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Katherine Moss

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ADOWA: FUNERAL DANCE OF ASANTE
AS A VEHICLE TO EXPRESS ETHNIC IDENTITY

KATHERINE MOSS

SCHOOL FOR INTERNATIONAL TRAINING
INDEPENDENT STUDY PROJECT
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the role of *Adowa* as a vehicle to express ethnic identity in Asante society. First, background information regarding African music is presented, bringing to light the concept of African music as an integrated, ‘total art’ and highlighting the distinction between traditional and contemporary African music. Traditional music is discussed in terms of its defining features, continuity through enculturation, and imitation of natural patterns of African speech. Based on such conceptions of African music as both ‘total’ and traditional (as the section heading suggests), *Adowa* as a socio-music form is introduced and detailed as a signifier of ethnic identity based on its social function and context, communal use, emphasis on collective responsibility, and encourage of group participation, as well as its representation of shared values and belief of the Asante people. Under the rubric of these three defining features, the two subsequent sections offer an in-depth analysis of *Adowa* – from its origins and history, to the instruments and technical features involved in its performance, to its specific dance movements and their corresponding meanings – all of which contributes to *Adowa* assertion of Asante ethnic identity.

METHODOLOGY

The data collection process employed for this paper involved both primary and secondary research. Methods of primary research include interviews, informal discussion, lecturer notes, and participant observation (in *Adowa* dance lessons, at two Asante funerals, and at one Asante enstoolment. Secondary sources involve a variety of relevant texts regarding music and African society, and were utilized both as background reading – to lend a context in which to prove often conflicting information gathered from the field – and also to verify and support my primary sources.

Interviewees were selected based on either their knowledge of *Adowa* as a socio-musical form, or their musical expertise. Moreover, as *Adowa* is primarily an Asante dance, most informants I selected belong to the Asante ethnic group. Significantly, the cooperation I received from the Centre for National Culture – Kumasi proved indispensable in my research, as the professional musicians and dancers there were always available for me – whether to interview, to teach me a new dance step or drum rhythm, or to whisk me off to an informative (and exciting) Asante community event. While my participant observations were limited to my private dance lessons and to experiences at particular social occasions where *Adowa* was performed, being immediately absorbed into the family of drummers and dancers at the cultural centre afforded me an unparalleled opportunity to witness how dance, *Adowa* in particular, is embodied in the lives of the performers. In other words, in a tangible sense, I was able to closely examine the ways in which *Adowa* actually does serve as a vehicle for the drummers and dancers to express their Asante ethnic identity.

Analyzing my data involved the cross-check of primary sources (interviews, discussions, etc.) against one another, as well as against information in books, or secondary research. While my research was greatly facilitated by individuals at the Centre for National Culture and elsewhere, I did encounter some limitations to my study. First, as a few weeks is hardly enough time to move to a new city, learn to navigate around a foreign place, and tackle the study of an entire musical form at once, the general time constraint on my study proved significant and often frustrating. Moreover, in managing my time, I often felt conflicted in deciding whether to accompany the performer s from the cultural centre to the

myriad Asante events (particularly funerals) where *Adowa* was being performed, or to stay behind and gather necessary secondary research or process and organize my work journal. Again, such difficult decisions would have been alleviated if there had been more time in which to realize all of these aims.

In terms of my participant observation through dance and drum instruction at the cultural centre, the knowledge and experience I gained far surpassed my obstacles I might have come across. On the one hand, as an inexperienced dancer (i.e. having no previous dance training or musical background), and due to the fact that it is difficult for “people of other cultures... [to] free themselves of their own concepts as to what time signature is in the music of other people,”¹ the complex poly-rhythms and tonal structure of *Adowa* proved difficult for me to immediately grasp. Yet, at the same time, I was able to consider this challenge in light of the benefits I was afforded as a new dancer: the many mistakes I did make provided opportunities to learn (and laugh), and to more easily notice the infinite number of steps and complicated gestures that comprise this musical form.

In the actual interviewing process, language barriers were tantamount, my ignorance of anything but ‘Twi kakra’ was compounded by the difficulty of reconciling often muddled conversation of British and US English, not to mention the trials of simply trying to communicate across cultures. Moreover, possibly due to the vast number of Ghanaian ethnic languages, or to the historical emphasis on oral over written forms of communication, I often found it difficult to find in books the exact terminology (i.e. language and spelling) of various musical terms and concepts that I had learned in the field. This often made substantiating my data a tedious, time-consuming job.

At the same time, my field work and research was greatly facilitated by the generous, enthusiastic individuals with whom I had the opportunity to work. Moreover, as music is a new discipline of study for me, the novelty of this self-chosen topic afforded me an eagerness and excitement about my ISP that buoyed my data collection process.

¹ N.N. Kofie, Contemporary African Music in World Perspective (Accra: Ghana University Press, 1994), 67

INTRODUCTION
MUSIC IN AFRICAN SOCIETY – BOTH “TOTAL” AND
TRADITIONAL

In an essay for the anthology, *Africana Studies*, Eddie S. Meadows writes that a musical culture maintains a distinct identity through the interaction of both the musical and social spheres of a particular community.² The function of music in the social life of myriad African cultures proves not only an integral one, but also encompasses only those beliefs, actions, and expressions that are relevant to the specific ethnic community in which it operates. In particular, as J.H. Nketia writes in *Drumming in Akan Communities of Ghana*, dance plays a paramount role in the social-musical life of most Africa societies, particularly the Akan of Ghana: “There is no band or association [of the Akan] that does not form a dancing ring”³ Indeed, physical movement as a response to music is regarded among the Akan as requisite to both musical performance and social interaction. In this way, “music integrated with dance, or music that stimulates affective motor response, is much more prevalent [in Akan society]...than purely contemplative music”.⁴

Despite the singular importance of dance in the musical and social life of the Akan ethnic community, the fundamental concept of music in the majority of African societies remains that of an integrated art form. In his essay, “Introduction to Music in Africa,” Akin Euba notes that the convergence of distinct disciplines in the arts renders African music a ‘total art,’ or “multi-art complex within the framework of social events.”⁵ According to this conglomerate artistic concept, not only do the genres of visual and performing arts (including instrument, song, and dance presentation) exist in tandem, but they are also interwoven in a complex relationship of dependency such that one artistic form is rarely found in isolation. As the Director of Agoro,⁶ a traditional dance troupe in Cape Coast, comments, the social

² Eddie S. Meadows, “African-American Music” in *Africana Studies*, ed. Mario Azevedo (Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 1993): 278.

³ J.H. Nketia, *Drumming in Akan Communities of Ghana* (Legon: University of Ghana, 1963): 170.

⁴ J.H. Nketia, *Music in Africa* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1992): 206-7.

⁵ Akin Euba, “Introduction to Music in Africa” in *African History and Culture*, ed. Richard Olaniyan (Ikeja: Longman Nigeria, 1982): 225.

⁶ Agoro means play in the Fante language, referring both to the group’s nature as a recreational activity and also to its confluence of disparate art forms.

context of environment in which traditional music is played “defies the artificial boundaries between art forms” that characterize Western music.⁷ Because every art form is seen as an essential element in social and community life, traditional African music necessitates the total integration or interplay of art forms.

In addition to the concept of music as an integrated art form, African music can be further delineated between traditional and contemporary music. While contemporary music is defined by its restricted use (predominantly for entertainment purposes), and by its incorporation of foreign music proves an integral part of the social life of its practitioners, and is rooted in the culture and traditions of the ethnic group in which it operates.⁸ Similarly Akin Euba characterizes traditional music as “music which has been practiced in Africa since pre-colonial times,”⁹ and Dr. Francis A. K. Saighoe of the Department of Music, University of Cape Coast describes traditional African music as involving ‘no trace of Western influence, [and as] exclusively performed on a tribal basis’.¹⁰ Surviving the devastation of colonization as well as the forces of Western acculturation, traditional African music has proven not only the oldest, most permanent musical form in African society, but also the most popular. Thus, traditional music can be seen as both a lasting and indivisible facet of community life among the various ethnic group of Africa.

