

**INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE AND CULTURAL VALUES IN EWE MUSICAL  
PRACTICE: THEIR TRADITIONAL ROLES AND PLACE IN MODERN SOCIETY**

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# **INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE AND CULTURAL VALUES IN EWE MUSICAL PRACTICE: THEIR TRADITIONAL ROLES AND PLACE IN MODERN SOCIETY**

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Among the Ewe, music is the pivot around which indigenous cultural practices revolve. Ewe musical texts, the focus of this research, are embedded with and are dynamic in the transmission of indigenous knowledge and values. Besides being a repository of knowledge and artistic traditions, through music, musicians document, preserve, and transmit indigenous knowledge and reenact the historical, social, and political structure of the Ewe. Ewe musical texts do not only possess documentary value but also represent the exercise of the imagination of composers. In this century, however, this role of music and the resulting cultural values faces a great challenge. Modern global cultural transformations continue to influence Ewe cultural elements. Furthermore, the mass commodification of the arts in modern times has affected the educational and cultural functions of Ewe arts and continues to reduce them to a state of entertainment. Due to these influences and challenges, some Ewe youth currently are ignorant about their cultural heritage, and are therefore, losing their cultural identity.

This study, therefore, is in response to the need for examining the aspects and functions of Ewe indigenous knowledge system, values, and musical practice and to help policy makers to create and promote awareness and use of indigenous knowledge and values among Ewe youth and scholars. It investigates Ewe indigenous knowledge and cultural values embedded in Ewe musical practice and the extent to which musical practice preserves and transmits them. The study explores the relationships between music and related arts and how their interactions affect

preservation and transmission of knowledge. It documents traditional songs and analyzes the extent to which musical texts express, preserve, and transmit knowledge and suggest steps that will promote the awareness and use of indigenous knowledge and values, and their harmonization with modern culture. The study examines musico-linguistic practices: as vehicles of philosophical concepts; that establish analogies between artistic creativity and procreation; that underscore Ewe concepts of triality, “democratic” principles, moral and humanistic values.

The study is a modest contribution to ethnomusicological literature demonstrating how music strengthens other domains of culture, and how indigenous knowledge can find relevance in modern society.

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION: BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

*“Nunya adidoe (adzidoe); asi metu (mesu) ne o.”*

*“Knowledge is like a baobab tree; no one person’s hands can embrace it all alone.”*

This old and very common Ewe proverb and song text likens knowledge to a tree. *Adidotsi*<sup>1</sup> (baobab tree/monkey-bread tree) is one of the largest and most useful trees with the longest lifespan in Eweland, and indeed, Africa.<sup>2</sup>



**Figure 1-1: Adidotsiwo (Baobab Trees)**

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<sup>1</sup> It is also called *adzido*, *adzidotsi* or *adidotsi*. The fruit of *adidotsi* is called *alagba*. When the tree (*adidotsi*) is young, it is called *alagbatsi* especially among the Southern Ewe of Ghana and Togo.

<sup>2</sup> See <http://geoimages.berkeley.edu/Geoimages/Johnson/Biomes/BiomesAfrica/Baobabtree.html> <http://www.blueplanetbiomes.org/baobab.htm> and Pakenham (2004). See also <http://www.championtrees.org/champions/images/baobab.jpg>

The proverb, like the tree, has been with the Ewe since time immemorial. In the simplest terms, the proverb underscores Ewe indigenous perception and concept of knowledge and wisdom. It shows the limitlessness of human knowledge and that there is always more knowledge, both old and new, to be learned. In Ewe indigenous philosophical conception, there is a limit to what any one individual can know; but there is no limit to what can be known. In other words, no one individual can claim monopoly of knowledge and wisdom; no one is omniscient. Upon this philosophy, are Ewe indigenous knowledge and cultural values based. It is these conceptual principles, which underscore the need to embed Ewe knowledge bodies and values in many spheres of people's lives, including their music and dance that motivate this study.

Chapter 1 introduces the musicological exploration into the Ewe indigenous knowledge system by delineating the background of the study with an ethnographic overview of the Ewe. It outlines their geographical, historical, religious, and socio-cultural backgrounds. In Chapter 2, I discuss the deeper meanings embedded in common Ewe musico-linguistic terminologies and concepts and assert that Ewe traditional philosophico-linguistic concepts establish clear analogies between artistic creativity and procreation. Language, I reiterate, is a vehicle of concepts, an embodiment of philosophical points of views, and a factor that influences philosophical thought. Chapter 3 looks at issues of cosmology, ontology, and epistemology. My analysis of evidence reveals the Ewe indigenous concept of trinity in different metaphysical entities, including the trinity of Mawu/Se (Supreme Being), the trinity of *dzodzome* (i.e., the three-pronged conception of existence and life circle), the tripartite conception of *amegbeto* (i.e., the trinity of personhood) as well as the concept of life-death complementarity. Based on my

analysis, I conclude that the concept of “heaven-hell” and “sin” are non-indigenous to the Ewe and also debunk false assertions that the Ewe concept of God is a borrowed one. Historical routes and events of migration of the Ewe from Ketu to their present homes is the subject of Chapter 4. From a musicological perspective, my historical discussion indicates that, although the forebears of the Ewe may not have developed the art of writing, they have documented historical events in other forms by other means including musical practice.

In Chapter 5, using musical products and practices, I chart the profile of Ewe traditional political culture and elucidate its indigenous knowledge system and what I regard as its embedded democratic tenets, institutionally, conceptually, practically, and theoretically. I follow up with a look at a related knowledge body—the military culture—in Chapter 6. Here I focus on military institutions, personalities, codes, warfare propaganda, and historic wars. My discussion illuminates the relevance of indigenous military knowledge and history, and the importance of music in defense, security, and stability in traditional Ewe society. It also elucidates the role of women in combat and the selection of combatants. The subject of Chapter 7 is Ewe socio-cultural knowledge and philosophical thoughts, focusing on humanistic and moral values. I illuminate the Ewe concept of *novi* (sibling) and *amedzro* (stranger), which underscore the global theory of humanity and human relationships. I assert that the deeper and wider significance of the concept *novi* and *amedzro* in Ewe culture is purposed, indeed, to deter people from the purely biologically determined blood-relation level to the wider social and human stage—the level where the essence of humanity is held as transcending the contingencies of biological relation, race, or ethnicity. At the core of this familial ethic is support for the universal declarations of human rights that protect all human beings. I indicate that musicians and their artistic products are vital in the dissemination, preservation, transmission, and substance of these concepts from

generation to generation. In the concluding chapter, having presented a cursory summary of the first seven chapters of the dissertation, I concentrate on the place and relevance of indigenous knowledge and cultural values in modern Ewe, Ghanaian, and African societies. I reiterate the need and possibility of harmonizing indigenous knowledge with modern scientific and global cultural concepts and offer some suggestions, possibilities, and processes of integration. I reiterate the important role of musical practice in any harmonization process.

## **1.1 STATEMENT OF RESEARCH**

### **1.1.1 Purpose, Aims, and Objectives**

This study investigates Ewe indigenous knowledge and cultural values embedded in Ewe musical practice and the extent to which music serves as a mode of cultural transmission in time and space. The study also explores (1) the relationships between music and related arts; (2) the various levels of symbolic interaction among artists and audiences; and (3) how these interactions affect preservation and transmission of these values and the life of the Ewe society and the individual.

It has been established in earlier research that music, as depicted and defined by the Ewe (and also in many African societies south of the Sahara), involves many aspects of the culture including dance, visual arts, verbal arts, costumes, and theater (an incorporation of art forms that may be separated in Western cultures). In addition, music is highly integrated with and related to language, history, philosophy, religion, and other socio-cultural bodies of knowledge and activities. My usage of the terms “integration” and “relatedness” refers to the closely knit, finely

interwoven, and high dependency of all the people's socio-cultural, politico-religious, and historico-philosophical bodies of knowledge. Integration here also involves the marriage or amalgamation of vocal and instrumental sounds, human movement, visual and kinesthetic imagery in multisensory and multidimensional modes. It also includes the inter-dependency of these bodies on each other in the process of dissemination, preservation, transmission, innovation, and transformation in time and space.

Ewe musical concept is an intrinsically woven element in the Ewe's everyday life. Although the various elements of this concept are closely related and interwoven in practice and in theory, to a very high degree, the interrelationship does not exist at the same level. For example, while the extent to which dance relates to and depends on music is almost limitless (in that dance may not exist without music), music does not necessarily depend on dance for its survival or practice. Visual art, on the other hand, relates to music on a complementary level and for that matter can, and does, function without music. Similarly, music employs visual art forms in different ways. While the performing and expressive and creative arts may well survive in an oral culture like that of the traditional Ewe, the transmission and preservation of historical and religious knowledge and activities may be hampered without active and continued dependency on the expressive, creative, and performing arts. Irrespective of the different degrees of inter-relatedness and levels of cooperation among these art forms, one may hardly exist and function, as an absolutely separate entity, in traditional African cultures. The art forms of music, dance, drama, and visual arts represent, as separate entities as well as a conglomerate, the phenomenal integrated creativity of the people. The evidence of creativity does not apply only to the music itself. Quite the contrary, the musical forms represented in African societies exist alongside visual imagery, kinesthetic, and linguistic expressions of art that are manifested in make-up,

costumes, dance, drama, instrumental ornamentation, sculpture, and other artifacts and forms of expression. This study undertakes a comprehensive analysis and documentation of songs and the above relationships, through which the social, cultural, and political representation of Ewe in West Africa, and particularly Ghanaian Ewe, can be constructed.

This project aims to fulfill three objectives. First, to collect and document traditional songs, song texts, and other text based musical practices (e.g. drum language, dance steps, and proverbs). Secondly, this study will examine, extract, analyze, and document the extent to which musical texts<sup>3</sup> and performance practices express, preserve, and transmit Ewe indigenous knowledge and cultural values. Thirdly, based on the analysis, the study will suggest steps that will promote the awareness and use of indigenous knowledge and values, and contribute to their harmonization with modern culture.

### **1.1.2 Research Problem**

Knowledge and culture are always in transition, and one of the best places to observe this is in Africa. One of the challenges faced by contemporary African societies is the harmonization of indigenous knowledge and culture with modern culture, especially where the values and processes (of acquisition, preservation, and transmission) of the latter conflict with those of the former. Moreover, some scholars—easily swaddled in fully emergent Western ideologies—are often either ignorant, lack the expertise, or are incapable of understanding the intricacies of

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<sup>3</sup> Musical text, as used here, is not limited to song texts. It also include all Ewe music and dance productions based on texts and/or relates to any verbalized or un verbalized texts that are linguistically meaningful to the speakers.

African culture, knowledge, and values and are, therefore, unreliable role models for African youth.<sup>4</sup>

Missionary activities, colonization, Western education, and modern global cultural transformations not only initiated but also contributed to the degradation, separation, and fragmentation of African indigenous knowledge and cultural elements. Additionally, these factors undermined the integrated nature, philosophy, and holistic moral fabric of traditional African culture. The Western educational system<sup>5</sup> (beside its positive impact in many spheres of the people's lives) exacerbated this by placing African performing arts and intellectual bases—normally integrated in traditional culture—in separate disciplines (such as music, dance, theater, history, philosophy, religion), leading to the production of new and individual professional artists and scholars. Christianity and other colonial legacies promoted the alienation of African youth and heightened their ambivalence toward African indigenous cultures, knowledge, and values. Furthermore, the mass commodification of the arts in modern times has affected the educational, communicative, and cultural functions of African arts and continues to reduce them to a state of 'entertainment.' The rapid growth of evangelical Christian churches and their continuing rejection and defamation of African believe and thought systems, indigenous wisdom, and performances in traditional contexts also contributes to the decline in the use of indigenous knowledge and art forms.<sup>6</sup>

Due to these factors, many African youth are profoundly ignorant about their cultural heritage, and thus are losing their cultural identity. To combat this, African governments and

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<sup>4</sup> These categories of scholars (both Africans and non Africans) were educated but purely on Western ideologies and cultural values. They are often in a position to greatly influence African youth due to their socio-economic status.

<sup>5</sup> The Western educational system has become dominant in Africa since the 1970s after the period during which many African states struggled, not only for their political independence, but also their cultural, ideological, and self-identities.

<sup>6</sup> It must be mentioned that some orthodox churches including the Catholic, (Evangelical) Presbyterian, and Anglican denominations in Ghana are incorporating some form of traditional music into their worship.

educational policy makers need more guidelines enabling them to promote indigenous African knowledge (including history, language, religion, politics, philosophy, and science) and cultural values, including respect and care for authority, the elderly, and the environment; justice, peace, and unity; and reconciliation among the youth, ethnic groups and political entities. To correct this situation and help African governments and policy makers, well meaning and educated scholars of African culture (including ethnomusicologists) should be encouraged to provide appropriate information to those involved in the education of African youth. From this point of view, I wish to contribute to Ewe society through the study of musical practices (including song texts), an important repository of information on Ewe indigenous knowledge and cultural values.

In African culture, musicians often exercise power through songs, drums, and dances. Among the Ewe of Ghana, Togo and Benin musical practices serve as repositories and transponders of indigenous knowledge and cultural values, and artists, in their performances, serve as custodians and transmitters of *nunya* (knowledge), *adanu/anyansa* (wisdom),<sup>7</sup> and *dekonuwo* (values, customs and institutions). Due to Western cultural influences, lack of scholarly studies and the documentation of Ewe (and African) indigenous knowledge and cultural values, the very survival of these bodies of knowledge, the cultures, and their values is at stake—at the verge of extinction.

In most oral traditions, the creative and performing arts not only serve aesthetic and recreational purposes, but also largely act as the repository and clearinghouse where indigenous knowledge and information is ‘kept,’ protected and transmitted from generation to generation. What may seem obscure to most Western researchers is the extent to which music does this in some parts of the globe, especially in African societies. This dimension of the role of music is

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<sup>7</sup> *Adanu* may also refer to craftiness, skillfulness, and ingenuity.

ingrained in African societies and serves as an indispensable means of indigenous education. Undoubtedly, Ewe history, philosophy, and values; health, ecological, and environmental sciences; and educational policies, theories, and practices are documented, preserved, and transmitted through means other than written documents and artifacts.<sup>8</sup> Music is one of these means. One can trace indigenous knowledge—the historic, philosophical, scientific, social, and political background—of Ewe from the following: (1) materials and processes (rituals and other formalities) used in making the various musical instruments; (2) the playing techniques, instrumental (rhythmic) patterns, sonic textures and characteristics (performance); (3) symbols, marks, and designs on the instruments; (4) kinesthetic patterns (dance steps, gestures, and symbols); (5) costumes, props, and other visual imagery; (6) song text (and other verbal art forms, including proverbs and names).

Among the Ewe, and perhaps many other African societies, music is the pivot around which indigenous cultural practices revolve.<sup>9</sup> Ewe musical texts and proverbs, the focus of this research, are the most dynamic in the transmission of indigenous knowledge and values. Besides being a repository of knowledge, values, and artistic traditions, through their songs and performance practices, musicians document, preserve, and transmit indigenous knowledge and reenact the historical, social, and political structure of Ewe people. Ewe song texts do not merely possess documentary value but also represent the exercise of the imagination. Ewe composers imagine lots of things that never occurred before and give them voice in song not as reports but

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<sup>8</sup> These are normally objects produced or shaped by human craft, especially tools, weapons, or ornaments of archaeological or historical interest.

<sup>9</sup> See Nketia (1963, 1974), Jones (1959), Wachsmann (1971), Blacking (1973), Amoaku (1975), Bebey (1975), Fiagbedzi (1977), Chernoff (1979), Locke (1980: 128), Euba (1990), Waterman (1990), Berliner (1993), and Agawu (1995, 2007)

as projections. In this twenty-first century, however, these roles of music (especially the former) and the resulting cultural values face a great challenge.

This study, therefore, is in response to the need (1) for examining the aspects and functions of Ewe traditional music as practiced in the society from perspectives other than most of those that have prevailed in the field of ethnomusicology and anthropology;<sup>10</sup> and (2) to help African governments create and promote awareness and use of indigenous knowledge and values among African youth and scholars. I therefore examine evidence of indigenous knowledge and values embedded in the various Ewe songs. Additionally, I identify and analyze the explicit and implicit evidence, when available oral and written Ewe traditional and historical narratives, verbal arts, and scholarly works. Further, I discuss the extent to which popular culture<sup>11</sup> helps in preserving, transmitting, and perpetuating the various bodies of knowledge and evidence over time and space.

This study does not aim to stop natural and positive transformations and changes occurring in Ewe society. Rather than “freezing” traditional culture (in scope, time, and space) and thereby stopping it from modification and innovation and preventing intra and inter-cultural influences, my research seeks to contribute to the preservation and promotion of positive and educative indigenous elements that harmonize with modern global, educational, and cultural transformations.

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<sup>10</sup> Much of the scholarly works on Ewe music was concentrated on rhythm and drumming (see section on state of research).

<sup>11</sup> As defined by Adjaye (1997: 1, 2004: 3)

### 1.1.3 Hypotheses

Any attempt at tracing the cultural background of a people, especially societies that have a long-standing oral tradition, must consider many areas, components, and aspects (of the people's lives and culture) including musical practices.

Much of the scholarly work on the vast spectrum of Ewe music in particular and African music in general has concentrated on drumming and rhythm. Kofi Agawu whose 1995 book focuses on rhythm from a different perspective, unequivocally states his “conviction that song rather than drum music lies at the heart of Northern Ewe modes of musical expression.”<sup>12</sup> Agawu's statement is an affirmation of some earlier researchers' (including J.H.K. Nketia) insistence that “pride of place be given to songs.”<sup>13</sup> Others called for attention not only to songs but also more specifically to song texts, language and speech-based musical production. Klaus Wachsmann indicates “there is hardly any music in Africa that is not in some way rooted in speech.”<sup>14</sup> Later, John Chernoff reiterates Wachsmann's view when he states rather broadly and generally that “African music is derived from language.”<sup>15</sup> David Locke, writing specifically on Ewe music, emphasizes; “song is the heart of African music performance.”<sup>16</sup> On his part, Francis Bebey adds, “vocal music is truly the essence of African musical art.” Despite the clear awareness of the importance of songs, song text, language, and speech in the musical culture of Africans, much of the research has focused rather on drumming and rhythm even till now. “There is, then, something of a dissonance between the overwhelming emphasis in the popular imagination on ‘African drumming’ as the site of ‘complex rhythms’ and the considered

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<sup>12</sup> Agawu (1995: 2)

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. See also Nketia (1963, 1974)

<sup>14</sup> Wachsmann (1971: 187)

<sup>15</sup> Chernoff (1978: 75)

<sup>16</sup> Locke (1980: 128)

statements by specialists that song holds the key to understanding these musical cultures,”<sup>17</sup> says Kofi Agawu in his prologue to his book *African Rhythm: A Northern Ewe Perspective*, which also focuses on rhythm but from a broader and all-inclusive perspective and modes including songs and language.

Obviously, critical analysis of song texts has been lacking, an investigation that, among other things, would have challenged the older literature, in which authors often concluded that Africa lacks philosophy, knowledge, and historical documents.<sup>18</sup> Such research would have enhanced efforts to unearth scientific, philosophical, and historical documents establishing the long tradition of Africa’s intellectual capacity and background and recognizing that Africa’s knowledge is couched in many spheres of life.<sup>19</sup> Among the Ewe, songs are some of the richest repositories of their knowledge.

Misconceptions such as those described above prevailed, primarily, because some scholars’ definition of intellectual and historical evidence was limited to written documents. Even so, the vast amount of written records recently discovered and being archived digitally attest to both the rich legacy of the written tradition in Africa yet to be unearthed, and the lack of the background necessary for interpreting and translating such records.<sup>20</sup> For example, two separate articles on John Hunwick’s recent findings in Timbuktu, Mali, illustrate that the hoax about Africa’s unwritten tradition may soon be disproved. Lack of literacy notwithstanding, some scholars, (from as early as the 1960s) have accepted that the organization of every traditional society is based on a set of attitudes, which incorporate history, arts, legends and myths.<sup>21</sup> In

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<sup>17</sup> Agawu (1995: 2)

<sup>18</sup> See Herskovits (1958) and Fage (1981)

<sup>19</sup> See Ki-Zerbo (1981), Amenumey (1986) Hunwick (1996, 1999), Akyeampong (2001), and Greene (2002)

<sup>20</sup> See Grossman (April 9, 2001, Chicago Tribune); and Castillo (Sept. 6 2002, The Chronicle of Higher Edu.).

<sup>21</sup> See Vansina (1965), and Amoaku (1975)

literate societies, these attitudes, events, and day-to-day activities are mostly preserved in written literature. The non-literate societies do so orally and thereby regard their oral tradition as the basis or root of their attitude.<sup>22</sup> As Jan Vansina points out, “oral traditions are historical sources of a special nature. Their special nature derives from the fact that they are unwritten sources couched in the form suitable for oral transmission.”<sup>23</sup>

The Western art of writing did not develop among the Ewe until recently, but knowledge and documentation did not elude our forebears. They may not have done so in writing<sup>24</sup> but the Ewe have indeed couched their knowledge and documented historical events, philosophical and scientific knowledge in other ways, by other means, including musical practice.<sup>25</sup> Evidence in musical instruments and the roles of performing artists and what they produce testify to this assertion.<sup>26</sup> For example, Montagu’s publication suggests further possibilities for material culture and musical instruments in updating history in Africa.<sup>27</sup>

Based on careful study of Ewe song texts (of many different genres)<sup>28</sup> and interviews with many scholars and cultural authorities in Ghana and Togo, this research concludes that Ewe songs, verbal arts, and dances are not simply repositories. The hypotheses forming the basis for this research include the following: (1) Ewes, like most African societies, use and rely extensively on music as a powerful tool in memory, means of documentation, and archive of indigenous knowledge and cultural values; and (2) the creation and performance of Ewe songs

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid

<sup>23</sup> Vansina (1965)

<sup>24</sup> There are opinions that point to the existence of some forms of writing among some African societies including the Ewe, as Prof. Datey-Kumodzie asserts and pointed out using adinkra symbols as point of his argument. Personal communication with Prof. Dartey-Kumodzie (Interview: Thursday, June 7, 2007, Accra, Ghana)

<sup>25</sup> See Amoaku (1975), Appiah (1992), Gyekye (1995), Wiredu (1996), Avorgbedor (2001), Agawu (2001), and Dor (2004)

<sup>26</sup> See Avorgbedor (1985) and Gbolonyo (2005)

<sup>27</sup> See Montagu (2002)

<sup>28</sup> Since 1993, I have been collecting traditional songs, folktales, proverbs, and other verbal arts.

serve as traditional means of education and define the roles of their practitioners as sages, intellectuals, historians, philosophers and educators.

This project examines evidence for these hypotheses and explores various types of usage in Ewe musical practices. I argue and propose to demonstrate that critical studies of these musical practices can lead to an in-depth understanding of Ewe indigenous knowledge and cultural values. Further, my research suggests ways through which indigenous knowledge bodies and values can be harmonized with modern culture and utilized for the development of the society.

#### **1.1.4 Research Questions**

The pertinent questions motivating the dissertation include the following: What are Ewe indigenous knowledge and cultural values? What kind of philosophical thoughts exist, and how do Ewe musical practices express, promote and transmit them? How relevant are these thoughts in today's world? What is the content, lyrical, and otherwise, of Ewe songs? What are the processes involved in the transmission of these values? How do the performances of the songs connect to, reinforce, or have some other effect on those bodies of knowledge and values? Are the songs and/or the knowledge and values in danger of being lost or disappearing, or under any foreign influence or threat? Are the content and the cultural importance of Ewe songs and values changing over time? How would this project help Ewe youth of today to appreciate and perpetuate these values for their own development and identity, while coping with modern global cultural changes and influences?

In answering these questions, this project explores the relationships and cultural dynamics between music and related arts, and the various levels of symbolic interaction among

philosophers, historians, artists and audiences and how these interactions affect preservation and transmission of the various bodies of knowledge, values, and the life of the Ewe.

## 1.2 STATE OF RESEARCH

This research focuses on Ewe music, indigenous knowledge, and cultural values while drawing on data, materials, and theoretical approaches from related disciplines including philosophy, history, religion, and linguistics. While studies on African philosophy and cultural values exist in the works of some scholars,<sup>29</sup> they are from general African philosophical perspectives. Besides Dzobo, who concentrates on values in Ewe proverbs, none focuses on or examines the musicological dimensions of the Ewe's indigenous knowledge and values. Musicological literature on Ewe songs is meager.<sup>30</sup> Much of the research on songs of other African cultures has not concentrated on indigenous knowledge. Although literature on Ewe history and language is quite extensive, none of these works considered the aspects of people's lives from a musicological perspective—a rich area for such information. This section reviews the relevant scholarly works within the disciplines outlined.

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<sup>29</sup> Dzobo (1973, 1997), Appiah (1992, 2003), Gyekye (1996, 1997), and Wiredu (1996)

<sup>30</sup> Avorgbedor (1994), Agawu (2001), Dor (2000) and Gbolonyo (2005)

### 1.2.1 African Musical Cultures

Research in African music can further be divided into seven or more categories.<sup>31</sup> These include historical studies, geo-cultural studies, performance studies, musicological studies, ethnographic studies, organological studies, and popular music studies. This project encompasses both ethnographic and performance studies.

(1) Historical studies focus on the relationship between musical style, instruments, and population distribution. They examine political and trans-cultural influences on musical style, songs, and histories of musical genres in particular regions.<sup>32</sup> (2) Geo-cultural studies are concerned with relationships between geographical distribution of instruments and stylistic traits in various cultures.<sup>33</sup> (3) Performance studies on African music examine traditional performance practices and the relationships that exist between music, dance, and the related arts. Researchers also examine the interactive relationships between levels and categories of artists as well as performers and audiences.<sup>34</sup> (4) Musicological studies focus on and critically examine the “music itself” or the “musical sound,” including elements such as melody, rhythm, scale, timbre, and texture. These works include, to various degrees, musical transcriptions and notations that serve as vital data for visual representation and understanding the musical sounds of specific cultures.<sup>35</sup> (5) Ethnographic research provides anthropological accounts of various musical cultures of Africa. Scholars in this category use their knowledge of musical practices and

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<sup>31</sup> Professor Nketia had earlier on given a four-part division. See Nketia (1998)

<sup>32</sup> Wachsmann (1971), Anderson, Backing, Euba, Nketia, and Rouget in Wachsmann ed. (1971), Fiagbedzi (1977), Kubik (1969), Euba (1990), Agawu (2003)

<sup>33</sup> Jones (1959), Merriam (1959, 1982), Chernoff (1979) and Rouget (1985),

<sup>34</sup> Nketia (1971, 1974), Kubik (1969), Ladzekpo and Pantaleoni (1970), Euba (1975, 1990), Locke and Agbeli (1980), Locke (1982), Pressing (1983), Agawu (1988), Dartey-Kumodzie (1989), Amegago (2000), Badu-Young (2002), and Ampene (2005)

<sup>35</sup> Blacking (1959, 1967), Bebey (1975), Ekwueme (1976), Stone (1982), Anku (1988), Arom (1991), Dor (2000), and Beeko (2005)

instruments as tools to investigate and understand the cultures and all institutions of the various societies of which the music and the artists form a part.<sup>36</sup> (6) Besides the construction and playing techniques of musical instruments, organological studies researchers are interested in unraveling the scientific knowledge including historical background of African musical instruments. They also study how these instruments are used in performance contexts and what these symbolize in social and other cultural contexts.<sup>37</sup> (7) Popular music studies investigate music as practiced in contemporary African societies. They focus on a variety of issues including urbanization, modernism, globalization, syncretism, and transculturation.<sup>38</sup>

### 1.2.2 Ewe Music and Dance

Ewe music in particular and African music in general has been known for its complex instrumental, drumming, dance ensembles, and rhythmic traditions<sup>39</sup> through two main ways: (1) From the early (late 19th and early 20th century) subjective and limited descriptive reports by explorers, colonial masters, missionaries, traders,<sup>40</sup> and many who were attracted by the “exoticism” of this musical tradition; and (2) to the more professional and research based studies by scholars from many fields.<sup>41</sup>

The following excerpts illustrate typical trends of the early accounts. A. M. Jones quotes a characterization by John Ogilby as he describes a music-making scene among the Ewe as:

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<sup>36</sup> Nketia (1963), Amoaku (1975), Chernoff (1979), Waterman (1990), Nzewi (1991), Berliner (1993), Ampene (2005)

<sup>37</sup> Nketia (1962), Euba (1990)

<sup>38</sup> Collins (1985), Manuel (1988), Waterman (1990), Collins et al (1997), Barber (1997), and Collins (1992, 2004)

<sup>39</sup> See Ekwueme (1976: 27-35)

<sup>40</sup> See Ogilby’s comments as quoted by Jones (1949: 7)

<sup>41</sup> See Nettl (1956: 2) and Nketia (1971: 3-4)

They have great inclinations to dance; so that when they hear a Drum or other instruments, they cannot stand quiet, but must show their skill. They meet usually in the Evenings to Revel; while some Dance, others play upon instruments, as Copper Panns, struck with Buttons [batons?] or Drums made from a hollow Tree, and cover'd over with a Goats Skin or such like barbarous Musick. They dance commonly two and two together, leaping and stamping with their Feet, Snapping their Fingers and Bowing their Heads one to another; some have horses tails in their hands which they cast one while upon on Shoulder, and one while upon the other; others with Wisps of Straw in their hands, which they let fall, then again suddenly reaching it, they cast it up aloft, and catch it in their hands. This Dancing having continu'd an hour or an hour and a half, everyone returns home. The women in the Kingdom of ARDER, at the east of the Gold Coast are so addicted to Dancing, that they cannot forbear upon the hearing of any Instrument, though they be loaden with one Child in their Belly, and another at their Backs, where they commonly carry them.<sup>42</sup>

While the description is detailed and depicts the typical music-making scene among the Ewe (especially the Anlo Ewe), it shows the extent of cultural naiveté of the author and general misconception of the people's traditions. He nevertheless observed that music is part of the culture, ingrained in the people.

Kwabena Nketia also quotes Colonel Northcott, a colonial officer's characterization of African music, in his monograph *African Music in Ghana: A Survey of Traditional Forms*. According to Nketia, Northcott wrote in the *Report on the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast*, 1899, that:

Iteration and reiteration of the same airs never seems to weary the West African. His chief musical treat however, is the tom-tom. In season and out of season, all day and all night, he is prepared to abandon himself to the delight of a noisy demonstration on this instrument of torture, and it is more often exhaustion on the part of the performers than boredom by the audience that puts a period to the deafening and monotonous noise.”<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Jones (1949: 7)

<sup>43</sup> As quoted by Nketia (1962)

Similarly, Kofi Agawu quotes a passage from Richard Lander's *Records of Captain Clapperton's Last Expedition to Africa*, published in 1830, as another representative style of discourse on African music pre-1900.

On the morning of Thursday, the 12<sup>th</sup>, we left Chiadoo, followed by the chief and an immense crowd of both sexes, amongst whom were hundred of children, the ladies enlivening us with songs at intervals, and the men blowing on horns and beating of gongs and drums, without any regard to time, forming altogether a most barbarous concert of vocal and instrumental music, which continued to our great inconvenience and annoyance till we arrived at Matone, when they took leave of us and returned. It would be as difficult to detach singing and dancing from the character of an African as to change the color of his skin. I do not think he would leave a single week in his country without participating in this favorite amusement; to deprive him would be indeed worse than death... Yet even on these instruments they perform most vilely, and produce a horrible discordant noise, which may perhaps, be delightful to their own ears; but to strangers, if they have the misfortune to be too near the performance no sound can be more harsh and disagreeable than such a concert. Of all the amusements of Africans, none can equal their song and dance in the still, clear hours of night, when the moon, walking in beauty in heavens, awakens all the molder affections of their nature, and invites them to gladness and mirth. On these occasions all care is completely laid aside, and everyone delivers himself up to the dissipation of the moment, without a thought of the morrow, his heart having no vacuum for melancholy anticipations.<sup>44</sup>

Although this clearly is not a scholarly account, it nevertheless depicts how the music of Africa was perceived, misunderstood and misinterpreted at the time. The three quotations portray classical descriptions of the music, which the writers generally ascribe to what was termed “primitive” African music.<sup>45</sup>

It should be noted that early ethnomusicological studies are rife with the influence of stereotypes, generalization, and cultural naivety. In the late eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, many explorers, travelers, colonial powers, missionaries, and researchers were attracted to the study of indigenous people of far-away lands or “primitive cultures.” They

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<sup>44</sup> Agawu (1992: 248)

<sup>45</sup> This is a description and generalization that started with non-professional researchers, but has continued with trained researchers and scholars who followed for many years.

were motivated by power, greed, adventure, and curiosity of the exotic, yet unconcerned with how the very notion of ‘exoticism’ and ‘primitivity’ might influence their studies and subjective accounts. These early studies and accounts may now be viewed as subjective, Euro-centric or ‘Western minded.’<sup>46</sup>

One conspicuous element of the later works is the level of attraction to Ewe drumming and rhythm. Some scholars noted this attraction. David Locke indicates that African polyrhythmic drumming has long fascinated ethnomusicologists. Specifically, the drumming of the Ewe-speaking people of the Guinea Coast of West Africa has been the subject of several lengthy studies<sup>47</sup> and its performance has been taught in many schools in the United States. “Although this music has been well studied, a coherent system of its basic rhythmic principle has yet to be developed. Indeed some of its most fundamental concepts are still the subject of vigorous debate.”<sup>48</sup> George Dor,<sup>49</sup> one of the very few scholars whose research concentrates on aspects of Ewe music other than rhythm and drumming also observed that: “Although the vocal genre of Ewe music constitutes an integral aspect of the tradition’s peculiarities, the vibrancy of Ewe drumming continues to entice most researchers to focus on rhythm, while pitch-related components of Ewe music have been relatively neglected.”<sup>50</sup> Other works that focus on rhythm and/or drumming include Akin Euba’s *Yoruba Drumming*,<sup>51</sup> Kofi Agawu’s *African Rhythm*<sup>52</sup> and Willie Anku’s *Procedures in African Drumming*.<sup>53</sup> Laz Ekwueme<sup>54</sup> earlier on wrote: “In

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<sup>46</sup> See for example Grinker (1997), Agawu (2003), and Euba (2008)

<sup>47</sup> See Jones (1959) and Pantaloeni (1972)

<sup>48</sup> Locke (1996). See also Lock (1978,1992), Chernoff (1979)

<sup>49</sup> See Dor (2001)

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, p. 3

<sup>51</sup> Euba (1990)

<sup>52</sup> Agawu (1995)

<sup>53</sup> Anku (1988). Other works focusing on African (Ewe) drumming and rhythm include Jones (1954, 1959), Pantaleoni (1970, 1972a, b, and c), Koetting (1970), Pressing (1983), and Burns (2005)

<sup>54</sup> Ekwueme(1976)

fact, to the best of our knowledge, apart from the early studies made by Jones of Zambian musical rhythm, more studies seem to have been made of Ghanaian rhythm—in particular Ewe dance drum rhythms—than the rhythm of probably all other areas of Africa combined.<sup>55</sup> Though many of these researchers mention the essence of songs and other aspects of this attractive musical tradition, a comprehensive work focusing on songs from an ethnomusicological point of view has yet to be undertaken.

Earlier (prior to 1980) notable contributions to the research literature on Ewe music range from Philip Gbeho and N. Z. Nayo to Nissio Fiagbedzi and John Chernoff.<sup>56</sup> After 1980, different (new) theoretical, methodological, and conceptual approaches to African music and dance were established as a result of a general change in scholarship in the field of ethnomusicology and anthropology. In Ewe music and dance, these changes could be seen in works of scholars including Daniel Avorgbedor, Kofi Agawu, David Locke, and S. Dartey-Kumodzie.<sup>57</sup> With the exception of Avorgbedor's researches on *Halo*,<sup>58</sup> beside Nayo's work, none of these studies has made songs and song texts the main focus of their research. Song texts have been peripheral or incompletely studied, even though the lyrics of Ewe songs have much to tell.<sup>59</sup>

In addition to the above, other works on song, dance, and history of Ewe can be found in diploma, BA, MA, and M.Phil theses in Universities in Ghana and Togo. These sources clearly identify and, to varying degrees, discuss aspects of song texts as sources of historical, cultural,

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid, p. 27-35

<sup>56</sup> Gbeho (1954), Jones (1959), Nayo (1964), Ladzekpo and Pantaleoni (1971), Amoaku (1975), Fiagbedzi (1977), Locke (1978), and Chernoff (1979)

<sup>57</sup> Avorgbedor (1987, 1992, 1994, 2001), Agawu (1988, 1995, 2001), Locke (1992), Fiagbedzi (1997, 2005), Dor (2000, 2004), Badu (2002), and Gbolonyo (2005),

<sup>58</sup> Avorgbedor (1994, 2001)

<sup>59</sup> See Nayo (1964), Locke (1978, 1992), Avorgbedor (1994, 2001), Agawu (1995), Gbolonyo (2005), and Burns (2005)

and moral education among Ewe. Most relevant among these unpublished works is N. Z. Nayo's<sup>60</sup> studies on the life and works of *Hesino*<sup>61</sup> Akpalu—one of the most popular and best admired Ewe traditional composer-poets, singers, and indigenous philosophers. In his thesis “Akpalu and His Songs: A Study of the Man and His Music,”<sup>62</sup> the chapters on “compositional techniques” and “the background stories of Akpalu's songs” are of particular relevance to this study. With respect to its contribution to the significance of music in Anlo Ewe culture, Nissio Fiagbedzi described its scope as being “of a special kind.”<sup>63</sup> Other musical works pertinent to this study include those by Komla Amoaku, Nissio Fiagbedzi, Daniel Avorgbedor, Kofi Agawu, and George Dor.<sup>64</sup>

Komla Amoaku raises two issues that resonate with the current study: (1) the Ewe, as a traditional society, symbolize and express “the Trinitarian concept of the universe (World of Spirits, Nature, and Temporal World)”<sup>65</sup> through traditional institutions and art forms, including music and verbal arts; (2) the various art forms and bodies of knowledge of any traditional African society are distinguishable but inseparable parts of an organic whole, in an organic relationship between themselves.<sup>66</sup> It is upon this evidence that he based his study *Symbolism in Traditional Institutions and Music of the Ewe of Ghana*. Amoaku addresses some scholarly inaccuracies, including misrepresentations and pointed out some contemporary problems of representing Ewe and Ghanaian cultures by Western theoretical methods. He further suggests the need to emphasize the cultures' perspectives using indigenous theoretical methods in cross-

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<sup>60</sup> See Nayo (1964)

<sup>61</sup> For detail information on *Hesino*, see chapter three.

<sup>62</sup> Nayo (1964)

<sup>63</sup> Fiagbedzi (1977: 11)

<sup>64</sup> Amoaku (1975), Fiagbedzi (1977), Chernoff (1979), Avorgbedor (1994, 2001), Agawu (2001, 2003), Dor (2004)

<sup>65</sup> Amoaku (1975: 3)

<sup>66</sup> Ibid (5)

cultural theorizing processes. His work is holistic in its integration of music, dance, costume, visual imagery, and symbolism in Ewe culture.

Nissio Fiagbedzi reiterates these points and adds that the historiography of Ewe music has its roots in the “mythico-historical past of the Ewe contained in an oral tradition of migration.”<sup>67</sup> His dissertation, *The Music of the Anlo*,<sup>68</sup> examines the general overview of Anlo musical tradition with attention given to almost all aspects. Although Fiagbedzi does not focus on song texts, his work covers a wider scope and gives a broader sense of the musical tradition of the Anlo Ewe—one of the major Ewe groups on which my own research focuses. His work investigates a possible historical development of Anlo Ewe musical tradition, acculturative influences, and musical styles, as well as the role and meaning of music and dance within the culture. Based on song texts, historical dates, and general musical practice, Fiagbedzi offered a taxonomy of musical types as reconstruction of the historical development of Ewe music. Later, Fiagbedzi re-integrates Anlo Ewe music, dance, and drama and reviews the creative processes, linguistic concepts, and socio-cultural functions of Ewe performing arts.

In consonance with Fiagbedzi’s research is E. Y. Egblewogbe’s dissertation<sup>69</sup> in which he provides a socio-cultural framework of Ewe personal names, typology, syntax, morphology, and semantics, and reveals the philosophical and educational values that underpin names and their meanings in Ewe culture. His findings led to a later publication<sup>70</sup> that examines the role of games in African children’s education. He discusses the Ewe cultural values, indigenous knowledge, and socio-cultural virtues that are transmitted to children through games, music, and dance activities at various stages of development. Through this study, he provides a contextual

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<sup>67</sup> Fiagbedzi (1977: xi)

<sup>68</sup> Ibid

<sup>69</sup> Egblewogbe (1977)

<sup>70</sup> Ibid (1995)

framework, educational and socio-cultural importance of children's games. Although Egblewogbe's researches focused on personal names and children's games, they are related to this research. His and Fiagbedzi's assertions on the contents and meanings of song texts and philosophies behind names and other verbal art forms inform this research.

John Chernoff,<sup>71</sup> focusing on Ewe music, clearly emphasized the above assertions and devised new theoretical concepts that underscore the use of music as a basis for a portrait of African culture. In his volume *African Rhythm and African Sensibility*, Chernoff establishes a sense of aesthetic appreciation that may refer readers, especially Westerners, to a (an African) lifestyle and "a sensibility towards life, revealing cultural patterns, ethical modes, and standards of judgment."<sup>72</sup> Among others, it is his third objective—to use music as a basis for a portrait of African culture—that will have meaning and clarity for all people with personal or historical interest in the image of Africa—that most resonates with this research.

Avorgbedor's works in 1994 and 2001 look at *halo* 'insult songs'<sup>73</sup> as literary production and its influence on social violence. Through the analysis of *halo*, and discussion of the range of literary devices employed by Ewe composers, Avorgbedor shows the power and relevance of song texts in the Ewe socio-political arena. Although the articles are on a single Ewe musical genre (*halo*), his expositions on Ewe composer's poetic artistry and the extent to which the composers employ songs and song texts in information dissemination make them relevant to this research.

Kofi Agawu's contributions to Ewedome (Northern Ewe) musical traditions are extensive. He is committed to balancing the scale of scholarship on Anlo music and that of

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<sup>71</sup> Chernoff (1979)

<sup>72</sup> Ibid: 4

<sup>73</sup> *Halo* has been very popular among the southern Ewes of Ghana and Togo until its proscription in 1962. See Avorgbedor (2001: 17)

Ewedome music. Although much of his work focuses on rhythm and compositional processes, his established manifestations of Ewedome folk songs makes them relevant to my work. In his article “Variation Procedures in Northern Ewe Music,”<sup>74</sup> Agawu distances himself from some of his predecessors on African music. For example, he questions Nketia’s position of ascribing vertical effects in indigenous African music to “incidental melodic process.” He also pointed out the ethnocentric biases in the works of some scholars including A.M Jones, W.E.F. Ward, and R. Brandel.<sup>75</sup> Agawu provides a comprehensive analysis of the contextual framework of Northern Ewe (African) rhythmic characteristics, approaches, and how they relate to, and integrate with life.<sup>76</sup> He also discusses their cultural functions and the relationship between language and rhythm. Centrality of language in the musical practices of Northern Ewe and Africans in general is key to Agawu’s study. This language centrality view that underlies Agawu’s book is enshrined in earlier claims that “without African languages, African music would not exist.”<sup>77</sup> Agawu’s work is an example of an integrated approach to theories on African music, dance, and language. From a different perspective, and using Ewe and Akpafu<sup>78</sup> musical examples, Kofi Agawu in his article “African Music as Text”<sup>79</sup> shows how appreciation of certain African musics might be enhanced by “our construal of them as texts.”<sup>80</sup> Texts, he argues, demand and deserve to be contemplated, a view which is a primary focus of this research project. Agawu’s approaches resonate with and inform my research.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Agawu (1990)

<sup>75</sup> Jones (1949, 1954, 1959), Ward (1927), Brandel (1961), Agawu (1990, 2003)

<sup>76</sup> Agawu (1995)

<sup>77</sup> Bebey (1975: 115)

<sup>78</sup> Akpafu is one of the (Guan) Ghanaian ethnic groups and languages spoken in the mid-northern part of the Volta Region in Ghana. The Akpafus are one of the closest neighbors of the Ewes and are mostly equally fluent in the Ewe language.

<sup>79</sup> See Agawu (2001)

<sup>80</sup> Ibid: 9

<sup>81</sup> See also Knight (1984)

Modesto Amegago's dissertation, *An Holistic Approach to African Performing Arts*,<sup>82</sup> focuses on African music and dance curriculum development and implementation. Using Ewe music and dance as the framework, Amegago investigates African philosophy, arts, aesthetics, and education and proposes a curriculum that uses African epistemic, aesthetics, and pedagogical bases for its development. George Dor's works,<sup>83</sup> on the other hand, explore the compositional processes of Ewe traditional vocal music, communal creativity, and song ownership using *havolu* (song composition/critique/perfection session)<sup>84</sup> as a case study. Dor's studies on Ewe compositional process reveal the role of the community in composers' textual and poetic choices. The findings and theoretical frameworks of these works motivate and reinforce one of the hypotheses of this study. His studies inform the compositional and creative theories employed in the current study's analysis.

In all the above works, songs have been investigated within specific genres, functions, and contexts. None of these researchers, however, made song texts the subject of their study. That notwithstanding, these and many other researches resonate with the current study and serve as a reference and guide to this research. My work expands not only the geo-cultural and historical scope of previous research (including my master's thesis)<sup>85</sup> but also the theoretical depth, methodological and analytical approaches, and dimensions. Specifically and most importantly, the current study focuses on song texts and using interdisciplinary approaches reveals the importance of musical text<sup>86</sup> including song texts in Ewe culture.

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<sup>82</sup> Amegago (2000)

<sup>83</sup> Dor (2000, 2004)

<sup>84</sup> This is a session that involves total musical composition in which musicians, with proven ability in traditional musical practice (such as master composers, drummers, dancers and choreographers), come together to either collaborate in composing a new song or piece, or listen to, critique, perfect, and learn a new song, from one of their colleagues, for a particular dance group as part of their initial preparations for 'a new release.'

<sup>85</sup> See Gbolonyo (2005)

<sup>86</sup> See Chapter 2 for detailed information on musical text.

### 1.2.3 African Thought Systems (Philosophy) and Cultural Values

The current research focuses on indigenous knowledge and cultural values. As such, studies in African thought systems (philosophy), morality,<sup>87</sup> culture,<sup>88</sup> and religion<sup>89</sup> are relevant to this dissertation. Earlier researchers (Western and Western-trained), in their limited knowledge of Africa, have often cast a fog over the cultural understanding of Africa and its people. Until the publication of notable works including Cheikh Anta Diop's influential works, *African Origin of Civilization* and *Cultural Unity of Black Africa*,<sup>90</sup> African culture was typically examined from Western perspectives.<sup>91</sup> Diop's works set the tone that changed the course of African historiography and cultural studies, and provide the basis for an Afrocentric transformation.<sup>92</sup>

Since the early 1980s, studies on African culture have been organized around four broad areas and topics. These include ethnocultural motif, intellectual and artistic traditions, concepts of cultural values, and cultural continua.<sup>93</sup> These works reiterate that the creation of African modernity requires serious and well-intentioned evaluation of indigenous African knowledge and values. Prominent among theoretical and philosophical foundations and concepts, on which many of the studies were based, is the belief that people of African descent share a common experience, struggle, and origin.<sup>94</sup> Many latter scholars distanced themselves from what has

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<sup>87</sup> Diop (1974), Dzobo (1973, 1997), Makinde (1988), Gbedegesin (1991), Kwame (1995), Gyekye (1995, 1996), Wiredu (1996), Mbiti, Gyekye, Ptah-hotep, Senghor, Nkrumah, Stewart and Garvey in Asante and Abarry (1996), Okra (2003)

<sup>88</sup> Diop (1978), Ayisi (1979), Asante and Asante (1985), Oruka (1990), Gyekye (1996, 1997), Appiah (2000), Adjaye and Andrews (1996), Asante and Abarry (1996) Adjaye (2004)

<sup>89</sup> Gaba (1965), Abimbola (1976), Fiagbedzi (1979), Gaba (1997)

<sup>90</sup> See Diop (1974, 1978)

<sup>91</sup> See Bascom and Herskovits (1970), Asante and Asante (1985: ix)

<sup>92</sup> Ibid

<sup>93</sup> See Asante and Asante (1985), Gyekye (1996, 1997), Appiah (2000), Adjaye and Andrews (1996), Asante and Abarry (1996) Adjaye (2004),

<sup>94</sup> Asante and Asante (1985: 4)

been labeled as “anti-African culture school,” which expounds the theory that African culture cannot exist because Africa encompasses too many ethnic groups.<sup>95</sup>

I agree with Molefi Kete Asante’s theoretical conclusion that, if there is a European culture, Asian culture, and Arabic culture, there is an African culture. Nevertheless, that is not to say that there are no observable and distinct differences between the cultures of different societies in these regions. Asante convincingly demonstrates that, although the cultural histories and linguistic characteristics of the different African societies are somewhat different, they share the same culture, for, “their particular histories are distinct but their general history is the same,”<sup>96</sup> and so is their general culture. This standpoint was emphasized by Wiredu, who indicates that various African cultures have similar fundamental commonalities that each one of them, and indeed all, could be subsumed under one general cultural type—African culture,<sup>97</sup> just as Western culture and European culture are identified. It is, however, important to note that, as similarities are discerned and one draws conclusions about subsumptions of a general African culture, there are very distinct elements that set each, and every, African society apart from the other. It should, therefore, be understood that there is African culture, and at the same time, there are African cultures.

In Gyekye’s *African Cultural Values: An Introduction*,<sup>98</sup> and Dzobo’s *African Proverbs: The Moral Values of Ewe Proverbs*,<sup>99</sup> the authors reiterate that the creation of African modernity requires serious and well-intentioned evaluation of traditional African knowledge and values. Both researches (and other works by both authors are valuable resources for this research) are

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid

<sup>96</sup> Asante (1985: 4)

<sup>97</sup> See Wiredu (1996: 157)

<sup>98</sup> See Gyekye (1996)

<sup>99</sup> See Dzobo (1997)

studies of cultural values of African societies that can be extracted from myths, proverbs, artistic symbols, and religious beliefs as well as socio-political practices and institutions.<sup>100</sup> Joseph Adjaye's *Boundaries of Self and Other in Ghanaian Popular Culture*,<sup>101</sup> a performance-based exposition of popular cultural practices, is also a relevant resource to this dissertation. Although the work focuses on Akan and Krobo of Ghana and not the Ewe, his multidisciplinary approaches, as well as theoretical and methodological concepts, serve as valuable bases and examples for my work. The definition and analysis of culture from perspectives of these later scholars including Asante and Asante, Wiredu, Gyekye, and Adjaye inform the current research.<sup>102</sup>

A number of studies in African philosophy exist, most of which were authored by Africans and/or from African perspectives. The underlining objectives and arguments of most of these studies fall under four main categories. While some cover the four categories and beyond, others concentrate only on certain areas. Their aims include (1) defining and stressing the universal character/characteristics of philosophy—"the propensity of some individuals in all human cultures to reflect deeply and critically about fundamental questions of human experience;"<sup>103</sup> (2) demonstrating that philosophy is fundamentally a cultural phenomenon; (3) arguing, establishing, legitimizing, and trying to define, in the 'metropolitan diction and mode,' the idea of African philosophy; and (4) identifying and demonstrating that not only did Africa have sages, or thinkers in Africa's cultural past, who reflected on issues of human existence and experiences, but that it also had mastered the means and ways by which this was done.

