians left Ghana. The music industry suffered even more severely when the government imposed substantial taxes on the importation of musical instruments and cut music from the school system's curriculum.[91] Churches were one of the few organizations to which this tax did not apply, thus many musicians who could not afford to travel abroad to pursue more promising musical careers began working in church bands.[92] To this day, many highlife musicians and bands remain in the church, where they perform gospel highlife.

With the 1980s also came rapid technological change. Cheap portable record and tape players became readily available, and as a result, recorded music developed into the basis of public entertainment, thus taking the place of live performance

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[89] Shipley, (forth.), 2; I am grateful to Jesse Weaver Shipley for allowing me to read and cite his unpublished chapter, which is one of the few texts recently written on Ghanaian hiplife; Collins (2002), 69-71.
[90] Shipley, 5.
[91] Shipley, 6.
[92] ibid.

groups.[93] The public quickly adopted this "mediated electronic performance" format and instead of inviting live musical groups to perform for private events like "funerals, parties, outdoorings (naming ceremonies), and dances, people hired *Spinners* or mobile DJs, because they were cheap and easy to hire." [94] This did even more to decrease performance opportunities for live ensembles and to dismantle the live music scene throughout Ghana.[95] Also, many of the musicians who had left Ghana due to the failing music industry returned periodically and introduced new technologies and musical styles, including electronic and synthesizer music from abroad.

A host of other social, political, and technological factors contributed to the decline of live performance groups in Accra. When the military curfew was lifted, the "nightlife in Accra began to make a modest comeback. However, the lack of instruments, the dispersal of the bands, and the interest in new technology meant that the musical landscape took on a decidedly electronic feel."[96] Live acoustic performance ensembles were therefore practically nonexistent outside of the church. In the midst of this vast political and technological transformation, urban centers like Accra were also experiencing tremendous generational change. Most urban Ghanaian youth felt that traditional music was outdated and boring.[97] Unlike traditional and older popular music, hiplife meets the demands of the growing urban youth; it provides a platform for discussion of contemporary political and social issues that older forms of popular music, like highlife, do not offer.

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[93] ibid.
[94] ibid.
[95] ibid.
[96] Shipley, 7.
[97] Shipley, 25.

Moreover, cheap and free distribution channels played a large role in the shift from live musical performance to mediated electronic performance and also facilitated tremendous access to hip hop and hiplife music. The Ghanaian government lifted restrictions of private media, which allowed distribution channels, including public radio and cheap computers, to influence the cultural climate.[98] The means of production of popular music also changed drastically with the introduction of inexpensive computers and recording software. Thus, the low production costs led to the creation of many studios, and it became relatively affordable for musicians to record their music.[99]

The internet provides another method of cheap and or free distribution of both Ghanaian hiplife recordings and electronic music from the United States and Europe. In August of 1995, Ghana was the second country in West Africa to be connected the internet.[100] The speed of and access to the internet increases exponentially each year; between 2000 and 2006, the number of internet users grew tenfold.[101] Whereas five years ago it would be unheard of to download mp3s at an internet café, today, it is now commonplace in many urban areas in Ghana. Thus, it is no surprise that "internet access by Ghanaians in Ghana and abroad has steadily become a part of the social life of the music."[102] Upon its release in the United States, pop music can be downloaded almost instantaneously in Ghana. In this way, Ghanaians are even more closely linked

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[98] Shipley, 13.
[99] Shipley, 40.
[100] Bulley, Andrew, Nii Quaynor, and William Tevie. "Expansion of the Internet Backbone in Ghana." Network Computer Systems Accra. 1 Apr. 2008 <http://www.isoc.org/INET97/proceedings/E5/E5_2.HTM>.
[101] "Ghana Internet Usage and Marketing Report." Internet World Stats: Usage and Population Statistics. Miniwatts Marketing Group. 1 Apr. 2008 <http://www.internetworldstats.com/af/gh.htm>. Between 2000 and 2006 the number of internet users grew by 1338%.
[102] Shipley, 53.

to the current popular trends that foreigners and Ghanaian expatriate musicians are developing abroad.