As the creation and maintenance of traditional music is exclusively grounded in a particular ethnic community, it follows that the continuity of such music in a community is ensured by members of that very cultural group. In this way, consistent with the creation of traditional music as occurring exclusively within the context of a defined ethnic community, the acquisition of sources to develop that music, a process of enculturation, also occurs solely within the confines of a particular ethnic group. This process of musical development contrasts to that process which occurs in contemporary music whereby new sources of

⁷ Celete, Director of CILTAD-Agoro. Lecture (and presentation) on “African Music” as part of the African Diaspora Seminar (School for International Training). Cape Coast Town Hall. 30 September 1998.

⁸ J.H. Nketia, Professor of Music at University of Ghana – Legon. Lecture on “Music of Africa” as part of the African Diaspora Seminar (School for International Training). Department of African Studies. University of Ghana – Legon. 7 October 1998.

⁹ Euba, 225.

¹⁰ Dr. Francis A.K. Saighoe, Professor of Music at University of Cape Coast. Lecture on “African Music” as part of the African Diaspora Seminar (School for International Training). University of Cape Coast. 4 November 1998.

information are added to a culture from group outside of the ethnic community (acculturation). Thus, it follows that in traditional music artistic traditions are passed from generation to generation through social exposure and participation in community life and, in so doing, ensure the continuity of its structure and form.

For example, as one Wala of the Upper West Region of Ghana comments, musical forms such as dance are simply “picked up” or “come involuntarily” as a result of participation in community social events and learning over time.¹¹ Nketia agrees, noting that the “principle [of musical instruction in African societies]...seems to be that of learning through social experience” such that the “exposure to musical situation and participation is emphasized more than formal teaching.”¹² Furthermore, in addition to involuntary social exposure, more active participation in the traditional process of enculturation is tantamount in African society, ranging from children who, attending funerals or other community events, “not only watch the steps and movements of older dancers but imitate them along the fringes of the [dancing] ring and behind it,”¹³ to the gradual teaching process of daughters by mothers who feel it is their “duty to ensure that their daughters know significant [funeral] dirges, particularly those appropriate for mourning their parents”¹⁴. In conjunction with means of social exposure and group participation, traditional music is typically cultivated by oral tradition,¹⁵ a process by which musical forms are transmitted aurally¹⁶ and indigenous musical notation is acquired through practice and performed from memory.¹⁷ To the extent that traditional music still thrives as an art form in contemporary African society, such methods of cultural preservation prove effective.

Finally, traditional music can further be characterized by its imitation of natural speech patterns, or the tonal language of the African community in which it is performed. Referring to the dependence on tone in African speech and the danger in creating ambiguities

¹¹ Abdullai Darimani, Regional Programme Officer, Environmental Protection Agency. Interview by author, 15 October 1998. Wa, Ghana. Written notes, possession of author, Cape Coast, Ghana.

¹² Nketia, *Music of Africa*, 58-9.

¹³ Nketia, *Drumming in Akan Communities*, 165: Participation Observation at Asante funeral, Eguaben, 11 November 1998; Participant Observation at Asante funeral, Namong, 21 November 1998.

¹⁴ Nketia, *Music in Africa*, 58-9.

¹⁵ Nketia, lecture on “Music of Africa” 7/10/98.

¹⁶ Roderic Knight and Kenneth Bilby, “Music in Africa and the Caribbean” in *Africana Studies*, ed. Mario Azevedo (Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 1993): 245.

¹⁷ Euba, 225.

through incorrect intonation, Nketia notes that the “close relationship between the ways [Africans] speak and the way we make music.”¹⁸ In this way, the rhythm and the tune of traditional African music is derived from tone, lending the perception that ‘everyday speech often sounds like singing’¹⁹ Moreover, many drum rhythms (especially those of the *atumpan*, or “talking drums”) are able not only to communicate messages, but also to replicate the rhythm and tonal patterns of spoken phrases.²⁰ Thus, as the ‘verbal phrase invariably corresponds to the musical phrase,’ it is apparent how deeply traditional music is embedded in the social life (modes of expression, speech and behaviour) of various African ethnic groups.²¹ Furthermore, shared community understanding of musical forms and their meanings (such as *atumpan* drum language) suggests the importance of community involvement and interconnectedness in maintaining ethnic customs and traditions.

¹⁸ Nketia, lecture on “Music of Africa” 7/10/98.

¹⁹ Nketia, lecture on “Music of Africa” 7/10/98.

²⁰ Knight and Bilby. 246.

²¹ Nketia, Drumming in Akan Communities, 35.

***A THEMATIC EXPLORATION OF ADOWA AS AN AVENUE FOR THE
EXPRESSION OF ETHNIC IDENTITY: SOCIAL CONTEXT,
COMMUNAL NEEDS AND GROUP PARTICIPATION,
REPRESENTATION OF CULTURAL VALUES AND BELIEFS***

Consonant to the significance of music in the daily life of the Akan, *Adowa*, a music and dance form of the Asante of Ghana which is customarily performed at funerals, not only serves as an example of an integrated, “total art” complex, but it also proves representatives of traditional African music. Through its immutable link to social context, emphasis on communal needs and collective participation, and function in imparting essential cultural values and beliefs, the institution and performance of *Adowa* serves as a vehicle to express ethnic identity.

Just as traditional African music is characterized by the integral role it plays in the everyday life of an ethnic community, *Adowa* proves functional music, providing a social context for community life. In Contemporary African Music in World Perspectives, N.N. Kofie writes that because “African music... is an integral part of the various social and cultural institutions within which it operates...its characteristic traits must therefore be looked for in connection with the institutions of which they form an inseparable part.”²² In other words, in order to understand the meaning of an artistic performance, one cannot study the music alone, but also the cultural significance of the occasion for which the music is performed.²³ Thus, as “music making [in African societies] is generally organized as a social event” and must be understood with regard to the cultural significance of that event, the nature of the social occasion in African society typically determines the type of music performed.”²⁴ *Adowa* must therefore be considered relative to its social function as a communal outlet for grief within the context of the funeral ceremony.

Evidence of the prominence of *Adowa* in Asante social life is due to its elaboration of pivotal funeral customs, and is highlighted by the considerable attention it is afforded with

²² Kofi, 75.

²³ Meadows, 277.

²⁴ Nketia, Drumming in Akan Communities, 51.

the context of the funeral ceremony: “Simple rites which could take only a few minutes to perform are spread out in a context of prolonged drumming, singing, and dancing”.²⁵ Broadly speaking, the funeral can be divided into four sections: preparation for after-life, pre-burial for mourning, actual interment, and post-burial mourning.²⁶ Pointedly, a Western conception of the “funeral ceremony” does not correspond to that of the Asante, in which the central funeral celebration does not involve the actual burial of the deceased, but rather occurs as part of the post-burial mourning (traditionally on the 8th, 15th, 40th, or 80th day or one-year anniversary of the death).²⁷

While *Adowa* is not performed in conjunction with the preparation of the body and pouring of libations that constitute the first step of funeral rites (preparation for after-life), it the pre-burial for mourning continues longer than one or two days, funerary drumming or a full *Adowa* production may be performed. Similarly, although drumming and dance does not accompany actual burial rites in the Asante ethnic group, sorrowful dirges are sung during the community processional from town to the cemetery, or decided place of burial.²⁸ Predictably, *Adowa* is almost always performed during post-burial mourning, particularly at the actual funeral ceremony which “is heralded in many ways, drumming and dancing being the commonest.”²⁹ Thus, based on its association with the funerary rites of the Asante community, as well as its function in enabling traditional mourning practices particular to that ethnic group, *Adowa* proves an integral facet of the daily social life and overall well-being of the Asante people. Accordingly, *Adowa* serves as a common point of reference in a shared cultural reality, and a defining feature of ethnic identity among the Asante people.