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<sup>100</sup> See Gyekye (1985, 1995, 1996, 1997) and Dzobo (1975, 1997, 2004, 2005, 2006), and Dzobo and Amagashie-Viglo (2004).

<sup>101</sup> See Adjaye (2004)

<sup>102</sup> See Ibid, Kwame (1995), Gyekye (1995, 1996), Wiredu (1996), Asante and Abarry (1996), Okra (2003)

<sup>103</sup> Gyekye (1995: ix)

Using different approaches, but focusing on the Akan of Ghana, Kwame Gyekye<sup>104</sup> and Kwasi Wiredu<sup>105</sup> critically explore the philosophical concepts of African traditional thinkers and discuss culturally defined values, knowledge systems, human rights, and concepts. Complementing Gyekye in part, Wiredu confronts the paradox that while Western cultures recoil from claims of universality, once colonized societies, seeking to redefine their identities, insist on cultural particularities. Both authors' expositions of the principles of African traditional philosophy are not purely theoretical. Their illustrations of how certain aspects of African political thoughts and ideologies may be applied to the practical resolution of some of Africa's most pressing challenges<sup>106</sup> resonate with this research. This work will draw on their theories but will focus on music and the Ewe; however, as much as I share some of Wiredu's perspectives, this research dissociates itself from some of his conclusions on African ancestorship and the pouring of libation.<sup>107</sup>

Kwame Appiah discusses the theories of traditional religions (old gods, new worlds) in a postmodern context and demonstrates the limits of symbolist interpretation of religion. Citing Kwasi Wiredu, he reiterates that the so-called "African problems" are only to be solved if understood to be human problems arising out of a special situation. After all, depending only on specific situations, not on a basic difference between people, "they may not be solved if they are seen as African problems, generated by Africans being somehow unlike others."<sup>108</sup> While these philosophical insights and thoughts have influenced the current research, the conclusions on scholarly thoughts and implications remain slight.

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid

<sup>105</sup> Wiredu (1996)

<sup>106</sup> See *ibid.*

<sup>107</sup> Ibid

<sup>108</sup> Appiah (1992: 136)

#### 1.2.4 Ewe Language and Verbal Arts

Like dance and drama, verbal arts, such as poetry and proverbs, are inextricably linked to music, especially song text and instrumental diction including drum language. Relevant scholarly works in this field that relate to the current research include works by G. K. Nukunya, Kofi Awoonor, E. Y. Egblewogbe, Kofi Anyidoho, and G. Ansre.<sup>109</sup> These works delve into the history, structure, and functions of Ewe traditional poetry, proverbs, drama, and language. Though these books and articles do not deal directly with music, the concepts are interwoven, and therefore, are relevant to this study.

In *Guardians of the Sacred Word: Ewe Poetry*,<sup>110</sup> Kofi Awoonor devotes the entire monograph to the life and works of three eminent Anlo Ewe traditional musicians. Though his research focuses on the poetic aspects of the works as well as other verbal creative skills, it contributes to music scholarship as well. Like Awoonor, Anyidoho's "*Oral Poetics and traditions of Verbal Art in Africa*"<sup>111</sup> and Klutsey Seshie's "*Akpalu fe Hawo*"<sup>112</sup> bring to light the contribution of oral poetry to other fields, including music among the Ewe and other African societies.

Anyidoho comprehensively discusses the various compositional techniques and processes used by Anlo composer-poets. Through his analysis and discussions, he demonstrates the different levels of multiple artistic skills of Ewe composer-poets and how their products serve as a medium of Ewe (African) oral poetry, song (musical creativity), and repository of indigenous knowledge and values. Anyidoho also examines *havolu and hakpa*, two institutional processes

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<sup>109</sup> See Nukunya (1969), Dzobo (1973, 1997), Dseagu (1975), and Seshie (1973), Awoonor (1974, 1975), Egblewogbe (1977), Anyidoho (1982, 1983, 1997), Ansre (2000), Afokpa, et al (2005)

<sup>110</sup> Awoonor (1974)

<sup>111</sup> Anyidoho (1983)

<sup>112</sup> Seshie (1973)

through which new songs may be realized (practices associated with song composition and musical practice among the Anlo Ewe). It is during these processes that the contents, especially textual, of the songs are examined and ‘approved’ for the ‘consumption’ of the wider public.<sup>113</sup> The multi and interdisciplinary scope of Anyidoho’s research is a direct characteristic, and the dictate of the integrated nature, of Ewe and for that matter, African performing arts. These features and approaches are relevant to the current study.

In various researches, Nukunya offers comprehensive studies of the indigenous and the contemporary religious practices, history, socio-cultural, political, and economic life of Anlo Ewe. Nukunya also examines and discusses the effect of contemporary changes on the various spheres of their life.

### **1.2.5 Ewe and African History**

Like language and verbal arts, this research borders on Ewe history. A review of the literature on history will reveal a number of authoritative scholarly works on African history in general,<sup>114</sup> as well as on the history of the Ewe in particular.<sup>115</sup> All these works focus on one or more aspects of the histories, although with biases and controversies on certain issues. In spite of these conflicts, they agree on most of the vital events that are part of my research.

Histories more often revolve around what may be the ultimate or the superlative events, though these events may not necessarily be the only outstanding historical events among the

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<sup>113</sup> See Dor (2004)

<sup>114</sup> Ajayi and Crowder, eds. (1985), Law (1991), Curtin et al (1995), Ilefe (1995), Fage (2002), Shillington, ed. (2005)

<sup>115</sup> Crowther (1927), Westermann (1930), Fage (1978), Parrinder (1949, 1970, 1986), Manoukian (1952), Ellis (1966), Mamattah (1978), Amenumey (1986), Greene (1996, 2002), Agbodeka (1997), Gavua (2000), Akyeampong (2001), and Lawrance (2005).

people. The need to organize historical topic for purpose of study and teaching eventually necessitates a focus on a limited scope of events. Such events become firmly entrenched as part of the historical narratives. Other significant events are crowded out, ignored, and even forgotten. For the serious student of any historical topic, such reference points must be regarded with a healthy dose of skepticism. One must continually question what has determined the importance of a given event, why and how any notions regarding its significance are advanced and by whom. Truly, history and music are as much political as scholarly. Many factors, ideologies, and perceptions—from populism through spiritism to ethnic and racial differences and dynamics—exert tremendous influence on the interpretation of ideas and events as they pertain to the formation and construction of the historical narrative on any society, including Africa in general and Ewe in particular.

The task of studying the history of the Ewe is not easy. Hence, this project does not aim at rewriting Ewe historiography, but rather intends to comment on, reinterpret (when necessary), shed more light on, and give more or alternative meaning and perspective to what has been known (orally and literally) through the lenses of Ewe performing arts, including music and dance. Misleading historical documents exist; explorers, missionaries, and Islamic crusaders wrote most of them. The shortcomings may be as a result of misinterpretations of the language and other cultural elements. A few historians have tried to rewrite and correct some of the misinterpretations. In modern times, an arguably more consistent and informed approach to the study of Ewe and many other African histories (oral traditions) is to compliment traditional historical methodologies with alternative sources including song texts, legends, folktales, proverbs, riddles, and poetry. These data can be reinforced with linguistic data<sup>116</sup> (looking at the

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<sup>116</sup> Westermann (1930)

transformations and influences of the people's language), ethnological, and archaeological data.<sup>117</sup> As S. Datey-Kumodzie<sup>118</sup> indicates, "no accurate accounts of Ewe history can be registered without a conscious and comprehensive study of the musical practices of the people. This is because the bulk of the historical events and narratives of the Ewe existence is couched in their performing arts, including music and dance."<sup>119</sup>

The above scholarly works on the historiography of Africa and of the Ewe as an ethnic group combine scantily written data from scattered sources with oral narratives. While some, including Mamattah, Amenumey, and Agbodeka, address multiple aspects using different resources, methods, and approaches, others such as Greene and Akyeampong, concentrate on periods, sub-groups, or ideologies. Among them, the works of Mamattah, Amenumey, and Agbodeka cover wider issues and seem to use a combination of approaches and theories. Greene and Akyeampong employ modern social historical theories and approaches in their studies. Their works are not only limited to one sub-ethnic group (Anlo Ewe) but also to a period (1800 to present), theories, and gender (in the case of Greene).<sup>120</sup> Mamattah's ground breaking and detailed volume *The Ewes of West Africa* (sometimes referred to as "the bible of Ewe history"<sup>121</sup>), is not only the first historical monograph from an Ewe perspective,<sup>122</sup> but also serves as background for later works.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> See Fage (1978), Parrinder (1970),

<sup>118</sup> Prof. Datey-Kumodzie (Popularly called Awunor) is a professor of African music and traditional religion. He is an expert of Ghanaian and African culture and one of the few recognized and highly respected African ethnomusicologists and cultural anthropologists that specialize in religion, Ewe music, history, philosophy, language, and their interrelationships.

<sup>119</sup> Personal communication with Prof. Datey-Kumodzie: Interview on June 7, 2007, at Accra, Ghana.

<sup>120</sup> See Greene (1996, 2002) and Akyeampong (2001)

<sup>121</sup> See Badu-Young (2002: 39)

<sup>122</sup> As an insider (born and bred Anlo Ewe)

<sup>123</sup> Amenumey (1986), Greene (1996, 2002), Agbodeka (1997), and Akyeampong (2001)

In his chapter, “A Brief History,” Kodzo Gavua<sup>124</sup> charts the history of the Ewedome (Northern Ewe) in Ghana. His exposition covers historical settlements, life before, during, and after the European encounter, as well as socio-political, religious and economic developments of the people. The chapter also discusses the relationship, influences, and cross-cultural exchanges between the Northern Ewe and other neighboring ethnic groups in Ghana. Gavua points out two main issues and asserts that they derive from Northern Ewe history (of migration and settlement, language and art forms). These include (1) “individualism and lack of nationalist approach to issues” that affect them (Northern Ewe) collectively; (2) fusion of Ewe traits with Akan traits and the incorporation of elements of Akan culture into Ewe ones. While his second point is neither new nor questionable, the first assertion (to which he assigned some reasons) needs further discussion and detailed study. This study considers his points from a musicological perspective.

Sandra Greene’s first book<sup>125</sup> on Anlo Ewe history documents the changes that occurred in ethnic boundaries as the Anlo Ewe state absorbed refugees, traders, and conquerors during the last three centuries of pre-colonial Eweland. It further analyzes the way shifting ethnic definitions affected gender relations in Anlo. In her second study,<sup>126</sup> Greene looks at the long geopolitical processes that have entangled the Anlo and how they have re-shaped daily life and culminate in new forms of modernity. She analyzes the form and history of that modernity and explores its historical emergence through the construction and reconstruction of a theory of the colonial cultural encounter in Africa. In writing a thematic history of landscape, Greene adopts approaches of geographers, historians, and anthropologists; her focus on sites includes the human

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<sup>124</sup> See Gavua (2000)

<sup>125</sup> See Greene (1996)

<sup>126</sup> See Greene (2002)

body as well as cities, lagoons, and the ocean. Her central themes, tradition, modernity, meaning, and memory, are pivotal to this research. Nevertheless, this study disassociates itself from her assertion on the place and power of Mawu (the Supreme God) in Ewe culture and rather brings out evidence that corrects her misinterpretations.<sup>127</sup>

Emmanuel Akyeampong,<sup>128</sup> on the other hand, charts the history of dramatic environmental change in Anlo Eweland. He illustrates how environmental considerations may be integrated into more mainstream approaches to West Africa, an area where historians have been less attractive to environmental issues. Based on his findings, he concludes that, by co-opting local land deities, the Anlo Ewe developed a “moral ecology” to mediate relations with their new environment. Although he uses an “eco-social” approach, his emphasis is on social and cultural forces. These two theoretical and methodological approaches are considered in the current research.

The literature thus far reviewed in no small way contributes to my research, which focuses on music, indigenous knowledge, and cultural values and establishes that song texts, drum language, dance movements, are rich and reliable sources that researchers can turn to for valuable historical information. Though none has dealt directly with this area, previous research serves not just as a model but also as rich research sources for the current work.

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid

<sup>128</sup> See Akyeampong (2001)

### 1.3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Ethnomusicology provides an ideal theoretical platform for addressing issues and gaps as outlined in this project. By drawing upon approaches from anthropology, historical musicology, philosophy, linguistics, and cultural studies, ethnomusicologists seek to understand not just “the music itself”—as a sonic construct—but also its role in the communities that produce and patronize it. As a result, ethnomusicology has proven successful in teasing out the complex ways in which music is used to construct and maintain individual and group identities, facilitate or protest political agendas, and naturalize or question cultural imbalances. As an ethnomusicologist, then, I am interested in song texts as a musical and literary phenomenon, a cultural practice, and a repository of other cultural elements of society. The theoretical framework of this study is therefore guided by research conducted in ethnomusicology, anthropology, African music, history, and African philosophy.

As suggested by earlier scholars including anthromusicologists (musicologists with strong anthropological background),<sup>129</sup> music making is both social behavior and action through which other social and cultural values, knowledge, ideologies, and behavioral patterns are articulated.<sup>130</sup> Hence, any major research in music, dance, drama, or poetry must look at its socio-cultural context and the values it denotes.<sup>131</sup> Since the 1950s, many scholars in ethnomusicology believed that a holistic analysis of the music of any people requires both an appreciation of the culture in which the music exists and what meaning the music might have to its indigenous practitioners. Therefore, studying music in context became the new standard for

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<sup>129</sup> See Olsen and Sheehy (2000: 6-7)

<sup>130</sup> See McAllester (1954), Merriam (1964), and Blacking (1967)

<sup>131</sup> See Hood (1971)

research and a move towards more acceptable objectivity in the field. In the 1990s, musicological scholarship was centered on the relationship between music sound, dance, and social relations.<sup>132</sup> These and other current and relevant anthro-musicological theories and procedures inform this work.

Also useful to this research is Thomas Turino's<sup>133</sup> theory of subjective cultural positions. While a significant area of discourse in ethnomusicological scholarship has been centered on the relationship between music, sound, dance, and social relations in the 1990s,<sup>134</sup> scholars in history and anthropology have concentrated on social historical theories and approaches that sought to reconstruct Africa's past from the primary records of ordinary lives—African societies' oral chronicles.<sup>135</sup> Examples include Akyeampong's studies on Anlo Ewe history and Jane Cowan's research<sup>136</sup> on dance among the Soho in which she considers dance as the platform where gender identities are contested and negotiated.<sup>137</sup> In music, Turino's work on Andean immigrants in Lima, Peru in which he examines how music is used as a strategy to "evoke Andean sense of cultural identity" in a new urban setting is a good example of this theoretical trend.<sup>138</sup> Among the different *modus operandi* employed in these studies are cross-cultural comparisons. In addition to the above and other interdisciplinary approaches (and perspectives including philosophy and linguistics), this research employs Turino's theory of "subjective cultural positions"<sup>139</sup> due to the socio-cultural implications and multidisciplinary scope of the current research.

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<sup>132</sup> See e.g. Cowan (1990) and Turino (1993).

<sup>133</sup> See Turino (1993)

<sup>134</sup> See Cowan (1990), Turino (1993)

<sup>135</sup> Greene (1996, 2002), Grinker and Steiner (1997), Akyeampong (2001)

<sup>136</sup> See Cowan (1990)

<sup>137</sup> See *Ibid.*

<sup>138</sup> See Turino (1993)

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*: 8

This dissertation is guided by other ethnomusicological methodologies and theories as well as relevant historical, anthropological, and sociolinguistic approaches and theoretical considerations. Since the 1950s, the field of ethnomusicology has looked more closely at subjectivity. The field worker, researcher, and scholar him/herself became the central figure in such debates as “insider-outsider.” Many scholars in ethnomusicology and related disciplines believed that meaningful analysis of the music of any people unquestionably requires both an appreciation of the culture in which the music exists and what meaning the music might have to its traditional practitioners. Soon, thereafter, studying music in context became the new standard for research—the order of the era. This became, and to a greater extent was understood as, a movement (if not a revolution) towards more acceptable objectivity in the field—a move that continues to evolve.

Ethnomusicological studies<sup>140</sup> provide evidence of a fundamental and indispensable relationship between music and other social, intellectual, and cultural domains in regard to knowledge, values, style, practices, underlying dispositions, and worldview. This research draws on these theoretical standpoints to discuss the intellectual and aesthetic factors as well as the development and practices of the songs. Furthermore, they allow consideration that Ewe song texts, dance movements, musical instruments, and practices are not just examples of culture but are also, and largely, repositories of the people’s knowledge, values, and history.

Philosophical and popular cultural works by Komla Dzobo, Kwame Gyekye, Joseph Adjaye, Kwasi Wiredu, Anthony Appiah, and many others<sup>141</sup> underscore the existence of African philosophy, system of thought and the importance of cultural values in the education of

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<sup>140</sup> See Amoaku (1975), Keil (1979), A. Seeger (1980, 1987), Feld (1982, 1984), Datey-Kumodzie (1989), Euba (1990), and Agawu (1995)

<sup>141</sup> Mbiti (1990), Wiredu (1980, 1996), Hountondji (1996), Gyekye (1995, 1996, 1997), Asante (1985, 1996), Makinde (1988), Oruka (1990), Gbadegesin (1991), Appiah (1992), and Kwame (1995)

African youth. African philosophers, including Henry Odera Oruka, distinguish what they refer to as four trends in African philosophy namely: ethnophilosophy, philosophic sagacity, nationalistic-ideological philosophy, and professional philosophy.<sup>142</sup> These theoretical trends may be summarized as follows:

(1) Ethnophilosophy involves the study and recording of the beliefs found in African cultures. Such an approach treats African philosophy as consisting of a set of shared beliefs, values, and a shared world-view—an item of communal property rather than an activity for the individual.<sup>143</sup>

(2) Philosophic sagacity is an individualist version of ethnophilosophy, in which one records the beliefs of certain special members of a community. The premise is that, although most societies demand some degree of conformity of belief and behavior from their members, a few of those members reach a particularly high level of knowledge and understanding of their culture's world-view; these people, some scholars believe, are sages.<sup>144</sup> In some cases, the sage goes beyond mere knowledge and understanding to reflection and questioning; these become the targets of philosophic sagacity, as Oruka indicates.<sup>145</sup>

(3) Professional philosophy, according to Oruka and his academic disciples, is the view that philosophy is a particular way of thinking, reflecting, and reasoning, that such a way is relatively new to (most of) Africa, and that African philosophy must grow in terms of the philosophical work carried out by Africans and applied (perhaps not exclusively) to African concerns. This type of view would be the intuitive answer of most Western philosophers (whether of continental or analytic persuasion) to the question 'what is African philosophy?'

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<sup>142</sup> See Oruka (1990)

<sup>143</sup> See Wiredu (1980), Gyekye (1987, 1996, 1997), Oruka (1990)

<sup>144</sup> Ibid

<sup>145</sup> Oruka (1990)

(4) Nationalist-ideological philosophy might be seen as a special case of philosophic sagacity, in which not sages but ideologies are the subjects. Alternatively, this might be seen as a case of professional political philosophy. In either case, the same sort of problem arises: a distinction between ideology and philosophy must be retained, between sets of ideas and a special way of reasoning.<sup>146</sup>

These four trends notwithstanding, African philosophy can be placed or evaluated from two main theories or viewpoints. The first one, referred to as “traditional African philosophy,” a fusion or combination of “ethnophilosophy” and “philosophic sagacity,” is that body of knowledge contained in, found in, or constructed out of the traditions, myths, language, art, “collective” wisdom, and memory of the indigenous people. It is the knowledge and values that are embedded in verbal arts (proverbs, folklore, aphorisms), rituals and, most importantly, in song texts and other music and dance practices. The second view or theoretical standpoint (a blend of “professional philosophy” and “nationalist-ideological philosophy”) looks at African philosophy as consisting of post-colonial literary works of individuals connected to Africa in one way or the other.

In this study, not only does the former viewpoint (traditional African philosophy), constitute part of the theoretical framework, but it also leans towards perspectives of and use approaches by African philosophers, including Kwame Gyekye and Odera Oruka.<sup>147</sup> The hypothesis of this study is that African philosophy (including Ewe indigenous knowledge and cultural values) as defined from the first theoretical point above, is constructed, embedded, expressed, and documented in Ewe song texts and verbal arts. Elaborating on Kwame Gyekye’s

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<sup>146</sup> See Kwame (1995) and Gyekye (1997)

<sup>147</sup> See Gyekye (1987: 11-12, 1995, 1997), Kwame (1995), Dzobo (1997), Mbiti (1990), Oruka (1990)

opinion,<sup>148</sup> Safro Kwame indicates that a philosophy so discovered or constructed is comparable to any philosophy including Western philosophy “without necessarily being, significantly, the same.”<sup>149</sup> On this basis, the lack of writing (written documentation) that characterized traditional Ewe society cannot be used as a point to deny the existence of an indigenous African (Ewe) philosophy that is comparable to any philosophy.<sup>150</sup> It is upon these theoretical perspectives that this research is partly constructed.

Any major research in music, dance, drama, or history, must look at its socio-cultural context and the values it denotes.<sup>151</sup> Thus, this work is informed by a cultural and historical approach (cultural factor approach<sup>152</sup>) that focuses on procedures used in history and anthropology, as well as in music. The definition of culture in this context leans towards (1) Kwame Gyekye’s (philosophical perspectives) as “the complex of ideas, beliefs, values, outlooks, habits, practices, and institutions that can justifiably be said to have been inherited or appropriated exogenously;”<sup>153</sup> the latter, however, having, in time, gained footing in the indigenous culture; and (2) that of Raymond Williams’, both as “a particular way of life whether of a people, a period or a group;”<sup>154</sup> and as “the works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activity.”<sup>155</sup>

This dissertation is structured in the awareness that scholarship and its related activities are to some extent subjective media. This notwithstanding, in a carefully balanced approach, a great measure of truth may indeed be uncovered. Whatever subjectivity may be present in the

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<sup>148</sup> See Gyekye (1987)

<sup>149</sup> Kwame (1995: xix)

<sup>150</sup> See Gyekye (1987: 11-12, 1995)

<sup>151</sup> See Hood (1971)

<sup>152</sup> Ibid

<sup>153</sup> Gyekye (1995: xii)

<sup>154</sup> Williams (1983: 90)

<sup>155</sup> Ibid

interpretation, analysis, and presentation of data (here and elsewhere) is, in itself, a means of gaining knowledge.

## **1.4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The research methodology for this study includes: (1) fieldwork for primary data collection, (2) library and archival research for secondary data collection; and (3) data transcription, transliteration, analysis, and interpretation.

### **1.4.1 Fieldwork, Location, and Research Schedule**

Most of the data for this project still exist in oral tradition. Fieldwork, therefore, constitutes the bulk of this research. It involves (1) analogue/digital audio and video recording of live musical, dramatic, and ritual performances by traditional dance-drumming groups and artists during festivals, religious, and ritual ceremonies, and life cycle events; (2) collection and documentation of songs, poems and proverbs through “in-depth focus groups and individual oral interviews”<sup>156</sup> with local authorities and traditional scholars including kings, chiefs, priests, elders, opinion

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<sup>156</sup> Stroh (2000: 196-214) and Bernard 2000: 167-185)

leaders, and prominent traditional artists;<sup>157</sup> and (3) participant-observer approach through which I had direct experience of different genres and performance behavioral patterns.

Individual and oral history interviews facilitate eliciting historical evidence, compositional processes, personal thoughts, and perceptions on songs, their texts, indigenous knowledge, and cultural values. Focus group interviews and performances enable me to ascertain the link and differences between individual and community situations, social positions, and processes of transmission.<sup>158</sup>

I used probability-sampling schemes (including simple random sampling and proportional stratified random sampling) in selecting villages and other communities as well as performing groups, genres, participants, and general audience categories within these communities. Different performances take place in many villages very frequently, in most cases, on daily bases. I also used saturation and dense sampling in the selection of individual artists, chiefs, priests, and other authorities on Ewe music and culture.<sup>159</sup>

This dissertation is a continuation of my master's thesis and of my life long indigenous education (which began from infancy through participation in and observation of Ewe cultural activities) and continuous passion for and deeper investigation into who the Ewe are and what makes them "Ewe" and African in general. Hence, data for this project is partly inborn,

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<sup>157</sup> By traditional scholars and authorities, I am referring to those women and men who are the originators, creators, composers, practitioners, and perpetrators of this knowledge bodies, skills, and culture. They are the scholars and authorities of Ewe music from whom all academic researchers get their information. They are the authorities, because they author (originate, create, invent, develop) and own the knowledge and skills of Ewe music and culture. So long as they continue to practice, theorize, and determine the course of knowledge and skills of the tradition and culture, they remain the authors, theorists, architects, designers, and scholars of the tradition; and so long as we, the conventional, academic, and metropolitan professionals, continue to go to them to refresh, tap, and try to understand what they do and thereby write it using our diction, we continue to be their students and cannot absolutely claim "authority" over them or their products, knowledge, and skills. That is to say, so long as what we write or do is dependent on what they originate, create, produce, and on how they produce and use it, our scholarship depends on their authorship; hence we cannot just lable them as "informants," but also recognize them as scholars, authors, creators of their knowledge, art, and skills.

<sup>158</sup>See Myers (1992)

<sup>159</sup> See Bernard (2002)

culturally/indigenously acquired (consciously or unconsciously through the process of traditional education and upbringing); and partly conscious efforts to unravel, know and understand the researcher as an Ewe, an African, and a musician. The later process of data collection (formal and intentional) began in 1987 when I started using traditional song texts, musical styles, and rhythms as a basis for contemporary African choral and brass band compositions.<sup>160</sup>

Organized fieldwork, however, practically began in 1993,<sup>161</sup> when I started collecting traditional/folk songs from different ethnic groups in Ghana and Togo. After much success from using gathered research materials for research projects at the University of Education, Winneba and University of Ghana, Legon, I embarked on a more vigorous fieldwork in 2002-2003 collecting more data for further investigation.<sup>162</sup> This process led to the commencement of graduate studies in the United States.

Since August 2004, the field research has focused on the Ewe and Fon of West Africa. In the summer of 2005, I conducted preliminary studies among the Ewe in Ghana and Togo. In the course of this preliminary survey, many musical groups, their leaders, and other prominent

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<sup>160</sup> As a second year student at the Evangelical Presbyterian Teacher Training College, Amedzofe, Ghana, I began taking some form of formal music lessons in Western art music (under the tutelage of Mr. Agbowada [1986-1987] and Mr. Ben Asamoah [1987-1990]) and started playing in the College Brass Band alongside other traditional musical groups. My classmates and friends, Mr Kwame David Tefe (Mon Amin) and Mr. Nornudzor Kofi Christian Hadzi were among the very first people who informally helped me with Western music notation and sight-reading. Later back at home in Dzodze, Penyi, Aflao, and Ho, I began working with choral and brass ensembles and some professional musicians including Mr. Paschal Yao Younge. I became the choir director/conductor (choir master) of some of the church choirs in the areas including S.S Peter and Paul's Choir, R.C. Church, Dzodze; Penyi and Agbozume Anglican Church Choirs, Ho-Depo St. Francis Choir, Aflao R.C Brass Band, Ho-Kpodzi E. P Brass Band, and later the director of Aflao R.C. Brass Band. Field recordings and materials collected and used from these early periods are still securely stored and being used for my present work.

<sup>161</sup> In 1993, I entered the University of Education (formerly University College of Education), Winneba to pursue degrees in education majoring in music education and Ghanaian language (Ewe) education.

<sup>162</sup> My final project/thesis at University of Education, Winneba in 1997 was based on my fieldwork and research materials and experiences from 1987. As the director of the University of Ghana Brass Ensemble and later as a Production Assistant working with Abibigroma (the University's resident theater company), I drew on my research materials to write pieces in African (Ghanaian) traditional idioms. Through these works and also serving as field/research assistant and site coordinator for the West Virginia University's Annual International Summer Course in African Music and Dance in Ghana, I met and worked with many international scholars and educators (including Dr. Paschal Yao Younge, the program director) who became interested in my work and influenced my professional and academic carrier.

figures of some key Ewe villages, towns, and institutions (religious, social and political entities) were involved.<sup>163</sup> These individuals, groups, and institutions readily accepted to be part of this project and eagerly performed and answered preliminary questions. I also visited traditional historical sites in Ghana and Togo, including museums, archives, shrines, and sacred sites where knowledge, artifacts, and other cultural valuables are kept.<sup>164</sup> Based on my previous knowledge, research works coupled with the preliminarily assurance, support, and a high sense of collaboration received from these feasibility studies, I tendered a final and official proposal for this dissertation.

In the summer of 2007, I embarked on a major focused fieldwork on this topic. Using the above methods and processes, field sites (towns and villages) were selected representing the various Ewe sub-ethnic and dialectic regions and divisions both in Ghana and Togo. This includes (1) Southern Ewe in southern Volta Region of Ghana (Anlo, Avenor, Tonu, and other traditional and dialect areas); (2) Northern Ewe in the central and northern Volta Region of Ghana (Asorgli, Awudome, Gbi, Akpini and other Ewedome traditional and dialectic areas), and (3) the Ewe of Togo and Benin.<sup>165</sup> Attention was focused on selected groups of musicians and ensembles in Dzodze, Aflao, Nogokpo, Klikor, Anlo-Afiadenyigba, Dzogadze, Anloga, Keta, Akatsi, Kpetoe townships and their surrounding villages representing the southern stylistic variants of indigenous Ewe music. In the Ewedome areas, research was conducted in Ho, Ziavi, Peki Dzake and Ayensu, Ghana Nyive, Koloenu, Alavanyo, and Hohoe-Bla. Research on the Togo and Benin Ewe stylistic variants led to Adidogome, Lome, Noepe, Tsevie, Dokplala, Togo

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<sup>163</sup> See Appendix D and E for list of Individuals, Groups, Communities, and institutions.

<sup>164</sup> Some of these sites include SOFIA (African System of Spirituality and Science) Mission House, Accra, Ghana; Humanu Foundation Center, Accra, Ghana; Dzogbefime Yeye and Agbosu Shrine, Dzodze-Dzogbefime; the Volta Regional Museum, Ho; Nogokpo and Klokori Sacred Shrines, Nogokpo and Klikor, Ghana; Notsie Shrines, Notsie, Togo; and Bokoga Torgbi Kumedzro's and Togbi Tublu Shrines, Dzodze, Ghana.

<sup>165</sup> See Appendix D and E for detail list of the various Ewe traditional and dialectic areas of the broad categories mentioned here.

Nyive, Kpalime, Anexo, and their surrounding communities. These communities have ensembles and musicians famous for their indigenous musical and cultural talents and performance styles.

Although sites were intentionally selected, no particular genre and ensemble served as the focus. In many of the selected communities, I worked with different ensembles that performed different kinds of music from varied genres. Musical genres and songs include (but are not limited to) *adevu*, *adzida*, *afavu*, *agbadza (ageshe)*, *agbekor/atsia (atsiagbekor)*, *adzogbo*, *akpalu*, *akpi*, *akpoka*, *atsigo*, *avihe*, *adabatram*, *adzro*, *agbosu*, *alaga*, *akaye*, *atrikpui*, *akpese/boboobo*, *babashiko*, *bobo*, *blekete*, *gadzo*, *gota*, *gahu*, *govu/gohu*, *gbolo*, *kinka*, *koku*, *kpegisu*, *yeye* (including all its seven suites), *zibo*, *zigi*, and *ziziha*.<sup>166</sup> Traditional musical ensembles and/or dance-drumming groups include, but are not limited to Dzodze, Ghana (*Atsibladekame*, *Didokuiwo Habobo*, *Dzigbodi Habobo*, *Dzogbefime Yeye*, *Alaga*, and *Agbosu*, *Togbi Tublu Shrine*, *Daformyami-Fiagbedu-Afetefe-Afeme Ageshe/Agbadza/Akpoka/Afa groups*), Aflao, Ghana (*Mawuli Kpli Mi Adzogbo Habobo* and *Brekete/Atigeli*), Ho, Ghana (*Miwoe Nenyoo Habobo*, *Dunyo Boboobo*, *Adabatram*, *Avihe/Akaye* and *Adevu* group), Taviefe-Deme, Ghana (*Boboobo* group), Have, Ghana (*Have Boboobo* and *Adevu/Akpi* group), Ziavi, Ghana (*Zigi/Avihe/Gbolo*), Anlo-Fiadenyigba, Ghana (*Gadzo/Akpoka/Afa/Duawusika* and *Babashiko Habobo*), Dzogadze, Ghana (*Atsiagbeko* group), Ave-Xevi, Ghana (*Xevi Gota* and *Kpegisu* groups), Alavanyo-Vudidi, Ghana (*Adevu/Akpi* and *Boboobo/Gbolo* groups), Ghana-Nyive (*Akpalu Habobo*), and Togo (Togo-Nyive *Avihe Habobo*, Adidogome-Lome, *Koba Habobo*, and *Dokplala Koku* and *Atrikpui*). Among the many master musician, scholars and authorities that serve as my major collaborators, discussants, and interviewees are Togbui Bokoga Logosu, Eku Modestus Ahiable, Togbui Dey III, Tsiamiga Agbedoza, Prof. S. Datey-Kumodzie, Prof N.

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<sup>166</sup> See Appendixes for detailed categories and further information on these and other musical genres and styles

Komla Dzobo, Mr. C.K. Kudjordji, Midawo Asafo Ahiakpa, Minawo Akosonshie Agbalekpor, Bokoga Kodzo Kumedzro, Kodzo Tagbolo, Killa S. Fiebor, Openo Gabienoo, Asomo Seku, Kosonde (Ametowoyona) Gbolonyo, Nanevi I. Maweta, and Agbo Seshie, Afefi Agbalekpo-Gbolonyo, Agbotadua Kumassah, Togbui Konu B.S. Lamadekoo, Kodzo Ashiabi, Kofitse Dekpe-Gbolonyo, and Yibo Seshie.<sup>167</sup>

Beside the various traditional performances, I also observed and documented the annual music and cultural festival of basic (elementary and middle) schools in the Volta Region of Ghana. As part of the government's efforts to preserve, transmit and promote indigenous music and dance as well as Western art music among Ghanaian students, the Ghana Education Service has instituted an annual festival where schools learn and compete in the performance of Ghanaian traditional music, dance, art, drama, poetry, drum language, and Western art music (choral music and sight reading). In the summer of 2007 I documented several performance events in the Volta Region in Ghana and was afforded the position of a guest and special adjudicator<sup>168</sup> at some venues including Peki, Jasikan, Ayoma, Akposokubi, Nkunya, and Ho. The events provided an opportunity to document details of the festivals. The school/political districts I visited include Jasikan, Kpando, Ho, Kpetoe, and Ketu. These events offered firsthand evidence to not only see and document some of the processes of modern forms of transmission of indigenous knowledge and cultural values vis-à-vis 'foreign' cultural element in Ghana, but also to see the level of involvement, actions, and inactions of the students, and the degrees of acquisition and transformations that take place.

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<sup>167</sup> See Appendix A, D, and E .for musical genres, names of groups, and dates of interviews.

<sup>168</sup> It should be noted that, I was invited to take this position, not necessarily because I was researching and documenting, but largely because of my noted combined knowledge and background in indigenous music, dance, and western art music. In addition, I have been serving as an adjudicator for such events long before I left Ghana in 2003. Many of the present music teachers, directors, adjudicators, and coordinators of the festivals are either my professors and/or colleagues (college mates), or in a few cases, former students.

In addition to regular traditional performances by ensembles, groups, and communities, festivals and life cycle events (which were not necessarily organized by or for me) data were gathered from other sources including ritual, religious, and other protected or ‘secret’ societies. The process of organizing or getting access to some of these groups, genres, and performances can be difficult, bureaucratic, and incredibly exhausting. However, the data one accesses, documents, and takes away (at the end of the day) makes one instantly conclude that it is worth the ‘hustle.’

It should be noted that, being a native Ewe and having a sound Ewe linguistic background as well as complete familiarity with the geographical space of field sites, was a great advantage. Besides getting easy access to research locations, I was able to freely and easily establish rapport and sustained mutual trust between the research team and the collaborators. My knowledge of Ewe protocol, ethics, and diplomacy facilitated conducting of interviews, interacting with groups and interviewees, and understanding of hidden, and/or tacit cultural nuances and dynamics at different settings. These advantages notwithstanding, I was limited at certain levels, arenas, and scenarios to the point that I needed help (not only from an ‘insider,’ but a highly placed one) to be able to get access to the venues and be granted audience. This was particularly important when visiting religious and secret groups.

During the preliminary research in the summer of 2005, and also in 2007 during a return visit to the field, I gained full access to complete performances and religious celebrations—that are restricted sites and performances—that a non-member would not have access to, under normal circumstance. These events include *Agbosu* (trance) ritual thanksgiving performance at Dzogbefeme, Dzodze; *Adabatram* (executioners) musical procession at Ho; *Yeve* religious worship and burial services at Dzodze and Dokplala; *Koku* burial performance ritual at Dzodze

Afiadenyigba, *Brekete* religious annual festival at Aflao; and *Alaga* (judicial trial and ritual) performance at Dzodze. The challenges of fieldwork became real when I tried to access all these restricted events. Among many obstacles, I needed to be diplomatic, flexible, and compromising on personal religio-spiritual beliefs, rights, needs, and interests. In many cases, access would have been denied except that a higher-ranking devotee and/or official with a clear, open and acceptable agenda, mission statement, and completely fulfilled specific requests led the researcher. Some of the people who facilitated access to these groups and genres include my Aunt, the late Minawo Akosonshie Agbalekpor, my former professors Prof. S. Datey-Kumodzie, Prof. Komla Amoaku, my uncle Boko Kodzo Kumedzro, Togbui Konu B.S. Lamadekoo, Midawo Asafo, my sister Kosonde (Ametor) Gbolonyo, and friend Yao A. Nugbey.<sup>169</sup>

For example, before the *Agbosu* and *Koku* performances, my assistants and I had to spend the night in a prescribed house, so what we ate and the bathing soaps and body creams we used the night preceding the performance were monitored. The host also made sure no one slept in the same room or bed with the opposite sex, used a wrist watch, took alcohol, smoked cigarettes, and/or used any intoxicant at least 24 hours prior to the start of the performance when we were allowed access to the shrines and the performance arena. The research team not only had to use specific clothing, but also wear them in a prescribed way. In the case of *Agbosu*, some of the rules were to prevent us from being attacked by devotees in trance during the performance. Others are to purify our bodies and spirits to undergo certain basic rites before being permitted to enter the shrines and observe certain rites and performances. Once all tests were passed, mainly under the guidance of my aunt Akosonshie, clearance permits (in the form of blessings) and access were granted so that the research team could move and act freely in documenting a

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<sup>169</sup> See Appendix E for the complete list of my collaborators and discussants.

plethora of religious rituals, sacred but highly philosophical songs, and other cultural activities that have been preserved under the rubrics of religion, mysticism, and secret rituals.<sup>170</sup> Research and fieldwork, therefore, gave me the uncommon opportunity, recognition, and access (as a co-opted or affiliated member) to otherwise societies, rituals, and materials that a non-devotee or a non-member would not have had. I, as may be expected, promised collaborators never to undermine their integrity and trust and pledged to use the opportunities and knowledge gained for research and other scholarly works for education and documentation. The current interest and aim is to see and document how their musical practice (especially songs) document and transmit any known Ewe indigenous knowledge and cultural values. Anything outside the scope of the declared agenda witnessed could not be revealed here or elsewhere.

In the course of this fieldwork, I employed the services of research/field assistants in Ghana and Togo. These include Agbesi Prosper Gbolonyo, Kodzo Pascal Ahiadzo, Komi David Tefe, Kwasi Divine Gbagbo, Yao Adolph Nugbey, Yao Francis Wettor, Kofi Nonudzor Hadzi, Mensah Rubin Gbeze, Godwin Kwaku Amenyitor, and Enyonam Becky Sedzro (all graduates of various universities in Ghana). They provided assistance in contacting, arranging, coordinating performing groups, artists, and collaborators. They also helped in operating recording equipments since in many cases multiple recording tools were used simultaneously.

Below is the list of equipment and specifications used for this research.

1. Two video cameras:

- Sony DCR-HC38 Digital Handycam MiniDV Camcorder  
Cassette: Sony DVM-60PRL 60 Minutes Premium Mini DV tapes.  
Panasonic AY DVM60EJ 60 Minutes DVC (Mini DV) tapes.
- Sony DCR-TRV520 Digital 8 Handycam Camcorder  
Cassette: Sony Video Hi8 Cassette, Hi8 Metal Evaporated (HME) 120 minutes.

2. Two Audio Recorders

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<sup>170</sup> See Chapter 3 for detailed discussion of sanity and spiritual communication.

- MD Recorder: Sony MZ-R55 MD Walkman Mini Disc Recorder.  
Disc: Sony 8MDW80CL 80 Minute Blank Mini Disc.
  - Olympus Digital Voice Recorder WS-300M
3. One Still Camera:
- Sony Cyber-Short Digital Camera DSC-W55/B

These tools were used to record and document musical and other artistic performances and interviews. Clear recording, accurate representation, and objective documentation are crucial to this project. While these recordings and other materials will be used primarily for this research, they would become valuable audio-visual resources for countless researchers and students.

Upon return to Pittsburgh, follow-up interviews were conducted with collaborators in Ghana and Togo mostly by phone and emails.

#### **1.4.2 Library and Archival Research**

A review of the current state of research on Ewe traditional music, with focus on songs as well as on history and philosophy, was the starting point of this work.<sup>171</sup> Library and archival research (which began in September 2003) reveals the extent to which these areas have been researched, and illuminates what needs to be done and how to approach it. This aspect of the research was conducted in libraries, museums, and archives in three countries: (1) Ghana: University of Ghana, Legon; University of Education, Winneba; The Center for National Culture (CNC), Ho; and SOFIA (African System of Spirituality and Science) Mission House, Accra; (2) Togo: Univesite du Benin, Lome, and (3) USA: The University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh. Other sources, such as radio and television stations where old recordings of songs and other traditional performances are kept, include Ghana Broadcasting Corperation (GBC), Accra, Ghana; Ghana

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<sup>171</sup> See State of Research on pages 20-34

Television (GTV), Accra, Ghana; Television du Togo (TVT), Lome, Togo; Volta FM, Ho, Jubilee FM, Keta, and Radio Hitz, Accra, Ghana. In addition, old commercial audio and video records, that are available in the open market, have been accessed. Furthermore, I conducted interviews with prominent creative art, history, religion, linguistics and philosophy professionals, and scholars including Prof. S. Datey-Kumodzie, Prof. Komla Amoaku, Prof. Komla Dzobo, Mr. C. K. Kudjordji, Agbotadua Kumassah, Prof. Cosmos Sowah, and Prof. Nissio Fiagbedzi.

### **1.4.3 Data Transcription, Transliteration, Analysis, and Interpretation**

Audio and video recorded interviews have been transliterated from Ewe into English and the music transcribed to facilitate analysis and to make data accessible. Various analytical approaches, including an “inductive” and/or “grounded approach”<sup>172</sup> which proceeds from identification of salient concepts and categories, were enacted to enable monitoring of consistencies in the flow of information. This also enabled me to cross-examine interlocutors, collaborators, and other types of data (especially from oral sources), and helped authenticate claims. Using both deductive and inductive methods in musical analysis, I establish, not only the relationship between primary and secondary motives of the composers and performers of the songs, but also correlate findings with the oral/verbal data from interviews, performances, and other sources. This helps in establishing the philosophical background of the composers of the songs, proverbs, and their texts as well as the compositional processes involved. Both diachronic and synchronic procedures were used to establish the processes and systems of preservation,

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<sup>172</sup> See Stroh (2000)

transmission, and innovation. Old recordings of traditional songs from as early as the 1950s at GBC archives provide the time depth component of diachronic studies.

My “insider position” as an Ewe musician, “outsider approach” as neither a history nor philosophy major, and a Western-trained musician inform a balanced critical look. My Ewe linguistic knowledge, deep cultural insight, and ethnomusicological background strongly shaped the approach and helped define and support the methodology, analytical, and theoretical goals. Data analysis and writing reflect a synthesis of ideas and all materials gathered. Any advantages or disadvantages in my position (as described above) are negated as my training and point of view of ethnomusicology as a discipline and a force that influence conclusions.

## **1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY**

This project contributes to scholarship in two main ways: (1) Theoretical and descriptive contribution; and (2) Practical, applied, and educational contribution.

### **1.5.1 Theoretical and Descriptive Contribution**

This project provides data that will lead to an in-depth understanding of Ewe songs, indigenous knowledge, and cultural values and suggestions by which these traditional elements can be harmonized with modern culture. It contributes to ethnomusicological literature demonstrating how music preserves, transmits, and strengthens other domains of culture, and how information derived from traditional song texts can find relevance in modern African societies. For centuries, musicians have played major roles in the preservation and transmission of knowledge and values

that embody the culture and traditions of the Ewe; thus, this research represents a modest contribution to ethnomusicology, linguistics, history, philosophy, and cultural studies. The current research brings some new information in contributing to the ongoing discourse in music, anthropology, and philosophy that seeks to understand and use indigenous knowledge, values, and societal changes affecting them.

### **1.5.2 Practical, Applied, and Educational Contribution**

In these areas, my research serves as a resource for African governments and educational policy makers to promote indigenous African knowledge and cultural values. Also, by underscoring the roles of songs, my research further illuminates the place of musicians in cultural sustenance, political integration, and education in Africa. If in fact sources of intellectual, philosophical,<sup>173</sup> and historical evidence<sup>174</sup> are not limited to written documents, then accurate and detailed account of these activities from sources such as song texts should be welcomed as valuable documents. This work is relevant not only because of the scholarly dimension, but also largely because Ewe is one of the major ethnic groups in Ghana, Togo, and Benin. As a multi-national or cross-national ethnic and cultural polity, it attracts both foreigners and indigenes who take interest in its people, religion, politics, philosophy, folklore, custom, law, language, occupation, social structure, and many other things apart from the music, dance, and history.

I believe that the study of indigenous knowledge, cultural values, and historical evidence in Ewe music will contribute to the intellectual and historical narratives of the people. This would also bring to light the tremendous creative resources embodied in Ewe songs and help to

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<sup>173</sup> See Gyekye (1987, 1995, 1996), Kwame (1995), Dzobo (1997)

<sup>174</sup> See Vansina (1965), Amoaku (1975), Akyeampong (2001)

throw more light on the knowledge and values of the people. By engaging in an in-depth study of this nature, I hope to open to other scholars another avenue and perspective for research in music and other fields<sup>175</sup> and make them aware of the need and possibility of looking at music, philosophy, and history from other angles and in other ways. Furthermore, my dissertation will help preserve the songs—some of which are in danger of being lost—for posterity and as a reference for Ewe youth, in particular, and African youth in general. I also hope that my research will inspire more studies in song texts and other aspects of Ewe performing arts and popular cultural practices in Africa and the Diaspora. In contributing to the works of my predecessors, my research fills a number of lacunae in the study of indigenous knowledge, cultural values, and Ewe song texts. It also contributes to the ongoing discourse (in my own discipline) that seeks to understand African indigenous cultures and societal changes that affect their conservation, promotion, and transmission.

## **1.6 ETHNOGRAPHIC OVERVIEW**

This dissertation deals with the content, craft, and practice of traditional music among the Ewe of Ghana. More specifically, it focuses on particular aspects of the content and practices that express Ewe indigenous knowledge and cultural values through song texts. For a better understanding of this research, and in order to place the material within the specific geo-cultural context, I present a brief summary of the geographic, historical, musical, and cultural background of the Ewe.

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<sup>175</sup>African studies, history, anthropology, sociology, religion, linguistics, education, philosophy, and political science

## 1.6.1 Geographical Background

### 1.6.1.1 Eweland and Its Location

Before the nineteenth century, the Ewe of West Africa were unified in one of the most powerful pre-colonial African states. However, due to colonization in the late nineteenth century, with its attendant compartmentalization of the continent and its people into multi-ethnic modern nation-states,<sup>176</sup> the Ewe have been arbitrarily divided into smaller entities. Today, the Ewe-speaking people of West Africa inhabit the areas between the River Volta in modern Ghana and the River Mono on the western borders of the Ancient Kingdom of Dahomey (now Benin).<sup>177</sup> The boundaries of these new African nations were drawn from those of the old British, French, German, Spanish, Belgian, Italian, and Portuguese colonies.<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> See the ‘Scramble for Africa’ and “European territorial claims to Africa on the eve of the Berlin Conference, 1884,” Shillington (2005:301-303). See also Davidson (1998)

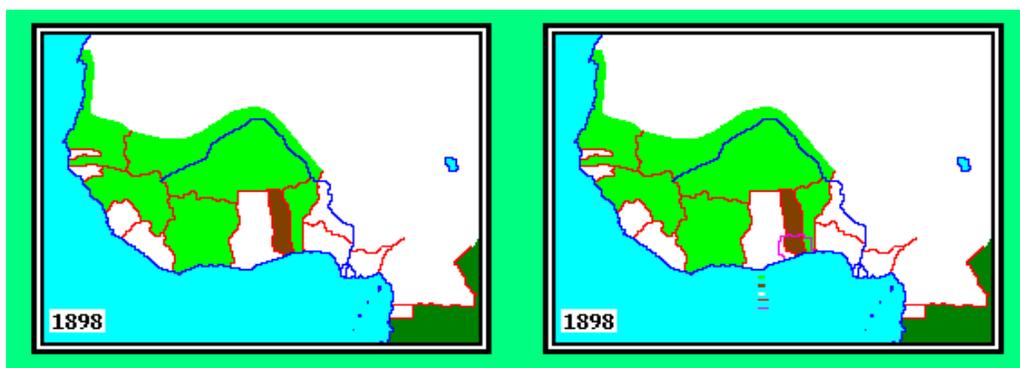
<sup>177</sup> See Nukunya (1997: 8)

<sup>178</sup> See Davidson (1998) and Shillington (2005)



Hence, by 1914, less than thirty years from the onset of the scramble, most of the African continent was 'claimed' by the European powers.<sup>180</sup>

As a result, the Ewe, like some other ethnic groups, have remained fragmented under three main flags, just as they were partitioned among the three colonial powers after the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885.<sup>181</sup> One portion of the Eweland went to Britain, another to Germany, and another to France. After World War I, the German-occupied areas were given to Britain and France as mandated territories by the League of Nations. Those who were under British rule (including some formerly under German rule) are now the Ghanaian Ewe. The majority of those formerly under German (and later French) rule are now the Togolese Ewe. Finally, those who were under French rule are now Benin (formally Dahomey) Ewe.<sup>182</sup> The following five maps show West Africa from 1898-1925. In Figure 1-3, the left map shows the land under British rule in white, German rule in brown, and French rule in green. The right shows the same, with the location of the Ewe cutting across the three colonies as delineated by a pink line. The larger map, figure 1-4, shows Eweland (in pink shading) under the three colonial territories in 1898.