Together these factors account for many of the challenges facing cultural troupes in Accra. Declining interest in traditional music, the ousting of live ensembles and favoring of solo electronic acts, the change in the means of production and distribution of music, and the desire of urban Ghanaian youth to express the contemporary identity of Ghana, have all helped hiplife to hijack the mainstream. Hiplife, however, is only one of many factors that creates problems for cultural troupes. Ghana is globalizing quickly and thoroughly and thus foreign cultural practices (from Europe and the Americas) are widely adopted in many urban areas. However, digitized solo performance was not a reality prior to the 1990's, thus the competition between larger groups with many instrumentalists and solo performers is a new phenomenon. In this way, hiplife contributes directly to cultural troupes' problems; in the current system, it is a better competitor. The economic framework of performance opportunities, sponsorship, and promotion in Ghana makes it much easier for hiplife artists to succeed than large groups. This is a catastrophic situation for the current format of cultural troupes. However, as the next chapter will address, hiplife artists are beginning to Africanize their music in ways that incorporate elements of traditional music.

Chapter 6: New Contexts for Traditional Music

Despite the belief that traditional music is slowly dying out, many Ghanaian musicians feel that there is hope in preserving it and are developing strategies to put traditional music in a contemporary context. Dela Botri believes that neo-traditional music has not responded to the changing cultural dynamics of Ghana. He feels that part of the problem is that "75 percent of [neo-traditional musicians] are doing the same thing. And sometimes if you go for a concert and you listen to these kind of things, the whole thing becomes ridiculous." The rhythms and the performances "have become monotonous to many people."[103] It is not surprising that Ghanaians are tired of cultural troupes that perform the National Dance Ensemble repertoire because it has not changed significantly for nearly fifty years.

Botri is an example of a Ghanaian musician who is experimenting with different adaptations of traditional music in order to establish for it a new formal relationship with contemporary society. He believes that to be successful and to compete with hiplife, the groups need to diversify their repertoire and create something that is fresh. Botri explains that, "contemporary music is very good. It is just a matter of fusing the traditional with the contemporary. If you play the traditional music alone they will not really enjoy it, so we have to put it in a contemporary context."[104] He expresses that to do this, Hewale Sounds takes "some of the traditional songs and re-works them and develops them in a different dimension. Some you can keep and some you have to really work on and extend to be able to capture their attention and let them focus their mind on what you are doing."

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[103] 17 Apr. 2007.
[104] ibid.

He feels that by doing this, it will generate interest in traditional music and make it more accessible to Ghanaian and foreign audiences.[105]

To separate themselves from cultural troupes that perform the National Dance Ensemble's repertoire, Hewale Sounds combines instruments from many regions of Ghana within the ensemble and develops techniques for playing contemporary styles on traditional instruments. Botri explains that unlike most groups, where "you will see only one instrument in an ensemble," Hewale Sounds "unites" Ghanaian instruments from "different cultures." Moreover, Botri's teacher, Danso Abiam, did extensive work and "research on how to get various skills on the atenteben." Abiam was able to manipulate traditional fingering and play the atenteben as a chromatic instrument and became a Western classical music virtuoso. With Abiam, Botri "extended the different ways of playing jazz and classical on the instrument."[106] Ghanaians have a newfound respect for the atenteben because of this contemporary adaptation of the instrument. Botri expresses that "years back people used to see the atenteben like a toy. But because of the way I play it, they now have a very different respect from then. Other musicians who are in Ghana are seeing what I am talking about." Botri asserts that because Hewale Sounds is unique, the group "is alerting people that we also have something in Africa and that we should show it to the world."[107]

Similarly, Botri believes that it is important to foster American and European interest in Ghanaian traditional music in order to legitimize the value of traditional arts for Ghanaians. In the early 1990s, many Ghanaians in the hiplife scene "looked

[105] ibid.
[106] ibid.
[107] ibid.

down upon local African style and language and saw it as outdated or 'colo' (colonial)."[108] It was not until an American rapper, Heavy D, wore kente caps, that Ghanaians "saw it as acceptable to follow [their] own traditional forms of dress."[109] Apparently, they needed the "African American legitimation of Ghanaian culture" before they were willing to accept it into hiplife culture.[110] Similarly, Botri feels that he needs to create his music so that "white people can also understand it; so they can take it." He wants to ensure that when the music goes to "America, people will listen." To do this, Botri uses "simple" rhythms in "4/4 or 6/8 time" so that Americans can relate to the music.[111]