Like the integration of art forms in African music, or “total art” complex, the collective involvement of community members in *Adowa* is requisite to its performance. Specifically, *Adowa* is rooted in its communal use, sense of shared responsibility for the individual, and group participation. As implied by its nature as an integral facet of Asante

²⁵ Nketia, *Drumming in Akan Communities*, 51.

²⁶ Nketia, *Drumming in Akan Communities*, 58.

²⁷ Kaakyire Kwame Dampney, Master Drummer, Centre for National Culture – Kumasi. Interview by author, 12 November 1998, Kumasi, Ghana. Written notes, possession of author, Cape Coast, Ghana.

²⁸ Nketia, *Drumming in Akan Communities*, 58; Dampney interview 12/11/98.

²⁹ Peter Sarpong, *Ghana in Retrospect: Some Aspects of Ghanaian Culture* (Tema: Ghana Publication Corporation, 1974): 31.

social life, *Adowa* involves entire communities in a shared socio-musical activity. In another words, its communal use in funeral and mourning ceremonies enables *Adowa* to function as an outlet for community involvement in a central social activity of the Asante cultural group: “The celebration of funerals involves whole communities, male and female alike, for the funeral is a great social occasion. Apart from the bereaved who are driven to sorrow and despair, the funeral provides an opportunity for display and social intercommunion.”³⁰ Unlike those musical forms performed at traditional puberty rites ceremonies which involve only partial groups, *Adowa* is employed in funerals by the entirety of the extended Asante ethnic community.³¹

In conjunction with its communal use in Asante social life, *Adowa* can also be seen to express a sense of collective responsibility for the individual, or place group over personal needs. For example, in Asante society it is not the individual family who is responsible for the funeral arrangements for one of its members, but rather the enter community: “Death in one family would not be the concern of only the bereaved family that has to arrange for the funeral; it would be the concern of the rest of the community as well, who will attend in sympathy and give every assistance to the family.”³² In fact, I have seen this done: observing funerals at Eguaben and Namong (surrounding villages of the Kumasi area), community donations offered to assuage burial costs and funeral expenses proved the rule.³³ Thus, in the context of funeral rites and customs, expectations of individual response to group needs and involvement in collective activity prevail in Asante ethnic communities.

In addition to the financial and practical funeral arrangements assumed by communities rather than individual families, mental and emotional support of the bereaved by collective rather than individual or partial-group forces of community is invariably demonstrated through *Adowa* dance. In fact, just as the Asante community conveys sympathy or assistance to the bereaved (for funeral expenses and loss in general), so too does the “shaking [of] hands with mourners upon arrival, and then joining in the dancing”³⁴

³⁰ Nketia, *Drumming in Akan Communities*, 58.

³¹ Nketia, *Drumming in Akan Communities*, 52.

³² Nketia, *Music in Africa*, 41.

³³ Participation Observation at Asante funeral, Eguaben, 11 November 1998; Participation Observation at Asante funeral, Namong, 21 November 1998.

³⁴ Sarpong, 31.

position *Adowa* as an instrumental method of encouraging group responsibility in the social life of the community, and reiterate bonds of ethnic interdependence. Specifically, particular movements in dance are relegated to such expressions of support to the bereaved: “[Upon arrival] community spectators enter the arena to dance, or give moral support to [mourners dancing] by placing coins on their foreheads or mouths, placing pieces of cloth or handkerchiefs around their necks, or spreading a piece of cloth on the ground for them to step on.”³⁵

Like the demonstrated support networks within communities which are evidenced in *Adowa*, so too is general group participation a fundamental element of the Asante musical form. Indeed, the inherent nature of *Adowa* as “group music” in which “everyone present takes part in some way,”³⁶ is what has been attributed as lending the music a “complete texture.”³⁷ Moreover, not only are “drumming, singing, and dancing... apart from the pleasure which they give, distinctive modes of social interaction,”³⁸ but such musical forms can also be employed as a kind of ‘common ground’ in which societal levels are ameliorated in the sense that all community members are enabled to interact in a shared context (e.g. the dancing ring).³⁹ Furthermore, *Adowa* is not reserved only for the royals, but allows public participation in its performance. Similarly, men and women both have always been always been permitted to dance *Adowa* – either separately or as pairs when one sex attracts the other to dance through his/her facial expressions or body movement.⁴⁰ Such total community participation strengthens social bonds and fosters a sense of belonging, of contribution to a shared cultural group, it “encourages involvement on a collective behalf...as means of strengthening the social bonds that bind [its members] and the values that inspire their corporate life.”⁴¹ Interestingly, as will be addressed later in the text, on a fundamental level, not only are numerous art or musical forms (instrument, song, dance) involved in the performance of *Adowa* but instrumentally, musically, stylistically, and in terms of the

³⁵ Nketia, *Music in Africa*, 33: Supported also by Participant Observation at Asante funeral, Eguaben, 11 November 1998, and Participant Observation at Asante funeral, Namong, 21 November 1998.

³⁶ Knight and Bilby, 244.

³⁷ Nketia, lecture on “Music of Africa” 7/10/98.

³⁸ Nketia, *Drumming in Akan Communities*, 170.

³⁹ Saighoe, lecture on “African Music” 4/11/98.

⁴⁰ Joyce Serwaa, Dancer, Centre for National Culture – Kumasi. Interview by author. 18 November 1998, Kumasi, Ghana. Written notes, possession of author, Cape Coast, Ghana.

⁴¹ Nketia, *Music of Africa*, 22.

performers and audience, *Adowa* proves a collective group of interacting participants, all of which contribute to the forging and maintenance of Asante ethnic identity.

Finally, ethnic identification among Asante people is fostered by *Adowa's* representation of shared cultural values and beliefs. As discussed above, clearly one such value expressed in *Adowa* is the regard for the collective group over individual needs. To reiterate, such a conviction is evidenced in both its social function and communal use, and also in particular *Adowa* dance movements which are presented during the course of a performance (addressed in more depth later in the text). In addition to expressing the value placed on group identity and well-being over self-identification and individual needs, a sense of shared human experiences, particularly in regard to death as a critical event in the life cycle, dominates the *Adowa* performance. Like the general connection Dr. Saighoe notes between African music and the human life cycle,⁴² an examination of *Adowa* reveals traditional Asante beliefs about death and methods of dealing with loss.

Specifically, as expressed in *Adowa*, the Asante funeral involves a celebratory or joyful aspect in accordance with the view that death provides not only an outlet to mourn the loss of an individual, but also to “celebrate the greatness of the deceased, [and] give the soul a rousing send-off into the realm of the ancestors.”⁴³ In this way, the joyous elements of an *Adowa* performance suggests a central belief in relation to Asante identity – that the earthly lives of ethnic community members are to be revered and extolled, and that humans are, in life and death, connected to the ancestral world.

Accordingly, dance is seen not as an inappropriate outlet of mourning as the Asante believe that one's sorrows should be ‘danced away’ such that the mourner ‘express[es] in bodily movements...the feelings embodied in ...the funeral, to appear not to be bothered by the ravages of Death.’ In this way, by dancing *Adowa*, “‘Death may be chased away’” and the life of the deceased, as well as his/her entrance into the ancestral domain, may instead be celebrated.⁴⁴ Correspondingly, the performance of *Adowa* is not intended to add to mourner's sorrow, but to provide an outlet for emotion, to convey sympathy to the bereaved,

⁴² Saighoe, lecture on “African Music”, 4/11/98.