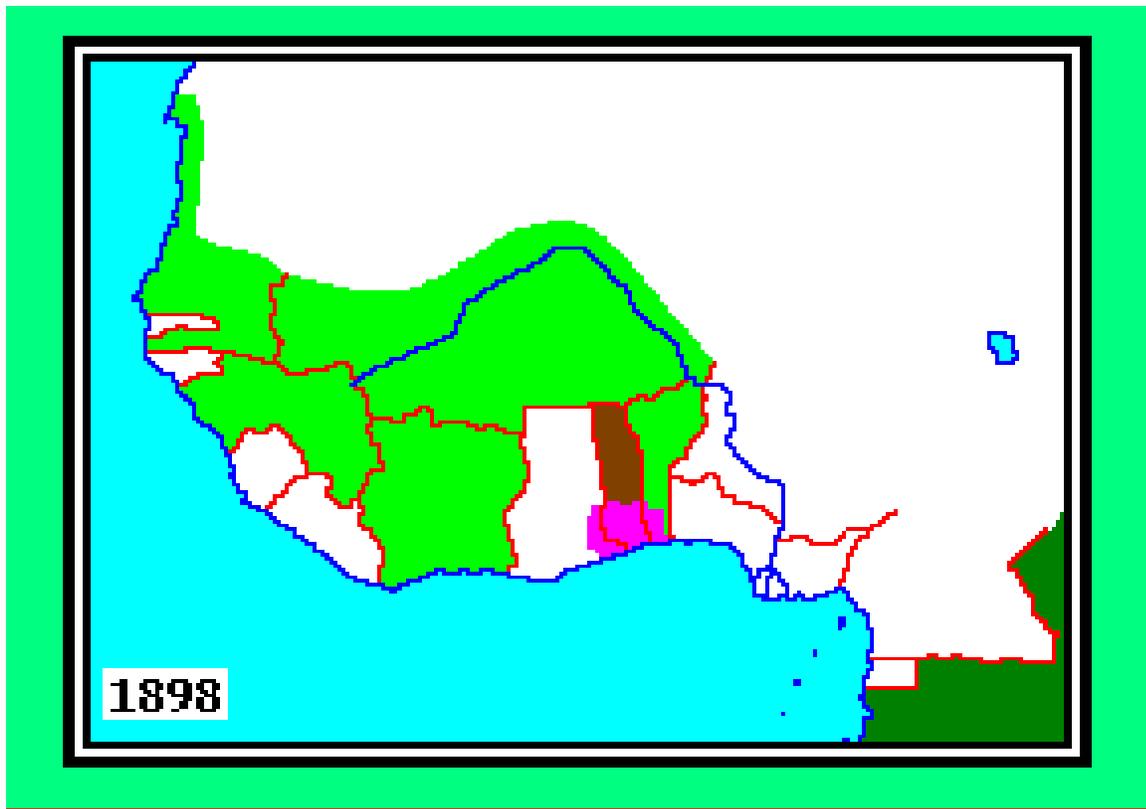


**Figure 1-3: Maps showing German controlled land (dark brown) by 1898**

<sup>180</sup> See Shillington (2005), Davidson (1998), and unimaps.com (2005: accessed: 01/21/08)

<sup>181</sup> Berlin Conference: From November 1884 to February 1885, European countries met in Berlin, Germany, divided Africa among themselves, and colonized the continent.

<sup>182</sup> Akyeampong (2001: 4-6), and Amenumey (1986: 20-23)



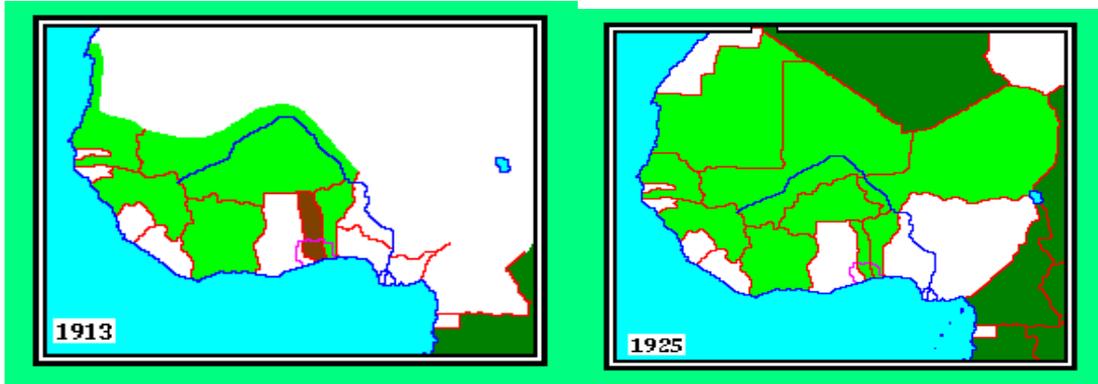
183

**Figure 1-4: Maps Showing Eweland (pink) under British, German, and French Rule in 1898**

The two maps below show Eweland in 1913 (before the First World War) and in 1925 after Germany's defeat in the war, when Germany relinquished political power over its African colonies.

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<sup>183</sup> Culled from: <http://www.terra.es/personal7/jqvaraderey/afri.htm> (Accessed: 01/21/08)



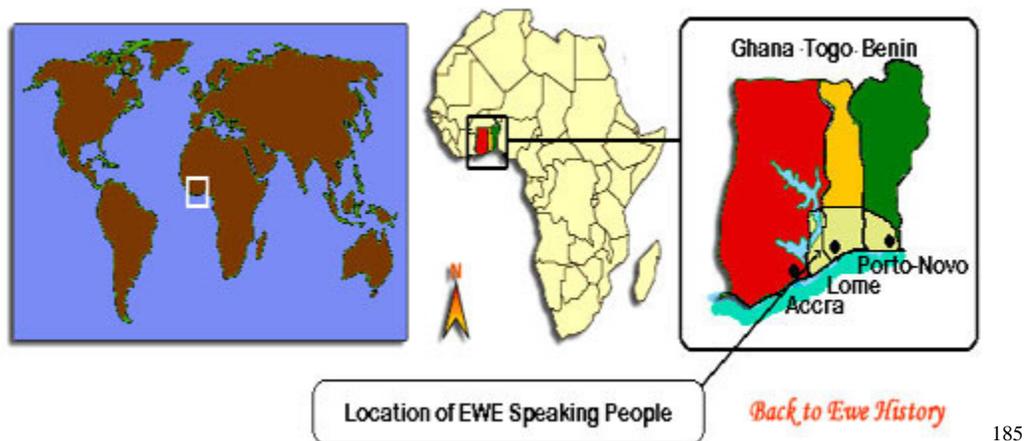
184

**Figure 1-5: Maps Showing Eweland Before and After World War I**

Presently, Eweland is located along the southeastern corner of Ghana, into the southern half of Togo and Benin up to Latitude 8 degrees north. The Ewe, therefore, live in southeastern Ghana, southern Togo and Benin, and southwestern Nigeria in the fishing settlements of Gbadagri (Badagri). Ewe neighbors to the east include the Fon, who are still regarded as part of the Ewe-stock (the two groups divided by the River Mono) and the Yoruba of Nigeria. To the west, River Volta divides the Ewe from their neighbors including the Dangbe (Adangme), Ga, Krobo, and Akan (Akwapim, Akwamu, Akyem, and Asante). Their northern neighbors include the Buem, Akpafu, and Akposo in Ghana; Kebu, Boasu, and Kabie/Kabre in Togo and Benin. To the south, Eweland is bordered by the Gulf of Guinea.

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<sup>184</sup> Maps curled from <http://www.terra.es/personal7/jqvaraderey/afri.htm>. It should be noted that all the maps have been modified by the author to show and highlight Eweland.



**Figure 1-6: Map showing the present location of Ewe in West Africa**

Irrespective of their separation by national (geographical) boundaries, political ideologies, and rules, the Ewe continue to maintain their ancestral affinities through language, music, trade, religion, cultural values, and cross-national but intra-ethnic marriages. Awareness and recognition of a common ancestry and linguistic background is the strongest cultural, social, and political link among all Ewe. The high degree of commonality notwithstanding, Eweland is not completely homogeneous. There are some dialectical differences. The differences exist in intonation, accent, and a few vocabularies. For example, Ghanaian Ewe may find some difficulty understanding the dialects of the Ewe in eastern Benin and western Nigeria. However, to a very large extent, the various West African Ewe dialects are mutually intelligible.

Ghanaian and Togolese Ewe, who provide the broader scope of this research, are one culturally knit group with autonomous ethnic ties. Ghanaian Ewe, who occupy one of Ghana's ten administrative regions called the Volta Region, settled at their present home around the 16th

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<sup>185</sup> Map culled from CEANA: Council of Ewe Associations of North America: <http://www.ceanaonline.org/sections/ewehistorymap.php> (Accessed: 02/13/09)

century<sup>186</sup> after a dramatic escape from Notsie.<sup>187</sup> The Ewe of the Volta Region, which lies in the southeastern portion of Ghana, sharing a common border with Togo to the East, could be divided into two main groups: Southern Ewe including Anlo, Avenor, Tonu (Tongu), and Bator, Mafi; and Northern Ewe (Ewedome) including Asogli, Adaklu, Awudome, Gbi, and Akpini.

Earlier settlements of the Anlo were established along seamless stretches of white sandy beaches of the Atlantic Ocean. Ewedome settlements are located inland, north of Anlo, stretching from what is now the international border between Togo and Ghana, and due west to the eastern shores of the Volta River and Akwapem range. The names assigned to some of the Ewe settlements include those that echo the natural endowment and beauty of the landscape they were to call home, e.g. Keta (lit. the head of the sand), *Denu* (lit. the beginning of palm trees), Kedzi (lit. top of the sand), Kpeve (lit. rock/stone forest), Kpedze (lit. red stone/rock), Nyive (lit. cow forest), Tsito (lit. rain mountain), Have (lit. pig forest), Todome (lit. between hills/mountain), and Adidome (lit. in/among baobab trees). Other names, such as Dzodze (lit. flew and landed) and Agbogbome (lit. in the spirit world) echo the essence of Ewe spiritual power.<sup>188</sup> Yet others, that echo the duration of the exodus and their ability to endure the hardships of migration, include Penyi/*Feyi* (lit. many years past), Blamezado (lit. deceived till night falls), Dzita and Dzido (lit. top of the heart and ability to endure).<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> See Crowther (1927), Manoukian (1952), Amenumey (1986), Mamattah (1978), Greene (1996, 2002), and Akyeampong (2001)

<sup>187</sup> An ancestral federated home or region currently within the borders of the modern state of Togo. The escape and subsequent resettlement are commemorated in an annual festival known as *Hogbetsotso Za* in which music and dance activities that illustrate these historical events are performed, which shall be seen in some song texts to be examined in the thesis.

<sup>188</sup> See Fiagbedzi (1977: 96) and Locke (1978: 34)

<sup>189</sup> See Akyeampong (2001: 6) and Nukunya (1997: 9). It should be noted that most, if not all, Anlo-Ewe names (including personal names and titles) have meaning and are normally associated with an event, belief, lineage, spirit, power, or proverb. In addition, all names have appellations in which the values and their deeper meanings are well articulated and enshrined. All these are echoed in the song texts and drum patterns of various traditional musical types.

External forces have influenced Ewe culture as they have the cultures of other African societies. The first Europeans who arrived at the Gold Coast (now Ghana) on the West African coast brought among other things the establishment of numerous Christian missions, mainly of Roman Catholic, Basel, and Bremen (which later became Presbyterian and Evangelical Presbyterian Churches). The Catholic and Bremen missions flourished in towns and villages such as Keta, Peki, Amedzofe, Akpafu and many other places that culminated in the wide spreading of Christianity in Eweland.<sup>190</sup> The intrusion of these religious bodies, as well as merchants, had both positive and negative effects on the traditional music and culture. The Western formal educational and health systems could be attributed to some of the positive effects to some extent. The negative repercussions, on the other hand, are traceable to slavery, colonization, and the undermining of the indigenous cultural, musical practices, and traditional beliefs, among others. This was evident in how the indigenes were forced under missionary activities and colonization to abandon their traditional practices in favor of European ones.<sup>191</sup> Fortunately, this act did not have a severe adverse effect on the practice of Ewe traditional music. To a large extent, Ewe traditional musical culture stood firm against these intrusions, because it formed an integral part of the general cultural heritage, most importantly, the linguistic, religious, and political practices. Although certain parts of the culture seem to have been influenced by this encroachment, there are still ‘authentic’ traditional musical resources—especially within the religious and political domains—including *yeve*, *afa*, *agbosu*, *koku*, *atsiagbeko*, *atrikpui*, and *adzogbo*.

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<sup>190</sup> See Gavua (2000), Akyeampong (2001: 7), Agbodeka (1997: 6-7), Greene (2002: 1)

<sup>191</sup> Ibid

### **1.6.1.2 The Environment: Physical Features, Vegetation, and Climate**

The physical map of Eweland shows a picture of an area beginning with coastal strips (coastal sandbars and lagoons), southern-central plains, and northern-central highland ranges, about a hundred and fifty kilometers from the Gulf of Guinea (the Atlantic Coast).

The coastal area (the South) lies halfway across the dry coastal plain that extends from the Mono estuary in the Republic of Benin (in the east) to the Volta estuary in Ghana (in the west). The area hosts large lagoons including Ano (Angaw), Avu, and Keta (the biggest of all). The three lagoons are interconnected and are linked with the Volta River. Others are Togo lagoon in the center of Eweland and the Anexo lagoon to the west. It should be noted that a large part of coastal Eweland is subject to periodic erosion by the sea. The sea invasion is due to the fact that the general elevation of the land around this area is only 75 meters above sea level and in the shoreline around Keta the land is actually below sea level. This notwithstanding, the coastal area is the most densely populated area of Eweland.<sup>192</sup> Major towns and cities located in this area include Anloga, Keta, Denu-Aflao, Lome, Anexo, Vogan, Grand-Popo, and Kutornu (Cotonou). The water bodies (sea, lagoons) of the area and scanty plots of sandy land around them provide the necessary conditions for somewhat complex agricultural and economic activities including fishing, salt industry, and trade. G. K. Nukunya notes that in this area “land is not only scarce but the soil is poor and climatic conditions hazardous. Thus it is for fishing and non-agricultural pursuits that the area is primarily suited.”<sup>193</sup> Hence, the greater part of the population engages in fishing activities. The most common crop cultivated in this area is shallot (onion).

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<sup>192</sup> See Agbodeka (1997), Greene (1996), Akyeampong (2001)

<sup>193</sup> Nukunya (1997: 10)

The southern-central plains extend to about three hundred kilometers to the east and upland to the north and about fifty kilometers to the west. This area is characterized by savanna vegetation with lush tall grass, widely spaced short trees, oil, fan, and date palm trees, and small groves interspersed with scattered borassus and baobab trees. The vegetation and climatic conditions of this area support agriculture with cassava and maize as the principal crops. The population of this area is low compared to the coastal south.<sup>194</sup> Important towns located in this geographical area include Adidome, Sogakofe, Akatsi, Dzodze, Tsevie, Tablibo, and Lakossa.

The northern part of Eweland is endowed with a combination of series of mountain ranges and plains. Locally, the ranges are generally called *Ewetowo* (Ewe Mountains). They stretch from the Volta River in the west into central Togo in the east. From the southern plains moving inland (away from the coast) the undulating plain transforms into the higher grounds of the southern foothills. Here lies the isolated Adakluto (Mt. Adaklu) one of the highest mountains in Ghana. Going further north, one finds the Abutia-Taviafe-Dodome and Peki-Avatime ranges running parallel from southwest to northeast. These two ranges merge at Kpoeta into what is locally called Kpoeta-Agome towo (Kpoeta-Agome Mountains). This range continues into the Republic of Togo where it merges with the Dayi, Akposso, and Atakpame mountains. Parts of this range culminate into Gemito (Mt. Gemi) and Afadzato (Mt. Afadza),<sup>195</sup> the third and first highest elevations/mountains in Ghana respectively. At the northern tip of Eweland lie the Santrokofi-Akpafu and Buem ranges. Starting from Santrokofi, they run parallel to Dayi ranges towards east to Adele and Atakpame in the Republic of Togo. Generally, the heights of these

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<sup>194</sup> Ibid: 12

<sup>195</sup> In the literature, this mountain is referred to as Mt Afadjato. However, the local name *Afadzato* is made up of two words *Afadza* (a personal name) and *to* (Ewe word for mountain/highland). Also, the letter 'j' is not in Ewe alphabet. Rather the letter 'z' is used. Hence, in Ewe autography, the name is 'Afadzato' but not 'Afadjato.' As such the correct name with its correct spelling, using Ewe autography is *Afadzato* (Mount Afadza).

ranges fall between 500-1000 meters.<sup>196</sup> Interpolating these mountain ranges and highlands are plains. These plains carry savanna vegetation, first continuing with the low savanna from the coastal plains with isolated baobab, borassus trees, and groves, and then gradually changing into high savanna vegetation with tall grassland. Along the fertile riverbanks and on the mountains are located thick, dense, tropical rain forests with tall and big evergreen trees. It is the plains lying in between these highlands that serve as passages for some of the noted rivers in Eweland. These include Amu (Volta Lake), Dayi, Tordzi, Tsawoe, and Kalakpa rivers. Some of the noted waterfalls in Ghana and Togo are located in Eweland. They include Amedzofe Falls, Tagbo Falls (Liati Wote), and Wli Falls in Ghana, and Akloa Falls in Togo. Farming is the predominant occupation of the inhabitants of this area. This is largely due to the fertile forestland on both the mountains and in the plains and valleys.<sup>197</sup> Cereals and root crops such as maize, cassava, yam, oil palm, plantain, and banana are their main food crops. They also grow cash crops such as cocoa and coffee for export. Fishing is also popular and lucrative along the rivers, especially along the Volta Lake and in River Mono. Some of the important towns and cities in this region include Ho, Kpando, Hohoe, Kpalime, Notsie, Agou, and Abomey.

### **1.6.2 Historical and Political Background**

Tracing Ewe history may be long, complex, and challenging. Early colonial and missionary literatures on Togo and the then Gold Coast (now Ghana) do not document much in the way of historical events on the Ewe and other ethnic groups. Some later researchers attribute this lack to the fact that the colonial masters and missionaries were not interested in the history of the people

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<sup>196</sup> See Gavua (2000)

<sup>197</sup> See Chapter 2 for discussion on impact of geographical location and ecology on musical resources.

but only in their products, natural, and manpower resources. As Kwami Dzator indicates, “the French who became the rulers of the majority of the Ewe (in Togo and Benin) did not care about the Ewe story. They were not interested in glorifying their ‘subjects’ through their history. They were rather interested in turning them into French citizens, establishing, and extending the history of the French in West Africa.”<sup>198</sup>

Some of the few earliest written historical documents by early explorers, missionaries, Islamic crusaders, and colonial ambassadors are often misleading. This may mainly be due to “misinterpretations of the syntax of Ewe lifestyle and rituals”<sup>199</sup> and prejudices on the part of the authors. Since much of the historical narratives remain in the oral tradition, an arguably more consistent, well informed, and holistic approach to studying Ewe history is to use alternative sources, such as oral narratives, legends, folktales, riddles, poetry, proverbs, and most importantly, song texts. Data from these sources can be reinforced by linguistics, ethnological, and archeological findings on the people and their environment.<sup>200</sup> It should be noted that scholars have begun using this later approach in recent times. Chapter 4 is devoted to Ewe historical knowledge with special focus on Notsie migration epoch and related narrative.

### **1.6.3 Religious Background**

This section discusses the general outline of religious and socio-cultural characteristics of the Ewe. Ewe culture is symbolized in this dissertation as one whole ethnic entity that identifies an indigenous group in the broadest sense, though antecedently distinguished in distant mythico-

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<sup>198</sup> Dzator (1998: ix). See also Amegashie-Viglo’s chapter “Colonialism and Colonial Administration in Africa.” In Dzobo and Amegashie-Viglo (2004: 65-77)

<sup>199</sup> Bedu-Young (2002: 60)

<sup>200</sup> See Fage (1978, 1981, 2002), Greene (1996, 2002), Akyeampong (2001)

historical past, and as subsisting through successive cultural phases of interaction with forces from within and outside West Africa cultural region. A diachronic account of this type is a valid statement of history, significant in its own way. Such a description, however, does not represent fully any single synchronic phase defined to mean the total range of the most characteristic, predominating cultural features distinguishable at a given time. I present in this study an interpretation of the indigenous Ewe culture as a backdrop against which I evaluate the function and significance of the music in general and song texts in particular. The structural dynamics of Ewe social relationships and cultural behavioral patterns in general are attributable to a world view that since time immemorial functioned as an annotation for the socio-political and religious order, and for the conflict and discrepancies inherent within human relationships, as well as a framework for control over the environment. This examination will therefore begin with an overview of the worldview and then proceed to the socio-cultural structures.

### **1.6.3.1 Worldview: Categories of Being in Ewe Ontology**

The importance of spiritism and religion in the life and culture of the Ewe and indeed all Africans cannot be overemphasized. Many scholars have made the observation that Africans are very religious, and that religion permeates their lives. As Kofi Awoonor puts it:

To speak of the nature or religion in any traditional African society is to attempt to isolate what is the very essence of the society. For, the whole society is based on the proper direction of the religious and spiritual obligations of man toward the hierarchical structure in which he takes his own place in all the three stages of his life.<sup>201</sup>

Mbiti asserted that “Africans are notoriously religious, and each people has its own religious system with a set of beliefs and practices. Religion permeates into all the departments of life so

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<sup>201</sup> Awoonor (1975: 51)

fully that it is not easy or possible always to isolate it.”<sup>202</sup> Mbiti also added, “in traditional life there are no atheists.”<sup>203</sup> Busia also indicate that Africa’s cultural heritage “is intensely and pervasively religious,”<sup>204</sup> and that “in traditional African communities, it was not possible to distinguish between religious and nonreligious areas of life.”<sup>205</sup> According to Parrinder, many colonial administrators in Africa used to refer to Africans as “this incurably religious people.”<sup>206</sup>

The Ewe, as part of the larger African society, are not left out in the spiritual and religious “infestation.” Mainly their spirituality and worldviews influence the material culture, social behavior, and belief systems of the Ewe. A traveler in Eweland is struck by the predominating, all-pervasive influence of spirituality in the intimate life of the family and community. Writing on the religio-spiritual life of the Ewe, Fiawo notes, “the sea, the lagoon, the river, streams, animals, birds and reptiles as well as the earth with its natural and artificial protuberances are worshipped as divine or as the abode of divinities.”<sup>207</sup> Hence, no account of the Ewe society could be complete without some degree of their worldview and spiritual life. It is therefore prudent to say that the traditional Ewe (as some other Africans) are conspicuously, possessively, remarkably, and to a large extent incurably spiritual.

Scholarly literature on traditional African worldview indicates that Africans, including the Ewe, have a concept of God as the Supreme Being who created the whole universe out of nothing and who is the absolute ground of all being. Abrifa K. Busia wrote: “The postulate of God is universal throughout Africa; it is a concept which is handed down as part of the

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<sup>202</sup> Mbiti (1990: 1)

<sup>203</sup> Ibid (38)

<sup>204</sup> Busia, A. K. 1968. *African In Search of Democracy*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, (page 1)

<sup>205</sup> Ibid (7)

<sup>206</sup> Parrinder (1961: 9)

<sup>207</sup> Fiawo (1959: 39)

culture.”<sup>208</sup> Having studied the concept of the Supreme Being held by nearly three hundred ethnic groups in Africa, Mbiti concluded thus: “In all these societies, without a single exception, people have a notion of God as the Supreme Being.”<sup>209</sup> But many Africans, including the Ewe, also conceptualize God as being immanent in that He or She is “manifested in natural objects and phenomena, and they can turn to Him or Her in acts of worship, at any place and any time.”<sup>210</sup>

The Supreme conception of God among Africans notwithstanding, Ewe ontology could be said to be neither monistic nor pluralistic but rather possesses attributes of both.<sup>211</sup> That is, Ewe ontology recognizes, beside or in addition to the Supreme Being which they called Mawu/Se, other categories of being as well. From an indigenous Ewe perspective, beside Mawu/Se (God), there are three other classes of being all of which are or have religious and/or spiritual characteristics or powers. These classes are: (1) the super-natural or immortal beings; (2) the mortal or animate being; and (3) the inanimate (but not spiritless in Ewe thinking) being.<sup>212</sup> The super-natural category includes *trowo* (lesser spirits: variously referred to as spirits, nature/lesser gods, divinities and deities), and *Togbe kple Mamawo* (ancestors or ancestral spirits). The mortal category consists of *amegbetowo* (human beings) and *lawo* (animals), *gbewo kple atsiwo* (plants). Inanimate (but spirited in Ewe cosmology) beings include *anyigba* (earth), *ye* (sun), *yleti kple yletiviwo* (the moon and the stars), *towo* (mountains), *atsiafu kple tosiwo* (the sea, rivers, and other water bodies). It should be noted that the various categories differentiate in terms of mutually exclusive inherent attributes rooted in observable or inferred experience. I will limit my discussion to Supreme God and the first categories of being

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<sup>208</sup> Busia, A. K. 1968. *Africa In Search of Democracy*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, (p 5)

<sup>209</sup> Mbiti (1990: 37); See also McVeigh, Malcolm J. 1974. *God in Africa*. Mass.: Cape Cod, (16); and Parrinder (1961: 32)

<sup>210</sup> Mbiti (1990: 43)

<sup>211</sup> See Gyekye (1995: 197)

<sup>212</sup> In Ewe metaphysics inanimate objects also have spirits.

(that is the super-natural or immortal beings) as they relate to, influence, and control the other two categories.

### 1.6.3.2 The Nature of Supreme Deity (God): Mawu/Se

In indigenous Ewe belief Mawu (God) literary meaning ‘that who supersedes all else’ is a supreme being, the creator of the universe and all things in it, having such characteristic attributes as omnipotence, omnipresent, omniscience, and being a force only for good. As the architect of the universe Mawu is the greatest power, an unfailing source of refuge and help to all people when everything fails, and a personal and moral being who judges human beings. Mawu is conceptualized as the source of life and everything in the universe. While many scholars have indicated the fact that in Ewe worldview, Mawu exists in more than one form or sex, there is some confusion as to whether Mawu is ‘three-in-one’ or ‘two-in-one.’ Nissio Fiagbedzi indicates the trinity of Mawu as *Se* or *Segbo* (the “impersonal law”), *Sogbla* (the male god), and *Sodza* (the female principle).<sup>213</sup> Komla Dzobo and Kodzo Gavua state that Mawu has two components that include *Miano-zodzi* or *Sodza* (the female component) objectified by the earth and *Lisa* or *Sogbla* (the male spirit of Mawu).<sup>214</sup> Ansa Asamoah also indicates the duality of Mawu but pointed out that *Sogble* is the daughter of Mawu and *Sodza* is the son of Mawu; with each having their unique characters.<sup>215</sup> From the above standpoints, there is clear indication of reversal of sex of the dual components of Mawu. While Fiagbedzi, Dzobo, and Gavua’s works indicate *Sogbla* as male and *Sodza* as female, Asamoah’s research shows the reverse. *Miano-zodzi* (mother earth) another name for *Sodza*, is often used as the spiritual name for *anyigba* (earth). *Miano-zodzi* is

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<sup>213</sup> Fiagbedzi (1977: 92)

<sup>214</sup> See Dzobo (1998) and Gavua (2000)

<sup>215</sup> See Asamoah (1986) and Badu (2002)

more commonly used among Ewedome Ewe within religious, spiritual, and ritual contexts to refer to *anyigba* (mother earth).

Based on the above and other scholarly works, it is obvious that indigenous Ewe religion and spiritual belief underscore the divine duality of the Supreme Being, Mawu. According to Togbi Bokoga Logosu, the third component of Mawu is however not non-existence.<sup>216</sup> The culture obviously does recognize *Se* as a component and clearly the third and overall force that binds the female and the male principles of Mawu. Summarizing from Fiawo's landmark work on the subject, David Locke writes thus: "Linked with Mawu is *Se*, a manifold concept: *Se* can refer to the maker and keeper of human souls, soul being conceived as that part of Mawu in every man; or *Se* can refer to man's destiny, the will and word of Mawu."<sup>217</sup> My collaborators and interviewees in the field (including Datey-Kumodzie, Bokoga Kodzo Kumedzro, Midawo Asafo Azafokpe, and Togbi Bokoga Logosu) indicate that *Se* is the total embodiment of the duality of the female and male components of Mawu. *Se*, therefore is sexless or a hermaphrodite. It is the third spiritual component that unifies the male and the female and does symbolize life. According to Midawo Asafo, "*Se ye nye Mawu segbolisa, gbogbo etolia yi ke bla Mawu Sodza kple Mawu Sogbla hafi wozu agbe*"<sup>218</sup> (*Se* is the Mawu Segbolisa, the third spirit that binds Mawu Sodza and Mawu Sogbla before they all became life). "In his own supernatural being Mawu is three in one," says Datey-Kumodzie as he enumerates the specific characteristics of this trinity from an indigenous Ewe mythical and religio-philosophical perspective during an

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<sup>216</sup> In separate interviews with Bokoga Kumedzro, Togbi Bokoga Logosu, Huno Afedo, and Alufa Bolu Tublu (see appendix E)

<sup>217</sup> Locke (1978: 32). See also Fiawo (1959: 44-50) and Locke (2005: 79)

<sup>218</sup> Midawo Asafo (see appendix E for details)

interview.<sup>219</sup> From my field interview and literature on the topic, I would prudently conclude that from indigenous Ewe point of view and belief, Mawu, the Supreme God, is three in one.

One can therefore summarize the trinity<sup>220</sup> of Mawu as follows: (1) Mawu Sodza (Miano-zodzi) the female principle and the source of life, characterized with harmony, peace, care, joy, freshness, creative, benevolent, and provident; (2) Mawu Sogbla (Sogle) the male principle characterized with power, labor, strength, toughness, steadfastness, pain, suffering, security, protection, destruction, and stern dispenser of justice; and (3) Mawu Segbolisa (also called Se or Mawu-Lisa) is life and the unity of life, the great spirit of the universe, the impersonal law and determiner of the destinies of human beings.<sup>221</sup> It is obvious and worth noting that the difference and variations in the terminology may be the result of dialectal differences, geographical, and subtle cultural variations between the various sub-cultures of the Ewe ethnicity. While the Southern Ewe prefer and/or commonly use certain terms to refer to the same concept and belief system, the Northern Ewe prefer or often use other sets of terms. The underlying concepts, beliefs, philosophy, and spiritual connotations of Mawu as God and the Trinity of the Supreme Being, no doubt are and remain the same among all Ewe.

### **1.6.3.3 Lesser Sprits (Divinities): *Trowo/Veduwo***

My interview with many authorities on Ewe religion and culture including Togbui Bokoga Logosu, Alufa Bolu Tublu, Midawo Asafo Azafokpe, Bokoga Kodzo Kumedzro, Komla Dzobo,

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<sup>219</sup> Personal communication with Prof. Datey-Kumodzie (Interview: June 7, 2007, Accra, Ghana).

<sup>220</sup> It should be noted clearly that the concept of ‘trinity’ in Ewe indigenous religious culture as indicated above has no historical or cultural link with, relationship, or reference to the Western Christian concept of ‘the trinity of God’ as in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. The Ewe concept of Mawu being three-in-one has been with them since time immemorial and long before the incursion of European explorers, traders, missionaries, and Christian crusaders into West Africa in the C15<sup>th</sup> through early C19<sup>th</sup> and after.

<sup>221</sup> In separate interviews with Midawo Asafo, Bokoga Kodzo Kumedzro, Alufa Bolu Tublu, Huno Afedo, and Togbui Bokoga Logosu (see appendix E for details)

Togbui Konu Lamadekoo, and Prof. S. Datey-Kumodzie reveal more details of the Ewe's concept of the Creator God. These scholars believe that in Ewe worldview, Mawu is remote and cannot be directly accessed hence not directly worshipped but only through divinities/lesser gods and other spiritual forms he has created and dwells. The Ewe, like many other Africans, established from time immemorial, a spiritual hierarchy that reveals a keen understanding of natural phenomena and a clever talent for manipulating them toward good for himself and evil for his enemies. Beneath Mawu is a group of many divinities/gods and by the light of her/his own logic the Ewe assigns to Mawu a certain degree of distance and approachability. The Ewe believe that Mawu being immortal, invisible, and suprarational, is omnipresent rather than merely mobile; is beyond ritual control except mediated through the lesser spirits/divinities.

There are neither organized religious services nor direct sacrifices for Mawu, no shrines or priests because s/he is believed to be beyond such considerations. The Ewe's conceptual distance of God from man is not because they consider Mawu unconcerned. In fact Kofi Awoonor clearly explains that:

By the light of his own logic, the African assigns to the Creator God a certain degree of distance and unapproachability, not because he considers Him unconcerned, but rather because he thinks of Him in his primal ancestral role as the supreme paterfamilias who must not be bothered with the petty details of the universe. He, Himself, appoints lieutenants and assistants who become overseers and guardians of various natural phenomena and faculties. These minor deities are the recipients of sacrifices and messages for the Creator God. He, whom the Ewe calls Mawu, receives no sacrifices Himself; He has neither shrines nor priests.<sup>222</sup>

Since Mawu is distanced from man, S/he created *trowo* or *anyigbadzi mawuawo* (nature divinities or spirits of the earth) and *veduwo* (spirit pantheons) to be the intermediaries between Herself/Himself and man. Ewe spirit pantheons include: (1) *Xebieso/Xevieso* or *So* (the god of thunder and lightning), *Da* (the snake god and the god of poison), *Anyievo* (the rainbow god and

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<sup>222</sup> Awoonor (1975: 51)

the god of rain), all of which continue to be actively worshipped in Yeve religion across Southern Eweland today; (2) *Afa* (the god of divination and foresight); (3) *Legba* (the household, clan, neighborhood, and community god) who oversees domestic and community harmony, fertility, and protection; (4) *Gu* (the god of iron, metal, war and all its derivatives); (5) *Sakpana* (the god of diseases, usually the small pox); and many other gods whose dwelling places include natural sources (animate and inanimate objects) and features including mountains, trees, water bodies (the sea, rivers, lagoons etc), caves, rocks, and animals.

According to my discussants<sup>223</sup> these divinities are Mawu's representatives on earth. They differ from the rest of created beings because they are immortal and invisible. They share some characteristics or features (plus their powers, mobility, and suprarationality that are greater than those of human beings) with Mawu, whose servants they are, for the benefit of mankind. However, the Ewe believes that while Mawu is only good, *trowo* may have potential for evil—thus being good and evil. As Fiawo indicates *tro* (singular for *trowo*) is “a god of spirit who confounds its client or worshipper with an ever-growing number of demands some of which may be conflicting.”<sup>224</sup>

There are different classifications or categorization of *trowo* and *veduwo*. The first paradigm divides them into public and private. Public ones may be for *duko* or *du* (a whole community, sub-ethnic group, town, or village), *hlo* (clan), *to*, *ko*, or *sa* (ward or neighborhood), *dzotsinu* or *fome* (lineage or family).<sup>225</sup> These public divinities serve all people within the geographical, historical, biological, and cultural defines of their jurisdiction irrespective of the

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<sup>223</sup> Interviews with Huno Afedo, Alufa Bolu Tublu, Togbui Bokoga Logosu, Bokoga Kodzo Kumedzro, Midawo Asafo Azafokpe, Prof. Komla Dzobo, and Prof. S. Datey-Kumodzie (see appendix E).

<sup>224</sup> Fiawo (1959: 51) also quoted in Locke (1978: 33)

<sup>225</sup> See Fiawo (1959)

individuals' and groups' religious or social affiliations. Private divinities are those that only serve the members of the institutions and groups who worship it or are its devotees and affiliates.

The second paradigm has three groups of divinities based on their source of origin. (1) *Hogbe Trowo*: those divinities originating from *Hogbe* (Notsie, the latest ancestral home of Ewe in Ghana and Togo). These are the oldest and most revered and prestigious of all divinities. They are believed to have been brought from Notsie to their present home by the people themselves. Examples are, *Afa*, *Yeve*, *Togbui Gbe* and *Togbui Tegbe*. *Afa* and *Yeve* are believed to have been with the Ewe from their ancestral homes in Ile Ife in Yorubaland, Nigeria and in Dahomey (now Benin). Divinities in this category are usually public although some may be private as well. (2) *Dzokpleanyiawo* (from natural origin): these divinities, usually public, are native or indigenous to Eweland and are usually embodied in natural entities such as forests, mountains, and rivers; for example, *Ameshikpe* (of Dzodze). (3) *Amedzro Trowo* (foreign, guest, stranger deities): they are those divinities believed to have been imported from other cultures and neighbors or brought by foreigners into Eweland. *Nyigbla* (Anlo war god) one of the revered Anlo Ewe divinities, for example, "is believed to have been imported from Gbugbla, a village near Accra."<sup>226</sup> Other imported divinities include *Atigeli*, *brekete*, and *godovedu*. This category of divinities may be public or private.

A third paradigm of supernatural powers includes *dzo*, *dzoka*, *dzosasa*, or *dzokasasa* (magical power) and *ama* (herbal medicinal power). The two powers, usually private, are complementary, closely related, and sometimes inseparable, and are often presented or used together. *Dzo* or *dzoka* is a magical power or charm with both destructive and protective forces made from various herbal ingredients and powerful animal parts. *Ama* is processed and

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<sup>226</sup> Fiagbedzi (1977: 96) See also Fiawo (1959)

unprocessed herbal concoction with spiritual powers that are used for curing different diseases both physical and spiritual. In Ewe indigenous culture, there is the strong belief that Mawu has endowed particular plants, animals, and other objects with spiritual powers, forces, and dynamism. Mawu then, naturally and mysteriously, reveals the knowledge to identify, use, and control these powerful natural objects to individuals and provide them with guidelines, rules, and regulations to their use. The prevalence of this magical power and its use among the Ewe is a common knowledge in Ghana and beyond. According to David Locke, “the Eye are noted among the ethnic groups in Ghana for the number and power of magic charms, commonly referred to in broken English as juju. Such magic charms were essential to any warrior and are often alluded to in many Atsiagbeko songs.”<sup>227</sup>

#### **1.6.3.4 Ancestral Spirits: *Togbewo/Togbiwo* and *Mamawo***

The fourth category of supernatural powers, entirely public, is *Togbewo kple Mamawo* or *Togbenoliawo* (ancestors or ancestral spirits). We as Ewe believe that a man’s soul lives on in the spirit world after death and must not only be cared for by the living but also called upon in times of physical and spiritual trouble and happiness.<sup>228</sup> “This is essential, for the ancestors can either provide for and guard the living or punish them,” says G. K. Nukunya.<sup>229</sup> The ancestors, those that have gone through the journey and directed by the guiding spirit, join the countless ones that went before. Blood, being the most meaningful force for the living, also unite them to the dead; thus, no family diminishes into oblivion. The ancestors, who were once living elders, continue to be spiritual elders in the supernatural world as they join spiritual hierarchy, not only

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<sup>227</sup> Locke (1978: 34)

<sup>228</sup> Interviews with Prof. S. Datey-Kumodzie, Togbui Bokoga Logosu, and Prof. Komla Dzobo (see appendix E)

<sup>229</sup> Nukunya (1969: 27). See also Chapter 3 for further discussion.

by their death, but also by their exemplary life on earth. They are bound by blood and in constant touch with their descendants still living. Ancestors are, in what has been mistakenly or incorrectly called “ancestral worship,” invoked to give help to their family descendants. In what is essentially an act of communion, an active line of communication is kept open between the living and the dead. Among the Ewe, ancestors are *respected*. We give *reverence* to our forebears but we do not “worship” them as has been rather unfortunately reported by some researchers.<sup>230</sup> It is the same respect, care for, demand and expectation from our elders that are extended to the ancestors of today, who were living elders of yesterday. As ancestors, they are generally preservative and protective of the lineage, the family, the clan, the village, the town, and the nation as a whole. As Nukunya puts it:

There is a great belief in the efficacy and power of the ancestral spirits in the lives of their living descendants and the doctrine of reincarnation, whereby some ancestors are reborn into their earthly kin-groups, is also given credence. The dead are believed to live somewhere in the world of spirits, Tsiefe, from where they watch their living descendants in the earthly world, Kodzogbe. They are believed to possess supernatural powers of one sort or another coupled with a kindly interest in their descendants as well as the ability to do harm if the latter neglect them.<sup>231</sup>

Kofi Awoonor also reiterates similar points and emphasis on the relationship between the dead and the living and the functions of ancestors in African cultures. He writes:

Ancestors are respected because they are our predecessors, our elders, and above all they exist in the spirit state in which they know more than we do since they “can see in the dark.” The ceremony of invocation, or libation, brings the dead, the living, and the unborn together in a communion. Like other minor deities, the

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<sup>230</sup> African scholars argue that “ancestor worship” is a misnomer. Idowu, for instance, wrote that “ancestor worship” was not worship but only veneration. See Idowu, E. Bolaji. 1973. *African Traditional Religion, A Definition*. London: SCM Press, pages 178-89. See also Igor Kopytoff, Karin Barber, P. J. Hountondji, Marcel Griaule all in Grinker and Steiner (1997); Parrinder (1961: 57), Mbiti (1990), Fortes, M. 1965. “Some Reflections on Ancestor Worship in Africa.” In *African Systems of Thought*, edited by M. Forte and G. Dieterlen, page 122. Oxford: Oxford University Press; Forde, Daryl. ed. 1954. *African World: Studies in the Cosmological Ideas and the Social Values of African People*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; Forte, M and G. Dieterlen, eds. 1965. *African Systems of Thoughts*. Oxford: Oxford University Press

<sup>231</sup> Nukunya (1969: 27)

ancestors can be both praised for achievement and rebuked for failure. Each family, or lineage, remembers its revered ancestors and on important occasions, such as births or funerals, offers prayers and drinks in ritual renewal of this bond.<sup>232</sup>

It should be noted that not all elders or people who die become ancestors or whose spirits are elevated to ancestral positions. It is only those who have lived lives worthy and worth emulating; it is only those who have contributed significantly to the welfare, protection, and good of their societies; and it is only those whose lives meet the required societal standards, who become ancestors. Another criterion for ancestorship is the amount of respect one commands or is given in lifetime especially at old age. This is important because it is the extension of an Ewe cultural phenomenon—high regards and respect for the elderly—that is extended to the ancestors; the elders in the spiritual world. As Nukunya rightly puts it:

An old man is regarded as a storehouse of traditional knowledge and secrets of success in life. And because of his age he is generally identified with the dead and the awe and fear associated with them. For these reasons, old men enjoy a good deal of respect not only within the lineage but also in the community at large.<sup>233</sup>

Among the many manifestations of care and respect for the ancestors is the importance and place of funeral and all its attendant activities including music and dance. Funerals serve as platforms for the celebration of life and recognition of death (though expected but never welcome) as the means to eternity—the ancestral world. The Ewe's fundamental attitude to life's fragility and fleetingness is underscored by their need and efforts to propitiate and appease the powerful supernatural forces believed to have ultimate influences over worldly phenomena. The Ewe, like other societies, understand that life is such an irreplaceable commodity, hence the tradition encourages that all energies are channeled towards its sustenance. Losing a family member is such a tragedy that is viewed with utmost seriousness. Writing on Anlo concept of life

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<sup>232</sup> Awoonor (1975: 50)

<sup>233</sup> Nukunya (1969: 159)

and death, D. Kodzo Fiawo points out in a comment, which while made in regards to the Anlo of southeastern Ghana is applicable to all Ewe of West Africa.

In the traditional preliterate Anlo society where the natural resources are relatively meager, where the inexplicable natural environment poses a threat to life, and where the people are flanked by warlike tribes and neighbours, we find the clue to their philosophy of life: it is aimed at life.<sup>234</sup>

Quoting Kodzo Fiawo, David Locke writing on *Atsiagbekor*, one of Ewe's war dances, indicate that this philosophy of the Anlo and for that matter the Ewe perhaps explains the vigor, great energy and vitality found in *Atsiagbekor*. Although music and dance performances are hallmarks of funeral celebrations, they in no way signify celebration of death over life. On the contrary, for the Ewe, many music and dance genres, including *Atsiagbekor* are dramatic affirmations of life and the forceful expression of their on-going vitality.

Unlike God, deities, divinities and ancestral spirits are associated with particular spots, places or shrines as foci for organized spiritual, religious, or cultural rituals. The community, clan, lineage, or individual sets these particular spots aside for communing with the divine. These forces may not themselves dwell at these locations, neither are they held imprisoned in them nor physically appear when called upon. They are, however, always invoked through prayer, libation, and rituals including music and dance into the shrines or trained media each time their presence or assistance is needed and are departed when their services are no longer required. It should be noted that some of the deities, including those Fiagbedzi calls *dzositrowo*, are associated with natural entities such as water bodies, sky, forest, and individuals. "Thus Xebieso, the thunder-god of Yeve...society lives in the sky; his wife, Agbui, lives in the sea; Avada, the first war lieutenant of the war god Nyigbla is identified with a tree at the market place

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<sup>234</sup> Fiawo (1959: 41)

at Anloga, and Dzotsife, his messenger, with the anthill of white termites.”<sup>235</sup> The abode of these deities, divinities, and ancestors (whether physical or conceptual, indigenous or foreign) are managed and directed by trained priests and priestesses. *Huno* (lit. the mother of *hu* spirit divinity) and *Bokono* (lit. mother of *bo* spirit power) are some of the titles for priest and spiritual leaders irrespective of their sex.<sup>236</sup>

From the preceding discussion, it is clear that in indigenous Ewe conception and world view, there is a Supreme Being called Mawu, the Creator God who is life and who makes or reproduces life and controls it. Being so big, powerful, beyond reach and direct contact with mortal beings, s/he created deputies (divinities and other spiritual powers) as representatives on earth. Ewe believe that these deputies intervene and interfere in the ordering of the spiritual community in which man and the forces of nature are one and interdependent. The institution of these gods and deities is an attempt to make sure of Mawu’s assistance and to some extent to influence it. *Trowo*, *veduwo*, and other spiritual powers are set up through the priest mediums that function as their spokespersons, oracles, and prophets. Thus, Mawu’s power, indefinable and hidden, extends from the highly spiritual and religious to the social and political. As deputies, the minor gods function as consultants of Mawu for peace, good health and substance of life among all mortal beings.

The place, role, and importance of music and musicians in the sustenance of these knowledge and how these practices relate to my study is discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

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<sup>235</sup> Fiagbedzi (1977: 96), interviews with Prof. S. Datey Kumodzie, Alufa Bolu Tublu, Togbui Bokoga Logosu, Bokoga Kodzo Kumedzro, and Midawo Asafo Azafokpe

<sup>236</sup> See Chapte 3 for detail discussion on spiritual and musical titles.

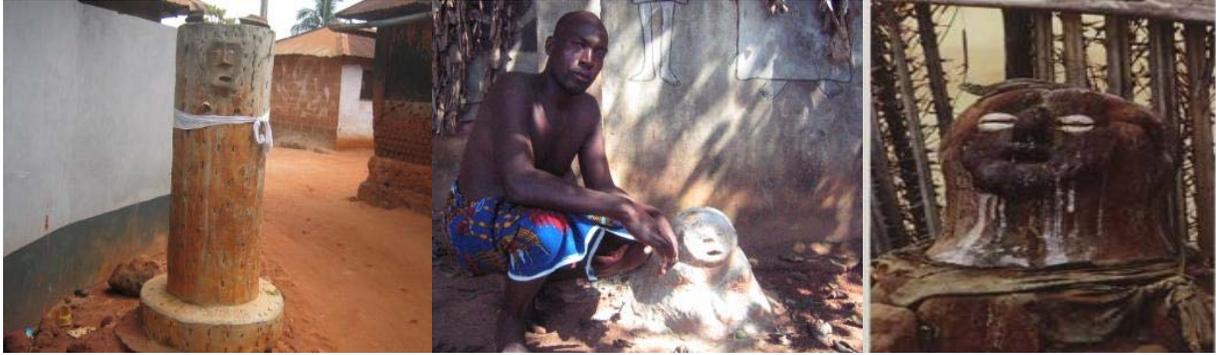


Figure 1-7: *Legbawo* (examples of symbolic representations of lesser divinities)

#### 1.6.4 Socio-Cultural Background

All Ewe, like other African ethnic groups, still maintain essentially their indigenous social institutions and kinship structures despite changes and modifications as a result of foreign cultural influences (contact with other West African and non-African cultures including Western culture). This section focuses on the kinship and social class structures of traditional contemporary Ewe society. Generally, there are three main dimensions of Ewe kinship system: family, lineage, and clan. These three significant dimensions are referred to by different but similar names depending on the sub-ethnic group, locations, dialects, and customs.

##### 1.6.4.1 *Fome*: Family

The first Ewe kinship unit is *fome* (lit., womb: meaning family, both extended and nuclear). The extended family is a patrilineal kinship unit which spans more than one nucleus family and whose members easily trace their descent to a common ancestry about a generation or two back through the male line and are known by the same surname. The nucleus family, comprising of a man, his wife or wives, and children, is the smallest kinship unit among all Ewe. In addition to spouses and children, a usual Ewe nucleus family includes other dependants like nieces and

nephews, and children of deceased relatives of both spouses. Marriage among all Ewe is virilocal so a wife, on marriage, is expected to live in her husband's house which is usually located in his lineage territory. In all cases, when a woman marries into another clan, lineage, or any other kinship segment other than her own, she still is not considered a blood member of her husband's segment. Although women married into the extended family and other segments are integrated socially, culturally, and economically, they are not regarded as blood members of the segment. When such a woman dies, her body is often collected, after necessary rituals by her husband's lineage, and buried by her own lineage.