Outside of Hewale Sounds, Botri experiments with combining traditional and contemporary music. On his latest solo album, he recorded a Dance Techno track that is played almost completely with acoustic traditional instruments. In 2002, he recorded an album with Ghanaian rap artists in which he plays traditional instruments as a replacement for electronic beats; the album fuses traditional Ghanaian and hip hop rhythms. Also, in 2007, Botri collaborated with hiplife superstar Obour and is featured on his latest album.[112]

In the midst of this fusion, Botri explains that "cultural exchange is important; we need to exchange our culture and learn from other cultures, but we need to keep our own" in the process. He recognizes the potential danger in relying on foreign sponsorship to preserve his own culture and that there must be a balance between foreign and local investment and appreciation. Without this balance, he fears that

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[108] Shipley, 10.
[109] ibid.
[110] ibid.
[111] Botri, April 17, 2007.
[112] Ibid.

foreigners will someday be teaching Ghanaians their own culture. Thus, Ghanaian musicians must simultaneously make an effort to build a basis of popularity and recognition on the home front.[113]

Despite the lack of popularity of cultural troupes in Accra, Botri feels that there is hope to cultivate Ghanaian interest in new formats of traditional music, like that which Hewale Sounds performs. He sees signs that "the understanding" and appreciation for "traditional music is coming gradually." At a performance that was part of the 50th anniversary celebration of Ghana's independence (March 7, 2007), Hewale Sounds played a concert with King Ayisoba, a hiplife artist.[114] Botri "was surprised with the way Ghanaians came to patronize the show. Within five minutes the place was full with people dancing cheering and whistling and things like that; a crowd of over 1000 people." He attributes this to the unique way in which Hewale Sounds play traditional music.[115]

Some hiplife artists have had success fusing traditional and contemporary music. For example, King Ayisoba's latest hit, "I Want to See You My Father," is at the top of the BBC World Charts.[116] He made the sound of the klogo, a two-stringed percussive instrument from the Upper Western Region very famous in Ghana and internationally. Perhaps most importantly, Ayisoba's music is highly appreciated in Ghana. He receives as much airplay as the most popular Ghanaian and foreign artists.

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[113] ibid.
[114] King Ayisoba is a hiplife artist who uses traditional instruments from his native Upper West Region of Ghana on his recordings and in performances.
[115] Botri, 17 Apr. 2007.
[116] "Panji Sure of King Ayisoba Gunning Down an Award At GMA 2007." 18 Apr. 2007. Joy FM Online. 1 Apr. 2008 <http://myjoyonline.com/entertainment/200704/3605.asp>.

Conclusion

Like all music, Ghanaian musical traditions are part of a continuous process of adaptation and respond to and cannot be separated from cultural practices and institutions. Ghanaians have always and will continue to incorporate diverse musical influences that reflect and shape their culture. For thousands of years, the people who live in the area that is now called Ghana have adopted and integrated outside musical influences into their culture and eventually considered the new developments to be part of their own musical traditions. From these ancient styles, to more contemporary styles such as kpanlogo and highlife, to modern hiplife, Ghanaian music has continued to reflect the circumstances specific to a given cultural group during a particular set of historical conditions.

Traditional music, however, is usually evaluated within the framework of historical authenticity. Such evaluative judgments are often inappropriate because traditional music is not static. Whether the subject is the historically traditional music that the Krobo people use for the female puberty rite ceremony called *Depot*, or pop-music created with a synthesizer to be played back on a private radio station, all Ghanaian music reflects cultural "ideology forged in specific social-historical circumstances."[117] Innovative musical practices and styles develop a role in, respond to, and even shape society and Ghanaians eventually accept the resulting musical styles as legitimate forms of tradition.