⁴³ Knight and Bilby, 248.

⁴⁴ Nketia, Drumming in Akan Communities, 65.

or to release pain. Examples of traditional Asante beliefs about death – music-making as an essential means of honouring the deceased, death as an inevitable element of the life cycle, the limitations of mortal life, the need to express a sense of loss at the death of a community member or chief – are reflected in much of the song texts that are often sung in conjunction with the *Adowa* dance (see Appendix C). In this way, men and women in Asante tradition “gather together in such [social-musical] contexts because they share common interests, common ideals, [and] common beliefs which form the basis of their community life”⁴⁵ and, as specific cultural values and beliefs unite any particular ethnic group, so too do the Asante values expressed in *Adowa* provide the foundation of Asante ethnic identity assertion.

⁴⁵ Nketia, Drumming in Akan Communities, 66.

ADOWA: AN EXAMINATION OF HISTORY, FEATURES, AND FORM

As one Asante dance director proudly affirms, “When you really delve into it you realize that the Ashanti *Adowa* is the first *Adowa*”⁴⁶ This ‘typical Asante dance’ is widely recognized as having originated both by and for the Asante people themselves. While it is yet unclear whether *Adowa* was initially a funeral dance reserved for the royal family (particularly the Asante king or a sub-chief), or whether *Adowa* was created for the use of the public and royalty alike,⁴⁷ it remains uncontested that *Adowa* has been employed principally for funeral occasions, be it on an Akwasidae (40th day anniversary of an individual’s death), or other periods of mourning.⁴⁸ Generally speaking, as the Senior Cultural Officer of the Centre for National Culture – Kumasi admits, the origin of *Adowa* is not straightforward.⁴⁹ Still, central aspects of *Adowa*’s history are commonly accepted, such as its rhythmic, vocal, and instrumental origins in the wake-keeping song vigils of *mpre*: “In the olden days, in matters of funeral occasions, if a man dies at 3:00p.m., you cannot bury him that day⁵⁰ ...[Thus,] someone must keep wake until the next day. The old women must bear the onus to keep awake so they would engage in an activity which would not permit them to sleep...singing!”⁵¹ Traditionally, the *mpre* would last all through the night, during which time the elderly women would sing song against death, or against the bereaved if she/he was not deemed a decent community member during his/her lifetime. They would sing songs to praise a great man who died so that he might “go in peace,”⁵² chant songs of happiness for the deceased’s entry into the ancestral world, or relate songs of sorrow for having lost a loved one.⁵³ Interestingly, when the women wished to sing insinuating or insulting songs about the deceased to ‘remind the bereaved family of all the doings against humanity’ that he/she

⁴⁶ Abena Afare Bediako. Head of Dance Department, Centre for National Cultural – Kumasi. Interview by author. 20 November 1998, Kumasi, Ghana. Tape recording, possession of author, Cape Coast.

⁴⁷ While one source indicates that *Adowa* was originally relegated to royal use (Bediako interviews 20/11/98), another source attests the *Adowa* was always open to the public as well as royal family (Serwaa interviews 18/11/98; the remaining Asante I interviewed were unsure about this aspect of *Adowa*’s origin.

⁴⁸ Bediako interview 20/11/98.

⁴⁹ Nana Sarfo, Senior Cultural Officer, Centre for National Culture – Kumasi. Interview by author, 23 November 1998, Kumasi, Ghana. Written notes, possession of author, Cape Coast, Ghana.

⁵⁰ According to the same source, Asante burials are traditionally reserved for the morning.

⁵¹ Sarfo interview. 23/11/98.

⁵² Sarfo interview. 23/11/98.

⁵³ Joseph Boamah, Assistant Cultural Officer, Centre for National Culture – Kumasi. Interview by author, 24 November 1998, Kumasi, Ghana. Written notes, possession of author, Cape Coast.

committed while living, the singers concomitantly warned the rest of the community that its individual members do not live in isolation, but are part of a larger whole – a concept of group identity reminiscent of *Adowa*'s emphasis on collective over individual needs.⁵⁴

Adowa as a distinct socio-musical tradition was developed when the *atumpan* was added to the performance of *mpre* music (singing and the playing of castanets or the *petia* drum) for funerals.⁵⁵ While it remains uncertain as to the specific motivations to add the *atumpan* in the Asante region is undisputed.

During the conquest of Opoku Ware I, the Asante and the Dagomba resolved to sign a peace treaty with the Dagomba people in which they “agreed to become brothers,” or to ensure mutual defence of their shared border (between the southern section of Dagomba territory and the northern area of Asanteland). In other words, the two ethnic groups would act as one another's ‘buffer zone’ against potential attacks.⁵⁶

Upon their arrival in the Dagomba territory (in the Northern Region of Ghana) to sign the treaty, the Asante were received with appellations played on the *atumpan*. As the Asante King granted the Dagomba the right to call themselves “Kotoko” (referring to their newly-cultivated relationship with the Asante Kotoko), the Dagomba developed a rhythm on the *atumpan* to signify their new name.

Significantly, during the drumming ceremony for the Dagomba and Asante royalty, one of the Asante royal drummers supported the Dagomba master drummer, Kokotintin (“tall red-coloured one”) in playing the ‘*tumpan*’ drums (or *atumpan* in the Dagomba language).⁵⁷ Upon returning to the Asante Region, the Asante supporting drummer carved his own set of *atumpan* which quickly gained popularity and widespread recognition among his people. Before long, the *atumpan* assumed a paramount role in Asante musical culture, particularly in the performance of *Adowa*.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Sarfo, Interview. 23.11/98.

⁵⁵ Sarfo, Interview. 23/11/98.

⁵⁶ Sarfo, Interview. 23/11/98.

⁵⁷ Sarfo, Interview. 23/11/98.

⁵⁸ Because the *tumpan*, or *atumpan* drums originated in the Dagomba region as an instrument for appellations, despite its leading role in Asante *Adowa*, the name for the talking drums does not mirror that of the musical

While, as previously mentioned, the impetus for the initial combination of *mpre* and *atumpan* (to form *Adowa*) remains unclear, suggestions have been offered by various Asante musicians. One informant offers that the performance of *Adowa* was coined as such in honour of one deceased woman, *Adowa*, at whose funeral the *mpre* and *atumpan* were first together.⁵⁹ However, another interviewee claims that *Adowa* was first employed after offence was taken by certain community members at the insulting messages about a deceased family member that were conveyed in *mpre* song. According to the source, *atumpan* were substituted for the traditional (albeit occasionally offensive) *mpre* song so that the instrument could convey the meaning of the song in drum language rather than spoken words. In this way, no one could prove that an insult was being made on the drums unless the accuser could repeat the presumably insulting message back to the drummer “with the sticks” rather than aloud – just as the drummer had done.⁶⁰ As such a task proves nearly impossible for those without extensive knowledge and experience in *atumpan* drumming; the instruments were added to mollify potential offence taken in response to the *mpre* singing.⁶¹

More mythical legends surrounding the origin of *Adowa* prove as renowned as those, which are grounded in conventional Asante oral history. Such tales typically involve the experiences of an Asante hunter who goes into the bush to find food but instead discovers a group of chimpanzees sitting in an *ojuma* tree. The animals, mourning the loss of a relative, were wailing songs of sorrow while beating the roots of the *ojuma* with sticks and, in so doing, created a system of beautiful, complicated rhythms. According to the narrative, when the hunter returned from the bush he called on the *Odikuro* (second to the chief) to share the experience with him. Subsequently, in an attempt to mimic the sounds of the chimpanzees,

form to which kit belongs (as is customarily the case), but rather has maintained its original Dagomba name (Sarfo interview 23/11/98).

⁵⁹ Boamah. Interview 24/11/98.