As corporate groups with properties, the clan, lineage, and family are very important in the socio-cultural, religious, and economic lives of all Ewe. Much as these indigenous institutions and structures are maintained and transmitted from generation to generation with much of the indigenous elements and structures still in place, there has been, and still are, many changes and influences that have affected them. The changes are easily descensible in economic activities, polity structures, and social organizations. For instance, in the past among the Southern Ewe, annual visits were paid to clan shrines at Anloga and Tsiamé where newly born members of the clans were spiritually inducted into the clan with elaborate rituals. Today, with Christianity and its attendant foreign cultural baggage, modern educational trends, and globalization taking a firm hold on the society's youth in particular, most of the indigenous kinship rites and ritual activities are at the brink of extinction. Nowadays, on such visits to clan ancestral shrines, though prayers are offered to the clan ancestors, they are more of sightseeing trips than serious spiritual pilgrimages. Also, with regards to residential patterns, there is overcrowding in the old settlement areas within the lineage territorial locale, leading to the

movement of many members, especially the younger generation, to the outskirts of the communities to occupy the closest lineage farmlands.

#### **1.6.4.2 *Afedo/Dzotsinu/Avedufe*: Lineage**

Lineage is another division within Ewe kinship structure and the largest segment of the clan. Among the Northern Ewe, it is called *Avedufe* (lit. forest or land ownership). It is derived from common ownership of land, which all members of the segment enjoy.<sup>237</sup> Among the Southern Ewe, lineage may be referred to variously (depending on time and space) as, *afedo*, *dzotsinu*, *afeme*, *agbanu*, and sometimes *hlo* and may be regarded as the most important kinship unit in the functioning of daily life. Nukunya's definition of lineage, although it refers to *afedo* of the Southern Ewe (Anlo Ewe), is without a doubt, applicable to *Avedufe* of the Northern Ewe as well.

The Anlo lineage may be defined as that branch of a clan found in a settlement, which comprises all persons, male and female, who are able to trace relationships by a series of [accepted] genealogical steps through the male line to a known ancestor and theoretically to each other. It is an exogamous group of nearly ten generations, which is named after its founding ancestor and has as a symbol of unity and strength, a stool, an ancestral shrine, a leader and a common property.<sup>238</sup>

Asamoia referring to the Northern Ewe, states that "members of the segment [lineage] are able to prove their blood relationship by tracing their diachronic genealogical connections at least four or more generations back to a common male ancestor."<sup>239</sup>

Lineage property is transmitted patrilineally within the lineage. Every Ewe lineage has communal property the most important being landed estates, believed to belong to the ancestors.

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<sup>237</sup> See Asamoia (2000)

<sup>238</sup> Ibid (1997: 50). See also Ibid (1969: 25)

<sup>239</sup> Asamoia (2000: 48)

All members of the segment are entitled to a number of rights and privileges including landed estates, a place to build a home and live, and a group to care for her/him in times of need and in old age. Although both female and male members of the lineage exclusively use and enjoy lineage landed estates, only males are entitled to own, by inheritance, a piece of the land and subsequently transfer same to the male offspring. Customarily, formal demarcations are made roughly (in the past using arbitrary units of measure) in every generation which determine the portion of lineage landed property an individual may cultivate without let, or hindrance from any other members of the lineage. However, before (and sometimes after) this formal demarcation, all descendants of the previous occupant as well as his close agnates may have access to it. Like many other things, the ancestors take an active interest in the lineage land; and although not unheard, it is considered a grave offense for lineage land to be sold.

The active participation and leadership role played by *Fometato*, *Afedome Metsitsi*, or *Amagatsiku* (the lineage head) is an important unifying force in the lineage. Usually, the lineage head is the oldest male member of the oldest living generation. It should be noted that, among all Ewe, old age comes with or is associated with great respect, power, wisdom, and good sense of judgment. Hence, among other things (with all things being equal), the older the lineage head, the greater his authority (knowledge, spiritual, and ritual power and efficacy), the better his judgments, and the more respect he commands among all members. As the oldest member of the lineage in terms of age and generation, the lineage head is the closest living member to the ancestors. Beside other duties, he functions as the spiritual father (beside the lineage priest if there is one) and the overseer of the spiritual and ritual activities of the lineage. He is the communication link between his living lineage members, the ancestors, and other powerful supernatural forces. In addition to spiritual duties, the lineage head performs other secular duties

in conjunction with the council of lineage elders, *Fomemetsitsiwo* (lit. lineage or family old men/women) drawn from several lineage segments, *fomewo* (families). These duties include administering of lineage landed estates and other properties, settling disputes among lineage members, overseeing marriages and divorce, and representing the lineage on all external councils. Virtually, no transactions, concerning or in the name of the lineage, can take place without the knowledge and approval of the lineage head. Although members of a lineage can, and do live anywhere within the lineage locality or territorial fields, they usually reside within extended family compounds and territories.



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<sup>240</sup> Photo by Prosper Agbesi Gbolonyo (January, 2009)

**Figure 1-8: *Dzotzinu Togbizikpuixo* (a lineage ancestral stool house) at Kuli-Dzodze, Ghana**

### **1.6.4.3 *Hlo/Ko*: Clan**

The Ewe term for clan is *hlo* or *ko*. While Southern Ewe refer to it as *hlo*, some Northern Ewe may call it *ko*.<sup>241</sup> *Hlo* and/or *ko* describe a group of people, male or female, who are believed to have descended patrilineally from a common putative ancestor. In *hlo*, there is also the sharing of the same totemic and other observances, while *ko* in Ewedome represent the largest residential units of people and include interrelationship by ancestry and marriage.<sup>242</sup> The clan is the most general level of all Ewe kinship structure (irrespective of sub-ethnicity and dialect difference), which is organized on the system of patrilineal descent. Hence all Ewe trace their succession and claim their inheritance and inheritable properties through the male parental line.

Among the Anlo, there are fifteen *hlowo* (clans) around which the social fabric of the society is woven. The fifteen listed indigenously according to the order of settlement include Lafe, Amlade, Adzovia, Bate, Like, Bamee, Klevi, Tovi, Tsiamé, Agave, Ame, Xetsofi, Dzevi, Vifeme, and Blu. Every Anlo belongs to one of the 15 patrilineal clans around which society is organized. Among the Southern Ewe, members of *hlo ta wiatoawo* (the fifteen clans) are spread throughout southern Eweland such that in all settlements, towns, and villages, most, if not all clans are represented. Unlike the Southern Ewe, *ko* (clan) among the Northern Ewe is not territorially dispersed. Rather, each clan lives in a well-defined area or territory within the town or village. In both cases, clan membership is generally obtained by birth although in the olden days others, including foreigners, slaves, and strangers, have been accepted and incorporated into

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<sup>241</sup> See Asamoah (2000: 48) and Nukunya (1997: 48)

<sup>242</sup> See Nukunya (1969, 1997) and Asamoah (2000)

the clans of their host, masters, and landlords and were given full membership status and rights.

According to Nukunya:

Strangers not specifically attached to any Anlo were grouped into three special clans created for strangers only, namely Blu, Dzevi, and Vifeme. Today a recent or new stranger is generally assigned to the Blu clan, when, as during a funeral, clan affiliation influences the rites. Affiliation of this nature is with the Blu clan because their origins are of more diverse and general nature than those of the Dzevi and Vifeme.<sup>243</sup>

It should also be noted that the Blu clan is not strictly a patrilineage similar to the other fourteen clans but rather consist of independent aliens who do not belong to any of the other clans.<sup>244</sup> Members of a clan or clansmen are supposed to relate to and treat each other as brothers since there is the understanding that members of the same clan have a common ancestor irrespective of where they live. Whether or not members are territorially dispersed in the case of *hlo*, or live in a well-defined geographical area in the case of *ko*, the clans have many characteristics of corporateness and features. An agnatic core, a group of elderly members, usually male, of the clan, controls members and/or territories. Clans own property including land, palm groves, ancestral shrines, and other landmarks. Like the members, these properties and landmarks may be dispersed or centrally located. They have leaders and sometimes rulers in whom they vest legal, spiritual, and ritual powers who, with other members of the clan, meet periodically for spiritual, ritual, and socio-political activities that bind them into a knit social institution. It should be noted here that while clan ancestral shrines in Ewedome (Northern Eweland) are always located within the territorial geographical location of the *ko* (clan), all but one of the Anlo *hlo* (clan) shrines are located in Anloga (the political capital of Anlo).<sup>245</sup> In all Eweland, all clans are equal in status but perform different functions to their members and

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<sup>243</sup> Ibid (1997: 48)

<sup>244</sup> See Kodzo-Vorduagu (1959: 16-32)

<sup>245</sup> The Xetsofe shrine is located at Tsiame.

localities since there are no aristocratic clan systems like those found in some clan-based traditional kingdoms like Nyoro and Bemba.<sup>246</sup>

In Anlo state, there are certain functions and positions that are traditionally performed or occupied by specific clans. Although the Lafe are the kingmakers at the state level, the Adzovia and Bate clans, who own the paramount stool, alternately provide the Awomefia, the king of Anlo.<sup>247</sup> The Lafe clan, founded by Togbi Wenya, is the oldest and largest Anlo clan and its members own a large proportion of the Anlo state land. The hereditary ritual specialists at the state level are the Amlade (founded by Wenya's twin brother Adedzenyaki) and the Lafe. But the chief priest of the state war god Nyigbla is provided by the Dzevi who are believed to have brought the god to Anlo from Dangmeland, west of Anlo.<sup>248</sup> Nukunya indicates that:

The ritual functions of the Lafe and the Amlade derive from their descent from Togbi Wenya (the acknowledged leader of the Anlo during their migratory journey and settlement in Anlo country) and his brothers. They are therefore recognized as the ritual owners of the land. As such during public occasions they are expected to pray to their ancestors for their support and success of the meetings.<sup>249</sup>

There are certain characteristic features that may distinguish members of one clan from the other, especially among the Southern Ewe. These may include food prohibitions or taboos, names, and certain personal qualities and characteristics. Every Southern Ewe clan has its own totem, often related to stories (some mythical) about the clans' origin, exploits of the founding personalities and ancestors. For example, According to Datey Kumordzie and C. K Kudjordjie, the Like clan (founded by Torgolo, the first cousin to Adladza I) takes as its *tro* (deity), the sawfish, which

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<sup>246</sup> The Nyoro (native name Banyoro, also Bunyoro or Kitara) are interlacustrine Bantu-speaking people of west-central Uganda (live also in former Zaire, now Congo). The Bemba (or 'BaBemba' using the Ba- prefix to mean 'people of' and also called 'Awemba' or 'BaWemba' in the past) belong to a large group of peoples mainly in the Northern, Luapula and Copperbelt Provinces of Zambia who trace their origins to the Luba and Lunda states of the upper Congo basin, in what became Katanga Province in southern Congo (DRC).

<sup>247</sup> Togbi Sri I and Togbi Adladza I are the respective founders of the two clans (Adzovia and Bate).

<sup>248</sup> See Mamattah (1978), Fiagbedzi (1977), Agbodeka (1997), and Nukunya (1969, 1997)

<sup>249</sup> Nukunya (1997: 49)

according to tradition once saved the founder's life. Hence, all members of the Like clan refrain from eating the sawfish.<sup>250</sup> The members of Xetsofe clan, believed to have been founded by men who mythically descended from the sky, have a reputation as healers. Also among all Ewe, "membership of a particular clan is believed to imply certain personal qualities or characteristics. Thus, members of one clan may be said to be notably wicked while another may be described as being even-tempered, generally lucky, or fertile."<sup>251</sup> Furthermore, every Southern Ewe clan has a pair of names, called *hlo nko* (clan name), for both males and females. It is, however, not clear if Northern Ewe clans have specific clan naming systems. My research could not find any name that is associated with *ko* (clan) among the Northern Ewe. In both Southern and Northern Ewe clan systems, endogamy is allowed but not necessarily enforced or required. While it is not uncommon to find endogamous relationships, exogamy exists almost at the same level.

#### 1.6.4.4 Social Class

Indigenously, there are four social classes among the Ewe. These include (a) *Fiawo kple Dumegawo* (lit. kings and state/town/community great persons) the nobility and professionals, (b) *Dumeviwo* (lit. children of the state/town/community) the free citizens, (c) *Awobameviwo* (lit. children in/under bond) the bondsmen, and (d) *Amefflewo* (lit. persons that have been bought) the slaves.<sup>252</sup>

*Fiawo kple Dumegawo* (the nobility) include the ruling class, kings, chiefs, and their elders, who by virtue of their membership of royal families inherit these offices by descent. "In other words, the high social status of the nobility and the power they wield are based on birth and

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<sup>250</sup> See Mamattah (1978) and Nukunya (1969, 1997)

<sup>251</sup> Nukunya (1997)

<sup>252</sup> See Asamoah (1986, 2000)

not on achievement.”<sup>253</sup> At the lower end of this noble or ‘upper’ class are the professionals including priests and special artists such as musicians and poets, who also acquire their positions partly due to their birth into specific families or lineages and partly due to their inborn and acquired skills and talents. However, unlike the nobility, to be inducted into the class of professionals, one needs to display or exhibit special skills and talents that meet high societal standards and levels besides being born into a specific family. The nobility and professionals enjoy sometimes exclusively, the acquisition of private property. Properties include landed estates, livestock especially cattle, boats and nets all of which go to strengthen their already high social position (but often not a disparate standard of living).

*Dumeviwo* (free citizens or natives) are the ordinary citizens and members of the society who legitimately trace their ancestry through a patrilineal descent, and who are not slaves, and in some cases not bonded. A free citizen may be materially rich or poor. Ansa Asamoah reiterates that free citizens enjoy “the right of usufruct in terms of lineage landed estate as the most important means of production.”<sup>254</sup>

*Awobamevio* (bondsmen, rarely found today) were aliens who were given right to use land, landed property, fishing implements including boat and net. In return, they were obliged to pay rent in cash or in kind (farming or fishing) seasonally or yearly to the local chief or the owner of the property. Bondsmen were also natives who place themselves under the protection of a local chief, an elder, or someone of a higher socio-economic status against vendetta or due to indebtedness. They may also be free indigenous citizens, who are indebted and could not pay in cash, but pay their creditor in labor for a period of time. According to Asamoah, the first few

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<sup>253</sup> Ibid (2000: 56)

<sup>254</sup> Ibid (1986: 24)

generations of alien bondsmen and their immediate posterity are regarded as aliens. After several generations, however, their descendants were granted native status.

*Amegefleawo* refers to slaves. *Amegefle* (lit. human being that has been bought or ‘a slave’) and *amesitsatsa* (lit. trading in humans or ‘slave trade’) do not exist today in Eweland. In fact from oral accounts, local, or indigenous slavery that took place in Eweland was a sporadic incidence. Research confirms these oral accounts and further points out that the sporadic slavery that took place was not as inhumane as classical slavery in ancient and modern Europe and in the Americas.<sup>255</sup> According to my field collaborators, in the past, slaves were people from non-Ewe ethnicity who were either acquired through the means of purchase or captured in war and were considered aliens. Agbotadua Kumassah indicate that some individuals (native Ewe) were, however, sold into slavery as a result of their anti-social behaviors. They were, in most cases, anti-social elements including thieves, murderers, and other social deviants who, by their criminal acts and records, had lost the protection of their kinsmen and kinship units.<sup>256</sup> Slaves, nevertheless, had certain rights and protection in Eweland. Any intentional killing of a slave (either by a native, an alien, or by another slave) was regarded as murder and sanctioned accordingly. They were allowed to marry even the natives. Asamoia writes: “Marriage between a slave and a free subject was allowed, but the children of such wedlock were still slaves, if the father was a slave. If vice versa, the children enjoy automatically the free citizen status because of the patrilineal principle.”<sup>257</sup>

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<sup>255</sup> See Asamoia (1986, 2000), etc....

<sup>256</sup> Personal communication with Agbotadua Kumassah (see appendix E). See also Fiawo (1943, 1998), Mamattah (1978), Nukunya (1969), Asamoia (1986, 2000) and Fiagbedzi (1977)

<sup>257</sup> Asamoia (2000: 56)

According to Westermann,<sup>258</sup> slaves had to work four days a week for their master. Traders who owned slaves usually gave the latter capital to start a venture. The slave was set free if he or she could pay a sum of money equal to the price of two slaves. Oral tradition from my interviews indicates that slaves normally labored on plantations, worked on the farms and in the fisheries, tapped palmwine, reared cattle and other livestock, and did handicraft. Slaves were no more required to work for their owners after marriage, although they still remain or are identified as slaves or slave families. Today, however, it is difficult if not impossible, to identify someone of a slave ancestry or a lineage, or a family that ever owned a slave in Eweland. This is because the descendants of former slaves have been freed many years ago and have been fully integrated into indigenous Ewe society without any stigma of or from their slave ancestry. It is believed that individuals from slave ancestry today even occupy important political and social offices in Eweland. Due to certain hereditary, lineage, and clan requirement for qualification to be enthroned as a king or chief, it is still impossible for a descendant of a slave to become a king or chief in Eweland just as it is for many other free citizens. It is not because such people are identified as descendants of former slaves but because they do not belong to royal family lineages.

In modern Eweland as in many other developing societies, socio-economic development, Western education, foreign religious and cultural influences, and globalization have given birth to new social classes with the predominant one being the Western three social class system.<sup>259</sup> These new systems although predominates the social structure of the cities and towns, no doubt exists alongside the first two of the traditional classifications discussed above—nobility and free citizens. Bondsmen are really rare, if at all they still exist among the Ewe.

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<sup>258</sup> As quoted in Asamoah (1986). See also *ibid*

<sup>259</sup> See Asamoah (1990, 2000) for detail information on other new social classes in Eweland.

## 1.7 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In this Chapter I outlined the background of the study and presented a cursory ethnographic overview of the Ewe. I discuss basic information regarding Ewe indigenous religious and social structures including the nature of Mawu/Se/Bomeno (Supreme Deity), *trowo/veduwo* (divinities), *togbeawo/togbi-mamawo* (ancestral spirit), as well as the indigenous concepts, scope, and make of *hlo/ko* (clan), *afedo/dzotsinu/avedufe* (lineage), *fome* (family), and other social classes and their values. I point out that in indigenous Ewe cosmology, there are four classes of being all of which have religious and/or spiritual characteristics or powers including the Supreme Being, lesser super-natural or immortal beings, the mortal or animate beings, and inanimate (but not spiritless) beings. The Supreme Being, in Ewe indigenous perspective, is three in one. That is, Mawu Sodza (Miano-zodzi) the female principle and the source of life, Mawu Sogbla (Sogle) the male principle characterized with power, and Mawu Segbolisa (Se/Mawu-Lisa) law or the principle of law, the unity of life, and determiner of the destinies of human beings. This triality is not in any way connected to, influenced by, or functioned according to the Christian concept of holy trinity.

With its broad and extensive overview structure, chapter one sets the tone for exploration of the indigenous knowledge system and cultural values of the Ewe. Since the primary source of data for this study is music, musical resources and practices as well as other verbal texts all of which are grounded in language, it is necessary to quickly look at the musico-linguistic background of the Ewe—the focus of chapter two.

## 2.0 MUSICO-LINGUISTIC KNOWLEDGE AND RESOURCES

The survival of a people's culture depends largely on many factors including language, music, and intellectual heritage that identify them as a distinct group of people. When a people loses their language and creative artistry, including music and dance traditions, they have lost much of their culture. Researches<sup>260</sup> indicate that a greater part of a people's cultural heritage, including their thought systems, is embedded in and expressed through the language and art forms. Some philosophers<sup>261</sup> have indicated that language is not only a vehicle of concepts and embodiment of philosophical points of views, but also influences philosophical thought. That is to say that the lines of thought of a sage are, at least to some extent, determined by the structure and other characteristics of his or her language, such as the grammatical categories and vocabulary.<sup>262</sup> Therefore, in talking about the music and indigenous knowledge of a people, one needs to critically examine their linguistic, musical, and philosophical paradigms—the goal of this chapter.

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<sup>260</sup> Diop (1974, 1978), Asante and Asante (1985), Mbiti (1969, 1970, 1975), Adjaye (1994, 2004), Oruka (1975, 1978, 1990)

<sup>261</sup> Wiredu (1980, 1990, 1991, 1996), Gyekye (1988, 1995, 1996, 1997), Nkrumah (1964), Mazrui (1974), Diop (1974, 1978), Mbiti (1969, 1970, 1975), Oruka (1975, 1978, 1990), Horton (1977), Hountondji (1983), *Second International Conference of Negro Writers and Artists*, Rome, March 25 – April 1, 1959 (Presence African, Paris, 1954), Abraham (1962), Makinde (1988), Oladipo (1988), Gbedegesin (1991), Appiah (1992, 2003), Asante and Abarry (1996), and Dzobo (2004, 2006)

<sup>262</sup> See Sandman Manfred. 1955. *Subject and Predicate: A Contribution to the Theory of Syntax*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. See also Wiredu (1980, 1996), Dzobo (1973, 1997, 2006), and Gyekye (1987, 1995, 1996, 1997),

The chapter discusses some musico-linguistic elements of Ewe indigenous culture that are necessary in the understanding and analysis of Ewe indigenous philosophical thoughts and musical practice in general and Ewe traditional songs in particular. It reviews the orthography of Ewe language, linguistically and musically, examines the concept of text and theme, and discusses the various qualities and responsibilities of an Ewe musician, levels of meaning embedded in Ewe musical texts, musical resources, musical titles, and verbal texts.

## 2.1 EWE CONCEPT OF MUSIC AND DANCE

In Ewe and many Sub-Saharan African languages, there is often no one word, term, or lexical item that stands for all that constitute ‘music’ in the Western conventional sense. The lack of a single word for ‘music,’ however, is not because Ewe language is underdeveloped to coin such a word. It is rather due to Ewe’s conceptualization of music as a holistic art form. For the Ewe, the concept ‘music’ is an enactment of life—an art of play. In other words, the Ewe, and for that matter African, concept of ‘music’ goes beyond ‘art for art sake.’ It incorporates other socio-cultural and philosophical concepts besides its aesthetics and artistic relevance. In view of this concept, the philosophy of traditional Ewe music education ensures that the musical life of *Ewevi* (an Ewe child/an Ewe) begins at infancy, when she/he learns to listen and move to music as she/he is carried on her/his mother’s back. While the mother sings, claps and dances, the child is perched on high in the midst of the musical performance, literally learning to play, sing, dance, and interpret music in her/his own way, even before learning to walk and talk, but most of all,

virtually acquiring the knowledge and culture of her/his people and learning their history, traditions, socio-cultural, moral, and aesthetic values.<sup>263</sup>

Among the Ewe and throughout West Africa, music is everywhere. On any given day, while strolling through a village, one may hear a mother singing a lullaby to a child, a man singing a work song as he sharpens his machete or cuts down a tree for firewood, a child singing an insult/teasing song against a cousin or a friend, a young man or woman composing and/or singing a courtship/love song to attract the opposite sex, or a relative singing a dirge for a lost loved one. You may hear children drumming while imitating their older siblings, or perhaps, there is a funeral celebration in which communal musical performance will last far into the evening. Generally, the purpose of all these ‘performances’ is to serve various ‘functions’—to put the child to sleep, lessen work fatigue, to insult and/or tease, to woo/court, and to mourn. However, consciously or unconsciously, intentionally or unintentionally, historical, moral, and cultural education is informally in progress, and the knowledge, culture, traditions, and values of the people are being preserved, propagated, disseminated, documented, transmitted, and perpetuated by these acts.

### **2.1.1 Musical Concepts and Interactive Relationship in Ewe Art Forms**

Even though Ewe as an ethnic group is widely known for its musical tradition (drumming, rhythm, dances, games, and songs),<sup>264</sup> *Wegbe* (Ewe language), as mentioned earlier, has no one word for ‘music.’ There are, however, various terms that refer to different activities, all of which

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<sup>263</sup> See Flolu (1999: 33-34)

<sup>264</sup> See for example Jones (1959), Nayo (1964), Amoaku (1975), Fiagbedzi (1977, 1997, 2005), Pantaleoni (1972), Pressing (1983), Chernoff (1979), Locke (1978, 1982, 1987, 1992, 1996), Avorgbedor (1987, 1994, 1992, 1994, 2001), Dor (2000, 2004), and Agawu (1988, 1990, 1995, 2001, 2003), Anku (1988), Flolu (1999), Younge (1989, 1991), Amegago (2000), and Badu (2002),

are integral parts of musical practice. In *Wegbe*, these terms include *ha* (song), *dzi* (sing or to give birth [to a song]),<sup>265</sup> and *hadzidzi* (singing or the act of singing, or giving birth [to a song] and for that matter making of vocal music in general). Other words or terminologies relating to vocal musical practice include *hakpakpa* (art of carving or creating a song or composition of song). In instrumental music making, the Ewe have terms including *fo* (play/beat/strike), *vu* (drum), and *vufifo* (the act of drumming or playing a drum); *ku* (blow [air/wind]), *kpe* or *dze* (wind instrument), and *kpekuku* or *dzekuku* (the act of blowing a wind instrument).<sup>266</sup>

The Ewe specify other aspects of their musical concept in their expressions. We identify *hadzigbe*, *nyagbe*, and *vugbe* as three categories of this concept. *Hadzigbe* (the singing voice) places particular emphasis on the quality of voice acceptable for singing. It is from this that we derive *hagbe* (lit. song voice/language, sound/language of song, or sound/language accepted and regarded as song). *Hagbe* may also mean poetic text. In general Ewe literature, poem is usually referred to as *hakpanya* (lit. song carving word or song composition word). In view of this, *hagbe* may be considered as the combination of musical tone and lexical tone.<sup>267</sup> *Nyagbe* (lit. word sound or speech utterance [that expresses a complete thought] or a sentence) and *vugbe* (lit. drum sound, voice, text, or pattern [a meaningful drum language]) all establish these (sonic) aspects of Ewe concept of music.<sup>268</sup> Nissio Fiagbedzi rightly notes that in composition, *nyagbe* guides the composer in his selection of text and melodic phrasing, and the listener in making meaning out of what the composer composes or sings in the song.<sup>269</sup> If *nyagbe* (lit. speech utterance) is used in a song it becomes *hagbe* (lit. sound of song or word of song). Likewise, if

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<sup>265</sup> See section 2.1.5. below for further discussion of “giving birth to song”

<sup>266</sup> See Fiagbedzi (1997: 154) and Dor (2004)

<sup>267</sup> See interview with Kofi Anyidoho and Kofi Awoonor on Verbal Africana: Ewe Stories and Story Tellers from Ghana at <http://www.let.leidenuniv.nl/verba-africana/ewe/main.htm> (accessed: 09/28/08)

<sup>268</sup> See Fiagbedzi (1977, 1997)

<sup>269</sup> See *ibid*

*nyagbe* is used as a drum language or drum pattern it becomes *vugbe* (drum language or drum text). This underscores the fact that many drum patterns are based on specific linguistic items. Generally, *nyagbe*, *hagbe*, and *vugbe* serve not only as texts but also as frameworks for shaping melody, rhythm, meaning, and even dance movements and patterns. The Ewe also have *ye* (dance) and *yedudu* (dancing or act of dancing) and *fefe* or *kodidi* (play or drama). It should be noted that *fefe*, *ko*, or *kodidi* may also mean or refer to the concept of a holistic performing art—a combination of music, dance, drama, and other verbal, kinesthetic, creative, and expressive art forms. Just as dance is barely separable from music, so is instrumental music in isolation rare among the Ewe. Vocal and instrumental music as one entity is often used to accompany dancing.

We already know that music, as depicted and defined in many African societies south of the Sahara, involves many aspects of the culture including dance, visual arts, verbal arts and other performing arts (an incorporation of art forms that may be separated in Western cultures). The Ewe (African) musical concept is an intrinsically interwoven element in their everyday life. Although the various elements of this concept are closely related and interwoven (in practice and in theory), to a very high degree, there is no doubt that the interrelationship does not exist at the same level. The extent to which dance relates to and depends on music is almost limitless; that is to say, dance may not exist without music. Music, on the other hand, does not necessarily depend on dance for its survival and/or practice. Visual art on the other hand relates to music on a complementary level and for that matter can and does function without music. Similarly, music does employ visual art forms in different ways but does not depend on them.

Irrespective of the different degrees of interrelationship and levels of cooperation between these art forms, one may hardly exist and function as an absolutely separate entity in traditional Ewe (African) society. As art forms, music, dance, drama, and visual art represent (as

separate entities as well as a conglomerate) the creative traits of the people. The evidence of creativity does not apply only to the music as a sonic entity. Quite the contrary, the musical forms represented in Ewe (and largely African) societies exist alongside kinesthetic and visual expressions of art that are manifested in dance, make-ups, costumes, instrumental ornamentations, sculpture, and other artifacts (paraphernalia and props).

The Ewe maxim: *Ame adeke meyina [womeyina] vugbo gano gbemehe dzim o* (lit. Nobody keeps humming songs while on his/her way to the drum), for example, may help in explaining this concept. In a deeper sense, the maxim means that one does not keep humming songs while on the way to perform music. This is because there are many activities, including singing, that are integral parts of an Ewe musical performance—activities that may last for hours. As such (if one is such a ‘good’ singer and/or so anxious to perform) there is no need to keep humming songs when that is exactly what one would be doing for hours at the performance ground. Further analysis of the main phrase “*meyina vugbo*” and its alternate renditions would help explain the concept of the drum (*vu*) as a holistic musical term and phenomenon in Ewe musico-linguistic concept.

When an Ewe says: (a) *meyina vugbo* (I am going to the drum); (b) *meyina vu woge/wofe* (I am going to make the drum); or (c) *meyina vu fo ge/fe* (I am going to play the drum); the speaker does not mean that she/he is: (a) walking to the musical instrument—drum; (b) going to make the musical instrument—drum; or (c) going to play/beat only the musical instrument—drum. Rather what the speaker means in all the three expressions is that she/he is going to *make music*, i.e. participate in musical production and/or performance.<sup>270</sup> *Making music*, as used here,

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<sup>270</sup> Similarly the Akan of Ghana would say *ka twenee* literally meaning “speaking” the drum. See Nketia (1962, 1963)

refers generally to an activity or series of activities that include playing of instruments, singing, dancing, and drama with the appropriate visual and kinesthetic representations.<sup>271</sup>

Irrespective of the speaker's particular role, either as a singer, dancer, drummer or actor, the expression usually refers to the entire (holistic) process of production. It should be noted that *vu* (drum) occurs in all the three expressions (examples) above. The use of *vu* (drum), on one hand, underscores and emphasizes the drum's central role in Ewe musical performance and practice. On the other hand, it represents the holistic nature of Ewe performing arts. Although there are a few indigenous Ewe musical genres that may not use drums or in which drums do not play central/master roles, there is always the underlying concept, perception, belief, and feeling of percussive rhythm underpinning any Ewe musical expression. Hence, *vu* (drum), which symbolizes all Ewe percussive instruments, is always part of most expressions of music and dance performance or production. In many cases, as in the three examples above, the use of the lexical item *vu* (drum) does not refer specifically to the instrument, but rather to the concept or the total activity of which the instrument *vu* (drum) is a part. It should also be pointed out that there are different expressions for specific activities, especially, if the performance is limited to only an aspect of Ewe music making. For example in singing, or singing practice, the Ewe may say *meyina hakpa* (I am going to singing rehearsal), *meyina ha dzife* (I am going to sing), or *meyina ha srofe* (I am going to learn songs).

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<sup>271</sup> For similar concept among the Akan of Ghana and Yoruba of Nigeria see Nketia (1962, 1963) and Euba (1990) respectively.



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**Figure 2-1: Female *Hakpa* Session at Dzodze Afetefe**

### **2.1.2 Ewe Musical Taxonomy**

African indigenous cultures differ in the taxonomy of their musical traditions and forms just as in their social organizations. Kwabena Nketia<sup>273</sup> notes that the Hausa and the Wolof of the Senegambia cultures in West Africa classify their musical instruments and musicians according to the ranks and political status of the kings and chiefs that patronize them. He also identifies the

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<sup>272</sup> Photo by the author

<sup>273</sup> Nketia (1974)

function and status of Akan royal musicians in traditional Akan courts as a special category that differentiates both the musicians and the musical genres from others.<sup>274</sup> These forms of taxonomy, as described by Nketia, may not be used in all cultures although they may be applicable.

Ewe musical taxonomy takes many forms. Ewe indigenous musicians and researchers on Ewe music have used various taxonomies that are similar in many ways.<sup>275</sup> Notable among these are those based on function such as *modzakadevuwo* (lit. leisure/boredom ‘killing’ music or socio-recreational music), *subosubovuwo* or *trovuwo* (lit. worship music or music for divinities/religious music), *avavuwo* or *avadevuwo* (music for war, warriors, or military activities), and *fiavuwo* (music for royalty and politics).<sup>276</sup> As Nissio Fiagbedzi, one of the pre-eminent Ewe ethnomusicologists noted, *Modzakadevuwo* could be considered autonomous due to the fact that they are associated with any non-musical activity, physical object or other art forms in Ewe thinking.<sup>277</sup> The classification of *trovuwo*, *avadevuwo*, and *fiavuwo* is largely functionally based. Other researchers have identified additional categories including *kuvuwo* (lit. music for death or music for funeral), *dowovuwo* (occupational music), and *glihawo/glimedehawo* (incidental music or story songs).<sup>278</sup> Although these additional categories are identified, their musical genres fall under earlier classifications. For example, in terms of socio-cultural function, many *modzakadevuwo* (socio-recreational music) are context-free, hence are performed for entertainment at funeral grounds and work places and their songs may be used during storytelling as *glihawo* or *glimedehawo* (story songs/incidental song).

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<sup>274</sup> Ibid: 53-54. See also Nketia (1963, 1969)

<sup>275</sup> See Fiagbedzi (1977, 1997)

<sup>276</sup> Fiagbedzi (1997: 159)

<sup>277</sup> Ibid

<sup>278</sup> See Kafui (2000: 126)

Today, *modzakadevuwo* (socio-recreational music) include *adzro*, *agbadza/ageshie*,<sup>279</sup> *akpese/boboobo*, *asiko*, *babashiko*, *bobo*, *duasika*, *egbanegba/gabada /gbolo*, *gahu*, *gota*, *kinka*, *nyayito*, *totoeme*, *tuidzi*, *woleke*, and *zigi*. Others including *agoha*, *akaye/avihe*, and *atigo/atsigo* are more associated with funerals, *glihawo* with storytelling, and *adevu*, *todziha*, and *agbleha* with occupations (hunting, fishing, and farming respectively) although they may all be classified as social, occupational, and recreational. *Subosubovuwo/trovuwo* (religious music) includes *afavu*, *adabatram/vuga (gbeto nido)*, *agbosu*, *alagavu*, *atigeli/tigare*, *brekete*, *kokuvu*, and *yevevu*. Examples of *avavuwo* (music for war and military activities) are *adzogbo/adzohu*, *akpi*, *atamga /atsiagbeko*, *atrikpui*, *adzogbo*, *gadzo*, *gakpa*, *kalevu/sonfo*, and *kpegisu*. Musical genres that fall under *fiavuwo* (music for royalty and politics) include *zizihawo*, *vuga*, *atompani*, *agblovu*, *adabatram*, *laklevu*, and *vukpo*.

According to Nissio Fiagbedzi,<sup>280</sup> besides the above taxonomy, the Ewe recognizes yet another form of classification which has a strong historical connotation. He identifies three categories as *blemavuwo/tsavuwo* (ancient musical traditions), *amegaxoxovuwo /ametsitsivuwo* (older generation musical types), and *sohevuwo/egbevuwo* (youth/modern musical traditions).<sup>281</sup> Since it is difficult to assign exact dates to these segments, the general evolution of Ewe history serves as a guideline and establishes the timeframes of this classification. In view of this, *blema* refers to the pre-exodus and exodus period (before and during the Ewe's migration to their

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<sup>279</sup> It should be noted that *agbadza* was originally an offspring of war genres and was not until recently classified as a recreational music. Even in modern times although it is sometimes performed as a recreational music, it is often associated with funeral celebrations. *Ageshe/ageshie* is a newer and faster version of *agbadza*.

<sup>280</sup> See Fiagbedzi (1977)

<sup>281</sup> It should be noted that there are other terms used for *sohe* 'youth' as in *sohevuwo* 'youth music and dance' or *egbevuwo/fifivuwo* 'modern music and dance. These terms include *ahivavuwo* 'courtship/dating/flirting music and dance,' and *dekadze-tugbedzevuwo* or *dekakpui-tugbekpivuwo* 'youthful music and dance.'

present land around the late 16<sup>th</sup> to early 17<sup>th</sup> centuries).<sup>282</sup> Some of its music and dance types include *yeve*, *afa*, *misego*, *amesivu*, and *atamga*, and *agbomasikui*. *Amegaxoxo/ametsitsivuwo* expands over the period of settlement at their present locations, their contacts and encounters with their neighbors and the colonial times. Its musical genres include *avadevuwo* (war dance-music), *fiavuwo* (royal, mystical, political music), and some *modzakadevuwo* (socio-recreational dances) such as *zigi* and *agbadza*, as well as some *subosubovuwo/trovuwo* (religious music) such as *agbosu*, and *atsigeli*. The last category, *dekakpui/egbevuwo* refers to the period of Ghana's independence and after. This includes genres such as *boboobo/akpese*, *bobo*, *kinka*, *gahu*, *gbolo*, *tudzi* and some new forms of the older styles.<sup>283</sup>

### 2.1.3 Musical Resources, Names, and Meaning

*Evi kpo ga medoa atompani o*  
(A rich child does not establish an *atompani* ensemble)

Although the Ewe may have musical instruments that fall under all the categories of the Hornbostel-Sachs classification, the predominant indigenous Ewe instrumental resources are membranophones, idiophones, and aerophones.<sup>284</sup> Most Ewe musical instruments derive their names from a number of sources. These include the materials used in making them, their playing position, performance technique, timbre, performer's location, and instrumental function. The root word for most of these instrument names is *vu*, a generic term for drum and refers to all

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<sup>282</sup> See Spieth (1906, 1910), Boahen (1966), Mamattah (1978), Asamoa (1986), Amenumey (1986), Agbodeka (1997), and Gavua (2000)

<sup>283</sup> See Fiagbedzi (1997: 158-160)

<sup>284</sup> See Sachs (1940), Nketia (1963, 1974), Kartomi (1990), Euba (1988, 1990, 2003), Ellingson (1979: 544)

membranophones.<sup>285</sup> Under this generic category *vu*, there are different types, sizes, and makes of drums:

(i) *Vuga* (*vu* = drum, *ga* = big/master/great).

Literally, *vuga* means big drum or master drum. *Vuga*, therefore, is a generic term used for any drum that plays the master or lead role in any Ewe musical ensemble, irrespective of its size.<sup>286</sup>

However, *vuga* as used here, refers to a specific type of drum, and in some cases a specific musical genre or style). *Vuga*, a ‘great drum’ (but not necessarily a master drum) is usually carved in a barrel shape. It is a big tall drum played with a pair of curved wooden beaters/hooks sticks and is associated with the institution of justice among the Anlo Ewe. In an interview with Datey Kumodzie, it was evident that in the past, *vuga* played an important role as a symbol of justice and punishment to all who were deemed recalcitrant. He indicated, “Its [*vuga*] sound at night, when the community was not at war, then signifies the pronouncement of capital punishment to someone who may have committed a serious offence against the society.”<sup>287</sup>

Among the Ewedome Ewe it is also used in court musical traditions.<sup>288</sup> *Vuga* is also called *tavuga* or *abudu* among some Anlo Ewe including Dzodze traditional area.<sup>289</sup>

(ii) *Laklevu* (*la* = animal, *kle* = wild, and *vu* = drum).

Literally, *laklevu* means leopard drum. *Lakle* is the Ewe name for leopard. It may also refer to any wild animal. *Laklevu* is a drum that takes its name from the leopard skin used for its drumhead. It is a friction drum that is played with a curved or hooked stick by rubbing or

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<sup>285</sup> It is worth noting that the same word *vu*, in Ewe, is also a generic name for automobile (cars, buses, trucks etc. of any kind). One, therefore, deciphers the meaning of *vu* from the sentence and its context (as to whether the speaker is referring to a musical instrument/performance or and automobile).

<sup>286</sup> Although with the exception of a few genres, *vuga* is usually the biggest sized drum.

<sup>287</sup> Personal communication with Prof. Datey-Kumodzie (Interview: 06/07/07, Accra, Ghana). See Chapter 2 section 2.2.3 for more information on this kind of punishment.

<sup>288</sup> See Dor (2000: 45)

<sup>289</sup> See Younge (1991)

drawing it across the surface of the powdered membrane—a playing technique that produces sounds very similar to that of the leopard’s cry which is actually meant to strike terror in the enemy (during war times). *Laklevu* is a drum that symbolizes “ferociousness, inhuman strength, and fearlessness characteristic of the leopard.”<sup>290</sup> Usually owned by kings and chiefs (or, for that matter, the community), *laklevu* is a military, royal, and state drum. Nowadays, it is played in the context of royal and military processions and gatherings, especially during festivals and funerals of kings, chiefs, executioners, warriors, accomplished hunters, and other prominent members of the society (who occupy or are affiliated with political or military positions and institutions). According to Bokoga Kumedzro,<sup>291</sup> it is associated with chiefly or kingship stool/seat called *Avadezi*, a political position that proclaims the military character of the occupier. The instrument, like others associated with kingship and the military, is always kept at the court of the king or chief who leads the community in times of war.



**Figure 2-2: Lakevu (an old leopard drum)**

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<sup>290</sup> Fiagbedzi (1997: 158)

<sup>291</sup> Personal communication with Bokoga Kumedzro (see appendix E). Bokoga Kumedzro (a paternal uncle of the author) is one of the oldest and experienced Afa priests and elder in Dzodze until his death late in 2008.

(iii) *Agblovu* (*agblo* = curved or hooked stick, *vu* = drum).

*Agblovu* literally means ‘curved stick drum.’ *Agblovu* is a drum that takes its name from the curved or hooked (an angle-7-shaped) stick that is used in playing it. Nissio Fiagbedzi summarizes the function of *agblovu* as follows:

*Agblovu*...serves as a royal insignia, an instrument of chiefly office. As one of the royal paraphernalia, it accompanies the chief wherever he goes, especially during state durbars where it functions as a musical herald announcing the presence of the king or chief and extolling his general stature and prowess in battle. It does this as a surrogate instrument, playing specific texts that convey the desired public image.<sup>292</sup>

(iv) *Vukpo* (*vu* = drum, *kpo* = short).

*Vukpo* literally means ‘short drum.’ However, *vukpo* as a name refers to a specific Ewe drum, but not just any short drum. It is one of the drums that are restricted to the king or chief’s courts. Among Ewedome (Northern Ewe), *vukpo* functions in a similar way to *agblovu* among the Southern Ewe. *Vukpo* is a signal drum usually hung slanting from the left shoulder of the player who often leads the king or chief in a procession. It should be noted that instead of *vukpo*, *laklevu* might be used to lead a war-chief during procession, especially among the Northern Ewe. According to C. K. Kudjordjie and Togbe Kotoko III of Ghana Nyive,<sup>293</sup> in a procession where *vukpo* is used, the musician plays short rhythmic phrases (which are based on specific verbal texts) intermittently to announce the presence of the king or chief that is being led in procession. The text is either an appellation associated with the king, his stool/seat name, political office and power, and/or remarkable feats attributed to his kingship. *Vukpo* is also played to summon people for communal labor and to lead search parties during emergencies, for example, to rescue

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<sup>292</sup> Fiagbedzi (1997: 156)

<sup>293</sup> Personal communication with Togbi Kotoko III (Interview: 06/16/07, Nyive, Ghana) and Mr. Kudjordjie (Interview: 06/18/07, Ho, Ghana)

and/or retrieve trapped or drowned bodies. In both cases, the verbal texts on which the drum patterns and rhythms may be based would differ from those used during a kingly or political procession.<sup>294</sup>

(v) *Atompani/atumpani* (usually referred to as the ‘talking drums’) is a set of twin drums carved in a bottle shape and played with hooked sticks. Like *agblovu* and *vuga*, *atompani* is used as a speech surrogate in different ways. It is actually one of the most important instruments in political, court, and royal ensembles, and may be regarded as *fiavuga* (chief big drum or chief instrument) in any Ewe kingship paraphernalia. It is mainly used, as a speech surrogate, to send messages. Some researchers indicate that, as a musical instrument, *atompani* (its name and functions among the Ewe) may be partly borrowed from and/or influenced by Akan traditions of Ghana. Some scholars suggest that names for some musical instruments like *atompani* may be the result of cross-cultural influences between the Ewe and Akan of Ghana. Daniel Avorgbedor writes:

Photographs depicting royal processions in 1730 in Abomey and 1965 in Port-Novo not only suggest cross influences between Ewe and Akan court music traditions but also specific performance practices such as playing techniques, construction, symbolism, and use of head transportation for drums in procession (Rouget 1996: 27-27). Beninese terms for musical instruments such as *akofin* and *atonkpalin* (*tompani*, Togo and Ghana) are further examples of this interchange as suggested also by Nketia (1971).<sup>295</sup>

Considering the name *atompani/atumpani* as a lexical item, for instance, it could not be reduced to morphological breakdown, as have been done to other indigenous Ewe instruments discussed above. In Akan language (Twi/Fante), this pair of instruments is spelled *atumpan*. In fact, none of my numerous interviewees, musicians, and even drum makers was able to give me the

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<sup>294</sup> See Kafui (2000)

<sup>295</sup> Avorgbedor (2005: 197). See also Kafui (2000)

semantics, lexical meaning, or morphological composition of the word *atompani* or *atumpani* in Ewe. All indications point to the word being a borrowed one from Akan language.



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**Figure 2-3: Young musicians on Atompani drum**

(vi) *Adabatram* (*adaba* or *adava* = insanity; *tram* = to go astray)

*Adabatram* also called *amegayibo* (*amega* = great/big man/person; *yibo* = gone into spirit realm) encapsulate the drum, the music it produces, and the spirit it embodies.<sup>297</sup> *Adabatram* is the most revered, feared, and awe-inspiring sacred drums of the Northern Ewe (and probably among all

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<sup>296</sup> Photo by the author (May 15, 2007: Peki, Ghana)

<sup>297</sup> See Amoaku (1975) and Agawu (1995)

Ewe). Komla Amoaku states that “the sound of ‘Adabatram’ signifies a moment in which gods and men participate in a ritual as a corporate unit.”<sup>298</sup> Kofi Agawu also states that:

It is believed that whenever it has to be beaten, Adabatram elects a carrier, possesses him – for it is always a man – and brings him to the scene of performance. From the moment in which an individual carrier is possessed until the moment in which the drumming and dancing are over, the carrier surrenders, hypnotic fashion, to the persona of the drum. It is Adabatram who dictates where the carrier should go, at what pace, when and where to stop, and so on. The task (and privilege) of carrying Adabatram is, of course, a serious spiritual and cultural assignment and falls only to individuals steeped in traditional religion and belief systems.<sup>299</sup>

Whenever *adabatram* is carried during performance, either by warriors or people chosen by the spirit of the drum, it does not tolerate the presence of strangers and children. It is believed that some children could become ill after witnessing a performance and *adabatram* may demand the blood of a stranger that it ‘encounters’ on its route. In the history of the drum, *adabatram* was played only on very serious occasions including war, historical festivals such as *Gligbaza* or *Dodoleglimeza* (Wall breaking or getting out of the wall: commemorating migration from Notsie/Hogbe), harvest festivals, and the funeral celebrations of kings and chiefs as well as warriors and executioners.

All the instruments discussed above (with the exception of *adabatram* which is peculiar/unique to Northern Ewe) are common to both southern and northern Ewe and are usually (but not always) played as solo instruments. Other kinds of Ewe drums are often and mostly played in ensemble. There are also certain drums that are peculiar to Southern Ewe and others to the Northern Ewe. The following drums are indigenously southern Ewe instruments but are not exclusively used by them. They include *atsimevu*, *gboba*, *sogo*, *kidi*, *kagan*, *kloboto*, *totodzi*, and *alagavu*.

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<sup>298</sup> Amoaku (1975: 211)

<sup>299</sup> Agawu (1995: 96)



**Figure 2-4: Selected Anlo Ewe Musical Instruments**

vii. *Atsimevu* (*atsi* = tree, *me* = in or inside, *vu* = drum)

*Atsimevu*, literally meaning ‘tree-inside-drum,’ refers to one of the largest and tallest Ewe drums. Typically, a southern Ewe lead drum, *atsimevu* has a long body about five to six feet tall with an open bottom. During performance, it usually rests or leans diagonally on a wooden structure (in the past, it was a forked tree) called *vudetsi* or *vuglatsi* (drum stand). It is from its performance position that it takes its name. It is played usually with two sticks, a stick and hand, or (seldom) with two bare hands as sometimes employed in *gadzo* war drumming.

(viii) *Gboba*

*Gboba*, also called *agboba*, *gbogba*, *boba*, *bomba*, is a cylindrical drum, much bigger in width, but far shorter in height compare to *atsimevu*. Also resting or leaning diagonally on *vedetsi/vuglatsi* (wooden stand), *gboba* is played with sticks and/or hands and it serves as a lead instrument in some Southern Ewe ensembles including *gahu* and *olenke*. In *kinka*, *gboba* is played with both hands, where it serves as a bass drum to support *atsimevu*'s main patterns and also enrich its rhythmic texture by articulating some of its master patterns. Unlike *atsimevu*, *gboba* takes its name from the booming bass sounds (*gbo-* and *-ba*, onomatopoeic syllables/vocables) that it produces. Hence, *gboba* is an onomatopoeic word.

(ix) *Sogo*

*Sogo*, also known as *agbobli*, is 'a teardrop-shaped drum' that plays both lead and supporting roles in many Southern Ewe musical ensembles. Its common name *sogo* is derived from the tree *logo* or *logotsi* (silk cotton tree) from which it is carved. According to discussants,<sup>300</sup> there are two main varieties of *logo* (silk-cotton tree) in Eweland; namely *dzogbelogo* (savannah silk-cotton tree) and *avelogo* (forest silk-cotton tree). *Avelogo*, also known as *logo azagu*,<sup>301</sup> is

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<sup>300</sup> Personal communication with Mr. K. Agbesi and also with Azagunoga Kodzo Tagbolo (see appendix E). Mr. K. Agbesi is an Ewe drum maker (carver) and a master musician at Peki-Ayensu and Mr. Kodzo Tagbolo, is one of the master drummers and musicians (*azagunoga*) in Dzodze.