As discussed in Chapter Four, Ghanaians created recreational and popular music styles such as ahada, kpanlogo, and simpa to respond to and shape the contemporary dynamics of their ethnic societies. Initially, older generations opposed

[117] Barber (1987:8) in Waterman (1990), 5.

these styles, but eventually, Ghanaians accepted them as legitimate musical traditions. Similarly, the renovation of traditional music that the National Dance Ensemble created both reflected and shaped Ghanaian society as it transformed from colonial rule to independence. Nketia and Opoku experimented with and successfully revised historically traditional music to fit within a contemporary context and effectively responded to the changing cultural dynamics in Ghana. Although it was a gradual and controversial process, their formalized repertoire ultimately redefined traditional music in Ghana.

All forms of traditional music, including historically traditional, neo-traditional, and whatever future formats will develop, are uniquely Ghanaian, dynamic, innovative, and are thus legitimate and valuable. Therefore, foreign-influenced Ghanaian music like hiplife and music from abroad are not a threat to traditional music but rather they are essential to the process of developing new formats for traditional music. Like older foreign-influenced Ghanaian musics, Ghanaians will inevitably recognize hiplife as a legitimate Ghanaian musical tradition, despite the current perception that it clashes with traditional music.

Meanwhile, the future of cultural troupes in Accra is not clear. It is possible that cultural troupes that continue to perform the National Dance Ensemble's repertoire, instead of responding to the contemporary dynamics of society, will die out.[118] Of the existing cultural troupes, those that create new formats for traditional music are the most likely to survive and are in a position to further the development of Ghanaian culture. These musicians are integral to the process of shaping new

[118] The National Dance Ensemble, however, will most likely not face the same future because it is government funded.

formats for traditional music because they serve as a bridge between historically traditional music and contemporary musical styles. Regardless of the influences that will shape the ways in which traditional music will evolve in the future, the contours of the Ghanaian musical landscape are ever-changing. Ghanaian musicians will continue their long tradition of creating music that is uniquely Ghanaian.

Today, Ghana is in the midst of vast cultural and social change, globalization, and rapid integration of new technology. Musicians from traditional and contemporary backgrounds are working both independently and collaboratively to respond to and facilitate this transition. Ghanaian musicians are in the process of reformatting traditional music to fit the new social, political, and technological realities of Ghana. It is difficult to speculate what this new innovation will look and sound like. Yet, regardless of the ways in which musicians transform traditional music, it is certain that these social, cultural, and technological influences will shape this change. With thoughtful collaboration, planning, and time, Ghanaian musicians will create the next generation of innovative traditional music in Ghana.

Map of Ghanaian Regions

[119]

[119] http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/geography/maps.php.

Photo Appendix

Dzyanamo

Rehearsal at Elephants on Moon, Kotobabi Junction, Newton, Accra. April 18, 2007

Sogo African Traditional Dance and Music Ltd.

Sogo performing at the Alliance Française April 18, 2007

Sectional mentoring rehearsal with senior drummer Bernard Sadzi

Sign in front of Sogo's main office, Nima Junction, Newton, Accra

Sogo group rehearsal, April 21, 2007, Nima Junction, Newtown, Accra

Agorsor

Practice in front of the University of Ghana, Legon[120]

Hewale Sounds

Hewale Sounds performing for SIT Spring 2007 Arts & Culture Program, February 2007

[120] This picture is borrowed from a youtube video <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YCRFR4w3fhw>. I did not have the opportunity to photograph Agorsor.

Dela Botri, founder and leader of Hewale Sounds

Historically Traditional Vs. Neo-Traditional

Ewe shrine for Mami Wata Divinity, village of Klikor, Votal Region (Historically Traditional)

University of Ghana, Legon Dance Department performs Kpanlogo at the One Touch Highlife Festival at Great Hall, University of Ghana, Legon, April 13, 2007 (Neo-Traditional)

Musicians From Various Cultural Troupes Perform and Dance During Sogo's Performance at the Alliace Francaise, April 18, 2007

Gidi Abeko of Agorsor (left) dances with Emannuel (right), a drummer from the Dance Department at the university of Ghana Legon.

Frances Akoutouah, a drummer for the Dance Department at the University of Ghana, Legon (left) Kwame Edward Dogbe of Dzanyamo (right)

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