⁶⁰ Sarfo. Interview. 23/11/98.

⁶¹ In fact, with time the *atumpan* succeeded in surpassing the *mpre* in terms of its prevalence in Asante musical tradition. According to the same oral history, because the women’s voices were completely overshadowed by the force and intensity of the *atumpan* drums (once they were added to the *mpre* singing), the importance of *mpre* in Asante musical culture has been diminished.

the hunter and the *Odikro* developed the multiple, complex drum rhythms which eventually came to be known as *Adowa*.⁶²

In regard to the requisite instruments of a traditional *Adowa* performance, an ensemble consists of one or two bells (either the *dawuro*, a single clapper-less boat-shaped bell – the most common, or an *adawuraa*, a slit-type bell); one or two hourglass drums called *donno*; one sonorous drum played by hand, *apentemma*; one *petia*, a tenor drum played with a stick; and one *atumpan*, the male and female pair of “talking drums” of low and high pitches respectively (see Appendix B). While drumming is traditionally a role reserved for men (as singing is for women), women do at times play the *dawuro* bell.⁶³

There exist approximately seven different rhythms for the *atumpan* and corresponding instruments although, significantly, the *dawuro* bell pattern remains constant in order to provide a “common point of reference for all of the drums.”⁶⁴ In fact, one master drummer notes that if the *dawuro* makes an error in playing the basic rhythm of *Adowa*, the entire piece is thrown off balance and the ensemble must begin anew.⁶⁵ When two *dawuro* are employed simultaneously, the central rhythm of an *Adowa* performance is based upon the one primary bell and the other “bell that crosses” (*ntwamu*).⁶⁶ In particular, the primary bell articulates the basic regulative beats of the music in duple timing, or by dividing the time line into two (or multiples of two).⁶⁷ In *Adowa* dance, the right foot moves forward on the strong beat of the bell pattern, while the left foot follows on the subsequent beat (see Appendix D1).⁶⁸

In addition to the constancy of the *dawuro* in the performance of *Adowa*, the particular drum beats of the *donno* and *apentemma* typically remain invariable (see Appendix

⁶² Sarfo. Interview. 23/11/98; Samuel Anyanor, Drum Instructor, Centre for Cultural Studies, University of Science and Technology – Kumasi. Interview by author, 23 November 1998, Kumasi, Ghana. Written notes, possession of author, Cape Coast.

⁶³ A.A. Agordoh, *Studies in African Music* (Ho.: New Age Publication, 1994): 109.

⁶⁴ Nketia, *Drumming in Akan Communities*, 29.

⁶⁵ Boamah. Interview. 24.11/98.

⁶⁶ Agordoh, 109.

⁶⁷ Nketia, *Music of Africa*, 213. Note: As N.N. Kofie writes in *Contemporary African Music in World Perspectives*. “If time in African music is predominantly duple...the reason is not far-fetched. It is due to the fact that much of African music is danced to and since without exception, movement in the course of dancing means moving the feet alternately, the accompanying music cannot but be in duple time”. (Kofie 68).

⁶⁸ Nketia, *Music of Africa*, 213.

D2), save in the performance of the complicated Techiman rhythm – the only rhythm in which the *dawuro* bell pattern alters its form.⁶⁹ If a gourd rattle (*ntrowah*) is employed in *Adowa*, its rhythm always remains constant (see Appendix D3).⁷⁰

As mentioned previously, there are a total of seven rhythms performed by an *Iadowe* ensemble (see Appendix E), all of which are selected by the whim of the master drummer, rather than by the social context or particular funeral in which *Adowa* is performed.⁷¹ Nevertheless, the various rhythms of *Adowa* prove essential in providing the dancer a basic musical form from which to determine his/her movements.

As the dancer essentially “derives motor feeling from the rhythmic structure, whose elements he articulates in basic movements,”⁷² the *dawuro* and drum rhythms help the dancer to find his/her bearings, determine the proper time of entry without getting off, or re-enter into the rhythmic structure of the ensemble.⁷³ In fact, in some dances, rhythm and movement are so closely knit that a “series of pre-arranged movements sequences or figures may each be identified with a distinctive rhythmic pattern so that changes in rhythm are automatically accompanied by changes in dance movement.”⁷⁴

Interaction between *Adowa* instruments and dancing, particularly between the drummer and the dancer, is also evidenced in the complex, “correlation between dance movements and drum rhythms [which are]...atomically understood by the members of an ethnic ensemble” such that the drummers and dancers themselves precisely understand what a rhythm means.⁷⁵ In this way, *Adowa* serves as an impetus for collective participation in terms of both instruments and performers. “The dance is full of communication. The link is usually between the dancer and the master drummer because you have to listen to the master drummer’s drum language and then interpret it in your movements.”⁷⁶ Moreover, cooperation is also apparent in the fact that “the drummer never loses sight of the capabilities

⁶⁹ Anyanor. Interview. 23/11/98.

⁷⁰ Dampety. Interview. 20/11/98.

⁷¹ Dampety. Interview. 20/11/98.

⁷² Agordoh. 33.

⁷³ Agordoh. 76.

⁷⁴ Agordoh. 34.

⁷⁵ Kofie. 24.

⁷⁶ Bediako. Interview . 20/11/98.

of the dancer.”⁷⁷ Specifically, the drummer might test the dancer by increasing the tempo or prevalence of drum rhythms so that the dancer can “show his or her skills” in order for the master drummer to play at the dancer’s level.⁷⁸ Similarly, even if a drummer varies the rhythm, “a good dancer is conversant with the drummer’s language and can follow any rhythm being played.”

In addition, the dancer can alter his/her movements to indicate that the drummer should change the rhythm being played. For example, if the drummer is playing too slow or too fast for the dancer, he/she can “indicate through dance to change the tempo... even by using only footwork.”⁷⁹ Correspondingly, if the drummer wishes that the dancer change his/her style, he/she will create variations in the drum rhythm to indicate to the dancer that he/she must quickly change movement to keep up with the music being played.⁸⁰ Furthermore, the drummer might “beat louder and introduce rhythmic variations or emphasize particular drum beats as the dance grows in intensity,”⁸¹ or even play a rhythm harder or softer, faster or slower, depending on the dancer’s routine.⁸²

This “open communication” or close collaboration between the drummer and the dancer is often facilitated by the drummer who “himself is a member of the dancer’s culture.”⁸³ Generally speaking, among the drummers, dancers, and audience, there is said to be a “bond of mutual respect and goodwill...essential to the success of the dance situation... [and] expressed in the observation of decorum and etiquette on all sides.”⁸⁴ Paralleling the “total art” complex, *Adowa* is constituted through the partnership of instruments and

⁷⁷ Kofie 75. Bediako, Interview. 20/11/98. Note: One dancer relates that in order to request a faster tempo, he moves his right hand in circles (with his index finger pointed) at shoulder level; he press his right hand downward at waist level (with the palm open) to request a slower tempo (Atta Kofi, Master Drummer and Dancer, Centre for National Culture – Kumasi. Interview by author, 25 November 1998, Kumasi, Ghana. Written notes, possession of author, Cape Coast.

⁷⁸ Sarfo. Interview. 23/11/98.

⁷⁹ Bediako, Interview. 20/11/98. Note: One dancer relates that in order to request a faster tempo, he moves his right hand in circles (with his index finger pointed) at shoulder level; he press his right hand downward at waist level (with the palm open) to request a slower tempo (Atta Kofi, Master Drummer and Dancer, Centre for National Culture – Kumasi. Interview by author, 25 November 1998, Kumasi, Ghana. Written notes, possession of author, Cape Coast. Nketia. Drumming in Akan Communities 162.

⁸⁰ Sarfo. Interview. 23/11/98.

⁸¹ Nketia, Drumming in Akan Communities, 162.