<sup>301</sup> *Azagu* is a *yevegbe* lexical item referring to drum. It should be noted that *Yeve* is one of the oldest and revered indigenous religious institutions of the Ewe. It is an institution that has its own language called *yevegbe* (Yeve language) as distinct from *Wegbe* (Ewe language). Although a few *Yeve* linguistic items are the same as used in Ewe, the two languages are not mutually intelligible. *Yevegbe* is spoken only and exclusively by initiated members and devotees of *Yeve religious order*. Research evidence has shown that *yevegbe* is linguistically closer to *Fongbe* (Fon language) than to *Wegbe*. Both devotees and authorities of *Yeve* (such as Midawo Asafo of Dzogbefime and the late Minawo Akosonshie Agbalekpor of Dzodze) and scholars whose research focus on *Yeve* including Prof. Datey-Kumodzie indicate in various interviews that *Yevegbe* and *Fongbe* may be, to some degree, mutually intelligible. See also Avorgbedor (1987).

believed to contain *sokpe* (thunder stone: a special spiritual stone).<sup>302</sup> *Sogo*, which is historically carved from *logo azagu*, or *avelogo* (the forest silk-cotton tree), takes its name from the combination of the first syllable ‘*so-*’ in *sokpe* (thunder stone) and the last syllable ‘*-go*’ in *logo* (silk cotton tree). *Sogo* is sometimes referred to as *agbobl*, a less common and historically newer term, which is believed to have been coined from the sounds produced on the instrument. *Agbobl*, therefore, is an onomatopoeic word. *Sogo* is played with two bare hands, a stick and a hand, or two sticks, as a master or lead drum in many ensembles. It also plays supporting roles when either *atsimevu* or *gboba* is featured as the lead drum. *Zevu* (*ze* = pot, *vu* = drum) meaning ‘pot drum’ refers to an *agbobl/sogo* that is constructed with cement or clay instead of carved from a tree trunk or by fastening flat snippets of wood together with iron belts.

(x) *Kidi*, *kloboto*, *totodzi*, and *kagan* are all (mainly and indigenously Southern Ewe) supporting instruments played with two sticks. They all take their names from their tone color (timbre) or distinct sounds they produce as well as their common dominant supporting rhythmic patterns. *Kidi*, alternatively called *asivi/ashivi* (small hand) or *kpetsi*, is primarily a supporting drum smaller in size compared to *sogo* and always played with two sticks; hence, the alternative names showing its position and role vis-à-vis the lead instruments (*atsimevu*, *gboba*, and *sogo*). *Kagan* or *kaganu*, also called *vuvi* (small drum) is the tiniest of all Southern Ewe drums. Being a small highly pitched drum and always played with two tiny sticks, *kagan* produces very high sounds after which it takes its name. *Kloboto* and *totodzi*, regarded as ‘brothers,’ are smaller and larger versions of the same type of instrument that play different rhythmic patterns when they are both featured together in the same ensemble, e.g., in *atsiagbeko*. They may be used as master or

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<sup>302</sup> *Sokpe* is a spiritual embodiment in *Yeve* and other Ewe indigenous religious institutions. Hence in *Yeve* there are spiritual entities and devotees who use *so* (thunder and lightning) as the root of their names and spirituality such as *Xebieso*, *Sogbla*, *Sodza*, *Sogbo*, *Sofahu*, *Hutodzes*, *Sofia*, and *Sonyamade*.

lead instruments when they feature separately in some ensembles as used in *alagavu*. *Kloboto* (and also *totodzi*) is called *alagavu* when it is used as master/lead drum in *alaga* ensemble.

Drums that are indigenous to the Northern Ewe (but are by no means exclusively used by them) generally derived their names from their sizes and roles or functions. They include *vuga*, *asivui*, and *vuvi*.



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**Figure 2-5: Ewedome Boboobo Drum set**

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<sup>303</sup> Photo by the author (June, 2007; Ayoma, Ghana)

(xi) *Vuga* (*vu* = drum and *ga* = big, master, or lead) meaning ‘master drum’ as used here differs from *vuga* as discussed earlier (although they semantically means the same thing). This *vuga*, also nicknamed or sometimes called *Havana*, means master/lead drum and refers to the biggest drum that plays the master or lead role in *boboobo* or *akpese* ensemble. It is played with both hands and serves as the master or lead drum in the ensemble. In recent times, many groups used two to four of this type of drum in one ensemble where they complement each other in producing massive sounds with heavy and complex master rhythmic patterns.

(xii) *Asivui* (*asi* = hand, *vui* = drum) meaning ‘hand drum’ is the hand-played medium-sized, single-headed drum that plays a supporting role when used in *boboobo* ensembles. However, it serves as a lead or master instrument in many other Northern Ewe ensembles including *akpi*, *gabada*, and *zigi*. *Vuvi* (*vu* = drum, *vi* = small) meaning ‘small drum’ is the tinniest single-headed hand-played drum among Northern Ewe musical instruments. It shares common features with *asivui*, except in size, where it is smaller.

Ewe indigenous idiophones include bells and rattles. *Ga* literally meaning ‘iron’ is the generic name for all kinds of bells. There are different kinds of *ga* (bell), which have different names depending on their shape, function and genre or ensemble in which they are used.

(xiii) Common among them is *gankogui* (also called *gakogui*, *gakpavi*, *tigo*, *gatigo* and *gagbleve*). The iron double bell is played with a single stick which produces high and low pitches (source of some of its names) as well as other pitches when played by an expert.



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**Figure 2-6: Gankogui**

(xiv) *Ekpo*, also called *kpodoga*, is a large single bell usually used by the town crier/announcer (commonly among Northern Ewes) to call public attention and to make public announcements. Both *kpodoga* and *gankogui* are held in one hand and played with a stick held in the other hand.

(xv) *Toke (atoke)* is a boat-shaped bell held in the open palm or curled fingers of a hand and stricken with an iron striker. It produces a high-pitched ringing sound from which it takes its name. Among the southern Ewe, a pair of *toke* tuned approximately a third apart may sometimes replace *gankogui* in some ensembles including *brekete* and *atsikevu*, and in performance sessions including *hatsatsia* and *hamekoko*. Among Northern Ewe, it may be used in many ensembles including *boboobo*, *gbolo*, and *adevu*.

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<sup>304</sup> Photo by author (June, 2007; Dzodze, Ghana)



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**Figure 2-7: Atoke/Toke**

(xvi) *Akoge*, (also called *frikyiwa/frintsiwa*, in Akan) is an Ewe finger metal idiophone that comes in two pieces and is popularly called in musicological literature as castanet. The bigger part is worn on the middle finger and the ring-shaped smaller part fits on the thumb. The two parts hit each other to produce a sharp high-pitched sound.



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**Figure 2-8: Akoge (Fritsiwa)**

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<sup>305</sup> Photo by author (June, 2007; Dzodze, Ghana)

<sup>306</sup> Photo by author (June, 2007; Dzodze, Ghana)

(xvii) *Adodo* is a double-ended two clusters of small iron bells forged onto both ends of a sturdy iron rod. Each of the resonators (bells) of each cluster has a small striker metal stickball mounted inside it. It is the metal stickballs in the resonators that produce high pitched rattling metallic sounds; hence it is sometimes described as an ‘iron rattle.’ Generally seen as a religious musical instrument, *adodo* is usually used in religious contexts especially in *Yeve* religion among the Southern Ewe. Normally, a choir of *Yeve* devotees plays (by shaking rhythmically) several of *adodo* to accompany sacred songs in so-called “free rhythm” (usually without drum accompaniment).



**Figure 2-9: Adodo**

(xviii) *Avaga* is also another instrument of the bell family that is associated with spirituality and religion. It is a small clapper bell usually used in many Ewe religio-ritual contexts. Crafted of hand-forged iron, *avaga* is a metal bell that has a small striker metal stickball mounted inside its resonator. The name *avaga* (*ava* = penis, *ga* = iron/bell) is derived from its metal stickball’s resemblance to the male genital organ (*ava*).

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<sup>307</sup> Ibid

(xix) Other Ewe idiophones include *go* (gourd), a generic name for rattles/shakers. Varieties of *go* include *axatse*, a rattle made from dried gourd with beads or plant seeds woven around it; and *akaye*, also made from the same type of dried gourd but with beads or seeds sealed inside the gourd. Usually the gourds of *axatse* are bigger in size than those of *akaye*. *Axatse* is commonly used among Southern Ewe while *akaye* is predominant among Northern Ewe. It must be pointed out that in some cases *axatse* and *akaye* may be used interchangeably in referring to either one of them.



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**Figure 2-10: Axatse/Akaye**

(xx) *Akpe*, sometimes called *asikpe* or *asikpoli*, refers to handclap, which is usually a predominant idiophone used in virtually all Ewe musical ensembles. The importance of *akpe* (hand clap) in Ewe musical practice is often underrated, especially by researchers and non-Ewe, who try to learn and perform Ewe music. Among the Ewe, *akpe* (handclap) is as important as many other instruments in the ensemble. In some genres and musical styles, the sound of *akpe* is not only indispensable but also needed in much volume and so much cherished that participants use wooden clappers to aid more *akpe* (clap) sound in their performance.

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<sup>308</sup> Photo by author (June, 2007; Dzodze, Ghana)

(xxi) Aerophones, generically called *kpe*, include *ladzo* (animal horn) and *dze* or *edze/adze* (whistle). Different kinds of whistles include *asito/ashito* (hand whistle), *neto* (coconut/palm nut shell whistle), *paploto/pamploto* (bamboo whistle), and *atsito/atsikuto* (wood/seed whistle). *Ladzo* (animal horn or horns in general) is one of the most important Ewe court or royal musical instruments. Like *laklevu*, *vuga*, *agblovu*, *vukpo*, and *atompani*, *ladzo* is also considered part of the royal regalia of any Ewe (especially Northern Ewe) king or chief. Musically, *ladzo* plays a role similar to *vukpo*—playing short musical phrases, based on specific verbal texts, as appellations for chiefs and other prominent figures in the ruling class during royal processions. Although *ladzo* is usually played as a solo instrument, it may function as part of an ensemble. As a solo, duet or trio, *ladzo* sometimes plays intermittently as a king or chief speaks on special occasions. Such interludes, sometimes played in dialogue with *vukpo*, serve as emphasis on the king's speech.



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**Figure 2-11: A young musician playing *ladzo* (animal horn)**

My field research, as well as the available literature on Ewe organology, does not show the existence of an indigenous Ewe chordophone.<sup>310</sup> Two sources make some reference to the probability of Ewe string instruments. George Dor, writing on ecology and musical instruments states that, “the name *benta*, a lute, still exists as an allegory in the memory of the aged.” In his footnote to this quotation, Dor explains that: “In a personal conversation, my father, Seth Dor, explained to me that a certain kind of rope in Ewedome forests is called *bentaka* (the string of *benta*) because it was used as the string of the obsolete lute called *benta*.”<sup>311</sup> Daniel Avorgbedor, writing on the musical resources of the Ewe of Togo and Benin, also indicates that indigenous

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<sup>309</sup> Photo by the author (June, 2007; Ayoma, Ghana)

<sup>310</sup> Chordophones refer to instruments in which sound is produced through the excitation of stretched strings (string instruments).

<sup>311</sup> Dor (2000: 42)

chordophones are rare among the Ewe. However, he gives a clear description of an obsolete raft zither:

The raft zither known as ayakpa in Benin is played for personal enjoyment and in a mixed ensemble known by the same name, ayakpa, which is performed by women of the court. (A recent study argues that women do not actually play the instrument but hold it as a prop [Rouget 1996].) The raft zither has twelve strings attached to bridges on both ends and over a bundle of stretched palm stems. Two persons play a version of one-stringed raft zither [that] has a gourd resonator attached. The construction and playing techniques of the raft zither emphasize percussive effects and render the instrument an idiochord. These descriptions apply well to parallel practices found among the Birom of northern Nigeria where it is called yonkwo.<sup>312</sup>

Notwithstanding the scarcity of indigenous chordophones, there are now string instruments that are common among, but neither indigenous nor unique to, the Ewe. These common but foreign or borrowed instruments may be accounted for when we consider Nissio Fiagbedzi's taxonomy. From a more historical and cultural, rather than organological perspective, Fiagbedzi puts Ewe musical instruments into three categories as: (1) those that may be regarded as specifically Ewe; (2) those borrowed in course the of their musical life from other Ghanaian or West African cultures; and (3) those resulting from their contact with Western European civilization.<sup>313</sup> Using this classification, the instruments discussed above (i.e., from *vuga* through *kpe/ladzo*), fall under category one of Fiagbedzi's classification. Category two instruments include *brekete* and *dondo* (as used in borrowed ritual and religious dances such as *tigare* and *brekete* religious institutions from northern Ghana and Togo) and *tamalin/tamale* (frame drum). *Brekete* and *dondo* (an hourglass-shaped tension drum) are both double-headed drums played with curved or hooked stick.<sup>314</sup> Instruments from Western cultures include

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<sup>312</sup> Avorgbedor (2005: 205)

<sup>313</sup> Fiagbedzi (1997: 155)

<sup>314</sup> It should be noted that *Brekete* and *dondo* are instruments that are indigenous to many other ethnic groups in West Africa. They are traditionally called *gungon* and *lunga* respectively in Dagbani, and are indigenous to the

*biglo/bugle, sanku* or *kasanku*<sup>315</sup> (as used in more recent genres including, *boboobo* and church choral groups).

Further descriptions of some of the instruments discussed in this section are scattered in earlier literature by some earlier researchers of Ewe music. Their works may be found in both print and electronic media.<sup>316</sup>

In conclusion of this section, it is necessary to note that today, some of the instruments are used in different contexts (but not entirely different ways). Due to the absence of war, the sacred and/or politico-military instruments are used during funeral celebrations of traditional state dignitaries including kings, chiefs, some elders, and heroes. They are also used during festivals as well as in purification rituals. Some of these instruments including *adabatram* are (considered) war gods in their own rights. These (war gods) instruments, mostly drums and horns which are usually many decades (if not centuries) old, were initiated and spiritually fortified in ancient times for military and political purposes. For these and other socio-religious reasons, individuals, irrespective of status, class, sex, and age, do not and cannot own some of these instruments. The community (state, town, village, clan), the office of the king and chiefs, and community based politico-military institutions usually own them. Hence such proverbial sayings and song text as:

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Dagomba of northern Ghana. *Dondo* is also an indigenous instrument among the Yoruba of Nigeria where it is traditionally called *dundun*. See Nketia (1974) Chenorff (1979), Euba(1990, 2004), Younge (1991), and Avorgbedor (2005)

<sup>315</sup> According to Fagbedzi (1997: 155-156), “the term, *sanku* appears to have been derived from the Dutch word, *zangkoor* meaning the singing choir. But among the Ewes as well as among the Akans and Gas, *sanku* has come to refer to the harmonium or organ and the accordion (with or without a keyboard). On the other hand, in the view of Helen Hause (1945) *sanku* is a Mende word for a stringed instrument, thereby suggesting its West African origin. Regardless of which theory is more likely, the southern Ewes have possibly added the prefix *ka* to *sanku* to distinguish all stringed instruments from keyboard instruments such as the organ. The word *kasanku* may have been coined to accommodate a new-found instrument of the stringed family.”

<sup>316</sup> See Younge (1991), Fagbedzi (1997), Amegago (2000), Kafui (2000), Gorlin (2000), Avorgbedor (2004), <http://www.cnmat.berkeley.edu/~ladzekpo/index.html>

*Nyonu kpo ga medoa/medua agblovu o, towoe nye atsibлага*  
(Lit. A rich woman does not establish/dance *agblovu*, yours is *atsibлага*)

*Evi kpo ga medoa/medua atompani o*  
(Lit. A rich child does not establish/dance *atompani*)

In a deeper sense, although both texts specifically mention ‘woman,’ and child, respectively, they refer or allude generally to all people. The fact is that no *individual*, male or female, rich or poor can (or is permitted to) establish an *agblovu*, *atompani* or any of the revered musical instruments or ensembles in Ewe society. *Agblovu* and *atompani*, like other sacred, politico-military, and ritual instruments and musical genres, cannot be established as personal, or social musical clubs. While individuals may establish socio-recreational musical genres including *atsibлага*, *boboobo*, *gota*, *zigi*, *bobo*, *gbolo*, and *adzro*, no one individual has the right and the power to establish ‘specially’ revered genres and instruments such as *agblovu*, *adabatram*, *laklevu*, *vuga*, *vukpo*, and *atompani*.

According to Tsiamiga Agbedeza, *Awavuwu* (war/military drums) are believed to have powerful military spirits that derived from the souls of war captives, prisoners, and enemies that were killed in previous wars.<sup>317</sup> Often draped around these instruments (not only as spiritual embodiments but also as military or war decorations and trophies) are objects believed to be, among other things, human skulls, bones (limbs), and other ‘war trophies’ which are usually wrapped in white or brownish pieces of cloth or plant fiber. Not only are successes in war attributed to these instruments and their sacred and military-spiritual decorations, but they also symbolize the military prowess of the state, the people and the warriors.<sup>318</sup> According to my discussants and collaborators, due to their spiritual and military power and purpose, such sacred

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<sup>317</sup> Tsiamiga S. Agbedeza is the main chief linguist of Togbe Kodzo Dei XI, the *Fiaga* (King) of Peki Traditional Area (also called *Deiga*). Personal communication with Tsiamiga S. Agbedeza (see appendix E)

<sup>318</sup> Ibid. See also Amoaku (1975), Agawu (1995), and Bluwey (2000)

instruments are kept in shrines or warrior chiefs' palaces. During war and/or other very "serious and important" occasions they are played by either designated warrior musicians (usually with very strong personal gods) or by those chosen by the spirits of the instruments on specific occasions.<sup>319</sup>

#### **2.1.4 Instrumental Construction and Environmental Influences**

The previous discussion demonstrates the predominance of drums in Ewe culture. Although these drums are different in size, shape, name, and function, they are usually made from two main material sources: wood and animal skin (hide). These materials constitute the two parts of a drum: (1) the drum shell or resonating body and (2) the membrane.<sup>320</sup> Historically, Ewe drums have been carved from tree trunks; that is, hollowing out resonators from tree trunks — a process Fiagbedzi termed "the old method."<sup>321</sup> Today, it is mostly Ewedome (Northern Ewe) drums that are still produced by the old method. The Southern Ewe (Anlo)<sup>322</sup> and others have resorted to using pieces of wood slabs fastened together by iron belts—"the new method."<sup>323</sup> The difference in construction materials and techniques between the Northern and Southern Ewe has historical and ecological explanations.

Environmentally, the Southern Ewe are located in predominantly coastal plains and low savanna land where few drum-making trees exist with trunks large enough to yield single drum shells. The Northern Ewe, on the other hand, primarily occupy the forest areas where large trees

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<sup>319</sup> Ibid. See also Amoaku (1975), Mamattah (1976), Agawu (1995), Bluwey (2000)

<sup>320</sup> See Nketia (1963: 7-15) and Dor (2000: 42)

<sup>321</sup> See Fiagbedzi (1977: 24)

<sup>322</sup> Anlo is used here to represent all southern Ewe sub-ethnic groups including Anlo-futatowo, Tonu- Mafi-Agave-Battor-Mefeawo, Some-Aflao-Dzodzeawo, Ave-Avenoawo, and all other Ewe people located in the southern part of the Volta Region of Ghana.

<sup>323</sup> Fiagbedzi (1977: 24). See also Dor (2000)

from which drums may be carved are prevalent. Historically, the Ewe trace their ancestry to Notsie as noted in chapter I. Notsie is located in a forest region in present-day central Togo, and therefore, shares similar vegetation with the central and northern Volta Region, the home of the Northern Ewe of Ghana. Given the abundance of trees in Notsie, it seems likely that Ewe drums were carved from tree trunks at that point (during their stay at Notsie) in the Ewe history.<sup>324</sup> Evidently, this tradition of drum construction continued among Northern and Southern Ewe at their present abode, after their migration; however, the Southern Ewe had to adapt to the environment soon after settling in an area where the vegetation differed from that of Notsie.<sup>325</sup> The Ewedome (Northern) Ewe continued with the same technology since they inhabited an environment similar to Notsie. According to George Dor:

Dewornu considers the ecology of Ewedome to be similar to that of Notsie; if so, it promises greater continuity in the instrumental resources of the Ewedome, including their method of drum making. In contrast to the ecology of Anloland, the inland Ewe region has abundant large trees, and about 90% of Ewedome drums are carved. These carved drums differ from Anlo drums in construction and shape.<sup>326</sup>

Although the Southern Ewe now use the new method of drum construction, the change was not abrupt. In separate interviews, Togbi Seshie of Aflao and C. K. Kudjordji of Ho indicated that Anlo Ewe's change to the newer construction method was a gradual process; a process to which both authorities assigned ecological explanation. "Initially, at the present location, Anlo Ewe continued making drums from tree trunks because there were isolated forests that had big trees."<sup>327</sup> The sparse, isolated forests with large trees existed in parts of the predominantly savanna land, especially around inland Anlo towns and villages including

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<sup>324</sup> See Dor (2000)

<sup>325</sup> See Fiagbedzi (1977), and Dor (2000)

<sup>326</sup> Dor (2000: 44)

<sup>327</sup> Mr. Kudjordjie (Personal Communication: Interview 06/18/07, Ho, Ghana)

Dzodze, Ave Dakpa, and stretching west to Akatsi, Adidome and Tongu districts. This environmental feature provided opportunity for continuing the old method inherited from their ancestral home Notsie, for a few centuries

The old tradition, however, could not be sustained due to increased deforestation as trees were used for fuel and other economic needs. Southern Ewe were then compelled to develop a different and sustainable method of drum construction—“the new method.” This change notwithstanding, there are still certain Southern Ewe drums (including *yevevu*) that are carved from tree trunks (“the old method”). The continuous, though isolated, use of carved drums in court musical practices and the religious institutions like *Yeve* establishes historical and cultural evidence of the Southern Ewe’s inhabitation of a forest region prior to settling in their present land.<sup>328</sup> Writing from an eco-social historical perspective, E. Kwaku Akyeampong, a Ghanaian Harvard Professor of History, supported this premise. In his book *Between the Sea and the Lagoon: An Eco-Social History of the Anlo of Southeastern Ghana, 1850 to Recent Times*,<sup>329</sup> the social historian indicated the Anlo had originally been an agrarian people who migrated to their present coastal and low savanna location from Notsie. According to Akyeampong, the Anlo Ewe agrarian traditions have not disappeared; in addition to fishing, they are Ghana’s largest producers of shallots. They use intensive growing methods to coax bumper harvests from small, sandy plots.

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<sup>328</sup> See Dor (2000)

<sup>329</sup> See Akyeampong (2001)

### **2.1.5 Composition and Procreation: Ewe Concept of Master Musician**

This section discusses the parallels between procreation, artistic composition, and creativity. I argue that since in Ewe culture and cosmology, females are believed to be the source of life and since Ewe indigenous musical titles and terminologies are linguistically and ontologically feminine, musical creation and practice is conceptualized as giving birth to life. I reiterate that from Ewe cosmological perspective, any process believed or understood to be analogous to procreation is characterized with feminine attributes, gender, and often, terms. I therefore embarked on a detailed musico-linguistic analysis of Ewe artistic terms and titles including *azaguno*, *hesino* and their sub-categories to support my claim and then conclude that, in indigenous Ewe concept, music production is analogous to propagation.

#### **2.1.5.1 *Azaguno, Hesino, and Heno: Ewe Musical Titles***

Three main categories of musical titles and positions exist among the Ewe. These include *Azaguno*, (master musician, instrumental composer/arranger and percussionist), *Hasino/hesino/Hakpala* (vocal music composer/composer-poet/composer-singer), and *Heno* (vocalist/cantor/lead-singer). To completely understand these terms and their philosophical underpinnings, consideration of their morphological structure, semantics, and etymology is essential.

*Azaguno* is a generic term for drummer (or percussionist) in Ewe. Morphologically, *azaguno* is made up of *azagu* and *no*. Etymologically, *azagu* is a *Yeve* lexical item referring to drum (or the tree, *logo azagu*, from which the drum is carved) and sometimes to any instrumental designation. Similarly, *no* is an Ewe linguistic item, derived from a feminine parental/kinship title, meaning mother or female parent. Hence, *azaguno* (*azagu* = drum; and *no* = mother)

literally meaning mother of drum, is the title for an Ewe drummer (irrespective of gender<sup>330</sup>). This title distinguishes the bearer from any common drum player, often called *vufola* (*vu* = drum; *fol* = player). These terms differ in that *azaguno* is a traditional artistic title while *vufola* is merely a descriptive term. It should be noted that it takes more than musical skills and knowledge to be titled *azaguno*. Among other prerequisites and qualities, an *azaguno* must be well educated by traditional Ewe standards (see next sub-section below). *Azaguno* may also refer to an instrumental (percussive) music composer. Hierarchically, the suffix *ga* (master or big), *vi* (small), and *kpe*<sup>331</sup> (help or support) may be added to *azaguno* to distinguish between the various levels and classes of drummers or instrumentalists. *Azagunoga* (drum + mother + big), literally meaning “the great/big mother of drum,” refers to the master drummer (this is not synonymous to “lead drummer” since not all lead drummers hold the title *azagunoga*).<sup>332</sup> *Azagunovi* (drum + mother + small) refers to a young and/or apprentice drummer or percussionist. *Azagunokpe* (drum + mother + help) refers to a supporting drummer who may be a mature or veteran percussionist, or young and apprentice instrumentalist (as in the case of *azagunovi*).<sup>333</sup>

Like *azaguno*, the generic name for an Ewe vocal music composer or composer-poet is *hesino* (also called *hasino*, *hadzeno*, or *hadzeno*)<sup>334</sup> while a cantor, lead singer, or singer-poet is called *heno* (also called *hano*, *hadzila*, or *hadzito*). Another term describing a vocal music composer is *hakpala* (literally meaning ‘song carver’). *Hesino/hasino*, as a lexical item, is made

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<sup>330</sup> Among the Ewe the title or position *azaguno* is always occupied by a man even though the title is feminine, linguistically and conceptually.

<sup>331</sup> *Kpe* (as in *azagunokpe*) is also believed to have been derived from *Yevegbe*. See Ibid.

<sup>332</sup> It should be emphasized that in Ewe culture being a ‘lead drummer,’ knowing how to play, or playing the lead drum in an ensemble or performance is not enough to bear the title *azagunoga* (master drummer). Bearing the title or being conferred with the title *azagunoga/azaguno* requires a more holistic and deeper artistic, historical, socio-cultural, moral, philosophical, and ritual knowledge and values other than just percussive or musical skills. Hence, not every drum player bears the title.

<sup>333</sup> Amegago (2000: 141)

<sup>334</sup> *Hadzeno* is peculiar to ‘old’ Ewe (especially Northern Ewe) usage. It is less commonly used nowadays.

up of three syllables, each with its own meaning. *He*, a diminution of the root word *ha*, means song or vocal music; *si* means push (as in child labor);<sup>335</sup> and *no* means mother or female parent.<sup>336</sup> Similarly, *hakpala* is made up of *ha* (song) and *kpala* (carver/composer). The etymology of the words or titles *hesino*, *heno*, and *hakpala* could be deduced from the Ewe conception of vocal music composition and functions of the bearers of the titles.

From linguistic, artistic, and Ewe cosmological perspectives, parallels may be drawn between the creative processes of musical composition, sculpting, and procreation. First, in considering *no* (mother or female), the Ewe conception of creativity is likened to procreation (i.e., giving birth or composing life). Undoubtedly, Ewe indigenous philosophical thoughts underscore that life is an artistic creative act of Mawu, *Se*, or *Bomeno* (the Creator). Ewe cosmology, therefore, recognizes the woman or female gender (*no*, *adzino*, or *nyonu*) as the source of life. Thus, *no* (female or mother), besides signifying female parent or femininity, is, in a deeper sense, an important concept denoting procreation—source of life and the processes of life creation or composition. Since musical composition is understood to be the creation of, or giving birth to a new form or kind of artistic life, the term *no*, which encapsulates creativity, birth, and life, is often appropriately attached to titles given to composers (*hesino*, *heno*, and *azaguno*) regardless of the musician’s gender).<sup>337</sup> Other terms underscoring the Ewe concept of composition and singing as acts of “giving birth to life” include *hadzila*, *hadzeno*, and *hadzito*, all meaning cantor, lead singer, or singer.<sup>338</sup> In a deeper sense, however, *hadzila* means “the one who gives birth to song”; *hadzeno* literally means “mother who gives birth to song”; and *hadzito*

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<sup>335</sup> *Si* (in other contexts) could also mean ‘to cut.’

<sup>336</sup> The position or title *hesino/hasino* is a feminine one. Whether or not the bearer of the title is a man or woman, he/she bears the same title.

<sup>337</sup> See Fiagbedzi (1997), Amegago (2000), and Dor (2000).

<sup>338</sup> Unlike *hesino*, *heno*, and *azaguno* all of which are (or used as) musical titles, *hadzila*, *hadzino*, and *hadzito* are used more as descriptive terms. They however, in no uncertain terms, lend credence to the parallel being drawn here.

literally means “father who gives birth to song.” *Dzi* (pronounced with a low tone) means, “to procreate” as in *dzi vi* (give birth to a child), *dzila* (parent, usually biological parent) and *dzi ha* (give birth to a song). When *dzi* is used in a musical context, however, it refers to vocal music production. Hence, the indigenous underlining concept of *hadzila/hadzito/hadzeno* (*ha* = song, *dzi* = procreate or give birth to, *-la* or *-to* = doer/owner: one who performs the action, and *no* = mother) is the person who gives life to the song.<sup>339</sup>

A second conceptual parallel may be drawn between musical composition and the art of carving as denoted in the Ewe word *hakpala* (composer-poet) and *nukpala* (carver). *Kpa* (pronounced with a low tone) means “carve,” “create,” or “compose” and *kpala* means “carver,” “creator,” or “composer.” Hence, “to compose a song” in Ewe is *kpa ha*, which may also be translated as “to carve or create vocal music.” *Hakpala*, therefore, means the carver, creator, or composer of vocal music. This conceptual parallel is meaningful given the craftsmanship, ingenuity, originality, and high sense of aesthetics essential for the art, act, and process of both musical composition and sculpting of any kind.<sup>340</sup>

Additionally, the term used for those who support the cantor in vocal music performance further reiterates the above conceptual parallels. *Haxeawo*, *haxiawo* or *halelawo* is the name for the “support cantors” as different from chorus singers. *Haxeawo*, *haxiawo*, *halelawo* (*ha-* = song, *-xeawo/-xiawo/-lelawo* = catchers/receivers/holders) refers to the singers who support the cantor in introducing or intoning songs and leading the singing. Their role is to serve as the bridge or intermediary between the cantor and chorus. When *heno* (cantor) intones or introduces a song (*do ha da*), *haxeawo* (support song leaders) “catch” the song (*xea ha*) and pass it on to or usher

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<sup>339</sup> It should be pointed out that the syllable or prefix *-la* as in *hadzila* is not the same as ‘*la*,’ a definite article ‘the.’ ‘*-la*’ as used here rather refers to the ‘doer’ or the person performing the action. Also ‘*-to*’ as in *hadzito* meaning ‘father,’ could be used (or mean the same thing) as ‘*-la*’—‘doer/owner/the person performing the action.’

<sup>340</sup> See also Fiagbedzi (1997) and Dor (2000)

in the chorus, who then sings the entire song. This role of *haxeawo* may be likened to (1) the role of a birth attendant or a midwife who assists the expectant mother during childbirth; and (2) a midwife as a person who produces, or aids in producing, something new or different. Song then is an artistic offspring (a child), which is intoned (given birth/life to) by the composer/cantor (the mother) who is assisted in the process by support song leaders (midwives) who prepare the product (baby) before ushering it into the ensemble (the larger society).

It is important to note that *Azagunoga* (the master drummer), *azaguno* (the drummer), and in some cases *yenua*<sup>341</sup> (the dance leader or lead choreographer) are also composers. While they create new musical ideas, most of the drum patterns and dance steps or movements they create are based on verbal texts that have meaning (see section 2.2.2 “Musical Text” for details). Also, master drummers compose new drum rhythmic motifs (*vugbe yeye wo*) to match new songs just as new dance movements are choreographed in consonance with song and drum rhythms.<sup>342</sup> The master drummer as a true composer is not unique to the Ewe of West Africa, but is a phenomenon in many Sub-Saharan African cultures. In his book on Yoruba drumming, African musicologist and composer Akin Euba illustrates how drum pieces are composed on *dundun* drums as self-sufficient items.<sup>343</sup> It should also be noted that, although both *azaguno* and *hesino/heno* mean the same as *vufola* and *hakpala/hadzila* respectively; the former are often

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<sup>341</sup> *Yenua* is not a common indigenous title given to a choreographer or dance leader. Indigenously, there is no designated traditional title as “master dancer.” My research findings suggest that *yenua* is a recently coined term being used to describe a lead dancer (and/or dance choreographer) of certain structurally rigid or strictly choreographed dances or dance-drumming ensembles (See Amegago 2000: 114). It should be noted that among the Ewe there is no title or official artistic designation as “master dancer” as often used in African music and dance productions, ensembles, and performances in Europe and North American. Among the Ewe everybody dances, although it is not everyone that is a ‘good dancer’ or has the artistic or choreographic skills and know-how required to compose a new dance or movement style. Ewe therefore, have lead dancers, who together with the *Azagunoga*, *hesino*, *henowo* and other knowledgeable members of the ensemble or dance-drumming club choreograph dances for such genres that demand strict dance choreography.

<sup>342</sup> See Fiagbedzi (1997), Amegago (2000), Dor (2000), and Badu-Young (2002)

<sup>343</sup> See Euba (1990: 387)

used as socio-musical/artistic titles (especially among the Southern Ewe) that bestow not only artistic honors but also social status; the latter describe or identify anyone who plays such roles in particular situations, ensembles, or contexts. Hence, titles precede the names of eminent Ewe musicians such as *Hesino* Vinoko Akpalu of Anyako, *Azagunoga* Kodzo Agbebo and *Azagunoga* Komivi both of Dzodze, and *Hesino* Dunyo among others.

Among the Ewe, a man always occupies the *azagunoga* position, even though the title *azagunoga* is, linguistically and conceptually, feminine. Because traditionally women do not play lead or master drum (if at all they play drum of any kind), men dominate the position, even though philosophically, the title is a feminine one.<sup>344</sup> Similarly, the titles *hesino* and *heno* are both feminine, irrespective of the holder's gender. Unlike, *azagunoga* or *azaguno*, the holder of the title *hesino* and/or *heno* may be male or female, although unscientific statistics indicate that there may be more male composer-poets and singers than female ones in Eweland.

One might question why the Ewe ancestors designed and/or named these positions and titles as feminine. The answer may be as philosophical as it is conceptual. As discussed previously, musical creation and practice (composing, arranging, organizing, and performing) is conceptualized as giving birth to life (i.e., to procreate). In Ewe culture and cosmology, females are believed to be the source of life; thus, any process believed or understood to be analogous to procreation is characterized with feminine attributes, gender, and often, terms. From the preceding musico-linguistic analysis of *azaguno*, *hesino* and their sub-categories, it may be concluded that, in indigenous Ewe concept, music production is analogous to propagation. The bases of this traditional conception and indigenous knowledge are rooted in Ewe cosmology.

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<sup>344</sup> It should be pointed out that in modern times Ewe women not only play some drums but also play master or lead drums in some ensembles. In some African cultures, women play the drums while men mostly do the dance.

They are not limited to *azaguno* and *hesino* as many other titles and terminologies reiterate this indigenous musico-linguistic, cosmological, and philosophical concept.

Again, within the artistic arena, the concept (artistic procreation) is discernible in *vudodo* (dance-drumming club formation or establishment). The term *vudodo* means forming or establishing a dance-drumming club. Like previous terms discussed, semantically and etymologically, the word reveals a clear concept of propagation. *Vudodo* (*vu* = drum, *dodo* = planting) literally means, “drum planting” or “music cultivation” and refers to musical club formation, where drum (as explained earlier) denotes the total concept of music, dance, and related activities. Therefore, formation of a dance-drumming club is conceived to be the process of planting and cultivating a tree or farm product that grows with time. The Ewe, therefore, draw another parallel between music production and plant cultivation; thus, “planting a drum” is analogous to planting a tree where music is like a fruit tree, for example, that is planted, nurtured, grows, bears fruits, and feeds the soul and spirit of humanity.

Other cultural contexts exist in which *no* (mother) may be used. For example, it may be used in titles signifying leadership, procreation, scholarship, and spirituality, irrespective of gender. Those titles include *Awuno* (sage, “philosopher,” and scholar, usually religious), *Bokono* (lit. mother of *bo* or *boko* spiritual power; refers to diviner, usually of *Afa* divinity), and *Huno* (lit. mother of *hu* spirit; a title for a priest or spiritual leader). Also, both ‘*da*’ as in *dada* and ‘*na*’ as in *nane* (all meaning mother/mama/mom/mummy) are synonyms of *no* (mother) and are used as infixes and suffixes to other terms and titles. For example, ‘*-na-*’ is used as an infix in *Minawo* and ‘*-da-*’ as in *Midawo* (both are titles for female and male high priests or leaders respectively in *Yeve* religious institutions). Also *dada* is used as suffix to *ava* (war) as in *Avadada* (war

commander or war chief).<sup>345</sup> *Avadada*, literally meaning “war mother,” is the politico-military title for war chief and the central wing commander of the Anlo military institution (see chapter 5 for details). Also relevant to emphasizing the concept of women being the source of life is the Ewe concept of masculinity and femininity in plants. A plant that does not bear fruits is labeled a male plant while a plant bearing fruits is labeled a female plant (e.g., *adibatsu* and *adibano* are male and female pawpaw trees [*indicia papaya*] respectively).<sup>346</sup>

### 2.1.6 Qualities and Functions of An Ewe Musician

The qualities and functions of the creative people titled musicians and composers are important to consider. These individuals combine the instruments, the language, and their poetic talents and musical skills to yield a product that both entertains and educates. Kwabena Nketia recapitulates certain attributes of African composers in general. These include (1) knowledge of the culture, history, and philosophy of the people; (2) clarity of mind, poetic skills, and sound linguistic background; (3) sensitivity, retentive memory, and ability to concentrate; and (4) good vocal apparatus, good sense of rhythm, and high improvisatory ability.<sup>347</sup> The traditional musician also acts in extra-musical roles that vary from culture to culture within Africa. Among the Senufo, he may be a healer and sorcerer. Among the Mandingo, special castes of musicians serve as historians, having memorized vast repertoires of songs and narratives commemorating past events and genealogies.<sup>348</sup> Among other African nations, including the Ewe, styles of drumming

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<sup>345</sup> In Dahomey, *dada* may be used as a political title, i.e., it may refer to a “king.” See for example Isichei (1997)

<sup>346</sup> *Adibatsu* (*adiba* = pawpaw; *tsu/atsu* = male/masculine/husband) and *adibano* (*adiba* = pawpaw; and *no* = female/mother/feminine)

<sup>347</sup> See Nketia (1974: 53-56)

<sup>348</sup> The Senufos are located in the northern part of Cote d’Ivoire and the southern regions of Mali. Mandingo: A member of any of various peoples inhabiting a large area of the upper Niger River valley of western Africa. It also

are closely associated with specific social classes, roles and functions (such as chieftaincy, execution, and war), with the king himself being the master drummer (for example, the Dagomba of northern Ghana).

In addition to these general qualities of a master musician, Kofi Nyidevu Awoonor outlined characteristics of Ewe composers, including having good aural perception, being poetic, being selective in word choice, and having a pleasant personality.<sup>349</sup> It should be emphasized that in Ewe society being a ‘lead drummer,’ knowing how to play, or playing the lead drum in an ensemble or performance is not enough to bear the title *azagunoga* (master drummer). Master musicianship requires high level of competence. Bearing the title or being conferred with the title *azagunoga/azaguno* requires a more holistic and deeper artistic, historical, socio-cultural, moral, philosophical, and ritual knowledge and values other than just percussive or musical skills. Hence, not every drum player bears the title. Within the context and status of *azaguno* and *heno/hesino*, the master musician plays a very special role as one who must be not only a consummate artist, but also wise and well-educated (according to traditional standards to which the society subscribes) and capable of exercising his power of influence with great responsibility.<sup>350</sup> He must be deeply experienced in issues concerning human nature, constantly evidencing extraordinary alertness and perceptiveness. According to a traditional saying, a master drummer must have seven eyes with which he can see the skeleton inside people. Turkson reiterates these qualities of a master musician and emphasizes the role of the cantor. He writes:

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refers to a group of closely related Mande languages including Bambara, Malinke, and Maninka, widely spoken in western Africa. They are also called Mandekan

<sup>349</sup> See Awoonor (1974: 18-19)

<sup>350</sup> I see the Euro-American designations and titles “master drummer” and “master dancer” (as they are used to describe many “African drummers and dancers” whether Africans or non-Africans) as commercial terms. In the West, those terms are more commercial terminologies than traditional artistic titles in my estimation. That is very true when you get to find out that most of the so called “master drummers” and “master dancers” were never drummers, let alone be titled ‘masters’ in their home countries, towns, and villages. This is an issue that needs further research attention.

Like the drummer who is the custodian of society's history, the cantor is given the same treatment by his society. As a composer, he is able to create a song on the spur of the moment and teach it to members of his community. In fact, it is his compositional practices that are employed in the songs.<sup>351</sup>

These qualities are considered innate and manifest from infancy to adulthood. A potential child composer may often display a high level of concentration during different activities. She/He is often very inquisitive, unusually philosophical, and proverbial in his/her speech and use of language. Additionally, this individual shows a keen interest in, and relentless efforts at, varying tasks during music and dance performances. Upon this background, the socio-cultural and physical environmental factors serve as catalysts in nurturing the individual into a full-blown master musician by Ewe standards in adult life.<sup>352</sup> As Mawulolo M. Amegago highlights:

A composer's sensitivity may stem from his or her social experience of joy, happiness, suffering and worry, sympathy, empathy, or needs within a given social environment. Such experiences form the basis of his/her unique expression and imagination. In addition, a potential child may not develop the skill for playing certain instruments if the instrumental resources are not available in his or her environment.<sup>353</sup>

Because of the enormous influence an Ewe musician has on the populace, the qualities of this individual cannot be overemphasized. An intensive, indigenous educational background and deep understanding of the culture (including language) enables Ewe and other African composers to assume multiple roles as mediators, authors, historians, public relation officers, communicators, cultural critics, ambassadors, social workers, and entertainers.

According to Dan Goolin, in Euro-American societies (and many modern societies worldwide), a successful politician, social activist, or advertiser must be adept at propaganda

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<sup>351</sup> See A. R. Turkson (1989: 77)

<sup>352</sup> See Flolu (1999) and Gbolonyo (2006)

<sup>353</sup> Amegago (2000: 116)

and/or be a master media manipulator.<sup>354</sup> This attribute, he said, is necessary in part because the print and electronic media serve as the means by which such individuals deliver messages, products, and policies to the people. Among the Ewe (and in many indigenous African cultures), politicians and opinion leaders—the “movers and shakers” of people and ideas—usually rely on music to relay messages. They often rely on musicians (if they are not musicians themselves) to promote their messages because, like television, radio, and newspaper, music is the prime communication medium and musicians are masters of the art. A musical product might be a political advertisement, a call for social justice, a memorial to an outstanding feat, an explanation or comment on an astrological phenomenon, a lesson on personal hygiene or birth control. If musicians are vested with the power to assure these messages were believed and embraced, society would surely ensure these individuals possess qualities beyond artistry and are *competent* by indigenous standards.<sup>355</sup>

In a larger sense, Ewe society expects the composer to create an image of a good and desirable life and society, not so much reflecting the life that people actually live, but rather an ideal to which everyone can aspire. Composers are therefore constantly inspired by heightened human experiences requiring urgent expression. Their improvisational potential and technical expertise enable them to extemporize and/or respond immediately to the demands or issues arising in the art making and social mediation process. Ewe believe that true musicians’ inability to respond appropriately or lack of avenue to do may affect them psychologically. Hence, the Ewe may say:

*Ha de amea gbe*  
(Lit. song has sent the person wandering afield)

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<sup>354</sup> See Goolin (2000)

<sup>355</sup> The Ewe indigenous concept of *competence* is a holistic one.

Or

*Ha do tsue*

(Lit. song has made him/her insane).

In an introduction to the first volume of the research project dubbed Eweland Series, *A Handbook of Eweland Volume 1*, Francis Agbodeka painted a vivid picture of the sagacity of Ewe composer-poets and master drummers. He adeptly portrayed their roles in society and illustrated their ingenuity.

*Henoga*, a composer poet, is an amazing individual. His mind is saturated with knowledge of his habitat, the inhabitants and events of his time. He has an assistant called *Halela* who must have the gift of retentive memory. Once he hears a tune and sings it to himself a few times it can never escape his memory for weeks or months. Suddenly, no matter where or when a beautiful tune would flash through the *Henoga's* mind he must rush to note it down or else it would vanish again. First, he sings it to himself and keeps on singing it till he finds his *Halela* and sings it to him. This way the tune would never be lost again, since the *Halela* is, as it were, a recording machine.<sup>356</sup>

He continues:

The *Henoga's* behavior is only a little less dramatic than that of Archimedes who rushed out of his bath naked into the streets shouting 'I have found it! I have found it,' when the truth about the weight of a floating body being equal to the weight of the water it displaces suddenly flashed across his mind in his bath. The *Henoga* has created something. But to turn it into a beautiful rhythm of drum, dance and song he has to work in collaboration with the master-drummer, *Azaguno[ga]*, changing a phrase here, adding or subtracting something here and there till a perfect rhythm is achieved and later introduced to the public through the dance club who are drilled in it for weeks on end.<sup>357</sup>

Undoubtedly, this brilliant illustration underscores the place of musicians in the annals of indigenous scholars.

Clearly pronounced in the above quotation is ingenuity and the retentive memory of the musicians. Good memory is an important quality of a musician. Since most of the socio-cultural

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<sup>356</sup> Agbodeka (1997: 4)

<sup>357</sup> Ibid

experiences initially have to be memorized for effective sensation, reflection, and expression, the Ewe believe that memory plays a vital role in developing the composer's sensitivity and in shaping her/his oral knowledge. The composer's memory is further reinforced by her/his role as a mediator and custodian of indigenous knowledge. The various participants who assist the musician in the creative process provide cues and clues to aid memory, constantly storing and retrieving artistic elements from long-term and short-term memories. In this regard, therefore, the composer's memory span may be socially constructed.<sup>358</sup> Nevertheless, his/her innate memory skill is highly recognized. The development of expansive memory and the ability to document oral artistic elements depends upon constant performance. Hence, the Ewe composer and performer usually solidifies memory of these elements through constant performance.<sup>359</sup> An individual musician's memory may be aided through clues and cues embedded in the art making process. Human memory is limited and wanes, especially during old age, thereby necessitating subsequent generations' continuation of the oral creative and performance process.<sup>360</sup>

In addition to all the above the Ewe composer, composer-poet, and master musician (*azagunoga* and *hesino*) is expected to strive for originality while ensuring continuity in tradition. My discussants<sup>361</sup> have pointed out that a competent composer in a musical group should be able to create new pieces for his/her ensemble, group, and genre without necessarily appropriating those composed by other musicians. Creative originality is highly cherished and rewarded while plagiarism is frowned upon, ridiculed, and sometimes "punished." For example, while the Ewe prize originality, they have derogatory phrases and expressions for artists that

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<sup>358</sup> See Dor (2004)

<sup>359</sup> See Amegago (2000)

<sup>360</sup> It is worth noting that the development of literacy in Africa challenges the continuity of the oral creative and documentation processes that has sustained the preliterate knowledge acquisition and preservation.

<sup>361</sup> In interviews with Kodzo Tagbolo, Henoga Asomo Seku, Killa Fiebor, Agbo Seshie, Kosonde Gbolonyo, Openo Gabienoo, and Nanevi Maweta (See appendix E for details).

often substitute musical texts of productions that they did not originate. Such musicians are often labeled *sevadziawo* (lit. hear and come to sing people), *tsovadoawo* (lit. cut and come to plant people), or *haziodehanukpalawo* (lit. composers of songs that lean on other's songs) all meaning, "people who are not original" in their creative practices—plagiarism. A competent musician is expected to be an originator of new ideas including new texts, melodies, and other musical forms (in addition to being able to perform works of other artists).<sup>362</sup>

In a process refined by countless generations, *azaguno* and *hesino* are nothing less than sages and oracular. These social visionaries and their idealistic images are engaged constantly, reevaluating and redefining society's most critical assumptions and values. In a normal course of dance-drumming activities through which real life situations are reenacted and dramatized, the society helps these scholars define the desirable attributes of communal life, and actively molds its citizens to conform to these ethics and behavior. These characteristic qualities of a musician and the role of music were highly regarded until recently when modern internal and external transformations and influences from foreign cultures, mass media, and other forces began to de-emphasize them.

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<sup>362</sup> See Dor (2000, 2004) and Merriam (1964)

## 2.2 EWE LANGUAGE, MUSICAL TEXT, THEME, AND MEANING

### 2.2.1 Ewe/Wegbe/Ewegbe: Ewe Language

The Ewe call their indigenous language Ewe, Ewegbe, or Wegbe (i.e., Ewe, also written Evhe, or Eve = the ethnic group as well as the language they speak and *gbe* = language) a major language of Gbe or Taidoid language cluster.<sup>363</sup> Ewe, and for that matter Gbe is spoken as an indigenous language and also as a second language in at least three countries in Africa (Ghana, Togo, and the Republic of Benin; that is, from the Greenwich Meridian to longitude 3 degrees East and from the Atlantic coast to about latitude 8 degrees North).<sup>364</sup> According to linguists Diedrich Westermann and M. A. Bryan, J. H. Greenberg, G. Ansre, and UNESCO, Ewe homeland stretches from Ghana through Togo, Benin, and to Badagry (Gbadagli) in western Nigeria.<sup>365</sup> Ewe belongs to the Kwa group of Sudanic languages (a sub-family of the Niger-Congo family of the Congo-Kordofanian language group of Africa). Ewe has different regional variants or dialects across the West African region. Beside dialects or spoken variants, until recently, one standard has existed for the written form or orthography of Ewe. Due to colonial policies and foreign linguistic influences from English, French, and German, Ewe orthography is facing standardization challenges; hence, its orthography is currently described as being in “a confused state.” F. Agbodeka, in his foreword to volume two of the “Studies of Eweland Series”, *The Ewe of Togo and Benin*, wrote:

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<sup>363</sup> See Capo (1991), Duthie (1996), and K. Ameka and Kofi Dovlo, “The Ewe Language.” Verba Africana (<http://www.let.leidenuniv.nl/verba-africana/ewe/c-ewe-language.htm>: Accessed 09/28/08)

<sup>364</sup> K. Ameka and Kofi Dovlo, “The Ewe Language.” Verba Africana (<http://www.let.leidenuniv.nl/verba-africana/ewe/c-ewe-language.htm>: Accessed 09/28/08)

<sup>365</sup> See Westermann and Bryan (1952), Greenberg (1970), G. Ansre (1971, 2000), UNESCO (1985), Dakubu (1988: 4), Duthie (1996: ii), and Atakpa (1997)

It should be useful...to explain to the reader that Ewe orthography is in a confused state, partly because of the existence of what we might call the ‘Ghana context,’ portraying ‘official’ and standard Ewe orthography, originally used by the whole of Eweland, and the ‘Togo context,’ embracing later developments in both Francophone Togo and Benin.<sup>366</sup>

In view of the “Ghana/Togo contextual” dichotomy, an author would have to choose and write in one of the contextual domains; that is, either in the “Ghana context” (in standard Ewe or English), or in the “Togo context” (in Togo-Benin Ewe variant or French). For purposes of this study, the Ewe variants in Ghana serve as the focus, and are referred to as the “Ghana context.” All indigenous Ewe words, names, expressions, and terminologies are written as they normally do in the “standard Ewe.” Within the “Ghana context,” however, dialectical differences in the orthography will be noted if such distinctions are necessary for clarity.