⁸² Boamah. Interview. 24/11/98.

⁸³ Kofie. 75.

⁸⁴ Nketia, Drumming in Akan Communities. 158

performers and thus speaks to the community interconnectedness and participation inherent in this socio-musical form. “[Collaboration between drummer and dancer] is a direction towards fulfilling the requirements of [the funeral] ceremony and satisfying the needs of members of the community for mutual collaboration on special occasions.”⁸⁵ In this way, the interaction between instruments and performers contributes to the expression of a shared Asante ethnic identity in *Adowa*.

Elaborating on the drum’s significance as an agent of communication in *Adowa*, the *atumpan* serves as the primary vehicle for information dissemination, the delivery of messages, and the expression of emotions or ideas. The *atumpan* drum language not only relates information to its listeners but, as an essential element of traditional African music, it also mimics natural African speech patterns through the use of both male and female drums. In terms of content, in *Adowa* drumming, the *atumpan* may be employed to greet audience members, give thanks to the chief or a prominent community member, comment on death, sympathize with the bereaved, or praise a good dancer.⁸⁶ Thus, the role of drum language in *Adowa* is both replete with meaning and related to its funerary use (see Appendix F).

While for the outsider the *atumpan*’s use of distinct combinations of only two pitches may prove enigmatic, members of the Asante community are generally familiar with the drum language and corresponding dance movements in *Adowa*. In this way, the understanding of *Adowa* drum language as relegated to participants in Asante social and musical life breeds a sense of interconnectedness and ethnic identification within a shared cultural group.

⁸⁵ Nketia, *Drumming in Akan Communities*. 158.

⁸⁶ Knight and Bilby, 246.

A FOCUS ON ADOWA DANCE: CONTRIBUTIONS TO ASANTE IDENTITY ASSERTION

Numerous suggestions have been offered as to the necessary attributes of traditional African dance, ranging from the ability to alternate between straight and bent postures, to the use of the entire body rather than isolated areas in responding to music, to the creative variation of movements during a dance performance.⁸⁷ While appealing drum rhythms will almost evoke some kind of physical movement – clapping the hands, stamping the feet, jerking the head and shoulders⁸⁸ - in *Adowa*, a few basic guidelines must be considered. For example, the *Adowa* dancer almost always begins and ends his/her movement with the right foot. Moreover, each step must correspond to the rhythm pattern of the *dawuro*: “No matter how hard you are listening to the drum language and interpreting it to... reflect it in your movements the bell should not be forgotten. If you miss the bell you will go off beat.”⁸⁹ In addition, with each step the hands move in successive turns in front of the body (at waist level with the palms open): the dancer must always make certain that the head is rotating in the same direction (left or right) as the hand being turned. At the same time, the legs should always remain slightly bent and steps should be made casually, like walking rather than bouncing. Weight should be balanced forward rather than backward.⁹⁰ Furthermore, while the *Adowa* dancer “does not aim at responding to every rhythm-pattern within a rhythmic complex, he simultaneously moves various parts of the body in response to certain rhythms.”⁹¹ In this way, as a dancer oftentimes responds to different drum patterns by manipulating the body in different directions simultaneously (to correspond with the different rhythms being played),⁹² *Adowa* movements prove both intricate and sophisticated.

In addition to movement-related considerations, pace, facial expression and attitude are also of paramount importance in *Adowa* dance. As one drummer comments, a good dancer is not only conversant in the appropriate dance movements, but also knows when to

⁸⁷ Nketia, *Drumming in Akan Communities*, 169.

⁸⁸ Nketia, *Drumming in Akan Communities*, 166.

⁸⁹ Bediako. Interview. 20/11/98.

⁹⁰ Ronald Agyemang, Dancer, Centre for National Culture – Kumasi. Interview by author, 17 November 1998, Kumasi, Ghana. Written notes, possession of author, Cape Coast, Ghana.

⁹¹ Kofie. 71.

⁹² Nketia. *Music of Africa*, 209.

dance slowly in order to accentuate his/her movements and when to dance quickly, to show off his/her skills.⁹³ Another dancer entails the importance of facial expression in *Adowa* in order to create the appropriate atmosphere for a funeral occasion. “Your facial expression, your forehead frowns, the look in your eye...as if you are almost crying. You look so sad and morose”⁹⁴ The same informant also adds that *Adowa* is a graceful dance that must be accompanied by appropriate intricate and elegant gesture.⁹⁵

In terms of the appropriate costume for dancing *Adowa*, women traditionally adorn themselves in two different cloths: three yards wrapped around the lower torso and tied with a knot, and four yards cloaked over the upper torso and left to hand (as does the traditional male cloth worn on everyday occasion).⁹⁶ While dancing in bare feet is customarily a sign of respect (and facilitates easy movement and stylistic footwork), native sandals called *kyow* may be worn in *Adowa* dance. Sandals or slippers are especially necessary for the chief or Queemother whose feet are not permitted to touch the ground.⁹⁷ In addition, beaded bracelets, necklaces, and anklets are worn for decoration rather than noise-making purposes, and handkerchiefs are often employed as props in dancing.⁹⁸ Costume and adornments are typically red and black, in accord with the significance of these colours as reserved for mourning in Asante culture.⁹⁹

Female *Adowa* dancers should not wear Western jewellery or apply make-up, and they must pull their hair away from their face, often done with a hair net, cloth hair wraps or other accessories are not admissible. In fact, originally in Asante society, women dancing *Adowa* would cut their hair extremely short and paint a black strip all the way around the hair line, as it is traditionally regarded as both beautiful and a sign of respect.¹⁰⁰ Male *Adowa* dances do not wear special hairstyle nor do they adorn themselves with jewellery or other regalia. Instead, they simply clad themselves in eight to ten yards of cloth which is wrapped around the body and, rather than being left to drape (as is the style worn for daily use), the

⁹³ Boamah. Interview. 23/11/98.

⁹⁴ Bediako. Interview. 20/11/98.

⁹⁵ Bediako. Interview. 20/11/98.

⁹⁶ Bediako. Interview. 20/11/98.

⁹⁷ Serwaa. Interview. 18/11/98.

⁹⁸ Serwaa. Interview. 18/11/98, and Boamah, Interview 23/11/98.

⁹⁹ Bediako. Interview. 20/11/98.

¹⁰⁰ Bediako. Interview. 20/11/98.

cloth is dropped around the waist and then tied in place. This enables the dancer greater flexibility in movement.¹⁰¹

The actual dance that is performed in *Adowa*, through its relationship to its social function and context as a funeral dance, emphasis on the collection participation, and expression of defining cultural values and beliefs, determine *Adowa*'s place as an ethnic signifier of the Asante people. As music, "however beautiful [is] meaningless if [it] does not offer to the experience or contribute to the expressive quality of a performance,"¹⁰² the meaningful content of *Adowa* dance movements both supports and enriches its social role as a funeral dance. In fact, one Asante dancer notes that particular movements in dance change depending on the nature of the social event. Accordingly, because *Adowa* is a funeral dance, it is comprised of "symbolic gestures, facial expressions, body movements and general communications of the body and face that will tell the audience or mourners that this is a sorrowful dance."¹⁰³ For example, a central *Adowa* movement in the placement of the hands on top of the head to signify the behaviour of crying, as if the dance is saying, "I'm in trouble. I'm in crisis." In addition, clasping the hands behind the back also expresses loneliness: "I am now so lonely. I have lost a loved one – maybe a mother or a father, husband or wife." Clenching the fists over the stomach with the arms crossed indicates "Now when I am hungry, who is going to give me food to eat? I am now an orphan. Nobody's going to care for me. I don't have anybody to turn to," and tapping or swinging the hands signifies pain: "You are hurt."¹⁰⁴

Just as dance can convey the situation or circumstance of its performance, so too can it express community membership: "Dancing at funerals... does not necessarily express only sorrow or grief, it may also...indicate group solidarity."¹⁰⁵ In fact, just as Asante funerals do not exclusively involve an expression of sadness, there exist various *Adowa* movements to express joy, love, peace, and so on.¹⁰⁶ Moreover, communication and interaction is stressed

¹⁰¹ Bediako. Interview. 20/11/98.

¹⁰² Agordoh. 33.

¹⁰³ Bediako. Interview. 20/11/98.

¹⁰⁴ Bediako. Interview. 20/11/98.

¹⁰⁵ Nketia. *Music of Africa*. 208.

¹⁰⁶ The movement to express joy entails throwing up the arms and clasping the hands in jubilation. Love and peace is expressed by crossing both the hands and fingers in a clasped position (Bediako interview 20/11/98.).

not only between the *Adowa* drummer and dancer, but among the drummers, dancers, vocalists, and audience alike. In other words, while the relationship between the drummer and the dancer is indispensable in an *Adowa* performance, the dancer must remain cautious “not...to concentrate on the master drummer along, the communication should be between the maser drummer, the dancer, and the audience all.¹⁰⁷ In this way, *Adowa* not only involves but is essentially defined by the active interplay of multiple participants: “There is always open communication in the *Adowa* dance – from the drummer to the dancer, drummer to the audience, dancer to drummer, dancer to audience, and from the audience back to the performers.”¹⁰⁸

Furthermore, while some dancers may be more conversant with the drum language and dance movements of *Adowa* than others, even the first-time dancer is encouraged to try his/her hand at dancing. I have not only witnessed but also experienced such community encouragement and involvement; although I had never dance *Adowa* in public, at a funeral ceremony in Namong I was literally dragged out of my chair and begged to dance, “small, small” (despite my inexperience and limited skills) in order to contribute in some way to the community event I was attending.¹⁰⁹ In general, while the drummer and dancer who are unfamiliar with one another must “take extra care” to perform with the appropriate skill and speed to coordinate rhythm and movement, as long as the dancer does not convey insult with his/her movements, anyone who attends a social even where *Adowa* is being played is free to join the dancing ring.¹¹⁰

Just as group participation is primary feature this musical form, no *Adowa* performance is complete without an understanding of the myriad meanings and significance of its intricate dance movements. As one Ghanaian once noted, “every turn of the hand [in *Adowa*] means something.” In other words, *Adowa* is centred on the representation of critical values and belief which define the Asante ethnic community: through the choice of

¹⁰⁷ Bediako. Interview. 20/11/98.

¹⁰⁸ Sarfo. Interview. 23/11/98.

¹⁰⁹ Participant Observation at Asante funeral, Namong, 21 November 1998. Note: Support or encouragement of community members is expressed in a variety of ways such as shouts and gestures of praise, or the movements of a fellow dancer quietly behind another, dancing unobtrusively by him/her, even wiping his/her face with a handkerchief (Nketia. Drumming in Akan Communities 168: also supported by participant observation).

¹¹⁰ Bediako. Interview. 20/11/98.

appropriate dance vocabulary and symbolic gesture, [dancers] express community beliefs.”¹¹¹ In fact, even audience participation, such as shouting in approval of a dancer, may indicate that the performance make manifest a social value or satisfies a moral need.¹¹²

The initial dance routine of an *Adowa* performance provides a means for the narration of fundamental values and beliefs of the Asante community. To initially come into the dancing ring, the dancer moves upstage by performing introductory movements, after which he/she solicits permission from the drummers to proceed dancing, and pleads for competent drumming by enticing them with money or a bottle of schnapps.¹¹³ The performer thus demonstrates, through dance, the importance of respect – not only expressed between members of the immediate performing space, but also for the satisfaction of the community spectators who anticipate a proper representation of their social life and values through the performance of *Adowa*.

After an exchange with the drummers, the dancer moves to face the audience so that he/she may greet the community members in attendance.¹¹⁴ The audience will then indicate approval by applauding or by imitating the dance’s movements. Significantly, if it is a chief or a Queen Mother dancing, he/she will perform the same movements to see audience approval, only elaborating on the movements slightly.¹¹⁵

The dancer follows the audience salutation by approaching the chiefs and elders of the audience, turning away from them, and throwing the right arm in the air (making a gathering gesture with the hand). The dancer then throws the left arm up in the same gathering motion, folds and unfolds the hands at waist level, and then throws his/her opened hands in the direction of the chief. This action signifies that the dancer’s entire being

¹¹¹ Agordoh. 33.

¹¹² Nketia, *Music of Africa*. 32.

¹¹³ To signify begging, the drummer will touch the back of one hand, palm open, to the open palm of the other hand. The promise of a bottle of schnapps is expressed by placing one closed fist under the elbow of the opposite arm such that the two arms form a ninety degree angle; at the same time, each arm turn simultaneously but in the opposite direction of the other (Bediako. Interview. 20/11/98).

¹¹⁴ In order to perform such a greeting, the dancer outstretches the right arm with the first two fingers of the right hand touching and similarly drawn out in an extended position (Bediako. Interview. 20/11/98).

¹¹⁵ Both arms are extended in the same fashion when a chief or Queen Mother greets the audience (as opposed to when an ordinary community member approached the audience with only one arm extended). In the case of a chief or Queen Mother dancing, a fist might be substituted for the hand motion mentioned above (Bediako. Interview. 20/11/98).

depends on the king or chief. An identical expression of respect to the chief – a paramount value in Asante society – is achieved by tapping the stomach lightly with hands (as if to literally indicate that an individual’s total well-being, as represented by the stomach depends on the chief)¹¹⁶ In order to seek permission from the chiefs, the dancer might throw both of his arms back behind him in the air, fists tightened.¹¹⁷ Apparently, as one dancer attests, in *Adowa* dance movements, “respect must prevail above all.”¹¹⁸

Once the dancer receives the approval of the chief,¹¹⁹ he/she reverts to a routine that may be partially pre-arranged and partially improvised. Just as the Asante value of respect is foremost in *Adowa* dance, so too are there highly insulting dance movements that are condemned by the community and which are thus rarely performed.¹²⁰ Generally speaking, in accordance with the traditional Ghanaian custom of using only the right hand (as a sign of respect) movements with the left hand show an attitude of irreverence, as does the pouting of the lips or indicating a person’s height with the palm turned downward.¹²¹ It should be noted that insulting dance movements are seldom performed without the dancer being subsequently required to slaughter a lamb or donate a bottle of schnapps to the chief as an apology for violating traditional values of deference and respect.¹²²

In addition to the axial importance of respect in Asante society as expressed through *Adowa*, the value of a united, collective identity is also crucial the dance movements of this musical form. For example, at the height of a dance, if the Asante dancer suddenly falls with his/her back into the arms or lap of another community member, particularly a prominent stat official, he/she wishes to convey that “with you behind me, I cannot fall.”¹²³ Moreover, as one Asante dancer notes, “the theme of unity is always present in *Adowa* dance” and is conveyed by crossing the arms and hands with palms opened, or by placing the two palms

¹¹⁶ Bediako. Interview. 20/11/98.

¹¹⁷ Boamah. Interview. 24/11/98.

¹¹⁸ Bediako. Interview. 20/11/98.

¹¹⁹ The chief indicates his approval by performing the same movements of recognition as the audience.

¹²⁰ One example of such an offensive movement is the imitation of gathering soil from the behind and then blowing the imaginary contents in the hands towards a person, indicating that the “dancer does not regard the individual for anything in his life.” Similarly, the dancer might throw one arm behind the back toward the lower part of the buttocks as if to indicate that a person is below him/her, a terrible insult to a fellow community member (Bediako interview 20/11/98).