As noted earlier, two main divisions of the Ewe in Ghana exist—the Southern Ewe and the Northern Ewe. However, one cannot limit language variants to these two broad geographical and sub-cultural divisions, for far more Ewe dialects exist. According to G. Ansre, Ewedome (Northern Ewe) dialect clusters or Ewe dialect variants include, but are not limited to Kpando-Ve cluster, Gbi-Awudome cluster, Anfoega-Have cluster, Kpedze-Anfoeta cluster, Ho/Asorgli-Matse cluster, Akrofu-Abutia cluster, Adaklu block, and Ave-Agotime cluster.<sup>367</sup> In the south, Ewe dialects include Anlo-Aflao cluster, Anlo-Dzodze/Penyi cluster, Anlo-Futa cluster, Anlo-Some-Denu cluster, Anlo-Ave cluster, Avenor block, Mafi block, and Tonu-Bator cluster.<sup>368</sup>

The Ewe spoken by the above traditional sub-groups varies. The dialectical differences are found in one or more aspects including, but are not limited to, lexis, grammar, and phonology. Despite these differences, the various Ewe dialects and sub-divisional variants are

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<sup>366</sup> Lawrance (2005: ix)

<sup>367</sup> See Ansre (2000: 24)

<sup>368</sup> See Atakpa (1997: 28)

mutually intelligible. Speakers of the other dialects easily accommodate the differences. In fact, as Ansre indicates, “the imitation of each other’s dialect differences is a very popular feature of the social joking relationship across the dialect groups.”<sup>369</sup> Since this project focuses on song texts collected from all Ghanaian Ewe dialects and dwells on textual transcriptions and analysis requiring knowledge about dialectical differences, it is important to introduce the reader to these dialectal differences and provide examples illustrating some of the dialectical differences in vocabulary. Using Ansre’s classificatory scheme, the lexical item in English is provided first, followed by the term’s name in Standard Ewe (SE) and variants from different Ewe dialects.<sup>370</sup>

Word:	Dialect of Ewe
1. Shin:	
<i>Kpaligbe</i> :	Standard Ewe
<i>(A)kpatsigbe</i> :	All Anlo (incl. Futa, Some, Dzodze, Aflao, Avenor, etc.) and Tonu
<i>Akpanyigbe</i> :	Anfoega
<i>Akpifoe</i> :	Akpini (Kpando)
<i>Gagawoe</i> :	Gbi Nyigbe (Peki)
2. Buttocks:	
<i>Gbi</i> :	Standard Ewe
<i>Ekpe/kpe</i> :	Ewedome (incl. Asogli, Awudome, Gbi, Akpini, etc)
<i>Kpetefe</i> :	Different local variants
<i>Mefi</i> :	All Anlo (incl. Avenor, Dzodze, Futa, Some, etc.)
<i>Agorgo/Agogo</i> :	Aflao-Anlo
3. Pineapple:	
<i>Atoto</i> :	Standard Ewe, all Anlo, Tonu, Kpedze local variants
<i>Abable</i> :	Ewedome local variants
<i>Abeble</i> :	Gbi Nyigbe (Peki)
<i>Ablande</i> :	Anfoega
<i>Ablendi</i> :	Akpini (Kpando)
<i>Abamble</i> :	Asogli (Ho)

Some differences in grammatical particles and morphemes exist in the various dialects, for example.

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<sup>369</sup> Ansre (2000: 24)

<sup>370</sup> Ibid

### 1. This thing

<i>Nu sia:</i>	Standard Ewe
<i>Enu yi or Enu ya:</i>	All Anlo (incl. Aflao, Futa, Avenor, Dzodze, Some) and Tonu
<i>Enu ele:</i>	Gbi Nyigbe (Peki)
<i>Enu tsi:</i>	Akpini (Kpando)
<i>Enu xele:</i>	Gbi Dzigbe (Hohoe)
<i>Enu ke:</i>	Awudome (Tsito)

### 2. My mother

<i>No nye:</i>	Standard Ewe and all Anlo
<i>Nana nye/Nane nye:</i>	Tonu (Mafi, Bator, etc)
<i>Ena nyi:</i>	Akpini (Kpando)
<i>Nyi no:</i>	Ve
<i>Eno nye:</i>	Asogli, Awudome, Gbi, and othe Ewedome variants

### 3. I said (say)

<i>Mebena:</i>	Standard Ewe
<i>Mebe de:</i>	Asorgli (Ho and surrounding variants)
<i>Mebana de:</i>	Inland Anlo (Dzodze, Penyi, Avenor)
<i>Mebena si:</i>	Coastal Anlo (Futa: Keta, Anloga, Vodza, Anlo-Afiadenyigba, etc)
<i>Mebaa lolo:</i>	Gbi (Peki, Hohoe)
<i>Mebe hi:</i>	Akpini (Kpando)

Beside lexical variants, tone and pronunciation differences also exist. Ewe is a tonal language and every Ewe syllable has a distinguishable tone.<sup>371</sup> Generally, three basic tones (low, mid, and high) are used in all Ewe dialects; however, according to G Ansre and other linguists, “it can be said that phonetically there are five level tones and six ‘moving’ tones.”<sup>372</sup> These are low, mid, high, extra low, and extra high. Also, some dialects have a rising tone (low-high or mid-high) on specific syllables. F. K. Atakpa provided an alternate description of tones, labeling the three basic tones above as the primary tones and the rising tones as secondary tones.<sup>373</sup> Tone is essential in determining the meaning of a word in Ewe. This is because change in tonal inflection often results in change in meaning. For example, the word ‘to’ in Ewe (irrespective of

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<sup>371</sup> A language is said to be tonal when the pitch at which a word is pronounced is varied to denote different meanings.

<sup>372</sup> Ansre (2000: 32)

<sup>373</sup> See Atakpa (1997: 42)

the dialect) would mean (1) thick (of a liquid as in *a thick syrup*) when pronounced with a *low tone*; (2) buffalo when pronounced with *mid tone*; and (3) mortar (as used with a pestle) also when pronounced with a *mid tone*; however, when the same word is pronounced with a *high tone*, it could mean (4) ear; (5) mountain; (6) to pound; or (7) father-in-law. In the case where there is more than one meaning (even with the same tonal inflection) of the word or syllable, the contextual meaning is derived from the sentence syntax.

### 2.2.2 Music Text

Music text, as used in this dissertation, is not limited to song texts, lyrics, libretto, or words of songs. It includes all Ewe music and dance productions based on texts or relates to any verbalized or un verbalized texts linguistically meaningful to the speakers of the language and holders of the culture. In addition to song texts or lyrics, for this research, musical text includes drum and other instrumental patterns and dance steps or movements based on verbal utterances, or meaningful linguistic expressions.<sup>374</sup> Researchers have established that some drum patterns in many indigenous African cultures are based on actual vocal texts. Additionally, some specific musical instruments and dance styles have patterns that, irrespective of where and when they are performed, are based on verbal texts. Such instruments are purposefully used as speech surrogates and play specific texts. Referring specifically to instruments, this artistic phenomenon is often called “drum language” in literature about African drumming.

The rhythmic patterns, called *vugbe* (literally drum voice: plural, *vugbewo*) meaning, “drum language” or “drum text,” are traditionally considered musico-linguistic texts and are

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<sup>374</sup> It is evident, from discussions with my collaborators and discussants that, musical text is as meaningful and important as any other linguistic text in Ewe culture (see appendix E).

interpreted as such. The texts are drawn from all aspects of people's lives and are based on almost all subjects—from secular to sacred, military to morality. The meanings of some of the *vugbewo* are complex. While some texts are offensive, vulgar, and teasing, others are historical and philosophical, while others, hysterical and frivolous. While the 'initiated' indigenes understand and 'accept' these musical texts performed in context as part of the culture and tradition, an uninitiated 'outsider' may find some of them embarrassing and unbearable.

While studying Ewe drumming in Dzodze, James Burns learned to not only play *vugbewo*, but also their meanings and the context in which they are played. In a 2008 article, Burns shares some of his first experiences:

As I began studying the *vugbewo* (drum language patterns) of the master drum, I was surprised to find that many of the phrases referred to things or events from contemporary life. Several of the *vugbewo* referred to really vulgar sexual rhymes/sayings, causing shock or embarrassment when I asked the meanings from the Western-educated Ewe who were assisting me with the translations.<sup>375</sup>

Comprehension and interpretation of *vugbe* depend on many factors, including the type of message, context, function, and the level of the listener's knowledge of the culture. Besides their usual musical functions, *vugbewo* and other musical texts, as means of educational narratives, are elaborate in Ewe musical practice. Subtle verbal expressions may be encoded in drum language and dance movements, which are readily understood, for example:

**Vugbe 1: *Mieva Do Za***

**Boboobo** (Text in Ewe)

*Mieva do za, za, za, mieva do!*

**Literal Translation**

We have come in our numbers, we have come!

This *vugbe* is a message indirectly sent to members of rival musical groups in the community. The message is one musical group's insinuation about rival groups as well as an expression of pride in numbers and the group's ability to excel in adversity. The underlying message

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<sup>375</sup> Burns (2005: 300) also at [www.oraltradition.org](http://www.oraltradition.org) (accessed: 03/28/08)

communicated that the group has come in great numbers and shall make this performance a big one although adversaries may wish the group dwindled in number and failed in performances. The *vugbewo* below comment on a similar subject, teasing others for not having ‘modern’ technological equipments—an electric generator plant and television set.

**Vugbe 2: Generator/Televisi**

**Ageshie and Boboobo** (Text in Ewe)

(i) *Generator le papa si! Ele asi woa?*

(ii) *Televisi le dada si! Ele asi wao?*

*Tso yi Sela gbo!*

**Literal Translation**

Dad has a generator! Do you have one?

Mom has a television! Do you have one?

Get up and go to Sela’s place!

These *vugbewo* are intended to be conversations between children from different social class backgrounds: one whose parents apparently have ‘modern’ technological appliances placing them in a higher-class status in contemporary Ewe living standards and the other child from a ‘poorer’ home. The first is a straightforward tease: “Papa (Dad)<sup>376</sup> has a generator, does your father have one?” The second goes beyond the tease and demands, “if your mother has no television, then you may go to Sela’s place (to watch her’s).”

Drawing parallels between his own American childhood and that of Ewe children in Dzodze, Burns writes: “It is not difficult to transport this scene to a school yard in America where a boy might boast to owning a Sony Playstation 2 as he teases another boy who does not have one, and this was created in a village that did not even have electricity at the time.”<sup>377</sup> These apparent children’s teasing conversations are, however, transported into adults’ social musical settings and used either directly or in disguised and codified ways as indirect messages

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<sup>376</sup> Papa (Dad) and Dada (Mom) are the traditional names or titles by which Ewe children call their father and mother respectively. Other indigenous Ewe names include *Papi, Fofo, Mpa* for father and *Da, Nananye, Nane, Mma* for mother. Today however, there are such borrowed terms/titles such as Dadi, Dad for father and Mama, Mom, Mamy, Mam for mother.

<sup>377</sup> Burns (2005: 315)

to rivals.<sup>378</sup> Hence, as the drummers play, both performers and audience sing the texts with the drum patterns loudly and teasingly while they dance, wave hands, and gesture toward their actual targets or surrogates. It should be noted that “*tso yi Sela gbo*” could be interpreted dissimilarly in different villages and/or contexts. It could mean “go and get drunk, (if it hurts you),” in which case, Sela owns a store in which liquor is sold. It could also mean, “go to Sela’s place and buy your own television” in which case Sela sells television sets in her store. Such *vugbewo* are understood by those actively or inactively patronizing social musical performances.

Often other types of *vugbewo* or levels of meaning are woven into drum language that can be understood only by people who participate actively in musical practice, possess deeper linguistic knowledge, are drumming initiates of a certain experience level, and/or hold significant positions demanding extensive knowledge of traditional practices.<sup>379</sup> Drum language may be used for reciting history and myths, praising kings and patrons, social commentary, and/or long-distance communication.<sup>380</sup> For example, the following *vugbe* is based on a maxim proverbially comparing the beard with the eyelash.

**Vugbe 3: *Ege Metua Xo Na Adaba O Ageshie*** (Text in Ewe: Anlo dialect)  
*Ege metua xo na adaba o;*

*Adaba li xoxoxo hafi ege va dzo;*

*Gake kpekpe le ege si wu adaba.*

**Literal Translation**

The beard does not narrate historical events to the eyelash;

The eyelash was there long ago before the beard came into existence;

Though the beard has more weight than the eyelash.

The drummer acting as a harbinger of history and wisdom uses the proverbial drum text above to suggest that knowledge is primarily based on experience gained through time. Compared to the

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<sup>378</sup> See also Flolu (1999: 38-40)

<sup>379</sup> See Nketia (1958), Finnegan (1970: 499), Awoonor (1975: 89), Locke and Agbeli (1980: 32-51), Yankah (1995), Euba (1990), Anyidoho (1997: 123-152)

<sup>380</sup> See Nketia (1962, 1963a, 1963b), Finnegan (1970), Awoonor (1975), Locke and Agbeli (1980), Akin Euba (1990), Yankah (1982), and Anyidoho (1997)

eyelash, which existed from the birth of an individual, the beard, grown later in life, has little knowledge of historical events. Similarly, a young person cannot have more knowledge about a historical event or epoch than an older person who may have experienced or know about that event from her/his forebearers.

Furthermore, the proverbial drum text emphasizes that no knowledge is new and whatever happens today may have happened before or be linked to an earlier event. It may have traces of something in the past, as another proverb and song text emphasize *Ka xoxoawo nue wogbea yeyeawo do* (it is by/according to old ropes that the new ones are woven).<sup>381</sup> As such, the eyelash (older entity), having been born with man, has witnessed everything man has experience, and therefore, has more knowledge about historiography than the beard (the younger entity). To fully comprehend the philosophical thought embedded here; one needs to have knowledge of Ewe concept of and attitude towards age, wisdom, knowledge, and respect for the elderly.

For the indigenous Ewe (and in many traditional African societies), age is not measured in numbers (i.e., number of years) but by one's knowledge, wisdom, experiences, behavior, conduct, and attitudes. Until recently, Ewe did not record their dates of birth numerically and did not celebrate birthdays as in Western cultures.<sup>382</sup> However, this does not mean they did not have

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<sup>381</sup> See Chapter 4, section 4.2 for information on this song text and proverb.

<sup>382</sup> Although, Ewe kids today may be celebrating birthdays according to their birthdates and in the style of Western cultures, it should be noted that it is a borrowed cultural element. Indigenously, birthdays are marked by conditions and special events that took place on or around the time the individual is born. Also, the days of the week are more often used as birthdays than the Western styles 'date' birthdays. That is to say, every Friday is my birthday since I was born on Friday (hence my name Kofi—the most natural name since nobody, not even my mother, decided when I was born). Many socio-cultural activities are organized based on birthdays of the week but not by the month, date, and/or year. My birthday may also be marked by the season, e.g. harvesting season, farming season, during a particular festival, etc or by natural or unnatural circumstances that surrounded my birth or happened at the time of my birth. For example, my name Togbi meaning “elder, king, chief, ancestor, or ‘oldman’” was given to me at birth because it is believed that my physical features, look, and first acts were enough signals for the elders present at my birth to conclude that “I was an ancestor (Togbi Dekpe-Gbolonyo, my great paternal grandfather) that has reincarnated. For the elders in my community, including my parents, it was an honor to name me after Togbi Dekpe-Gbolonyo, one of the great ancestor in our lineage, and since then call me “Togbi,” a name of honor and respect (not because I was “old” at birth but because I am a reincarnated Great Ancestor, Togbi). More importantly, it is their

the concept of age for Ewe understand age from a behavioral, experiential, and practical conceptual perspective. A person is as old or young as he/she acts; a person is as old as the quality and amount of wisdom possessed, knowledge displayed, and productivity to the society. Unlike the West, “old age” is a compliment and solicits and command much respect, status, responsibility, and pride. Hence, if an elderly person’s behavior does not merit her/his status and position, she/he is said to be “young” or a “child” (irrespective of the number of years the individual has or physical appearance). Such a label or reference is not a compliment but often a devaluation, disrespect, or even an ‘insult.’ The text of the above proverb (used as a song text) underscores the Ewe concept of age and experience. It states the following:

**Song 1: Nusi Dzo Egbea**

**Adzro** (Text in Ewe: Anlo dialect)

*Nusi dzo egbea la,  
 Etogbi dzo kpo va yi  
 Eye ametsitsiwo kpo etefe;  
 Eyata devi mate nu agblo  
 Blemanyawo na novia tsitsia o  
 Eyatae tsitsiawo be,  
 Ge metua xo na adaba o*

**Literal Translation**

What has happened today,  
 Its kind has happened in the past  
 And elders witnessed it (as it happened)  
 Hence, a child may not tell  
 Historical narrative to his elder sibling  
 For that reason, the elders say,  
 The beard does not narrate/tell history to the eyelash

It is important to note that Ewe musicians can say virtually anything through music without fear of reprisal.<sup>383</sup> As indicated earlier, some of the *vugbewo* could be based on profane and sexually explicit and vulgar texts. Below is an example:

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believe, wish, and hope that by naming me after that illustrious ancestor, I would grow and live up to his good deeds and be as responsible and hardworking as Togbi Dekpe-Gbolonyo. All these underpin Ewe naming concepts and concepts of age (see footnotes in section 2.2.4 below).

<sup>383</sup> See, for example Awoonor (1974, 1975), Fiagbedzi (1977), Anyidoho (1982, 1983, 1997), Avorgbedor (1994, 2001), Amegago (2000), Gbolonyo (2005), and Burns (2005)

**Vugbe 4: Kolo Do Sopota**

*Ageshie* (Text in Ewe: Anlo dialect)

*Kolo do sopota, ava do gakuku*

*Bolobolo do dzadza ge de 'me*

*Aleakoe Mawu woe, wosi ami de eto*

*Za me miadogo;*

*Kolo nuti gba, gba, gba za nado*

**Literal Translation**

Vagina wears lingerie, penis wears iron hat<sup>384</sup>

Uncircumcised penis struggles to get in

This is how God made it, smeared oil on its edge

We shall meet at night

For the vagina, bang, bang, bang, till nightfall

Obviously, a text like the above may not be acceptable to many people, especially the ‘culturally unoriented.’ James Burns writes: “While these patterns are being played on the drums, a chorus of men and women chant the texts along with them—all at a funeral!”<sup>385</sup> As “vulgar” as this *vugbe* may be, it is not just played on the drum but is also vocally articulated by audiences and other performers alongside the instrumentalist. To the culturally oriented indigene, the literal meaning of this *vugbe* extends beyond vulgarity (vulgar sexual language), instead underscoring an indigenous Ewe characteristic of manhood and sexuality. If used in its correct performance context, this *vugbe* is an indirect message to those rare men who have not been circumcised (*bolobolo* or *avamatsomatso* [uncircumcised penis]). Circumcision, it must be noted, is one of the most important rites of manhood in Ewe culture.<sup>386</sup>

To be regarded as a man in indigenous Ewe conception, one has to be circumcised (*tso ava*) very soon after birth. Ewe society frowns upon the uncircumcised man (*boloboto*). Secondly, *bolobolo* (uncircumcised penis) is sexually unattractive to almost all Ewe women. If an individual is known to be uncircumcised, he is ridiculed and may not be attractive to any

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<sup>384</sup> *Sopota* is a corrupted English word ‘supporter’ (a Ghanaian common term used to refer to underwear, usually that used by men). Both ‘lingerie’ and ‘iron hat’ as used in this translation refer to the prepuce: the loose fold of skin that covers the glands of the penis and the clitoral hood—the skin covering the glands clitoridis.

<sup>385</sup> Burns (2005: 313)

<sup>386</sup> In indigenous Ewe culture, circumcision is a fundamental rite to manhood. While it is not a religious act or ritual (as in some other cultures, eg Jewish and Islamic religions), it is very necessary for every male to be circumcised at very early age, usually a few days or weeks after birth, irrespective of one’s religious affiliation or beliefs. In the past, it *may* have had some spiritual connotations. But in general, it is one of the early rites of passage that indigenous Ewe culture requires. It is believed, and I can speculate, that most, if not all, indigenous Ewe men are circumcised very early in childhood; and that the very few uncircumcised men in Eweland today may be people of other ethnic and cultural background.

woman; thus, drum language and other musical platforms are used along with other media to educate people about the importance of circumcision for a healthier, lasting, and enjoyable sexual life and for social recognition in indigenous Ewe conception.

For Ewe women, virginity and abstinence from pre-marital sex are cherished. Historically, the paternal aunt (*tashi/tasi/ete*)<sup>387</sup> of the groom (*nugbeto-sronyonu*) ascertained the virginity of the newly married wife by inspecting the matrimonial bed (usually covered in white calico) of the newly married couple. Bloodstains on the bedding indicated the new wife was a virgin (*Afesro* [lit. wife/female from home] or *Dzo tso afe* [lit. coming from the origin]), thereby immediately sparking respect and traditional womanhood privileges and status for the bride. Such failure to prove virginity may negatively impact the new couple's married life and the relationship between their families. The woman also may reveal whether the man is circumcised and/or "alive" (*le agbe* or *le ntsu me* [lit. in manhood]), that is, being worthy of manhood. The *vugbe* above is simply commenting on a situation whereby an uncircumcised man tries to convince a potential sexual partner by drawing parallels between the "naturalness" of the uncircumcised penis and a virgin's vagina. It also alludes to possible "struggles" or difficulties of breaking someone's virginity and/or having intercourse with an uncircumcised man.

Not everyone<sup>388</sup> who listens to the above text would interpret it similarly as holistic interpretation requires deeper (philosophical) understanding of Ewe cultural concepts of sexuality and morality. Many people may base their understanding on the explicit meaning of the text. Their perceptions may be impacted by their own moral and cultural judgments and/or they may base their conclusions on the opinion of some "informants" who may have provided only

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<sup>387</sup> This done usually by the paternal aunt (*tashi/tasi/ete*) but sometimes also carried out by the maternal aunt (*noga/daga* or *nodi/dadia*) of the groom

<sup>388</sup> Including Ewe and non-Ewe

surface explanations of the text and the context without considering the underlying concepts.

James Burns writes:

Such language is considered vulgar by many older Ewe, who have expressed to me their belief that when they were growing up people would not use this type of language in public. They blame ‘the youth of today’ for having lowered the standards of polite speech. In any case, it is also important to acknowledge the secularization that has transformed the sacred traditional music genres into new forms that resemble popular music with all its openness to experimentation and its willingness to break social taboos and barriers.<sup>389</sup>

While the *vugbe* used above is partly a characteristic of *ageshe* (a newer version/style of an older Ewe musical genre, *agbadza*, still being performed), however, it is possible that the “vulgar language” phenomenon is not solely a characteristic of the new forms of Ewe musical genres as Burns suggested. Such musico-linguistic expressions (drum texts, song texts, dance movements, gestures, proverbs, etc.) have been with the Ewe for centuries and have been used *contextually* for varied purposes.

One example of these musico-linguistic expressions is *avlevu*, a complete movement in the seven suites of the *yevevu* (*Yeve*, the god of thunder’s religious music)<sup>390</sup> in which “vulgar sexual” drum texts/patterns, dance movements, and sensual gestures are used. If, as researchers have purported, religious musical traditions including *yevevu* are some of the oldest indigenous forms of Ewe music, then, modern “vulgar” musical text may not be solely the consequences of modern cultural influences.<sup>391</sup> Neither is it solely the secularization of sacred traditional music nor the general transformations and “experimentations” on the part of the youth of today.<sup>392</sup>

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<sup>389</sup> Burns (2005: 313)

<sup>390</sup> *Yevevu* is considered a suite of seven to nine dance forms, movements or musical styles. Each movement and song is related to specific phase of worship. The seven major dance movements include *akpedada*, *husago*, *sogbadze/sogba*, *avlevu*, *adavu*, *afovu/afotoe*, and *sovu*. *Avlevu* is often referred to in ethnomusicological literatures as “comic relief.” See for example Fiagbedzi (1977), Avorgbedor (1987), and Younge (2002)

<sup>391</sup> For example, as James Burns suggests “...the youth of today for having lowered the standards of polite speech” (Burns 2005: 313)

<sup>392</sup> *Ibid*

While, as Burns indicates, Ewe indigenous music is being transformed and not used simply as an avenue for breaking social taboos and barriers, much of the phenomenon is not “new.” For example, the following song text (closely related to the *vugbe* discussed above) has been in the *Agbadza* repertoire since the 1950s, as indicated by Hesino Asomo Seku of Dzodze, Kila Stephen Fiebor of Anlo Afiadenyigba, and Amega Setsoafia Seshie of Aflao.<sup>393</sup>

**Song 2: *Avakuku Medea Do Gbo O***

*Agbadza* (Text in Ewe: Anlo dialect)  
*Avakuku mede'a do gbo o*  
*Meganyame kolo'a nam o*  
*Megatugu kolo'a nam o*  
*Alime kedi wo*

**Literal Translation**

A dead penis does not go near a vagina  
 Do not pester (disturb) the vagina for me  
 Do not torment (bother) the vagina for me  
 Your skinny waist

This song text relates to the *vugbe* discussed earlier as it comments on male impotency, erectile disorder, and/or sexual dysfunction. Childbirth is a high priority in indigenous and modern Ewe culture. Having children is more valuable than material goods/riches (as in the name *Amewuga*, another name of the author), but conceiving offspring requires a potent man and fertile woman. Hence, women (usually through songs and dance) tease men to assess a potential partner's potency and reject those who are “dead” (*ku*) or cannot “stand up right” (*tu* or *matenu ali/atso o*). Although Ewe men are usually not overweight or physically large, those deemed too slender are sometimes ridiculed—hence the expression “your skinny waist” as in the song above.<sup>394</sup>

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<sup>393</sup> Personal communications with Asomo Seku, Amega Setsoafia, and Killa Fiebor (see appendix E for details). In separate interviews with these accomplished and popular Anlo Ewe composers and lead singers, they sang these and other songs and told not only stories associated with them at the time but also emphasized the deeper meaning and educative aim of such songs and drum language as discussed above. Some of these songs have been recorded by the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC) Ghanaian Language music sessions in the early 1960s. In separate interviews with Mr. Kwame Senyo (GBC, Volta Star Radio, Ho) and Mr. Kwame Dzokoto (TV Africa, Accra) both formerly at Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC) Ewe section, the two broadcasters and authorities on Ewe culture and language agreed with my musician collaborators.

<sup>394</sup> Although the above physical feature relates to Ewe men, it is worth noting some of the feminine features of “beauty.” The characteristics features of beauty and aesthetics differ from culture to culture. Some features that may be cherished as “beautiful” in one culture may not necessary be appreciated in other cultures. In indigenous Ewe (and in many cases other African) cultures, being “fat,” especially having a large buttocks/butt is a complement (associated health hazards aside)—a characteristic feature of beauty in Ewe conception. In view of this, some

Although typically performed by both genders together in social and recreational musical settings, the song is sung from a woman's perspective.

Besides using drums or instruments to articulate verbal expressions, other musical instruments perform rhythms, based on specific textual patterns. Irrespective of where and when they are performed, such instruments are purposefully used as speech surrogates and thus, play specific texts. These instruments are often referred to as "talking drums." It is noteworthy that all drums, to various and varying degrees, communicate or "talk," but certain drums or instruments in some cultures are specifically made and used for "talking" or as special communicative devices. Among the Ewe, four of such "talking drums" or instruments include *laklevu*, *vuga*, *agblovu*, and *atompani* (see section 2.1.3 for further information).

### **2.2.3 *Vuga* and Ewe Justice System**

The use of drum patterns as musical text rather than for rhythmic purposes is illustrated in the use of *vuga* within the Anlo Ewe judicial system. *Vuga*, according to my research field sources,<sup>395</sup> is a symbolic instrument that was associated with the Anlo Ewe justice system in the past. The sound/rhythms/patterns of *vuga* in Anlo in the middle of the night was a signal to the community of the fate of those whose unpopular or inappropriate behavior could no longer be tolerated by the people, the king, and his council of elders. Nissio Fiagbedzi states, "It [*vuga*] was used to announce at night the execution of capital punishment, the deportation or selling into

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women even put stuff (fabrics and other materials) under their cloth just to depict and sometimes to exaggerate that aspect of Ewe femininity and characteristic of beauty.

<sup>395</sup> Personal communication with Dr. Nissio Fiagbedzi (see Appendix E), Prof. Datey-Kumodzie, Mr. Kwame C. Kudjordjie (see appendix E),

slavery of undesirable citizens.”<sup>396</sup> As an instrument for making such execution announcements, *vuga* was used in pairs, one as male and the other as female. The drums are sounded in the middle of the night just outside the home of the accused, usually “an evildoer who is proven to be recalcitrant, refractory incorrigible.”<sup>397</sup> First, the male *vuga* sounds (plays) the text:

*Vi nese to fe gbe, vi nese no fe gbe; miede za, miegbo za*

(Lit. A child must listen to the father’s “voice”, the child must listen to the mother’s “voice”; we went by night; we returned by night)

The female drum immediately responds by playing the text:

*Gbewoe nye nyegbe*

(Lit. your voice is my voice, meaning “so let it be” or “I agree with your decision”).<sup>398</sup>

In the past, such drum texts/rhythms usually frightened those who understood and knew their consequences; someone, forcibly taken out, was going to *Toko Atolia* (the Fifth Landing Stage) for the severest punishment. The Ewe capital punishment, *nyiko fofo de amedzi* (burying criminals alive), was usually meted out at a grove called *Toko Atolia* (the Fifth Landing Stage) in Anloga, the traditional capital of Anlo Ewe State.<sup>399</sup> The drum texts and their deeper meanings articulated the Ewe’s socio-cultural moral value system that teaches and enforces law and respect for order. Concerning children’s discipline, Ewe parents must be unanimous in allocating punishment and reward, as the culture does not permit parental disagreement as expressed in the proverb “*egbeve menyia vi o*” (lit. two [disagreeing] voices do not bring up/rear a child) meaning parental disagreement is detrimental to a child’s upbringing.<sup>400</sup> Hence, drum texts (e.g., as quoted in the *vuga* patterns above) echo similar messages and underscore those values.

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<sup>396</sup> See Fiagbedzi (1997: 156)

<sup>397</sup> Mamattah (1976: 200)

<sup>398</sup> See Fiawo (1943), Mamattah (1976), and Fiagbedzi (1977)

<sup>399</sup> Ibid

<sup>400</sup> See Kumassah (2005)

According to C. M. K. Mamattah,<sup>401</sup> *vuga* and its rhythm became associated with the Anlo Ewe capital punishment system when Togbi Nditsi I introduced what became known as *nyikovu* or *zavu* (execution drum or night drum). Togbi Nditsi I, the fifth Anlo Awomefia (King)<sup>402</sup> who ruled Anlo from 1568 through 1594, is purported to have introduced the use of the drum and rhythm for the specific purpose of capital punishment.<sup>403</sup> “The drum personifies the government of the people, helped to establish law, order and discipline within the State.”<sup>404</sup>

This Anlo Ewe institution of justice and the use of *vuga* in playing the *vugbe* during the night are documented in a play entitled *Toko Atolia*, or *The Fifth Landing Stage*, by F. Kwasi Fiawo.<sup>405</sup> To help readers not culturally informed to understand this justice system in its cultural context, Fiawo reiterates the underlying principles and context of such punishments:

Our forefathers detested crime and showed relentless severity in exacting the penalty from the guilty. In those days, there were no police in our land nor public prisons. Each member of the community was concerned to guard against social disorder, aiding the unwritten laws of the country to operate severely on those who habitually infringed them. Some of these offenders were made by the State to pay fines, others were banished, and some were reduced to serfdom, while others were buried alive according to the gravity of the offence.

If one of our forefathers could arise from his grave today and spend but a week among us, he would be sadly disappointed. On the other hand, we of today are prone to accuse them of cruelty in the exercise of their judicial rights. The case is analogous to the conceptions of the Ancient Jews and the Christians. The one condemns leniency as a predilection for the offender while the other maintains that the merciful shall obtain mercy, and that there is none righteous.

Severe punishments were necessary among our forefathers owing to the state of hostility, which existed. Tribal and inter-state strife and pillage were rife, and the cause they traced to the felonious acts of the country’s scoundrels. It was commonly expressed among them that ‘The habitual liar brings disagreement between brothers’; ‘Debt leads to either brigandage or war.’ Concerning stealing,

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<sup>401</sup> Mamattah (1976)

<sup>402</sup> While Mamattah (1976) puts the reign of Togbi Nditsi as 1704-1749, Kumassah (2003) puts it as 1568-1594. See the next page for my analysis and conclusion on this disagreement.

<sup>403</sup> Others also contend that *nyikovu* was introduced by Torgbi Sri I the first Awormefia (Anlo Ewe King at their present location) who reigned from 1468 to 1504. Yet, others thought it has been with the Ewe since time immemorial. See Fiawo (1943), Mamattah (1976), Fiagbedzi (1977), and Kumassah (2005)

<sup>404</sup> Mamattah (1976: 200)

<sup>405</sup> See Fiawo (1943)

adultery, and the evil practices of sorcery, they said that these acts were responsible for the destruction of nations. They based their view upon their experiences from the days of their migration from Hogbe to Anlo land.<sup>406</sup>

This vivid description depicts the situation at the time and the rationale behind such punishments that may be viewed today as cruelty. Although this Anlo Ewe system of capital punishment was outlawed in the 1940s, its fundamental principles continue to live with the Ewe today. Musical instruments, texts, rhythms, and dance movements serve as reminders of this past. Today, those instruments and musical genres are performed for purposes other than execution; however, they remain sources of historical narratives in concrete and abstract forms. The mention of “*vuga*,” “*Toko Atolia*,” “*miede za, miegbo za*,” and other such texts serve as reminders of the past.

To underscore the role of music in preliterate Africa in general and Ewe society in particular in the sustenance and execution of the justice system of the society, the publisher of Fiawo’s book adds these thoughts.

Only yesterday we were thinking of an Africa of Fable, Drum and Dance. Through uncountable years the genius and temperament of Africa, shut away from any possibility of literary expression, developed a wonderful technique of tone and body movement. ‘Words’ were not required. Gesture in varying rhythm accompanied by sound in appropriate tone – whether of drum or of choral ejaculation – told the story and pictured the scene. Today, Africa is made free of man’s accomplishment in the things of the mind. She does not desert the drum or the dance. She experiments in a new technique. It is drama upon which she is still busy; now with literary articulation.<sup>407</sup>

While there is no disagreement about the justice system or use of musical instruments and their rhythms, a discrepancy exists about the dates of the reign of Togbi Nditsi, the king purported to have introduced the use of the drums into this justice system. While Agbotadua Kumassah puts the reign of Togbi Nditsi as 1568-1594, C.M.K. Mamattah puts it as 1703-1749. These highly different dates leave one wondering about the accuracy of either; however, information from my

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<sup>406</sup> Ibid (vii)

<sup>407</sup> Fiawo (1943: xi)

field research indicates many agree with Kumassah that Togbi Nditsi was one of the earliest Anlo rulers. This conclusion is derived from the following information. First, Mamattah and Kumassah as well as many of my discussants agree that Togbi Sri I was the first Awomefia (Anlo Ewe King) at the Anlo Ewe present location. Secondly, they all agree that Sri I reigned in the second half of the fifteenth century. Thirdly, both researchers agree that Togbi Nditsi was the fifth Awomefia (King). Finally, researchers have suggested that life expectancy in those days was very low; this factor, coupled with wars, resulted in short reigns for many kings. More kings than five Awomefiawo would have ruled Anlo by the eighteenth century; thus, with Togbi Nditsi being the fifth king, his reign falling within the second half of the sixteenth century is highly possible. Based on this information, it is not likely that Togbi Nditsi would have ruled in the eighteenth century, but instead, likely ruled in the second half of the sixteenth century. While inconsistencies of dates of reign and the initiator of the drum into the justice system exist, *vuga* obviously played a significant role in the Anlo Ewe justice system.

#### **2.2.4 Song Text, Theme, and Meaning**

All the textual translations and musical transcriptions in this dissertation are originally my own. Ewe songs have two or more levels of meaning. I have provided literal translations, which in some cases, represent the first level of meaning and in some instances do not make sense in the English language. My reason for including literal translation is to demonstrate, at a glance, the first level of meaning of Ewe songs and to implicitly show its inadequacies regarding total comprehension of indigenous Ewe songs. The second and third levels of meaning of the songs form the bases and the bulk of the discussion that, either precedes the song text or follows it.

Generally, there are three main timbral modes through which Ewe songs are expressed. These include *hadzidzi* (vocal singing), *gbemehedzidzi/gbemetete* (lit. singing voice song/voice sounding or stretching; all referring to humming), and *akuilolo/akulolo* (weaving whistle; meaning whistling). Humming among the Ewe, as noted by George Dor, takes two forms. In *gbemetete*, the singer's mouth is often closed and there is no articulation of words. On the other hand, *gbemehedzidzi/gbemehadzidzi* "involves the enunciation of characteristic vocables that may or may not be intermitted by the first kind of traditional humming [*gbemetete*]." <sup>408</sup> While all the above timbral modes of expression are employed during compositional processes and in individual performances, in real public performances for audiences only *hadzidzi* (singing) with actual words are used. However, in some performances of "restricted" genres and styles including *koku* and *agbosu*, *gbemehedzidzi/gbemetete* (humming) and *akuilolo/akulolo* (whistling) are employed, mostly by performers in trance.

Ewe songs are presented in different forms. George Dor identifies five variety of ways in which Ewe songs are presented. These include: (1) lyrical songs: songs characterized by lyricism with much emphasis on the texts during their presentation; (2) interjection of spoken text into songs during performance; (3) alternation of songs and speech mode (continuum between song and speech mode); (4) declamatory songs; and (5) "imagined texts" or "songs without words." <sup>409</sup> My dissertation used all but "imagines texts" or "songs without words" since the main aim of the research is to analyze song texts.

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<sup>408</sup> Dor (2000: 210)

<sup>409</sup> See *ibid* for further discussion

Song texts used in this dissertation are primarily in Ewe. While a few are in Fon<sup>410</sup> and *Yevegbe*, others are multi-lingual, a mixture of two or more languages including Ewe, *Yevegbe*, Fon, Akan, Yoruba, English, and French. Some words were drawn from other Dahomean languages while others are from Anago, a sub-ethnic group of Yoruba in Nigeria. The "old age" of some songs in Ewe, Fon, and *Yevegbe* resulted in the words being termed "*nyatsitsi/gbetsitsi/Wegbetsitsi*," (old word/old language/old Ewe). In addition, the song texts include many proverbs, allusive texts, and references. The proverbs, common and popular among indigenes, are nevertheless, often older than the songs and have deeper philosophical thoughts and references. Hence, one needs not only sound Ewe linguistic knowledge, but deeper insight and meaning of the proverbs to be able to fully comprehend and appreciate the songs and knowledge embedded in them.

The underlying themes of many of these songs include, but are not limited to the historical, philosophical, moral, ethical, religious or spiritual, socio-political, military, and funerary. However, while under these broad thematic categories, song texts are usually about specific topics, ideas, and issues that concern and are of interest to the citizenry, and also fall within the broader cultural milieu. Song texts generally refer to divinities, gods, ancestors, conflicts, military, and war circumstances, such as stress, courage, loyalty, death, cowardice and sorrow, as well as social commentary on topical issues. These song texts constitute a very important part of the heritage of Ewe oral literature.

Ewe musical texts are expressions that may be categorized under two kinds of statements—"direct" and "indirect" statements.<sup>411</sup> Direct statements refer to expressions that are

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<sup>410</sup> Fon is spoken in the Republic of Benin and is closely related to Ewe. The two languages and their speakers trace their ancestry to one source.

<sup>411</sup> See Finnegan (1970, 1992)

“made in plain or overt terms” while indirect ones may be “covert and ambiguous by not representing directly the intended message but require construction of deeper signification from the listener.”<sup>412</sup> In direct statements for example, musicians often mention in their song texts the names of individuals and groups associated with specific historical and other events, including heroic acts, rites, actions, and concepts within their societies. Among the Southern Ewe, genealogies and biographies are often sung in songs using direct statements or played on drums as speech surrogate. Also factual special events that happen in the communities are cast in direct statements and conveyed through musical texts and practice. On the other hand indirect statement, an integral element of Ewe verbal practice, employ philosophical dicta (proverbs, maxims, parables, etc.), satirical expressions, innuendo, metaphor, allusions, and other figurative expressions. As George Dor indicates, the mastery, contextually appropriate, and correct use of these indirect language and figurative expressions is not only a sign of maturity and mastery of the Ewe language but also a display of cultural knowledge and more importantly a show of artistic creative competence and knowledge of socio-linguistics of ones culture. Dor states that: “A person endowed with words of wisdom expressed through indirect language is often described by the Northern Ewe as *numetsitsito* (‘somebody who possesses a grown mouth’).”<sup>413</sup> Other Ewe terms that describe individuals who eloquently employ such indirect statements and appropriately use philosophical dicta in their expressions include *numebibito* (lit. a person with well-cooked mouth), *adebibito* (lit. a person with well cooked tongue) both meaning “an eloquent person”; *ametsitsi* (lit. an old person; meaning wise person), and *amea tsi de afe* (lit.

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<sup>412</sup> Dor (2000: 204)

<sup>413</sup> Ibid: 206)

one that is well grown at home; meaning a matured and socio-linguistically informed person).<sup>414</sup> Ewe poetic use of language “is prized both in speech and in song.”<sup>415</sup> This is discernible in the predominance of such Ewe literary and artistic productions in which poetic and figurative language is predominate. These productions include *hamelo* (lit. song inside proverb; meaning “proverbs cast in song”), *halo/amedzuha/edzuha* (songs of abuse/insult), *ahamaha* (satirical songs/allusive songs), and *hamebe* (lit. song inside parables; meaning “parables cast in songs”). Dor indicates that “Ewe song texts constitute a rich source for a detailed examination of indirect language.”<sup>416</sup> Songs discussed in this dissertation may be categorized under direct and indirect states.<sup>417</sup>

Meaning is crucial in the comprehension of any concept. Meaning exists at different levels, especially when related to a cultural phenomenon. The meaning of an idea, which leads to an understanding of a particular concept or sets of cultural concepts, becomes more complex and difficult when it depends on the meaning of other related ideas, elements, contexts, and/or functions. For example, a common *asinana* (Ewe stylish handshake) has meaning far beyond social interaction. As cultural norm and social order, handshake is done in a counterclockwise direction, i.e., from right to left. In fact, it is a serious breach of socio-cultural order, a display of ignorance, noviceness, and an insult to those you great (shake hands with) if one initiates

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<sup>414</sup> This should be understood against the fact that in Ewe culture and society, age is not necessary measured in terms of *numbers* (i.e. number of years one has) or in terms of *physical appearance*, as in some Western cultures. The Ewe more importantly conceptualize age in terms of behavior, conduct, act, knowledge, experience, and moral principles. Also, old age (on the bases of good behavior, conduct, act, knowledge, experience, and culturally acceptable moral principles) is often a complement, an honor, and an achievement that comes with respect and high social recognition. Among the Ewe, it may be considered an “insult” and “dishonor” to label someone as being “young” since such categorizations and labels often interpreted on the bases of, or equated to, immaturity, misbehavior, misconduct, immorality, lack of wisdom, and inexperience, and not on the bases of *physical appearance*, as discernible in some cultures including Euro-American society.

<sup>415</sup> Dor (2000: 206). See also Awoonor (1974), Anyidoho (1982, 1983, 1997), Avorgbedor (1985, 1994, 2001a), and Amegago (2000)

<sup>416</sup> Ibid

<sup>417</sup> For more examples see See also Awoonor (1974), Anyidoho (1982, 1983, 1997), Avorgbedor (1985, 1994, 2001a), Dor (2000), and Amegago (2000)

handshake from the left to the right.<sup>418</sup> Typically, in act of *asinana*, men grab thumbs to symbolize strength (symbol/characteristic of masculinity), join palms to signify love (brotherliness), and end with a finger snap whose sound means, “we are alive” (another sign of masculinity).<sup>419</sup> Hence, to fully understand the meaning of a cultural concept, especially of preliterate traditions like the Ewe, one needs to not only comprehend the different levels of meaning of the original concept, but also that of other concepts linked with it. Such is the nature of Ewe indigenous songs and those of many other preliterate African societies.

Songs, like proverbs, are linguistic forms of communication that use symbols and other literary devices. Ewe traditional songs have at least two levels of meaning. Ewe composers (like many others throughout the world) are poets who rely extensively on proverbs, imagery, metaphor, and other linguistic and artistic devices to capture and effectively transmit events, stories or thoughts in the shortest and simplest, but deepest form. Komla Dzobo, writing specifically about proverbs, uses the following analogy of palm-nut to explain the nature of decoding proverbs. His analogy is applicable to Ewe song texts: “Using the analogy of a palm-nut, it must be said at the very outset that a proverb has a ‘shell’ and a ‘kernel,’ i.e. a form and content. The content is always some moral truths, principles or attitudes, and the linguistic

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<sup>418</sup> In fact, *asinana* (handshake) and its associated norms, values, and significations are taken so seriously. A reversal of the accepted order and direction of handshake is often one of the first acts that may signal the individual’s knowledge of the culture; and often the individual is immediately labeled as a cultural novice, an “outsider,” a non-Ewe, or in some cases a “stupid” person. This is because since everyone (except children, who are not expected to shake hands with adults) is supposed to know “such a simple and common social-humanistic act” such a reversal is often interpreted as an “insult” (*edzu*) or an act of “slapping” (*tomefofo*) those one greets. On the other hand, when such acts (reversal of the handshake order) is carried out by a well informed indigene, then it is interpreted as a deliberate spiritual and often evil and destructive intentional act. In such cases, one must be ready for spiritual retaliation either instantly or later. It is also worth noting that this “from-right-to-left” directional order of greetings is connected to the Ewe concept and cultural norms associated with the use of right and left hands. There is a clear distinction between what the left hand does and what is solely the domain of the right hand. Reversal and inappropriate use of the correct hands for the correct act, in many cases, is seriously frowned upon.

<sup>419</sup> It should be pointed out that indigenously Ewe women rarely shake hands (with the opposite sex) in public. If they do, they are never the first to initiate it, it is often very simple, and does not include grabbing the thumb and snapping the fingers. Today, however, it is becoming common for women to shake hands with anyone in public (but still, without those masculine characteristics). See Locke (1992)

structure provides its form.”<sup>420</sup> Additionally, the language typically used is old and replete with ancient historical, cultural, and religious references; thus, even the average native speaker may not completely understand the textual meaning. The evolution of the Ewe language contributes to these difficulties, which are further complicated by the multilingual structure of some songs. Hence, complete and deep comprehension of the songs demands knowledge of the culture and personal experiences in the tradition.

Usually, a superficial descriptive level, surface, or facial meaning exists which, though meaningful in its original language, sometimes may not make any sense linguistically when translated into a different language. A deeper, proverbial, or actual meaning is also present, which may be hidden or enigmatic to the layman<sup>421</sup> or cultural novice (even in the original language). The deeper meaning is often the message the composer intends to convey to the larger populace. Yet another philosophical and/or spiritual level of meaning may exist that is discernable by only a few in the society. To illustrate these levels of meaning, consider an indigenous Ewe perception about youthfulness as depicted in the proverbs *Ade to boboe metsia ade nu o* which literally means “the leaf does not keep its tenderness forever.” Explaining this proverb, Dzobo states:

This is a very tease way of expressing a whole philosophy of youth and indirectly, of life. In this proverb life is seen as comprising at least three stages: infancy...youth...old age. Youth like the green summer leaf is very beautiful to look at, but it is transitory. It passes on into old age. The main point of the proverb is this ‘Youth is not a permanent stage for anybody to rejoice in.’ It must therefore be spent thoughtfully. Remember your old age in your youth, and spend your youth in humility and not in arrogance.

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<sup>420</sup> Dzobo (2006: xviii)

<sup>421</sup> Layman is used here to refer to someone whose knowledge and linguistic skills are limited to just daily language use and whose cultural and musical knowledge of the tradition is very limited.

A song text related to the above proverb is: *Atsiowo fe angba ya mesea yoyro o* meaning "the leaves of an artificially decorated plant soon wither."

Discerning philosophical, spiritual, and other meanings of songs and performance practices is usually the "preserve" of indigenous scholars, priests, master artists, political leaders, and individuals possessing natural or professional appreciation for deeper knowledge.<sup>422</sup> The difficulty of decoding these layers of meaning is partly due to the texts used in the songs and the composer's state of mind at the time of composition. It is believed that many composers are inspired or even directed by supernatural beings to compose songs or create musical genres.<sup>423</sup> With understanding of the use of symbols in Ewe poetic communication, song texts, proverbs, and other maxims used in musical performances can be decoded by everybody.

Symbolism is a communicative device used in many indigenous African cultures, including the Ewe. In their thoughts and actions, artists use symbols as visual representations of persons, scenes, objects, events, epochs, situations, and relationships. For example, in their poetic expressions, knowledge may be symbolized in the baobab tree; an eyelash may symbolize old age, knowledge, and/or experience; and the beard and green leaf symbolize the young, tenderness, and youthfulness. As David Locke indicates: "A song ostensibly about hunting and war may be intended as advice for right living."<sup>424</sup>

In poetic communication, including songs and proverbs, symbols usually refer to something beyond themselves; hence they relay additional meaning while communicating what is usually the truth in context. Therefore, to understand the philosophical thoughts embedded in

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<sup>422</sup> It should be noted that "indigenous scholars" as used here refers to Ewe indigenes that are steeped in traditional knowledge, philosophy, and practices and does not necessarily refer to indigenous Ewe who have merely higher Western education.

<sup>423</sup> See Locke (1978, 1992, 2005), Fiagbedzi (1977), Anyidoho (1983), Dor (2000), and Amegago (2000)

<sup>424</sup> Locke (1992: 11)

song texts and proverbs, one must, as part of the decoding process, identify utilized symbols and their connotations. African paremiologists<sup>425</sup> and poets, including Komla Dzobo, have identified two types of symbols common in indigenous African poetic communication—(1) denotative symbols and (2) connotative symbols.<sup>426</sup>

In a personal communication, Komla Dzobo explained that a denotative symbol is a name or label for an entity while a connotative symbol refers to the implied meaning the symbol transmits.<sup>427</sup> The understanding of connotative symbols is necessary for understanding the deeper content of many song texts. For example, a father may use a song to advise a son about to travel abroad for further studies. In his song, he used two proverbs; (1) *dumenyo meso afe o* “good foreign land/country is never equal to homeland” and (2) *atikpo no tome fe alafa deka mezua lo o* “a piece of log that remains in a river for a hundred years does not become a crocodile,” as follows:

**Song 3: *Dumenyo Meso Afe O***

***Kinka*** (Text in Ewe: Anlo dialect)

*Dumenyo mesoa afe o*

*Vinye, do nku edzi be*

*Dumenyo mesoa afe o*

*Eyata ne ele gbea dzi la*

*Meganlo afe be o*

*Elabena, atikpo no tome*

*Fe alafa deka mezua lo o*

**Literal translation**

Good foreign country never equals home

My child, remember that

Good foreign country never equals home

So, while in the wilderness (foreign land)

Do not forget home (your native land)

Because, a log that remains in a river

for a hundred years does not become a crocodile

Using Komla Dzobo’s analytic framework, four significant symbols appear in the second proverb *atikpo no tome fe alafa deka mezua lo o* “a piece of log that remains in a river for hundred years does not become a crocodile.” (1) *Atikpo* “log” connotes a person who lives in a

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<sup>425</sup> Scholars who study proverbs and proverbial expressions

<sup>426</sup> See for example Dzobo (2006: xix). See also Awoonor (1974, 1975), Dzobo (1975, 1997, 2004, 2006), Anyidoho (1982, 1983, 1997), Gyekye (1995, 1996), and Korem and Abissath (2004)

<sup>427</sup> Personal Communication with Rt. Rev. Professor N. Komla Dzobo (Interview: Monday, June 18, 2007 in Ho, Ghana). See also Dzobo (2006)

foreign country; (2) *Tome/To* “river” connotes the foreign country; (3) *Lo* “crocodile” connotes a native of that foreign country; and (4) *Fe alafa deka* “a hundred years” connotes a long period of time.

Having decoded the symbols, the true meaning of the proverb becomes clearer: ruling out naturalization, even if one lives in a foreign country for a long time, he/she will never become a citizen of that country. Even with naturalization (which is not an indigenous Ewe concept), one cannot become a native or citizen by birth if he/she lives in a foreign land. The moral import of this statement is that one must, therefore, love or learn to love his/her own native land and never forget it in the course of sojourning in a foreign “greener” land. The meaning of this second proverb naturally ties in with the first proverb *dumenyo mesoa afe o* (good foreign country/town never equals homeland) and therefore, underscores the advice offered through song.

In addition to these symbolic meanings, an evaluative meaning also exists for many songs, proverbs, and other artistic communicative devices. For instance, in the previous illustrations, at least two forms of action are tabled. The first is ‘love for one’s native land’ and second, ‘subversive to it.’ The song/proverb evaluates the two actions and recommended love of one’s native land and ranked it higher than disloyalty.<sup>428</sup> Understanding the evaluative meaning of song texts and proverbs is as important as the symbolic meaning since it contributes to unraveling the moral truth of the text. According to Dzobo, the moral truth, which may be expressed either as a principle of conduct, a value, or attitude, is an essential part of the meaning of the text.

Another common linguistic and artistic feature that is necessary for a complete understanding of Ewe musical texts is parallelism. There are two levels or kinds of parallelism

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<sup>428</sup> Dzobo (2006)

that are commonly used in Ewe poetic expressions. They are comparative parallelism and metaphoric parallelism. The former refers to a situation in which two entities, that may or may not share inherent social, biological, practical characters, features, or relationships, are compared in one statement. The former refers to the practical but indirect application of such comparison in real life situations, its usefulness, and the moral lessons it teaches. For example, in the proverb and song text “*nunya adidoe asi mesune o*” (lit. knowledge is a baobab tree; hand cannot embrace it), the limitlessness of knowledge and wisdom is compared with the size of a baobab tree—a comparative parallelism. What the proverb actually teaches is that in Ewe indigenous philosophical conception, there is a limit to what any one individual can know; but there is no limit to what can be known. In other words, no one individual can claim monopoly of knowledge and wisdom; no one is omniscient. The metaphoric parallelism here is therefore the parallel between the limitlessness of knowledge and the enormous size and usefulness of the baobab tree.<sup>429</sup> Awareness and understanding of these and other “enigmatic expressions” in Ewe musico-poetic practice are necessary, for, they provide both artists and audiences “deep thoughts for contemplation,” and appreciation.<sup>430</sup>

If one is to understand the deeper thoughts in indigenous Ewe song texts and proverbs, it is crucial to move beyond literal meanings. This is because literal meaning may present vastly different understandings to people of different ages, cultural and traditional orientation, background, religious beliefs, and social status. To the listener and performer, deeper/actual meanings become apparent as one passes through various stages of life and cultural education and awareness. For example, an interpreter of Ewe song texts or proverbs must have extensive

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<sup>429</sup> See subsequent chapters for examples in song texts, proverbs, personal names and expression and their deeper explanations and discussion. See also Dor (2000: 206-207)

<sup>430</sup> See Agawu (1995: 131) and Dor (2000: 208)

knowledge of the customs, social organization, history, occupations and religion of the Ewe, and understanding of the plant and animal life of Eweland. As many texts are composed from indigenous experiences and/or imaginations, an interpretation requires intimate knowledge of local customs and social institutions. Such deeper understanding is necessary so that Ewe performances are not viewed as “mere entertainment complete with enough athleticism to amuse spectators.”<sup>431</sup> A holistic comprehension would help audience to view such performances as “occasions on which the more thoughtful of us would renew our continuing engagement with some of life’s basic and most difficult questions.”<sup>432</sup>

Similarly, for an Ewe to fully understand and appreciate songs and maxims from a foreign culture, he/she needs to have some experience with other cultural entities. For instance, songs from Western cultures about snow, ice, and other intemperate weather conditions require personal experiences with winter conditions to be fully understood. The song “In the bleak mid winter” offers an example relevant to me:

In the bleak midwinter, frosty wind made moan,  
Earth stood hard as iron, water like a stone;  
Snow had fallen, snow on snow, snow on snow,  
In the bleak midwinter, long ago.<sup>433</sup>

Growing up in the coastal and forest tropic regions of Ghana, this researcher sang this song yearly from late November through early January since childhood, but never understood its actual meaning. While attaching some religious connotation (since the song was performed during Christmas), it was not until arriving in the United States and experiencing winter firsthand that understanding of the meaning of those lines became clear. Likewise, it is difficult for a

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<sup>431</sup> Agawu (1995: 131)

<sup>432</sup> Agawu (1995: 131), see also Dor (2000)

<sup>433</sup> Words by Christina Rossetti (1872): She wrote these words in response to a request from the magazine *Scribner’s Monthly* for a Christmas poem). Music by Cranham, Gustav T. Holts (1906). See <http://www.cyberhymnal.org/htm/i/n/intbleak.htm> (accessed: 03/17/08)

person who has never seen or heard of a train, or who knows nothing about the train's role in the development of the United States, to appreciate an American song featuring a train as its main metaphor or theme. Similarly, any outsider to Ewe culture (or even a historically and/or culturally unoriented or uninitiated young Ewe) may not fully comprehend an Ewe traditional song featuring Kundo, Notsie, or *Klilinu* as its theme.<sup>434</sup> To truly understand such texts, translation,<sup>435</sup> research, and/or orientation into the culture are essential.

Levels of meaning and understanding notwithstanding, songs are essential in the Ewe's everyday life and in the sustenance of Ewe culture. Writing about dancing clubs and the role of songs, Ladzekpo and Pantaleoni indicate, "to *Eweawo* [Ewe] songs are the most outstanding features of a dancing club's performance. By its songs, a club's individuality and quality are most established, and learning them is the first and foremost difficult thing a newly formed club must do."<sup>436</sup> In this case, clubs are identified not only by the drums and rhythmic patterns used but the songs styles and texts utilized. As indicated earlier, songs and those who "give birth" to them are as important to both preliterate and literate Ewe society as their political and spiritual leaders. Ewe composers are social visionaries, sages, and politicians who embed their idealistic socio-cultural images in their products—products they have sweetened with their artistic skills and philosophical ingenuity. Musicians rise to their duties by their ability to inspire society through their ideas and skills.

To clarify the sometimes obscure meanings of texts and allusions, this researcher presents representative songs, proverbs, and other texts according to their imagery and the themes they

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<sup>434</sup> See chapter 4 page 273 for examples of such songs

<sup>435</sup> Although translating a song text from one language into another poses other challenges, it nevertheless helps to a great extent.

<sup>436</sup> Ladzekpo and Pantaleoni (1970: 7)

express. The majority of the songs and proverbs use animal imagery and natural entities: for instance:

*Koklo naka nu na ahonoe naka?*  
(Can the pigeon scratch where the fowl scratches?)  
Meaning, “can the enemy fight as strong as we can fight.”

*Ko de lado anyidi hawo fe afoa?*  
(Who can trace the footprint of an ant?)  
Meaning to defeat us is as difficult as tracing the footprints of an ant—almost an impossible task.

*Eto nutie miekpa vua do*  
(We have carved the canoe according to the nature of the river).  
Meaning we have fought the battle according to the nature of the enemy, and have won.

*Vimaseto nekplom adze ayiyo*  
(The disobedient child should move carefully with me)  
Meaning the stubborn but weak enemy had better respect my strength and power.

Full song texts of these and other examples are presented throughout this dissertation.

### 2.3 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This chapter has highlighted the deeper meanings embedded in common Ewe musico-linguistic terminologies and concepts. First, the chapter established that the lack of a single lexical item denoting “music” in Ewe language and culture is not due to lack of linguistic development, but rather due to Ewe’s conceptualization of music as a holistic art form. “Music” is an enactment of life; it goes beyond “art for art sake” and incorporates other artistic, socio-cultural and philosophical concepts. Hence, the philosophical thoughts, concepts, and terminologies or

expressions, including *vu* (drum) that refer to and underscore music as a general artistic phenomenon incorporate all the related creative expressions.

Second, the chapter suggested that Ewe traditional philosophico-linguistic concepts establish clear analogies between artistic creativity and procreation. The Ewe concept of *no* (mother/female) as the source of life, as well as other artistic, politico-military, and spiritual/religious titles underscores the procreative concept of musical production. Against this background and in a process refined by countless generations, Ewe musicians (including *azagunowo* and *hesinowo*) are not just artistic procreators, but also nothing less than sages and oracular. These social visionaries and their idealistic images are utilized constantly, reevaluating and redefining society's most critical assumptions and values. In a typical course of dance-drumming activities through which real life situations are reenacted and dramatized, the entire society helps these "procreators" and scholars define the desirable attributes of communal life, and then actively mold its citizens to conform to these ideas of ethics and behavior. These characteristic qualities of a musician and the role of music were held in high esteem until recently when modern influences from within Ewe society as well as from foreign cultures, mass media, and other forces began gradually to de-emphasize them.

Third, the chapter indicated from Ewe perspectives that language is not only a vehicle of concepts and embodiment of philosophical points of views, but also influences philosophical thought. In other words, the thoughts of a sage are at least to some extent, determined by the structure and other characteristics of his/her language, such as the grammatical categories and vocabulary.<sup>437</sup> Therefore, when considering the music and indigenous knowledge of the Ewe, a critical examination of Ewe linguistic and philosophical paradigms is essential. The chapter

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<sup>437</sup> See Sandman Manfred. 1955. *Subject and Predicate: A Contribution to the Theory of Syntax*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

therefore defined and set parameters of certain terms and concept. Text, it explained, extends beyond song texts, lyrics, libretto, or words of songs, and includes all Ewe music and dance productions based on texts and/or relates to any verbalized or un verbalized texts. Additionally, it establishes that drum patterns are based on actual vocal texts. Also, specific musical instruments and dance styles are used as speech surrogates and include patterns, phrases, and rhythms based on specific texts. Hence, the rhythmic patterns, called *vugbewo*, are traditionally considered musico-linguistic texts and interpreted as such.

In addition, the chapter established that meaning is not only important but is embedded in many levels and socio-cultural acts. Musical text and dance steps are all relevant in the interpretation of Ewe indigenous knowledge and philosophical thoughts. As artists and educators, composers present the society's visions to the community through their artistic use of musical text. As varied as the songs may be, the process of natural selection eliminates songs with weak and undesirable messages, or songs that are unappealing or disagreeable to the people. Those with desirable messages and/or enticing artistic characters gain widespread popularity and are sung as long as they are contextually appropriate and their messages remain relevant, even after many generations. These song texts are imbibed at varied times in life, depending on the genre and textual composition and become scripts and references that are recalled and quoted (both in song and speech) later in life.

The chapter concluded that songs and their texts, besides underpinning the very fabric of society, serve as the repository and as a medium through which indigenous knowledge and thought systems are transmitted in both preliterate and literate Ewe society.<sup>438</sup> It is also obvious that the survival of Ewe indigenous music is directly linked with the survival and continuous

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<sup>438</sup> See Awoonor (1974, 1975), Dzobo (1975, 1997, 2004, 2006), Anyidoho (1982, 1983, 1997), Gyekye (1995, 1996), Korem and Abissath (2004), and Goolin (2000)

practice of Ewe culture. For when the Ewe lose their language, they will lose much (if not all) of their culture since the greater part of their cultural heritage, including their philosophical thoughts, is embedded in and expressed through their language and music. It is in view of this that I argue in my next chapter, among other things, that there are Ewe (African) philosophical thoughts and that those philosophical thoughts are embedded in various cultural practices including musico-linguistic art forms. Chapter three also examines some common tenets in African philosophy and tries to point out how certain Ewe thought processes fit into the broader African philosophical framework and how we can identify them in musical practice.

### **3.0 PHILOSOPHY AND METAPHYSICAL CONCEPTS**

In chapter 2, I discussed the musico-linguistic background of the Ewe, described musical resources, and unraveled the deeper meanings of Ewe musical titles, as well as the qualities and functions of Ewe musicians. I also discussed language and other musico-linguistic forms that are necessary in the understanding of Ewe indigenous knowledge and philosophy. Finally, I outlined the various levels of meanings in Ewe musical text, spoken text, and theme.

Chapter 3 focuses on Ewe and for that matter African philosophy and metaphysical concepts. The chapter is in two parts. Part A addresses concepts in African philosophy. Based on extensive philosophical literature, I argue that African philosophy exists and that it is embedded in various cultural practices including musico-linguistic art forms. I also outline the various categories and processes of knowledge in Ewe language and culture. Part B discusses Ewe metaphysics, focusing on ontology and the concept of Supreme God. It reiterates the fact that Ewe and other indigenous African people believe in the existence of a Supreme Being, whom the Ewe call Mawu. Using musical text, proverbs and other musico-linguistic resources, I dispute the belief that Africans did not have the concept of Supreme God until they encountered European-Christian missionary crusaders.

### 3.1 AFRICAN “PHILOSOPHICAL” CONCEPTS: WORLDVIEW

How does African philosophy apply to this study? Research that has indigenous knowledge and cultural values at its core surely has much to do with philosophy, as philosophy is defined as “essentially a rational, critical, and systematic inquiry into the fundamental ideas underlying human thought, experience, and conduct—an enquiry whose subject matter includes epistemological concepts and categories.”<sup>439</sup>

This chapter does not aim at tracing the history of philosophy in Africa. Neither does it intend to engage in the many philosophical arguments regarding the terminologies, definitions, and boundaries of African philosophy. Rather, it attempts to reiterate the existence of African philosophy as demonstrated by many African philosophers; discuss some of the many sources of African philosophy; register basic Ewe cultural elements that reinforce scholarly assertions already made; and demonstrate how musical practice contributes to the sustenance and propagation of philosophical tenets. This chapter defines and discusses concepts that are fundamental to the dissertation, but not necessarily in the “metropolitan philosophical diction” and not with the aim of engaging in and/or projecting one. It is here that I present limitations and clarifications of some concepts and terminologies employed in the research.

The issue of the existence of African philosophy has been discussed in many philosophical scholarly works and still continues to be of interest to many other researchers.<sup>440</sup>

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<sup>439</sup> Gyekye (1995: 4)

<sup>440</sup> See for example Abraham (1962), Nkrumah (1964), Mbiti (1969, 1970, 1975), Mazrui (1974), Diop (1974, 1978), Oruka (1975, 1978, 1990), Hountodji (1983, 1996), Makinde (1988), Oladipo (1988), Horton (1977), Hountondji (1983), Gyekye (1988, 1995, 1996, 1997), Wiredu (1980, 1990, 1991, 1996), Dzobo (1973, 1997, 2004, 2006)

My research indicates that there are some doubts about the existence of African philosophy. Some researchers<sup>441</sup> thought that what is termed African philosophy “is still in the making.”<sup>442</sup> Kwame Gyekye, for example, indicates that scholars, including philosophers, “tend to squirm a little at the mention of African philosophy, though they do not do so at the mention of African art, music, history, anthropology, or religion.”<sup>443</sup> He adds that: “Whereas the latter cluster of disciplines has been—and still been—cultivated or pursued by scholars, both Africans and non-Africans [sic] African philosophy [sic] is relegated to limbo, and its existence doubted.”<sup>444</sup> Gyekye suggests two main reasons as to why he thinks some scholars are skeptical about the existence of African philosophy: first, is the lack of writing in Africa’s historical past; and second is that African traditional thought is not always accepted as philosophy.<sup>445</sup> It is, however, worth noting that, Gyekye and many other scholars have adequately and convincingly demonstrated that not only does African philosophy exist but also that African traditional thought is and should be regarded as philosophy.<sup>446</sup> My conviction that African philosophy exists stems from both my own fieldwork and evidence from scholarly works I accessed in the course of my research. In using the term “African philosophy” however, I do not intend to argue that there is or will ever be a unitary or uniform African philosophical perspective. Rather, what I agree with and wish to portray here is summarized in Kwame Gyekye’s chapter on the “Idea of African Philosophy,” in *African Intellectual Heritage*. He explains that:

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<sup>441</sup> See for example Horton, Robin. 1977. “Traditional Thought and the Emerging African Philosophy Department: A Comment on the Current Debate,” *Second Order, An African Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. VI, No. 1, pp. 64-80. See also Wiredu (1980), Gyekye (1995), and Hountondji, Paulin J. 1983. *African Philosophy: myth and Reality*. Translated by Henri Evans. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

<sup>442</sup> See for example Wiredu (1980: 36), Gyekye (1995: 8, 32),

<sup>443</sup> Gyekye (1995: 3)

<sup>444</sup> Ibid. Philosophical sagacity, he says, is therefore presumed to be a special relish of the people of the West and the East.

<sup>445</sup> See for example Horton (1977: 64-80), Hountondji (1983), Wiredu (1980: 36), and Gyekye (1995: 8, 32)

<sup>446</sup> See Gyekye (1988, 1995, 1996, 1997), Wiredu (1980, 1990, 1991, 1996), Oruka (1975, 1978, 1990), Appiah (1992), Asante and Asante (1985), Asante and Abarry (1996), and Dzobo (1973, 1997, 2004, 2006)

A justification exists for talking of African philosophy or describing a body of ideas as African—not in the sense that these ideas are not to be found anywhere else in the world [or that these ideas are held by all Africans], but in the sense that this body of ideas is seen, interpreted, and analyzed by many African thinkers (and societies) in their own way. Thus, by ‘African’ I do not mean to imply that a particular body of philosophical idea is uniquely or exclusively African [or necessarily common to all African cultures]. I am using ‘African’ in the sense in which one might use ‘Western’ or ‘European’ or ‘Oriental.’<sup>447</sup>

It should be clear that in addition to African philosophy, one could also talk of Ewe, Akan, Yoruba, Ibo, Zulu, Kikuyu, or Shona philosophy just as in addition to Western philosophy one can speak of American, German, or British; and of Chinese or Indian philosophy in addition to Oriental philosophy. If indeed it makes sense to talk of Western or Eastern philosophy,<sup>448</sup> would it not make sense to talk of African philosophy too? In addition, African philosophy is used here not in the sense that every African adheres to it, but in the sense that the philosophical system, tenet, or cultural element being discussed arises from, and hence is essentially related to, African life and thought.<sup>449</sup> Such a basis would justify a discourse in terms of “African philosophy” just as the similarities in the experiences, traditions, cultural systems, values and mentalities justify the appropriateness of the Western philosophy or Oriental philosophy, and so on. Similarly, by use of Ewe philosophy I do not mean all the philosophical thoughts and cultural elements discussed are peculiar or unique to the Ewe. Rather, it is used in the sense that the philosophy being discussed arises from, and is essentially related to, Ewe life and culture (which is part of African life and culture) and which may or may not be common to other African lives.<sup>450</sup> It is upon this analytical conclusion that I base my use of terminologies and discussion in this chapter and in all philosophical analysis in this dissertation.

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<sup>447</sup> Kwame Gyekye in Asante and Abarry (1996: 294)

<sup>448</sup> As clearly indicated in the title of one of the philosophical journals *Philosophy East and West*

<sup>449</sup> See Kwame Gyekye in Asante and Abarry (1996: 294) *ibid.*

<sup>450</sup> See chapter 1 section 1.2.1

### 3.1.1 African Thought Systems (“Philosophical Thoughts”)

There are some misconceptions in the literature about the existence of African philosophy. Some researchers<sup>451</sup> thought that what is termed African philosophy “is still in the making.”<sup>452</sup> They put forth this argument because of the lack of written material in Africa’s historical past, which led to the absence of a doxographic tradition, or a tradition of recorded opinion.<sup>453</sup> From the discussion above I agree with pro-African philosophers including Kwame Gyekye<sup>454</sup> and argue that, based on numerous philosophical literature, song texts, proverbs, and other verbal and artistic resources philosophical thought did exist in preliterate Africa.

As early as 1959, at the second Congress of Negro Writers and Artists held in Rome, the Commission on Philosophy passed the following resolution:

Considering the dominant part played by philosophic reflection in the elaboration of culture, considering that until now the West has claimed monopoly of philosophic reflection, so that philosophic enterprise no longer seem conceivable outside the framework of the categories forged by the West, considering that the philosophic efforts of traditional Africa has always been reflected in vital attitudes and has never had purely conceptual aims, the commission declares: (1) *that for the African philosopher, philosophy can never consist of reducing the African reality to Western systems;* (2) *that the African philosopher must base his enquiries upon the fundamental certainty that the Western philosophic approach is not the only possible one; and therefore, (a) urges that the African philosopher should learn from the traditions, tales, myth and proverbs of his people, so as to draw from them the laws of a true African wisdom and to bring out the specific categories of African thought. (b) calls upon the African philosopher, faced by the totalitarian or egocentric philosophers of the West, to divest himself of a possible*

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<sup>451</sup> See *ibid.*, Gyekye (1995), Horton, Robin. 1977. “Traditional Thought and Emerging African Philosophy Department: A Comment on the Current Debate.” *Second Order: An African Journal of Philosophy* 6, no. 1: 64-80. See also Hountondji, Paulin J. 1983. *African Philosophy: myth and Reality*. Translated by Henri Evans. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

<sup>452</sup> See for example Wiredu (1980: 36), Gyekye (1995: 8, 32),

<sup>453</sup> See for example Horton (1977: 64-80), Hountondji (1983), Wiredu (1980: 36), and Gyekye (1995: 8, 32)

<sup>454</sup> See Gyekye (1988, 1995, 1996, 1997), Mbiti (1969, 1970, 1975), Oruka (1975, 1978, 1990), Wiredu (1980, 1990, 1991, 1996),

*inferiority complex*, which might prevent him from starting from his African being to judge the foreign contribution...<sup>455</sup>

This resolution set the tone for many major works that have followed and have since then established the African philosophical paradigm.<sup>456</sup> Works such as these have shown that African philosophical thought exists and is expressed both in the oral literature and in the thoughts, actions, and concepts of the indigenous people. These scholars argue that many of Africa's preliterate philosophical materials are embedded in songs, proverbs, myths and folktales, rituals, beliefs, customs and other traditional practices of the people including their arts, symbols, and socio-political institutions and practices.

The presence of African philosophical thought is apparent through the writings of many scholars on African culture and philosophy.<sup>457</sup> Their works exhibit major studies on the subject. Below are series of quotations from major works that support the point. In 1938, when writing on the Dahomeyan (closest kins of the Ewe, culturally and linguistically), Herskovits states:

In a culture as highly organized as that of Dahomey...there was no lack of opportunity for the development of a complex philosophy of the Universe. The upper-class Dahomean does not need to restrict himself to describing concrete instances when discussing the larger concepts underlining his everyday religious practice, he is not at a loss when questions of the nature of the world as a whole, or abstract principles such as justice, or destiny, or accident are asked him.<sup>458</sup>

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<sup>455</sup> *Second International Conference of Negro Writers and Artists*, Rome, March 25 – April 1, 1959 (Presence African, Paris, 1954), page 441; as quoted with italics in Gyekye (1995: 33)

<sup>456</sup> See for example Abraham (1962), Nkrumah (1964), Mbiti (1969, 1970, 1975), Mazrui (1974), Diop (1974, 1978), Oruka (1975, 1978, 1990), Hountodji (1983, 1996), Makinde (1988), Oladipo (1988), Gyekye (1987, 1995, 1996, 1997), Wiredu (1980, 1991, 1992, 1996), Gbedegesin (1991), Appiah (1992, 2003), Asante and Abarry (1996), and Dzobo (2004, 2006)

<sup>457</sup> See for example *ibid*

<sup>458</sup> Herskovits, Melville J. 1938. *Dahomey: An Ancient West African Kingdom*. New York: J. J. August, p. 296; as quoted in Gyekye (1995: 13)

Another example can be found in the writing on religion and philosophy in Africa of E. G. Parrinder. He notes that: “Art is a means of expressing a basic philosophy of life...”<sup>459</sup> Earlier, E. W. Abraham, also writing on African philosophy and religion pointed out that “as the Akans could not write, they express their philosophico-religious ideas through art...”<sup>460</sup> Further proof can be found in Kwame Gyekye’s works on African philosophy. Alluding to William Fagg’s observations on the religious and philosophical basis and content of African art,<sup>461</sup> Kwame Gyekye reiterates as follows: “The philosophical content of African art emanates from its well-known symbolic character. Also, art is one of the areas of African cultural tradition where the critical impulse of the African mind comes to the fore.”<sup>462</sup> Beside arts, the complexities of African religious beliefs and practices constitute an important source of African philosophical thought. In line with that, Bolaji Idowu reveals that:

The religion of Yoruba... finds vehicles in myths, folk-tales, proverbs and sayings, and is the basis of philosophy. As there are no written records of the ancient past of the people, all that has been preserved of their myths, philosophy, liturgies, songs and sayings, has come to us by word of mouth from generation to generation.<sup>463</sup>

Adding to this perspective, John S. Mbiti states that: “As with proverbs, the collection and study of religious songs is very scanty, and yet this is another rich area where one expects to find repositories of traditional beliefs, ideas, wisdom and feelings.”<sup>464</sup> Emphasizing on music as one of the major sources of African philosophical thoughts, Kofi Abrefa Busia, wrote: “Akan

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<sup>459</sup> Parrinder, E. G. 1969. *Religion in Africa*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, page 25; as quoted in *ibid*.

<sup>460</sup> Abraham, W. 1962. *The Mind of Africa*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p. 111 as quoted in *ibid*.

<sup>461</sup> See Fagg, William. 1960. “The Study of African Art.” In *Cultures and Societies of Africa*, edited by Simon Ottenberg and Phoebe Ottenberg, 466-467. New York: Random House.

<sup>462</sup> Gyekye (1995: 14)

<sup>463</sup> Idowu E. Bolaji. 1962. *Olodumare, God in Yoruba Belief*. London: Longmans, p. 5-6; as quoted in *ibid*

<sup>464</sup> Mbiti (1990: 87)

drum language is full of riddles that conceal reflective thought and philosophy [and] funeral dirges philosophize on human life and death.”<sup>465</sup>

Philosophical thoughts in Africa have not been confined to pure conceptualization. African philosophical thoughts are equally expressed or reflected in socio-cultural values. For example, the humanistic strand of Ewe, Akan, and Yoruba philosophical thought, as in that of other African cultures, is often expressed with the concern and understanding that people in African communities feel for their fellow men. This is expressed through the social institutions of a clan (*hlo*, Ewe; *abusua*, Akan; and *idile*, Yoruba), with its web of kinship ties and other social relationships.

Proverbs, song texts, myths, aphorisms, and other cultural expressive forms are the wise sayings of individuals with acute speculative intellects. These artistically expressive forms become philosophically interesting as they raise and answer questions regarding commonly held beliefs as well as interpretation of human experience.

Mythopoeic imaginations are an integral part of indigenous African cosmology as they are among other cultures. Myths serve as important modes for abstract thought throughout African cultures. For example, from Yoruba tradition, Bolaji Idowu states that “...Odu myths enshrine the theological and philosophical thoughts of the Yoruba...”<sup>466</sup> Similarly, R. S. Rattray, writing in his book *Akan-Ashanti Folk Tales*, points out that folktales “mirror more or less accurately the ideas [of] the people and their general outlook upon life, conduct and morals.”<sup>467</sup> Exploring the philosophical importance of myths requires extensive and detailed examination. According to some modern African philosophers, “The myths can be said to be imaginative

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<sup>465</sup> Busia, Kofi Abrefa. 1962. *The Challenge of Africa*. New York: Praeger, p. 11

<sup>466</sup> Idawu (1962: 45)

<sup>467</sup> Rattray, R. S. 1930. *Akan-Ashanti Folk Tales*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, page ix; as quoted in Gyekye (1995: 14)

representations of religious or philosophical (metaphysical) ideas or prepositions; they presuppose conceptual analysis and conceal philosophical arguments or conclusions.”<sup>468</sup> Kwame Gyekye supports this point by saying that philosophers like Parmenides, Plato, and others have resorted to myths in order to present thought. He quotes J. A. Stewart who wrote: “Myth...is an essential element of Plato’s philosophical style and his philosophy cannot be understood apart from it.”<sup>469</sup>

Like myths, proverbs and aphorisms can be accessed as sources of African philosophical thought. Proverbs, which often are used as song texts, especially in Ewe musical practices, are symbolic and deep expressions that lead to a better understanding of situations, events, ideas, values and patterns of behavior. As a Yoruba proverb states, *owe l’esin oro* (lit. proverbs are the horses of word) meaning “a proverb is the horse which carries one swiftly to the discovery of ideas.”<sup>470</sup> Mbiti emphasized that, “it is in proverbs...that we find the remains of the oldest forms of African religious and philosophical wisdom.”<sup>471</sup>

Many have noted the popularity of proverbs as legitimate sources of Africa’s intellectual and philosophical thought. For example, Kwame Gyekye quotes a work by J. G. Christaller, a German scholar and missionary who is reported to have collected over three thousand Akan proverbs in 1879 as:

May this collection [that is of proverbs] give a new stimulus to the diligent gathering of folklore and to the increasing cultivation of native literature. May those Africans who are enjoying the benefit of Christian education make the best of this privilege, but let them not despise the sparks of truth entrusted to and preserved by their own people and let them not forget that by entering into their way of thinking and by acknowledging what is good and expounding what is

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<sup>468</sup> Gyekye (1995: 15)

<sup>469</sup> Stewart, J. A. 1960. *The Myths of Plato*, edited by G. Levy. London: Centaur, page 26; as quoted in Ibid.

<sup>470</sup> See Dzobo and Amegashie-Viglo (2004)

<sup>471</sup> Mbiti (1990: 86)

wrong they will gain the more access to the hearts and minds of their less favored countrymen.<sup>472</sup>

Similarly in 1916, British anthropologist R. S. Rattray, who was employed by the British colonial administration of the Gold Coast (now Ghana), wrote of Ghanaian proverbs as:

The few words [of the Author's Note] the present writer has felt it duty bound to say, lest the reader, astonished at the words of wisdom which are to follow, refuse to credit that a "savage" or "primitive" people could possibly have possessed the *philosophers, theologians, moralists, naturalists, and even it will be seen philologists, which many of these proverbs prove them to have had among them.*<sup>473</sup>

One common argument that is often raised against these cultural forms as sources or bases of African philosophy is the lack of identifiable authors. For example, most if not all the songs and proverbs that I have used in this dissertation have no identifiable authors or composers. So whatever philosophical thoughts and indigenous intellectual products there are in them could not be ascribed to any one individual. African philosophical thought is often labeled as "collective" because (1) it is the intellectual product of all or most of the members of a community or (2) it is accepted, used and understood by the whole community.<sup>474</sup> This school of thought is often contrasted with other philosophic traditions, apparent for example in French or Chinese philosophy, where individual philosophers are designated as the producers and "owners" of specific philosophical thoughts. African belief and thought systems (philosophical thoughts) are not attributed to single known authorian source(s).

Africa's preliterate historic past has lacked this latter type of philosophers, i.e. "*known and identifiable* individual thinkers who stand out and can claim to have originated specific

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<sup>472</sup> As quoted in Gyekye (1995: 15).

<sup>473</sup> Ibid. Italics by Gyekye

<sup>474</sup> See Oruka (1990), Appiah (1992), Gyekye (1987, 1997) and Wiredu (1980, 1996).

philosophical doctrines and to whom we can trace such doctrines.”<sup>475</sup> It is important to note that even in the well-established literate societies, there is evidence of philosophical development similar to what is labeled as African “collectivism.” For example, sources of knowledge of early Greek and Islamic philosophies that cannot be traced to any one individual are analogous to African proverbs and song texts as “collective” philosophical thoughts. It is therefore, inconsistent and ethnocentric to recognize unidentified authors and fragmented Greek and Islamic philosophic ideas as intimations of Greek or Islamic philosophy, and then to refuse to accept African song texts, proverbs, and other sayings as sources of knowledge of African traditional philosophy.<sup>476</sup>

Despite its label, there is no doubt that it was individual sages that authored African “collective” philosophy. As Kwame Gyekye clearly puts it, “A *particular thought or idea* is, as regards its genesis, the product of *an individual's mind*.”<sup>477</sup> Although it is possible to have two or more people produce the same ideas simultaneously in time and space, the ideas so produced are still individual philosophic products from individual minds. Gyekye convincingly explains the issue and argues against scholars’ previous interpretations and views. He states:

It is always an individual’s idea or thought or proposition that is accepted and gains currency among other people; at this stage, however, it is erroneously assumed to be the “collective” thought of the people. “Collective” thought, then, is a misnomer. There is, strictly speaking, no such thing as “collective” thought, if this means that ideas result from the intellectual production of a whole

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<sup>475</sup> Gyekye (1995: 24) emphasis is the author’s. It is worth noting that even in the history of well established literate cultures not all authors of philosophical products are known or identified; some have since time immemorial, remained anonymous. The authenticity and/or authorship of some Western and Islamic philosophical thoughts and treatises have remained bone of contention among scholars. See for example Gyekye (1995: 21-22). See also E. Dupree, “L’Aristote et la Traite des Categories.” *Archiv fur Geschichte der philosophie*, 1909, Vol 22, pp. 230-51.; S. Mansion, “La doctrine Aristotelicienne de la Substance et la Traite des Categories,” *Proceedings of the Tenth International Congress of Philosophy* (North-Holland Amsterdam 1949), Vol. 1, pp 1099-100. See also Kwame Gyekye, *Ibn al-Tayyib’s Commentary on Porphyry’s Eisogoge* (Dar al-Mashreq, Beirut, 1941-6, pp 31-9; all as found in Gyekye (1995) footnote 29 and 30 on page 216.

<sup>476</sup> See Appiah (1992), Gyekye (1987, 1997) and Wiredu (1980, 1996).

<sup>477</sup> Gyekye (1995: 24). Italics in the original

collectivity. What has come to be described as “collective” thought is nothing but the ideas of individual wise people; individual ideas that, due to the lack of doxographic tradition in Africa, became part of the pool of communal thought, resulting in the obliteration of the differences among these ideas, and in the impression that traditional thought was a monolithic system that does not allow for divergent ideas. Yet, as productions of individual intellects, we can reasonably conceive these ideas (or some of them) to be varied and divergent.<sup>478</sup>

Overall, “collectivity” or “individualism” should not detract from the values and ideas contained in the songs texts, proverbs, and other cultural forms. Indigenous Africans give more attention to the ideas presented and less effort to identifying their authors, who themselves have benefited from communal experiences that may have contributed to the formulation of their ideas. It is this African concept—attention to the ideas embodied in Ewe song texts, proverbs, myths, and fables as they are used in musical practice—that is the key focus of my research.<sup>479</sup>

### 3.1.2 Ewe Epistemology

#### 3.1.2.1 *Nunya* (Knowledge) and *Adanu/Anyasa* (Wisdom)

*Nunya* (lit. thing known, experienced, or observed) meaning “knowledge,” may be seen generally as awareness, expertise, and understanding of an act, or the truth gained through experience. *Nunya* is also (sometimes) used to translate the English word “wisdom”; hence *nunyala* (lit. an intelligent person) refers to “a wise or knowledgeable man/woman.” In Ewe epistemology, *nunya* is the sum of what has been perceived, discovered, reasoned, practiced, experienced, or learned.<sup>480</sup> The Ewe, (like other Africans) believe that experience is the primary means of acquiring knowledge. Many Ewe proverbs, maxims, and song texts underscore the

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<sup>478</sup> Gyekye (1995: 24)

<sup>479</sup> Where possible, authors have been identified and duely acknowledged.

<sup>480</sup> See *ibid.*, and also *The American Heritage Dictionary of Idioms* by Christine Ammer. Copyright © 1997 by The Christine Ammer 1992 Trust. Published by Houghton Mifflin Company.

above concept. For example, *dedela fe afoe bia na* (*lit.* it is the goer's feet that become red or get dusty), meaning "he who feels or experiences it knows it"; and *nusi nesro la, eyae nanya*<sup>481</sup> (what you have learned is what you would know).

The Ewe proverb and song text *nunya mele aklama me o* (knowledge is not a gift of the gods), underscores the fact that knowledge is acquired by individual efforts and is not a matter of luck or divine intervention. In the Ewe concept of being and causality, the term *aklama* is often used in reference to the name for the god of fortune. S/he is believed to be the guardian spirit that accompanies every individual into this world. *Aklama* seeks the good fortune of her wards, provides them security and safety in the world. The philosophical thought in the proverb/song text above, therefore, is the fact that one would not know anything if one solely relies on *aklama*, the god of fortune or divine intervention. Instead, one must work for himself/herself. For, knowledge is not like manna that dwells in "the pious" or falls from heaven onto "the pure in heart."

The terms for wisdom in Ewe are *adanu/anyasa/anyansa*.<sup>482</sup> From Ewe epistemological perspective, *adanu* also means skill, dexterity, art, craft, artfulness, idea, or thought.<sup>483</sup> In Ewe indigenous perceptions, *nunya* (knowledge) and *adanu/anyasa* (wisdom) have both practical and theoretical (philosophical) dimensions. Gaining *adanu* and/or *nunya* involve action and individual efforts. Thus, the practical dimension of Ewe philosophy is already embedded in the original meaning of the word. A similar concept can be found in the Greek philosophical word

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<sup>481</sup> Note that the syllable 'nu' as in the word 'nusi' and the syllable 'nya' as in the word 'nanya' are both derived from the root word "nunya" knowledge, emphasizing them as the bases of the maxim.

<sup>482</sup> *Anyasa* as used by some Ewe (specifically the Ewedome) to denote wisdom, is a term believed to have been borrowed from the Akan (Twi) language (*nyansa* as it is in Twi) meaning knowledge or wisdom. See Dzobo and Amegashie-Viglo (2004: 31) and Gyekye (1995: 61, 1996). Akan is the biggest ethnic group in Ghana (geographically and also in population). Akan is made up of three major sub-ethnic groups (Asante, Fante, and Akwapim-Akyem) that speak different but mutually intelligible Akan dialects including Asante Twi, Akwapim Twi and Fante.

<sup>483</sup> Personal communication with Mr Simon Lamadeku and Prof. S Datey-Kumodzie (see appendix E),

*sophia* which is translated to mean wisdom, but also skill, intelligence, practical wisdom, and learning.<sup>484</sup> Kwesi Wiredu, in his book *Philosophy and An African Culture*, wrote that: “A fact about philosophy in a traditional society, particularly worthy of emphasis, is that it is alive in day-to-day experience. When philosophy becomes academic and highly technical [and abstract], it can easily lose this quality.”<sup>485</sup> Understood as the capacity for philosophical thinking, Ewe indigenous thinkers, like their other Ghanaian counterparts, including the Akan, hold that *adanu* or *nyansa*, is a mental faculty that is largely inborn.<sup>486</sup> However, where *adanu* means skill, skillfulness, or practical knowledge, it still has to be acquired. In Akan, the word is made up of two syllables *nya* (to obtain) and *nsa* (that which is never exhausted).<sup>487</sup>

In indigenous Ewe culture, *adanu/anyasa* (wisdom) is the ability to discern what is true, right, and lasting; it describes knowing how to use knowledge that is already acquired. *Adanu/anyasa* is an inborn ability to use knowledge deduced from experience, which can be used continuously in improving upon life. It is the quality or state of being thoughtful or wise (*sophos*); having the knowledge of what is true or right, coupled with just judgment as to action, sagacity, discernment, or insight. *Adanu/Anyasa* is good judgment, the generation of ideas, and the positive and appropriate use of knowledge. It is, in Ewe and many indigenous African cultures, the sum of learning through the ages and ability to utilize such possession in a productive way. As mentioned earlier, *nunya* (knowledge) and *adanu/anyasa* (wisdom) have both practical and theoretical (philosophical) dimensions. Even though there is always so much

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<sup>484</sup> See Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, Oxford. Clarendon Press. 1940, (<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/cgi-bin/ptext?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.04.0057>: accessed 03/24/08), and also Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000

<sup>485</sup> Wiredu (1980: 16)

<sup>486</sup> See Gyekye (1995)

<sup>487</sup> See Dzobo and Amegashi-Viglo (2004: 13)

emphasis on the practical experience, theoretical knowledge and wisdom need to be geared towards solving practical issues. Gyekye agrees:

Wisdom (Akan: *nyansa*) includes the ability to think out ways of making success in one's personal life—to analyze and solve the practical problems of life—and the ability to pay reflective attention to fundamental principles underlining human life and experience. Wisdom thus can be practical or theoretical (philosophical).<sup>488</sup>

He adds that:

The intellectual activities of the traditional African sages, or thinkers, are of course theoretical, even though the basis of their wisdom is in human experience. African maxims, which are generally the creations of the sages, are intended to convey truths that are profound and abstract.<sup>489</sup>

To be able to acquire knowledge and wisdom that would be useful in solving practical issues, one has to continually search and enquire. Thinkers often lay emphasis on the need to ask questions with the aim of expanding knowledge. For example, the following song texts and proverbs give some ideas: *Motabiala mehua mo o* (lit. s/he who asks for directions, is never lost; or an enquirer often finds the way). Another goes as; *vi bia nya ta se medzoa la o* (lit. the child that asks questions/researches/enquires is never stupid). These songs both convey the message that, to acquire knowledge and to be wise, one must constantly enquire, search, and question. An Akan proverb makes the same point that, *nyansa, yensua na yento* (wisdom, we acquire [it through learning and experience]; we do not buy [it]). In this case, *nyansa* means skill or practical knowledge.

To the best of my knowledge, there is no word in Ewe language that directly refers to or translates as its English equivalent “philosophy” or the Greek *philosophos*. However, the Ewe philosopher and musico-anthropologist Datey Kumordzie, in an interview, indicates that the

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<sup>488</sup> Gyekye (1996: 137)

<sup>489</sup> Ibid: 141

words or expressions *nunyala*, *adanuto* or *adanudela* (lit. thing knower, owner of wisdom/ideas, or user of wisdom/ideas) all actually meaning, “wise person” are equivalent to the Greek *sophos* (wise man).<sup>490</sup> Another Ewe word, *susu*, looks very similar to its Greek counterpart and may be used interchangeably with *adanu* or *nunya* in some contexts and situations. *Susu* meaning “reason” or ‘brain’ refers to idea or thought, which are all related at different levels of wisdom or contexts of being wise.

There are other categories or concepts of wisdom and knowing in Ewe conception. These include the combination of terms referring to the two main concepts previously discussed—knowledge and wisdom. One of such concepts is *susununya* (lit brain knowledge or knowledge/wisdom from reasoning). It is a combination of *susu* (brain or reason) and *nunya* (knowledge). This refers to the knowledge gained from reflections that are based on or grounded in wisdom. Its nature, according to C. K. Kudjordjie and Komla Dzobo, may not require an immediate experience as its source, although, it may rely on deductions from premises that have been already established from previous experiences or from wisdom.<sup>491</sup>

Another concept is *nusronya*, literally meaning ‘thing learned and known’ or ‘acquired knowledge.’ It is a combination or fusion of two words, *nunya* (knowledge) and *sro* (learn). *Nusronya* refers to knowledge acquired through formal processes of learning, either by indigenous pedagogical processes and individualized personal experiences or foreign (usually Western) educational curricula and methodologies. Synonymous or related to *nusronya*, is *agbalemenunya* literally ‘book inside knowledge.’ Although indigenous, these terms gained currency as post-colonial terminologies that are defined and used from modern educational

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<sup>490</sup> In an interview with Prof. Datey Kumodzie (see appendix E). See also Dzobo (2006), Dzobo and Amegashie-Viglo (2004), and Gyekye (1995, 1997)

<sup>491</sup> Personal communication with Mr. Kudjordjie and also with Rt. Rev. Prof. Komla Dzobo (see appendix E). See also Dzobo (2006) and Dzobo and Amegashie-Viglo (2004)

perspectives. Komla Dzobo indicates that the popular designation of *nusronya* is “book knowledge.” Similarly, *agbalemenunya* refers to knowledge acquired from books as distinguished from *afemenunya* (lit. home knowledge) knowledge acquired through indigenous means and/or practical experiences.

*Nusronya/Agbelemenunya* (book knowledge) is often associated with Western educational concepts, colonization, and other foreign cultural influences, usually acquired by means of print and electronic media. Dzobo states that: “*Nusronya* is not highly valued by the traditional society because it tends to be foreign and thus is divorced from the realities of the African environment.”<sup>492</sup> While this statement is true of indigenous Ewe attitudes it is worth noting its true contexts. That is, *Nusronya* or *Agbalemenunya* (book knowledge) may not be highly valued when an individual is unable to use it in solving practical issues in real life situations.

In the Ewe philosophical paradigm, wisdom and knowledge are primarily tools for solving real life challenges and for good behavior. Therefore, if an individual has spent much time in school, the community expects from that person not only the acquisition of knowledge and attitudes (that are often foreign), but also the display of well-rounded behavior that meets indigenous cultural standards. Any ‘irresponsible’ behavior or ‘foolish’ act by such a ‘schooled’ individual is highlighted and criticized. In addition, any deviation from traditional norms or signs of lacking indigenous knowledge on the part of such individual may be blamed on “impractical knowledge” from books.<sup>493</sup> Accordingly, there are such expressions as *agbelemenunya koe*,

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<sup>492</sup> Dzobo and Amegashie-Viglo (2004: 30)

<sup>493</sup> Personal communication with Mr. C.K. Kudjordjie and also with Rt. Rev. Prof. Komla Dzobo (see appendix E)

*adanu kui (adeke) o* (it is only book/theoretical knowledge; no wisdom); or *nusronya son koe, afemenunya deke mele esi o* (its all theoretical knowledge; s/he has no indigenous wisdom).

Another category of wisdom and knowledge in Ewe epistemology is *sidzedze* literally meaning the “act of knowing (something).” Antonymous to *sidzedze* is *simadzemadze* (the act of not knowing/ignorance). *Sidzedze* is rooted in awareness, understanding, and familiarity. It is the knowledge that is gained as a result of acquiring a certain level of awareness or gaining certain understanding of concepts, relations, and situations in terms of their fundamental principles. As in the other categories, the epistemic meaning in the concept *sidzedze* is embedded in the following proverb in which its antonym is used *Simadzemadze ame dokui fe ablode de wodoa kluvi ame* (the freedom that comes from lack of self-knowledge/ignorance only enslaves or makes one a slave). In other words, the self-knowledge that is worth having and really freeing is the awareness or knowledge of how much one does not know. Anything short of not knowing how ignorant one is about the fundamental principles of the mind and of wisdom is equated with being in ‘slavery.’ Dzobo again explains this philosophical thought further:

The proverb teaches the importance of having sound knowledge of one’s abilities, inadequacies, interests, desires and dislikes...such knowledge will set a man free to live and to relate himself meaningfully and purposefully to others. Self-knowledge is enlightening. Knowledge is freedom.

The deep interpretations and meaning conveyed in the above proverb could be likened to that of Pythagoras of Samos.<sup>494</sup> According to the familiar anecdote, when the Greek philosopher and mathematician was referred to as a wise man, he humbly said that his wisdom consisted in knowing that he was ignorant, and that he wished not to be called “wise” but a “lover of

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<sup>494</sup> Born between: c. 580 B.C.-572 B.C. and died between: c. 500 B.C.-490 B.C. In my research I have seen as many dates of birth and death of Pathagoras from different resources I consulted.

wisdom.”<sup>495</sup> Being modest, which is obviously what Pythagoras displayed by refusing to be called *sophos* (wise) and preferring to be called *philosophos* (lover of wisdom), in itself is a high mark of sagacity, and a display of wisdom and freedom.<sup>496</sup>

In Ewe epistemology, it is believed that *adanu*, *nunya*, and all related concepts take on meanings that are positive as well as negative. For example in the song text: *ame fe futo medoa adanu nyui na ame o* (one’s enemy does not give one a good counsel or wise ideas). In other words, you cannot trust your enemy to be your good counselor. A counselor is one who has accumulated knowledge and wisdom and also knows how to manipulate them for good or for bad ends. The song text warns that wisdom can be used negatively. Conversely, wisdom is used positively, for example, when wisdom is compared with riches as in the proverb: *Amedahe nyanue dia gbo hotsuto* (it is the poor wise man who makes the rich man look stupid). In other words, a poor but wise person stupefies a rich but unintelligent person. This underscores the fact that wisdom is worth more than riches.

The limitless nature is yet another perception about wisdom and knowledge. Wisdom’s depth is philosophically expressed in the proverb *Nunya adidoe, asi metune o* (knowledge/wisdom is like a baobab tree, no one person’s hands can embrace it). Enshrined in this proverb (often used in many song texts) is the understanding that there is a limit to what any one individual can know but not a limit to what can be known. Since knowledge is limitless, anyone who claims to know everything actually displays his or her ignorance and is often seen and labeled as such. The philosophical relationship or parallel between wisdom and the baobab tree as used in the above proverb can be further examined to unearth further epistemological tenets that may shed light on Ewe philosophical thought.