¹²¹ Sarpong. 114.

¹²² Bediako. Interview. 20/11/98.

¹²³ Nketia. Drumming in Akan Communities, 124.

against one another vertically, as if the dancer has his/her hands clasped in prayer.¹²⁴ ON the whole, *Adowa* movements, replete with signification, assert critical values and beliefs of the Asante community. Furthermore, as the dance itself also enables groups interaction of shared musical traditions, *Adowa* dance proves a hallmark of Asante ethnic identity.

By virtue of changes in occupation, trade, political factors, or forces of colonization, musical forms often migrate from one ethnic group to another. In the process of crossing cultural boundaries, musical traditions not only fall susceptible to alterations in form and function, but also risk becoming totally displaced from their original ethnic association. In fact, “most Akan popular dances enjoy a short life of some four or five years, after which they begin to wane.”¹²⁵ However, *Adowa* as a distinct musical form has not only been maintained in its Asante birthplace, but is has also proven consistent with its original form. “[The *Adowa*] movements which were initially performed are the same ones that re performed today. The drum language and the corresponding dance steps have stayed the same since their creation – the tradition ha been preserved.”¹²⁶

Adowa’s longevity may be seen as existing both in spite of and because of the inevitability of change within the Asante ethnic group. Typically, the continuity of a musical form contradicts forces of change within a community, such that societal evolution often occasions a diminished importance of ethnic traditions within that community. However, as “the youth have been always learned from their elders:”¹²⁷ about the central customs and traditions of their culture, *Adowa* has proven an enduring tradition of the Asante people despite current forces of change and modernization.

At the same time, because culture is constructed and reconstructed continually it may be argued that, with societal change comes a fresh perspectives and dynamics approaches to the development of musical traditions. Just as there exists a “continuity of experience which grows in depth with each occasion of [a] performance,” so too are new innovations and

¹²⁴ Bediako. Interview. 20/11/98.

¹²⁵ Nketia, Drumming in Akan Communities, 70.

¹²⁶ Bediako. Interview. 20/11/98.

¹²⁷ Boamah. Interview. 24/11/98.

individual initiative woven into each successive production of *Adowa*.¹²⁸ In this way, because performers might elaborate on a drum rhythm or add distinctive steps to a dance routine, *Adowa* proves a fluid musical form yet one that respects the importance of maintaining ethnic traditions. Thus, as the central Asante dance, the perpetuation of this cultural tradition can be seen as not only resisting forces of change within Asante community, but also bending with such social transformations. In this way, with each consecutive performance, the role of *Adowa* as a vehicle for expressing Asante ethnic identity is not only ensured, but also enlivened with both individual spirit and the collective dynamism of the Asante people.

¹²⁸ Nketia, Drumming in Akan Community, 31.

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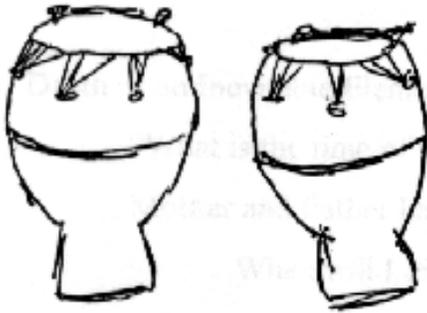
APPENDIX A:

MAP OF GHANA – ASANTE REGION

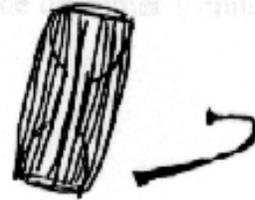


APPENDIX B:

ADOWA ENSEMBLE - INSTRUMENTS



Atumpan



Donno



Apentemma



Petia



Dawuro

APPENDIX C:

ADOWA SONG TEXTS REGARDING HUMAN LIFE AND MORATALITY

1. Music-making as an Essential Means of Honouring the Deceased.
“Let the gong sound.
Let the drummer play for me.
Yaa Nyaako, let the gong sound.
And the drummer play for me:
I am calling Nyaako.”

2. Death as an Inevitable Element of the Life Cycle
“What is the time of my death like today, the drummer’s child?
Mother and Father have both died:
 When will I die?
Woman without issue, the curse one!
 When will I die?”

3. The Limitations of Mortal Life
“Ananse has toiled in vain.
Why did Nyaakotia do that?
Ananse has toiled in vain.
Nyaakotia started to make a farm but could not complete it.
Ananse has toiled in vain.
Nyaakotia of the mausoleum, receive condolences and depart.
Ananse has toiled in vain.”

4. The Need to Express a Sense of Loss at the Death of a Community Member
“We are bereft of a leader.
Death has left us without a leader.
Grandsire Gyamfi Amoyaw of Wonoo,

He hails from Wonoo, Grandsire Gyamfi Amoyaw,
He has died and left us without a leader.

Alas, mother! Alas, father!

Alas, mother! Alas, father!

Grandsire Gyamfi Amoyaw of Wonoo,
He hails from Wonoo, Grandsire Gyamfi Amoyaw,
He has died and left us without a leader.”

5. ... at the Death of a Chief

“Woman of wealth that knew no poverty

But on Akwasi’s last Sunday.

Obiragowaa, beautiful and rich

But on Akwasi’s last Sunday.

O, that Sunday, Akwasi, my father,

Sunday is for me a memorable day.

Be quick and let us depart: no place is safe.

No one reigns forever on the throne of time.”

-- Nketia, Drumming in Akan 61-2.

APPENDIX E:

DRUM RHYTHMS OF ADOWA ENSEMBLE

1. Sereserebidi (most common)
2. Nkentenunu (meaning “empty basket,” as if the family is left without food because of a parent’s death)
3. Adampa (meaning “empty house,” to indicate that the house is empty because of a parent’s death)
4. Otwee Bedi Mpenim (named after the antelope whose skin is used in making drums)
5. Asokore Mampong (name of a town in Kumasi)
6. Adanpon (signifying a cemetery)
7. Techiman (name of a city in Ghana, the most difficult, complicated rhythm, highlife tune)

-- Boamah interview 24/11/98.

APPENDIX F:

DRUM LANGUAGE OF ATUMPAN IN ADUWA PERFORMANCE

Dawuro:

“If you are going to send the body to the cemetery, please be quick” – Se mo de no beko a, mo mfa no nko ntem (an appeal to bury the body before it begins to rot and leave a poor scent)

Petia:

“It’s now enlarging and if you leave [the body] longer it will burst” – Ohurukutu ohurukutu

Atumpan:

“Now the body is full of termites and they will eat its flesh” – Nkanka bedi no nam

General Drum Language:

“Go home, put on a cloth, and come and join” – Ko fie kofa ntoma begro

“Thank you” (expression of praise or appreciation) – Mo, akudonto

-- Sarfo interview 23/11/98.

APPENDIX G:

SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Where did *Adowa* originate (i.e. physical location and ethnic group?)
2. When did *Adowa* originate?
3. What were its intended functions? In other words, what was the purpose of the dance?
4. How was *Adowa* performed? Please describe specific movements and their corresponding meanings. Are these movements still performed today? Do they carry the same message or ideas?
5. Has *Adowa* changed its form over the years? Since its inception? How?
6. How many performers are involved in an *Adowa* production? Who are they?
7. How would you describe the current function or purpose of *Adowa*?
8. What is the context in which *Adowa* is currently performed (i.e. time and place?)
9. Please describe the gender roles in *Adowa*, are there specific musical activities from which women or men are prohibited? What are the reasons for such restrictions? How do they affect the performance of *Adowa*?
10. Please describe the costumes for both men and women in *Adowa* (including make-up, accessories, hair styles, footwear, and other regalia).
11. What are the instruments used in *Adowa*? What are the most common rhythms played on each instrument? What is the purpose of the instruments and drum language?