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<sup>495</sup> See <http://www.sacred-texts.com/cla/ogv/ogv33.htm>, and also Gyekye (1995: 16)

<sup>496</sup> See Ibid and Dzobo-Amegashi-Viglo (2004) and Gyekye (Ibid)

The baobab tree is called *adidotsi* in Ewe and its fruit, mildly sweet and sour, is called *alagba*. However, when baobab tree is young, it is usually called *alagbatsi* (*alagba* = the fruit of baobab; and *atsi* = tree).<sup>497</sup> The term *Alagbatsi* (a young baobab tree) is never used in the proverb above. It is only when the tree grows big and tall, that its name changes to *adidotsi*, as used in the proverb. One theory we can deduce from this name change is the difference in experience, role, and usefulness as a result of difference in age, size, and role.<sup>498</sup> *Alagbatsi*, as a young baobab tree does not bear much fruit. As a young baobab tree, one person may embrace it with hands. But as *alagbatsi* grows, gets taller, expands in size, begins to bear fruits, and becomes more useful to the people, its name changes to *adidotsi*, which then is compared with wisdom and knowledge. In fact, one more characteristic of this great tree is the fact that as it grows, when part of its trunk is cut or chopped off, it naturally does not just grow back, but also expands more than the part that has been cut off. In Ewe epistemology, this phenomenon of expansion is likened to the “knowledge shared is knowledge gained” phenomenon. The more one shares his wisdom and experiences with others, the wiser and more knowledgeable that person becomes. By the time *alagbatsi* becomes *adidotsi*, it is believed to have accumulated more experience in terms of energy, produce, resilience and adaptation to weather conditions and thus has become more useful in the practical life of the people.

Another analogy between the baobab tree and wisdom is the Ewe (African) concept and association of wisdom with age and experience. As Ewe thought system is based principally on experience, it is natural to credit an elderly person with wisdom because he or she has gained

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<sup>497</sup> It should be noted that, the name distinction (with regards) age and size of the tree is not predominant among young Ewe, especially those who do not grow up in the rural communities and/or are engaged in activities that may demand the knowledge of these distinction. However, the elder generations know and use these name distinctions in their discourse.

<sup>498</sup> The theoretical perspective analyzed here is based on my personal communication with Togbui Konu S. Lamadekoo and Amega Setsoafia Yibo Seshie and Kofi Nyadi (see appendix E)

experience in life.<sup>499</sup> Similar to what Gyekye pointed out about Akan, Ewe thinkers see wisdom and knowledge as an activity that may be inferred from what a person says and how he or she says it and not only in act. At a community gathering, traditional court of the king, or any social/public place, for example, the individual who is able to provide and articulate an intellectual analysis of the subject matter or practical solution to the problem under discussion; the person who is able to argue and convince others; the person who is able to bring together all the relevant facts in order to point out an underlying reason is, usually, the one considered to be wise and/or a deep thinker. Such gatherings as described above, especially those at the royal palace, are usually attended mostly by the elderly (*ametsitsiwo*). Even when a few young adults were present, etiquette gives little room for a young adult to be heard. Such a setting gives instant impression that it is only among the elderly that wise people are found. Such conclusions may be false for a young adult also may be considered wise if s/he can exhibit similar intellectual characteristics.

As another maxim indicates, *ametsitsi xloanu devi; devi ha xloanu ametsitsi* (an older adult counsels a child; a child also counsels an older adult). One obvious reason why in many preliterate African societies (including Ewe) elders are traditionally acknowledged as sources of indigenous knowledge and wisdom is that they possess the cumulative philosophical reflections of many indigenous thinkers, in an oral-aural environment. This idea is coupled with the indigenous African philosophy that heavily relies on experience and practical solution in the acquisition of wisdom. It is, therefore, natural to credit the elderly folks with wisdom due to their experiences gained over the years, as is alluded to in the maxim *detsitsi me ye aha nyui le* (the

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<sup>499</sup> Although it surely does not follow that every elderly person have the intellectual ability or capacity to make philosophical sense of her/his experiences.

best quality of liquor is in the mature palm tree).<sup>500</sup> It is important, however, to note that this is not a doctrine, and that the experience of the young but wise must also be considered. Also, it does not follow logically that every older adult has the intellectual ability to make philosophical sense of his or her acquired experiences.

### **3.1.2.2 *Nunya and Adanu/Anyasa As Holistic Entities***

To the indigenous Ewe (and most Africans), knowledge is not limited to written documentation. Even in modern African culture, the fact that knowledge is closely linked to experience still holds true. This, however, may not be the case in some other cultures of the world. In August 2006, in his annual address to Orff-Schulwerk music educators, Doug Goodkin indicated that knowledge, in Euro-American culture, is often separated from the whole of life, made abstract, and disembodied. Knowledge is often considered, as something to learn in the head only and thus is divorced from the hand and the heart. This may be a shortcoming of Western culture (and in a strange way, one of its strengths as well).<sup>501</sup> Much of this ‘deficiency’ may not be due to books’ inability to provide knowledge, but may derive from the idea of knowledge being divorced from values and reduced to knowing about something rather than living that thing; experience.

This ‘deficiency’ in knowledge is not limited to Western culture and can be found in other cultures as well. On the invention of the art of writing and documentation, a story was once told by the Greek philosopher Plato about an Egyptian king, Thamus, who was being given a sales pitch by the god Theuth about his various inventions. One of the inventions being referred

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<sup>500</sup> Traditionally, called *deha* (lit. palm drink), palm wine’ is a sweet and high alcoholic beverage produced from palm tree. Normally, the more mature and well developed the palm tree, the better quality and quantity of liquor that it produces. Just as in the human scenario, it doe not always work that way.

<sup>501</sup> Doug Goodkin’s annual speech delivered at San Francisco Orff Course, San Francisco, CA: August 2, 2006. See also Doug Goodkin (2006) *The ABC’s of Education: A Primer for Schools to Come*.

to was the art of writing and Theuth pitches his sale saying: “Here is an accomplishment, my lord the king, which will improve both the wisdom and the memory of the Egyptians.”<sup>502</sup>

Surprisingly, Thamus was not impressed and he openly retorted:

...those who acquire it would cease to exercise their memory and become forgetful; they will rely on writing to bring things to their remembrance by external signs instead of their own internal resources... and as for wisdom, your pupils will have the reputation of it without the reality; they would receive a quantity of information without proper instruction, and in consequence, be thought very knowledgeable when they are for the most part quite ignorant. And because they are filled with the conceit of wisdom instead of real wisdom they will be a burden to society.<sup>503</sup>

Like the doubtful King Thamus, indigenous Ewe and many other indigenous Africans believe that knowledge and wisdom are sustained, productive, and lasting if they are lived. Hence, indigenous Ewe educational philosophical principles underscore the need, not only to acquire knowledge but more importantly, to live and exercise it. Ewe indigenous knowledge forms an integral part of almost all daily activities of the people. Knowledge is thus all-inclusive, forming ties to the community, character, and creativity.

From an indigenous African musician, educator, and scholar’s point of view, knowledge involves knowing and expressing something in the body through dance and kinesthetic media, in the hand through drumming, in the heart through song and proverbs, in the character through moral behavior, as well as in the head through understanding. If knowledge is greater than knowing facts about a subject matter or procedure, then for an Ewe (and for that matter an African), it needs other forms of transmission than just books, written sources, and lectures. Thus, songs, song texts, rhythms, dances, serve as a means to preserve and transmit knowledge

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<sup>502</sup> As quoted in Goodkin (2006: 77)

<sup>503</sup> Postman (1993: 3-4)

and are essential to daily life.<sup>504</sup> This understanding of knowledge and its processes is engrained in the minds, the souls, and the hearts of the Ewe and has helped us keep our indigenous knowledge, cultural values, and our belief and thought system (“philosophy”) for many generations.

### **3.1.2.3 Indigenous and Traditional**

*Afe* or *De*, (lit. home or native), meaning ‘indigenous’ or ‘traditional’ are terms that may be used interchangeably. This is so because of the similarities they share: (1) in meaning, linguistically and philosophically; (2) in concept and theoretical framework; and (3) in scope and implications. ‘Indigenous’ refers to anything characteristic of, native to, innate and occurring in an area or environment. It may refer to something native to a particular region, ethnic group, language or country but may as well be occurring naturally in other places simultaneously or asynchronously in time and space. It may also be a learned type of behavior, feeling, act or characteristic of a people. Finally, indigenous may refer to objects and people with origins in particular location(s) specifically.

On the other hand, ‘traditional’ or ‘tradition’ is used in this work as a mode of thought or behavior continuously followed by a society from generation to generation—as in a customary practice. These practices are viewed as a coherent body of precedents influencing the present and its progressions into the future of an identified group of people. According to Gyekye, “tradition [is] any cultural product (i.e., values, practices, institutions, etc.) that was created or pursued by past generations and that, having been preserved by successive generations, has persisted to the

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<sup>504</sup> This is not to argue that music text could be better than written media in the preservation and dissemination of knowledge. Rather I wish to emphasize that music text in particular and musical practice in general contributes tremendously to the preservation of indigenous Ewe knowledge and could still be used as a valuable aid to written media in modern times.

present (i.e., a particular present).”<sup>505</sup> Tradition, therefore, is anything that has endured through generations.<sup>506</sup> *Eve dekonu* (Ewe traditional/indigenous practice) is an inherited pattern of thought and/or specific practice of long standing—a custom associated with and unique to the Ewe. The indigenous or traditional practice of the Ewe is the continuous transmission of elements of Ewe culture from generation to generation, through oral-aural communication, imitation, and practice. It must be pointed out, however, that tradition is non-static.

#### **3.1.2.4 Indigenous Knowledge (IK)**

Indigenous Knowledge (IK), Traditional Knowledge (TK), and in some cases Local Knowledge (LK) are terms that refer to similar concepts and may be used interchangeably in many cases. Generally, they encompass the wisdom and practices of communities. In many cases, these knowledge systems have been mostly orally transmitted from generation to generation. Different forms of indigenous knowledge may be expressed through different means. While some are expressed through stories, legends, rituals, and even laws, others may find expression through music, dance, sculpture, theater, and poetry.

In this study, by Ewe indigenous knowledge (*Eve/afeme nunya* or *Eve/de nunya*), I mean all bodies of knowledge of all aspects of Ewe culture that have been transmitted orally-aurally, practically, and theoretically from generation to generation which identify the Ewe as a people. These bodies of knowledge include, but are not limited to: (1) historical, linguistic, religious, and philosophical knowledge; (2) medical, ecological, environmental, and other scientific knowledge

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<sup>505</sup> Gyekye (1996: 164)

<sup>506</sup> See Gyekye (1997: xi, 219-232) and *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition, published by Houghton Mifflin Company (2000); <http://dictionary.reference.com>; *WordNet* © 2.0, © 2003 Princeton University

bodies; (3) economic, political, and geographical knowledge; and (4) human rights, artistic knowledge, social, moral, cultural, and esthetic values.

“Indigenous knowledge,” as a term, may be challenged on the grounds that one may not be able to totally substantiate the fact that all the constituents of “Ewe indigenous knowledge and cultural values” are intrinsic and/or originated only with the Ewe. As Kwame Gyekye points out, “it is true that no cultural tradition can claim to be a pure tradition, in the sense of having evolved or developed on its own terms, in total isolation from alien cultural influences.”<sup>507</sup> Certainly, some bodies of knowledge that have been accepted as part of Ewe culture have been borrowed from other cultures. Some of those cultural elements, therefore, may not be unique to the Ewe. Undoubtedly, it is clear that what we refer to as “Ewe indigenous or traditional” may just as well be “indigenous” or “traditional” to other groups of people. Nonetheless, that in itself does not negate the fact that those bodies of knowledge are indigenous to the Ewe. We are reminded that something native to a particular region may as well be occurring naturally in other places simultaneously, even without cross cultural influences. With this understanding, such an argument against the use of the term “indigenous knowledge” may not be justifiable. Indigenous knowledge as used in this work encompasses the cultural traditions, values, and belief systems concerned with everyday realities of living in a particular place—Eweland in this case.

The term “indigenous knowledge (IK)” is crucial to the definition of the scope of this research. In current scholarship it is sometimes used interchangeably with “traditional knowledge.” I carefully chose these terms over other related terms including “cultural values” and “folklore,” none of which is suggestive of and encompassing the entire scope of my study. Although at certain theoretical levels, the meaning of folklore may be equated to traditional or

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<sup>507</sup> Gyekye (1997: 224)

indigenous knowledge, thereby being synonymous with IK, there are important distinctions that need to be recognized. For instance, besides its references to specific things, “folklore,” often used as a term of contempt, has a negative connotation in some Western scholarly circles, referring to the charming superstitions of simple (often “primitive”) people.

The same argument may be made of “cultural values,” which is conceived as a form of acceptance of Western scholarly dissimilitude, that there is something called “knowledge” and something called “values”—a distinction that may carry derogatory implications in the academic arena. However, every society has values as well as, and different from, knowledge. But the distinctions of what constitutes “value” and what “knowledge” depends largely on who is the classifier and whose culture is being classified. Indigenous knowledge is local knowledge. It is unique to every culture or society. In many cultures and societies, IK is the basis for local-level decision-making in areas including, but not limited to, agriculture, health care, food preparation, education, natural-resource management, and a host of other activities. It provides problem-solving strategies in and for many communities and it is commonly a communal intellectual property rather than personal intellectual property. For the Ewe, some types of indigenous knowledge, like that of other societies, may be tacit knowledge, and difficult to codify.

Ethnomusicologists, drawing on anthropological theories and influences, have preferred “indigenous” and/or “traditional” over “folk” in order to emphasize the vibrancy of practices in our contemporary world, rather than demeaning them as “folk” traditions.<sup>508</sup> Although some may think that indigenous scholars may tend to emphasize, or even essentialize, indigenous knowledge forms of their respective cultures, it is our hope that we conduct research that will educate the larger community on this domain of culture.

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<sup>508</sup> See Geertz (1983)

### 3.2 EWE METAPHYSICAL KNOWLEDGE AND VALUES

In Chapter 2 I mentioned the various categories of being: namely God, divinities, ancestors, human beings, etc, among the Ewe. This chapter looks further and deeper into these categories. Using evidence from fieldwork including musical and other literary sources, this part of Chapter 3 concentrates on and discusses the various ontological concepts, their nature, constituents, roles, and their underlying philosophical thoughts in Ewe culture.

Ewe music and dance practices evolved as an essential component of three key indigenous sub-cultures—religious culture, politico-military culture, and socio-economic culture. Although the musical traditions and practices of all three cultural aspects play vital roles, it is the religious and the military sub-cultures that are predominant among the people. While the military sub-culture proves to be influential, the function of the religious sub-culture is perhaps the most impactful as it has a presence in the daily activities of the people. In this chapter, using evidence from musical and other literary sources (including song texts and proverbs), I reiterate the existence of Supreme God in indigenous African, and in particular, Ewe culture. The chapter challenges researchers who implicitly or explicitly suggest that the Ewe either do not have the concept of and/or belief in one supreme God or copied it from European missionaries. It further provides data that will illuminate different perceptions of being in indigenous Ewe conception and critically analyzes related concepts: namely, human beings, destiny, death, life, and how they affect the Ewe cosmology.

### 3.2.1 Ewe Ontology: The Concept of Being

As I mentioned in previous chapters, the world-view of the Ewe religious sub-culture includes Ewe ontology<sup>509</sup> and Ewe cosmology.<sup>510</sup> It has been established in this research and in many earlier studies that the African, (including the Ewe) since time immemorial had the concept and belief in one Supreme God.<sup>511</sup> The indigenous African world into which Islamic and European Christian crusaders, missionaries, traders, and anthropologists entered (from the fifteenth to the nineteenth centuries) was a religious world in which the concept of God as one Supreme Being was already held, variously named, and limitlessly revered. Even in the present day it is said that religion enters all aspects of Ewe life so fully that it determines literally and practically every aspect of life, including moral behavior, and can hardly be isolated. Inherent to indigenous Ewe society there is rarely anything that exists or happens that has no spiritual meaning, connotation, or explanation. Any form of success, mishap, or misfortune is readily credited to, or blamed on, some superpower or divine intervention.<sup>512</sup> For example, the birth of a new life, success of an individual at a job, or marriage of the young adult is often attributed to some divine goodwill. In the same vein, barrenness, prolonged draught, or poor harvest may be taken as punishment from the gods.<sup>513</sup>

The Ewe understand and believe in the universe as a body of different forces that control the individual in many ways. These forces, seen as servants and/or mediums to the Supreme God (Mawu/Se), are ranked according to their influences on the individual and the society.

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<sup>509</sup> This include knowledge about and respect for divinities and other supernatural beings, devotional activities, and the tenets of divine and moral states of living

<sup>510</sup> Includes knowledge and understanding about the nature of the universe, both the living environment and the metaphysical realm

<sup>511</sup> See for example Bossman (1705: 348), Parrinder (1961), Gyekye (1996), Gaba (1997)

<sup>512</sup> See Gaba (1997: 85-104), and also Abotchie (1997: 73-84),

<sup>513</sup> Ladzekpo: [www.cmnat.berkeley.edu/~ladzekpo](http://www.cmnat.berkeley.edu/~ladzekpo)

Observance and performance of devotional activities and the development of divine and moral principles, in which the performing arts are integral, rank as some of the most cherished Ewe values. Music is a key element of this religious culture and each deity and divinity is associated with a distinct repertoire for various devotional activities. Devotional activities include but are not limited to the rite of consecration or centering oneself in the divine spirit; the rite of invocation and spiritual communion with the divinity, and the rite of gratitude, reverence, and respect for the divinity.<sup>514</sup>

### 3.2.2 Mawu/Se: The Concept of Supreme God

Various African societies have common attributes, but different names, for the same concept of Supreme God and other divinities. For example, the Ewe of Ghana, Togo, and Benin call God Mawu; the Akan of Ghana, Nyame; the Yoruba of Nigeria, Olorun; the Mende of Sierra Leone, Ngewo; the Bambara of Sudan, Faro; and the Ibo of Nigeria, Chukwu.

Some of the early European travelers noted the general African concept of Supreme God and their extreme piety. A European traveler to West Africa (in the 17th century) observed that not only did the African recognize the existence of one Supreme God but also believed in Him. In 1705, William Bosman states in his book *A New and Accurate Description of the Coast of Guinea, Divided into the Gold, the Slave and the Ivory Coasts* that:

The African believed in a supreme God, that they had ‘an idea of the true God, and ascribed to Him the attributes of Almighty and Omnipresent; they believe He created the universe, and therefore vastly prefer Him before their idol-gods; but do not pray to Him or offer sacrifices to Him.’<sup>515</sup>

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<sup>514</sup> See Ladzekpo (1971: 6-22), Gaba (1997: 85-104). See also [www.cmnat.berkeley.edu/~ladzekpo](http://www.cmnat.berkeley.edu/~ladzekpo)

<sup>515</sup> William Bosman (1705: 348) as cited in Parrinder, E. G. 1961. *West African Religion*. London: Epworth Press, page 14. See also Gyekye (1996: 3)

Kwame Gyekye indicates that European missionaries realized on their arrival in Africa that there was no need to introduce or convert the African to the concept and belief in one God or in a life after death, “for both of these fundamentals of world religions were already deeply rooted in Africa.”<sup>516</sup> Writing specifically on the Ewe of West Africa, German missionary<sup>517</sup> reports testify to the fact that Mawu was believed to be the Supreme God among the Ewe before the European incursion into West Africa, as indicated by A. B. Ellis:

The German missionaries, who are the only class of Europeans who ever seem to try to discover what the religious beliefs of the natives really are...are of opinion [*sic*] that Mawu is held to be the lord of the terrestrial gods, who are subordinated to his control and some even go so far as to say that he created them... Sacrifice is never directly offered to him and prayer rarely. The natives explain this by saying that he is too distant to trouble about man and his affairs, and they believe that he remains in a beatific condition of perpetual repose and drowsiness.<sup>518</sup>

Kodzo Gavua notes that long before the Ewe’s first encounter with Europeans, “the indigenous religion of the Northern Ewe combines belief in a High God, *Se, Segbo-Lisa*, or *Mawuga*, who is spirit, omnipresent, omnipotent, and omniscient, with belief in other smaller gods that serve as agents of the High God and as media through which humans communicate with this God.”<sup>519</sup> In 1977, Nissio Fiagbedzi wrote: “For the Anlo [Southern Ewe] there are six classes of being...these classes are: (a) the Supreme Being or Mawu, (b) the lesser deities, including deified ancestors, (c) human beings...As Creator, Mawu is conceptualized as the source of everything in the universe...”<sup>520</sup> Earlier in 1975, Kofi Awoonor wrote: “...the Creator

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<sup>516</sup> Gyekye (1996)

<sup>517</sup> The Germans (both missionaries and colonial masters) were some of the earliest Europeans to have contact with the Ewes of West Africa. They established Christian church denominations such as the Bremen and Basel Missions, some of which are today the Evangelical Presbyterian Church/Ewe Presbyterian Church (E. P. Church) and various Catholic missions all around Eweland in West Africa. Note that these Germans wrote most of the early documents on Ewe history.

<sup>518</sup> Ellis (1890: reprint 1965: 32-33). Also quoted in Greene (2002: 16).

<sup>519</sup> Gavua (1997: 85). Kodzo Gavua was writing on the religious practices of the Ewe (Northern Ewe specifically) See also chapter 2 of this dissertation for more information on Ewe names of the High God.

<sup>520</sup> Fiagbedzi (1977: 92)

God. He, whom the Ewe calls Mawu, receives no sacrifice Himself; He has neither shrines nor priests.”<sup>521</sup> Further proof is found in Kwame Gyekye’s book *African Cultural Values: An Introduction*.

The idea of a supreme God was certainly not imported into Africa. Symbols on the ancient gold-dust weights and on other forms of art and references to the existence and character of a supreme being in myths, proverbs, and drum language attest to the antiquity of African idea of one God.<sup>522</sup>

Despite these and many other scholarly findings, there are still researchers (even in contemporary scholarship) who maintain the African indigenous concept of one Supreme God was an imported one from Europe. It is astounding that even with a large body of research stating otherwise it was still believed that the concept of a Supreme God in Ewe culture was borrowed.

Writings such as those from A.B. Ellis strengthen this misinformation:

Mawu...is regarded as the most powerful of the gods but he is not a supreme being or a creator. Although he is chief, he is but one of many independent gods...but though one may occasionally obtain from natives who inhabit the seacoast towns, and who, having all their lives *been in contact with Europeans, have become familiar with the European notion of the creator and supreme god*, statements that go to corroborate this [Mawu as Supreme God in indigenous Ewe conception], yet it is evident that this is a modification of the more original conception of Mawu and *is due to European influence...*<sup>523</sup>

Any thought of these assumptions being limited to ‘older’ literature is quickly dismissed when one critically looks at some recently published scholarly works.<sup>524</sup> For example, in her book *Sacred Sites and the Colonial Encounter: A History of Meaning and Memory in Ghana*, Sandra Greene<sup>525</sup> indicates that until their contact with the European missionaries, the Ewe neither had the concept of, nor believed in Mawu as the

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<sup>521</sup> Awoonor (1975: 51)

<sup>522</sup> Gyekye (1996: 4)

<sup>523</sup> Ellis (1890: reprint 1965: 32-33); the emphasis is mine. Also as quoted in Greene (2002: 16)

<sup>524</sup> See for example Rosenthal (1998, 2005), Meyer (1999), Greene (2002), and Uzor (2004)

<sup>525</sup> See Greene (2002)

Supreme God. She states that Mawu was just one of the Ewe gods and that Ewe conferred and/or expunged the status of supremacy of any of their gods at different times. Although accounts by most scholars and researchers of the religious beliefs of the Ewe (including those quoted above), coupled with oral narratives (as in song texts, proverbs, etc), often state clearly that Mawu/Se is historically conceptualized as the Supreme God or Being in the entire Ewe region, Greene's assertion is still to the contrary. There is no doubt her conclusions were partly based on the works of some past writers who considered their own perceptions and views of indigenous African concepts as more 'accurate and factual' than that of the indigenes themselves. For example, she writes:

A deity perceived at one point in time as the most powerful was defined as supreme, but it could lose that designation if its power appeared to diminish in relation to other gods. Thus, I noted that Mawu was worshipped as a supreme deity in the seventeenth century in the coastal town of Whydah. By the eighteenth century, however, the worship of Mawu is said to have taken on more of the attributes of a lesser god. In the coastal polity of Anlo, Mawu continued to be worshipped as the Supreme Deity, but by the eighteenth century it had to share this designation with another god, Se, which was associated with the Yoruba Ifa divination system.<sup>526</sup>

Greene is not alone in her assumptions. Similarly, Judy Rosenthal, in her chapter "*Religious Traditions of the Togo and Benin Ewe*," wrote:

While there are vodou orders or worshippers who at times refer to *high god*, and for some that would be *the same as the Christian and/or Muslim God*, others admit to no almighty or all-powerful creator. For many, God is 'the whole thing,' xexenu (nature, or the world). The high god, including *the God of the Bible*, is usually called Mawu these days, *for that is the word that the missionary translators of the Bible chose*, although *Mawu was a vodou in times past*.<sup>527</sup>

This clearly underscores the fact that some contemporary researchers continue to perpetuate in the misleading misconceptions and fallacious frameworks underlying scholarly tactics of earlier

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<sup>526</sup> See Greene (2002: 16)

<sup>527</sup> Rosenthal (1997: 184); the emphasis is mine.

Euro-American researchers in Africa.<sup>528</sup> It is ironic that at the same time that Rosenthal was writing her version of the Ewe concept of Mawu, other researchers were trying to set the records right: Writing on Guin-Mina Ewe<sup>529</sup> Cultures and Practices, Messan Kossi Assiom, Foli Fionyo Eccoc-Aduadje, Mawule M. Kuakuvi, and A. A. Amenoume outline the Ewe concept of supreme God, Mawu as:

The traditional religion of the Guin-Mina people is really a suite of transcendental relationships between man and the Supreme Being, Mawu, Creator of the universe, and of all beings and powers contained therein. This Supreme Being, despite its grandeur, does not occupy a place on this earth; rather, it is the role of the lesser pantheon of Guin-Mina deities, which number over forty who do.<sup>530</sup>

Elsewhere they added that, “from the moment of birth, until death, the Guin-Mina individual is in symbiosis with Mawu and the lesser deities.”<sup>531</sup> According to Chief Agbano II, “At the summit of the hierarchy is Ata Mawu-Kiti Kata, Mawu Kokodabi, the Lord God, all-powerful, eternal, and invisible. He is incarnate, immense, very powerful and immortal...One does not pay cultic homage to Mawu, nor does one offer sacrifice to him.”<sup>532</sup> These quotations are but a selected few works that represent indigenous Ewe conception of Mawu, the Supreme God.

With the knowledge that contrary research exists we are better prepared to analyze the details of Greene’s misinterpretations. First, there is no deity in Ewe culture that is defined as

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<sup>528</sup> How long shall some researchers continue to force bitter pills of inaccuracies, distortions and subjective perceptions down the throats of those being researched without their (the researched) knowing? I wonder how many (if any) researchers have ever told their research subjects the very reasons why they do what they do! I wonder how many (if any) researchers go back to present their works to the very people they researched for evaluation and feedback! I can only imagine the reactions and actions of the researched (in many African cultures) if they ever get to know and really understand how the very people to whom they unconditionally opened their doors and hearts are portraying them. If the researched in indigenous African societies should ever have the opportunity to know exactly how they are presented and misrepresented; how they are said to have collaborated in the misrepresentations, and the disproportionate benefits of the proceeds of their ‘collaboration,’ the research field in traditional Africa would no longer be the same

<sup>529</sup> Guin-Mina is one of the Ewe sub-ethnic polities in Southern Togo.

<sup>530</sup> Assiom et al. (2005: 48)

<sup>531</sup> Ibid

<sup>532</sup> Ibid: 51

supreme other than Mawu (the Supreme God). The name Mawu, by ontological definition, means Supreme. Etymologically, two words or phrases make up the word “Mawu.”

*Ma* or *Emā* = He/She that

*Wu* or *Ewu* = surpasses or supersedes

Thus, Mawu (*Emā si ke wu*), which literary translates as ‘that which *surpasses* or *supersedes* all else’ refers only to one Supreme entity (God). Mawu by Ewe definition was never a lesser deity. There do exist many lesser deities in Ewe culture. However, there has never been one single lesser deity that all Ewe worshipped in time and space. Lesser deities and other metaphysical entities are subordinate to one Supreme God (See Chapter 2 for detailed information and other names for God or Creator).<sup>533</sup> In Ewe society, individuals may change their allegiance from one lesser deity to another depending on their assessment of the efficacy of the powers of their chosen lesser deity. Hence an individual may see one god as being more powerful than others in time and space but the powers of lesser deities were never compared to, let alone exchanged, as Greene asserts, with that of Mawu/Se.

Secondly, Greene makes the argument that the name, power, and attributes of Mawu are given to various deities at different times. Contrarily, many earlier researches have shown that Ewe have specific gods and names for specific or particular powers, duties, and beliefs.<sup>534</sup> For example, *Nyigbla* is the Anlo Ewe god of war;<sup>535</sup> *Anyievo*, is the god of rain and rainbow; *Egu*, the god of iron, fire, hunting, and their derivatives, *Afa*, is the god of divination; and

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<sup>533</sup> See also Parrinder ([1949] 1961, 1956, 1970, 1986), Gaba (1965, 1969, 1997), Awoonor (1975), Fiagbedzi (1977), Hill (1981), Locke (1996), and Gavua (2000)

<sup>534</sup> See for example Parrinder ([1949] 1961, 1956, 1970, 1986), Gaba (1965, 1969, 1997), Awoonor (1975), Fiagbedzi (1977), Hill (1981), Locke (1996), and Gavua (2000)

<sup>535</sup> *Nyigbla* is an Anlo Ewe war god. Its polarity among all Ewe have diminished not because of the generally efficacy of its power but because there are almost no wars nowadays—a condition that necessitates and calls for its primary duty.

*legbawo/veduwo* are various community and household gods who oversee domestic harmony, fertility, and protection.<sup>536</sup>

Another cultural aspect that Greene fails to factor into her analysis is the Ewe concept of names. Research has shown that the Ewe do not just name people, things, concepts, or places only for the sake of naming them.<sup>537</sup> Indigenous Ewe names conjure a high degree of linguistic complexity and semantico-cultural significance within the society. Traditionally, an Ewe name may have two or more of the following. (1) a meaning with an appellation connecting the name to one thing or another; (2) a connection to a proverb and/or a philosophical thought of life for the entity that bears the name; (3) a deep underlining concept or circumstance under which the entity came to exist or was conceptualized; and (4) a label for identity similarity or differentiation. So, for example if *Nyigbla* (the war god) or any other Ewe deity suddenly or over time “switches position” with Mawu, what then happens to their names, powers, attributes, etc? Do all their innate characteristics (i.e. *Nyigbla* as a war god and Mawu/Se as Supreme God) change too? The importance of the names, powers, attributes and other innate characteristics of these entities are too vast for this to be considered.

Fourthly, Greene argues that Mawu shares His supremacy with *Se* (*Se*, in Greene’s understanding is “another god”), as she claims. What is misunderstood is that *Se* is another name for and characteristic of Mawu. Ewe use *Se* as the short form of *dzogbese* (destiny/fate), which is God in every human being as well as the law (“impersonal law”) that guides the human being

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<sup>536</sup> See chapter two for details and also Agbodeka (1997), Nukunya (1997) Fiagbedzi (1977), and Gaba (1965, 1969, 1997). Also see Adjaye (2004) for Akan parallels.

<sup>537</sup> See Egblewogbe (1977, 1980), Anyidoho (1983, 1997), Atakpa (1997), Agbedor and Johnson (2005), and P.K.M. Ameevor, *Nkowo De?* Tema, Ghana: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1987.

according to its ontological conception.<sup>538</sup> Amenoume and his colleagues, writing on the Guin-Mina Ewe ontology notes:

A mythical song proclaims the *kpoli* [an existential vow]; every life is pre-determined and each has its destiny (*Se*). This supreme destiny is the governing rule of the entire universe...Thus, at least according to Roberto Pazzi (1968), destiny is often referred to by the name *Mawuse* and to the *Se*, the Guin attribute the prerogative of the universal first governing principle. *Mawu* thus sometimes signifies the ineluctability of any given event. Viewed like this, the name *Mawu* may also be translated as ‘destiny.’<sup>539</sup>

It is true that *Se* is associated with *Afa* (which is the Ewe version of Yoruba *Ifa*).<sup>540</sup> But *Se* is not “another god” as Greene claims, but the same supreme entity and metaphysical concept Mawu. *Se*’s association with *Afa* neither negates its being Mawu (Supreme God) nor replaces the supreme status with Mawu, for *Se* is Mawu and Mawu is *Se* in Ewe ontology. *Se*’s association with *Afa* actually underscores the ontological philosophy of *Afa*, a divination system based on the Ewe-Yoruba concept of being.

Those familiar with Ewe names know that Mawu and *Se* refer to the same Supreme Being since the Ewe often use them interchangeably as prefixes to personal names. As Dzobo indicates “The divine names *Se*, Mawu, *Lisa* (*So*, *Fa*) appear a great deal in Ewe theophorous names and are taken as personal names.”<sup>541</sup> Below are a few examples:

*Mawuli is the same as* (or) *Seli*  
“God exists/God is with us”

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<sup>538</sup> See Fiagbedzi (1977), Amoaku (1975), Agbodeka (1997), Gavua (2000), Dzobo (2004), Lawrance (2005), Locke (1978), and as shown in many song texts in this dissertation.

<sup>539</sup> Amenoume et al (2005: 52)

<sup>540</sup> It should be remembered that *Afa* (*Ifa* in Yoruba) is a common religious—divination—institution among the Ewe and the Yoruba. Historical and archeological research has shown that both ethnic groups lived together prior to the Ewe and their Dahomean kins westward migration between the 10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries. *Afa* (*Ifa*) was one of their common religious institutions—a belief system they continue to practice to this day. Other common religious practices they shared then and now include *Yeve* (*Shango*, Yoruba), and *Egu* (*Ogun*, Yoruba). See William R. Bascom, *Ifa Divination: Communication Between God and Man in West Africa*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969; Wande Abimbola, *Ifa: An Exposition of ifa Literary Corpus*. Ibadan, Nigeria: Ibadan University Press, 1976; Anyidoho (1983, 1997), and Gaba (1997)

<sup>541</sup> Dzobo and Amegshie-Viglo (2004: 62)

*Mawunyo* or *Senyo*  
“God is good”

*Mawulete* or *Selete*  
“God actively exist and alert”

*Mawuena* or *Sena*  
“It is God that has given”

*Mawudem* or *Sedem*  
“God has saved me”

*Mawuko* or *Seko*  
“Unless God”

*Mawukomayo* or *Sekomayo*  
“I shall call only God (alone for help)”,<sup>542</sup>

Again, the meanings stated for these names allow us to infer another level of meaning. For example, a name like *Mawuena* or *Sena* (God has given or it was destined by God), the interpretation of whatever it is that God has given depends on the individual, family, and the clan’s world-view as well as the philosophy of being. So, it could mean ‘it is God that gives life’ or ‘my destiny has been given to me by God so, whatever comes my way is from God.’ Others may look at it from success in life, and yet others may interpret it to be that their marriage was destined to be. In the following song the individual attributes everything that happens to him/her to God.

**Song 4: *Mawue Na***

*Adzoha* (Text in Ewe : Anlo dialect)

*Mawue na, Mawue na*

*Ne nye me de sro*

*Mawue na*

*Ne nye me dzi vi o*

*Mawue na*

*Ne nye me kpo ga o*

**Literal Translation**

It was destined by God (caused by God)

Even if I do not marry

It was destined by God (caused by God)

Even if I do not have a child

It was destined by God (caused by God)

Even if I am not rich

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<sup>542</sup> It should be noted that Mawu/Se (God) in all these names could be replaced with or could mean *Dzoghese* (destiny)

*Mawue na*  
*Adetagbatsutsue do lo be*  
*“Amenuvela medoa yome*  
*Kple ame o*  
*Masewo de afi ya*  
*Nye mele yome yi ge o”*

It was destined by God (caused by God)  
It is the tsetse-fly that proverbially said  
“One’s helper does not go to eternity  
with one’s body (dead body)  
Let me leave you here (I can only take you this far)  
I am not going into eternity (with you)”

The Ewe believe that Mawu determines everyone’s destiny (*dzogbese*). As the song exhibits, no matter how much “help” you get from others in life, your destiny would not really change. People can only do so much to help themselves in life since one’s destiny cannot be changed. The underlining concept in all the interpretations refers to God and destiny. That deeper reference does not only establish the concept of Supreme God (Mawu/Se) but also destiny/fate as its integral part.

Lastly, the Ewe never worshipped Mawu/Se directly but rather through His/Her intermediaries. As Kofi Awoonor have pointed out:

The African established, from time immemorial, a spiritual hierarchy...Beneath the Creator God is a host of minor deities...the African assigns to the Creator God a certain degree of distance...not because he considers Him unconcerned, but rather because he thinks of Him in his primal ancestral role as the supreme paterfamilias who must not be bothered with the petty details of the universe. He, Himself, appoints lieutenants and assistants who become overseers and guardians of various natural phenomena and faculties. These minor deities are the recipients of sacrifices and messages for the Creator God. He, whom the Ewe call Mawu, receives no sacrifices Himself; He has neither shrines nor priests.<sup>543</sup>

It is unclear how some researchers came by their conclusions. Through this research, however, I hope to help in reversing such assumptions. To conclude this section, I wish to emphasize that the assertion that the Ewe conception of Mawu as the Supreme God was copied from European missionaries and that Mawu’s supreme position has “changed” over time and space in Ewe

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<sup>543</sup> Awoonor (1975: 51)

society is unfounded and incorrect.<sup>544</sup> From time immemorial, the Ewe gave Mawu the highest spiritual status, reverence, and supremacy without interruption, competition, or sharing.

### **3.2.3 Ewe Socio-Spiritual Communication Concepts**

#### **3.2.3.1 *Tsifodi/Adegbedodo*: Pouring of Libation**

I have already provided various examples found in writing and quotations of scholarly work that establish the indigenous Ewe conception of the Creator God and of Ewe ontology as a whole. In addition, using more evidence now from Ewe musical compositions, I assert that among the Ewe Mawu/Se is the highest spiritual entity that holds the ultimate status, reverence, and supremacy without interruption, competition, or sharing.<sup>545</sup> Due to the belief that Mawu/Se is too big and powerful to be approached directly, the Ewe traditionally have communicated with Him indirectly through lesser gods and other means. *Tsifodi/Adegbedodo*, i.e., pouring of libation (usually referred to as prayer)<sup>546</sup> is one of the means by which the Ewe communicate with the Supreme God through lesser deities. Another mode of communication can be found in the

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<sup>544</sup> It is obvious that if researchers had taken into consideration much of the literature produced by indigenes of the society they write about as well as factored in knowledge of other cultural aspects of the people they would have avoided some of the misconceptions and concluded differently. It is worth noting that a few non-African scholars try to engage with scholarly works of African scholars and thereby not only argument their research findings but also give voice to the indigenes and let Africans speak for themselves. Unfortunately many other Euro-American researchers and scholars (for reasons I cannot explain) blatantly ignore scholarly works by African scholars as Prof Akin Euba (one of the prominent scholars of African culture) rightly pointed out in a speech he delivered at SEM in Atlanta, GA (see also Euba 2008). They rather prefer and often cite works of non-Africans and thereby continue to perpetuate the very subjectivity and misrepresentation that underlies those works. How far and how long can some researchers go to deny Africans of what they think their concepts and beliefs are? When would all researchers wholly accept African concepts that are comparable to that held by other cultures (especially Westerners) as indigenously African and attribute them to Africa without any reference to it wholly or partially being imported from somewhere outside Africa?

<sup>545</sup> See Rosenthal (1998, 2005), Dzobo (2004), Greene (2002), Gyekye (1996),

<sup>546</sup> As Prof. Kofi Agawu noted, “Colonial discourse sometimes referred to the pouring of libation as praying, but libations are more than entreaties, confessions or thanksgiving. They are flexible narrative spaces designed to accommodate a range of desires.” Agawu (2007), see also Anyidoho (1997) and Awunor (1975). Also for perspectives on parallel Akan practice see Adjaye (2004) and Yankah (1995).

compositions and musical activities of traditional musicians. These musicians carefully use the various names of Supreme God and related appellations in their works but more often refer to *trowo/veduwo* (lesser gods/spirits) through whom they send prayer, worship, sacrifice, and other messages rather than aim their music directly at Mawu/Se (God).

Although Ewe channel prayer through lesser deities and spirits to God, no Ewe prayer begins without reference to Mawu/Se and the trinity of His/Her embodiment. Prayer is referred to as *adegbedodo* (lit. tongue voice/message projecting, sending, or planting), or *tsifodi* (lit. water pouring/offering), *gbedododa* (lit. projecting/sending/planting one's voice or message), *adefofo* (lit. beating the tongue). Comparable (often referred to) in English to a libation or pouring of libation, all the Ewe terms for prayer convey the idea of talking to a superior or supernatural entity in a petitionary manner.<sup>547</sup> Usually two or three items are used in praying: *tsi* (water) and/or *dzatsi/wotsi* (a solution of white corn flour), and *aha* (alcoholic beverage).<sup>548</sup> Indigenous Ewe formal *tsifodi* (libation) section is often in four parts. These are (1) Introduction/Prelude: involving vocal and symbolic gestures of the trinity of life and God; (2) Invocation: calling (by name) gods, ancestors, and legendary figures through reciting their appellations and praise texts; (3) Petition: stating the immediate reason for the occasion including blessings for oneself and the community and warding off the seen and unseen enemies and constructing ethical constraints on the event; and (4) Conclusion: calling for peace, good

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<sup>547</sup> See Adjaye (2004) for a deeper and extensive discussion of libation. Although Professor Adjaye's discussions focus on Akan libation, much of the elements and concept, he elucidate, are the same and applicable to the Ewe and other Ghanaian ethnic groups.

<sup>548</sup> Traditionally *wotsi* or *dzatsi* (white corn flour solution) and *deha* (palmwine: alcoholic beverage from palm tree) are the ideal drinks for libation (prayer), as they are considered natural, pure, and unprocessed. In addition, the variety is to provide for those ancestors and deities who do not drink alcohol. Nowadays, both locally distilled and foreign imported strong alcoholic drinks are also used due to their availability and convenience. See Gavua (2000), Badu-Younge (2002),

health, and prosperity.<sup>549</sup> With a calabash of water, corn solution, and/or alcoholic drink in his/her hands, an indigenous Ewe usually begins an official prayer saying:<sup>550</sup>

<b>Tsifodi: Text in Ewe</b>	<b>Literal Translation</b>
<i>Oo! Oo!! Oo!!! Etoe nye agbe</i>	Oh! Oh!! Oh!!! Trinity is life
<i>Mawuga meyo wo</i>	Supreme God I call on you (I invoke you)
<i>Trowo kple veduwo kata meyo mi</i>	All lesser deities I call on you
<i>Miafe tsi/aha nye yi mixoe no</i>	Here is your drink accept it
<i>Togbuiwo kple mamawo kata</i>	All male and female ancestors
<i>Meyo mi</i>	I call on you
<i>Miafe tsi/ahae nye yi mixoe no</i>	Here is your drink accept it life <sup>551</sup>

According to the Prof. Komla Dzobo, Boko Kodzo Kumedzro, and Dr. Dartey Kumordzi<sup>552</sup> the three-part concept of life and being supports both the Ewe concept of the trinity of Mawu, God (the female principle, the male principle, and the unity of life/impersonal law) and the trinity of *amegbeto*, the human embodiment (soul, spirit, and body).<sup>553</sup> This concept of trinity is usually invoked vocally (as in line 1 above) along with symbolic raising of the calabash (into the air/up) and dropping of the drink on the ground three times (usually right, center, and left).<sup>554</sup>

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<sup>549</sup> See Fiagbedzi (1977), Anyidoho (1983), Agawu (1995, 2007), Gaba (1997), and Gavua (2000)

<sup>550</sup> An elder or otherwise qualified individual, usually but by no means exclusively male, performs libation pouring. See Anyidoho (1983), Agawu (1995, 2007), Gaba (1997), and Gavua (2000). For perspectives on similar practices in Akan and other Ghanaian cultures see Adjaye (2004) and Yankah (1995).

<sup>551</sup> Some times *Ee* (Eh) or *agoo* (knocking) may be used instead of *Oo*. The trinity of life establishes both the Ewe concept of the trinity of Mawu (God) as discussed in chapter 2, as well as the trinity of the human embodiment (the soul, spirit and body). Sometimes line 2 may be followed by series of different names of God and his/her endless appellations; line 3 may be followed by a list of carefully selected divinities; and line 6 is also followed by specific names of ancestors with their appropriate appellations and praise names recited one after the other. Line 7 is followed by the petition and then the conclusion

<sup>552</sup> Personal communications in separate interviews (June, 2007, Ghana; see Appendix E for details)

<sup>553</sup> See Chapter 1 section 1.6.3.2 for detailed discussion

<sup>554</sup> It should be noted that while the form of libation pouring is always the same, there may be subtle variations and differences in the procedure and content depending on many factors including sub-ethnicity, dialect, local community, individual offering the libation, and occasion. See Adjaye (2004) for detail discussion of the Akan versions.

Prof. Kofi Anyidoho, an Ewe poet, indicates that names of divinities, as well as the Supreme Deity, are some of the most elaborate Ewe poetic corpus. “Mawu’s attributes of divinity, for instance, may be poetically invoked in a series of names...”<sup>555</sup> For example:

*Mawu Kiti Kata*

“God that is Near and Far (Omnipresent God)”

*Mawu Adanuwoto! Ebe ye nli (wo) asi nli (wo) afo*

“God the Creative Craftsman (God the Creator, Master-Artist): He who crafts hands and feet”

The complex nature of Mawu is shown in his names above *Mawu Kiti Kata*; Mawu acts as both *Mawu Kiti* (God that is close by, right where you are) and *Mawu Kata* (God that is far away, scattered, and sparse). By implication, God is All and One, Here and There, the holistic, omnipresent nature of Mawu. As Kofi Anyidoho puts it, “the artistic nature of Mawu evokes, among other things, the Creator’s superb sense of symmetry and the complementarity of all things in creation.”<sup>556</sup>

Prayer, being what it is and how people conceptualize its importance and relevance in their everyday life, is seen largely as a means of petitioning and communicating with the supernatural world. It is also a way to seek permission from both the living and the supernatural. Hence, prayer, as well as other communication with the metaphysical world in Ewe society, is not restricted to speech. Musical performance is a reliable and frequently used medium of spiritual communication. Every musical performance begins with musical prayer, asking permission, acknowledging the presence and power of the divine, and declaration of intentions. It usually takes different forms and has various names including *kaklanana gbogbowo* (informing the spirits), as well as *banyinyi*, *ayodede*, *nudededo*, *eflanana*, and *ago dodo*, depending on the

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<sup>555</sup> Anyidoho (1997: 130)

<sup>556</sup> Anyidoho (1997: 130)

musical genre, occasion, context and/or function.<sup>557</sup> Some involve the invocation of deities and divinities,<sup>558</sup> announcement of the dignitaries of the group, renouncement of perceived enemies and pessimists, and proclamation of the group’s qualities and aims. Below are a few of such songs, usually performed as preludes to musical activities.

The first four songs below are *afa* divination songs. Although they belong to *afa* divination repertoire and are sometimes associated with certain *afaduwo* (*afa* divination signs) they are performed as preludes in many other Southern Ewe musical genres and repertoires including *akpoka*, *agbadza*, *kpegisu*, and *gazo*.

**Song 5: Bokono Daxo**

*Afa* (Text in Ewe: Anlo dialect)

//:Aloo (*halo*) ya!

*Gbeato/Agu ato://* (*spoken 3x*)

*Bokono daxo nedo adegbe*

*Nu na nyo*

*Gbee dze abla*

*Awuno doaxo nedo adegbe*

*Nu na nyo*

*Gbee dze abla aye* (*2x*)

*Gbee dze abla*

*Awuno doaxo nedo adegbe*

*Nu na nyo*

*Gbee dzeabla aye*

**Literal Translation**

[Call]: *Alo ya* (calling for attention)!

[Response]: Voice stops/prayer is yours<sup>559</sup>

The Great High Priest/Diviner should offer a prayer

So there would be success (all things will be good)

An Afa divination oracles

(It is prayer that makes or brings success)

The Great High Priest/Diviner should offer a prayer

So there would be success

(It is prayer that makes or brings success)

(It is prayer that makes or brings success)

The Great High Priest/Diviner should offer a prayer

So there would be success

(It is prayer that makes or brings success)

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<sup>557</sup> See Younge (1992).

<sup>558</sup> See Anyidoho (1997).

<sup>559</sup> “*Aloo ya*” is a socio-spiritual call for attention or a ritual form of seeking permission, which is predominantly used in *Afa*. It may also be rendered as “Call: *Aloya!* (permission/attention!) Response: *Gbee/Agbo/Agu* (prayer/voice/gate/) *yato/ato/towo*” (responded/five/yours). The leader often ritually asks the spiritual entities and the community gathered for permission to carry-on with the activities. The people (sometimes representing the themselves as well as the spiritual entities) give a metaphorical response indicating that “the permission, prayer, and information is received” and that the way is cleared for activities to proceed.

**Song 6: *Bokono Menyi Ba****Afa* (Text in Ewe: Anlo dialect)*Bokono menyì ba ee**Batselele Awuno menyì ba**Awuno menyì ba ee***Literal Translation**

High Priest I venerate you

Batselele High Priest I worship you<sup>560</sup>

High Priest I revere you

**Song 7: *Ametowo Adegbe****Afa* (Text in Ewe: Anlo dialect)*Ametowo (fe) adegbe ee**Mafoe de dzi wo adi bo loo**Ametowo (fe) adegbe**Mafoe de dzi wo adi bo**Ametowo (fe) adegbe**Mafoe de dziee**Ametowo (fe) adegbe**Mafoe de dziee**Tsetulawoe nye Awuno daxowo**Mafoe de dzi wo adi bo ee**Ametowo (fe) adegbe**Mafoe de dzi wo adi bo***Literal Translation**

One's own prayer (libation)

I will add to it for a better result (efficacy)

One's own prayer (libation)

I will add to it for a better result (efficacy)

One's own prayer (libation)

I will add to it

One's own prayer (libation)

I will add to it

The Blessed are the Great Priests

I will add to it for a better result (efficacy)

One's own prayer (libation)

I will add to it for a better result (efficacy)

Each of the above songs reiterates the concept that everything depends on the blessings of the divinities even for the success of a performance, hence the need for a spiritual communication. For example the High Priest and the members of the group often offer prayers and reverence to the divine and ask for their blessings. In fact, any request, irrespective of their functional differences, is preceded with *nudededo* (act of prayer, reverence and permission, and/or offering). This functions not just as a religious act but also as a socio-cultural, artistic, and moral obligation in Ewe perception. The following Adzogbo/adzohu-Atsia song reiterates this point:

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<sup>560</sup> *Bokono* and *Awuno* are sometimes used interchangeably. They are religious titles usually used by *Afa* high priests and diviners.

**Song 8: 'Mea 'De Yi Vedu Yo Ge**

*Adzohu-Atsia* (Text in Ewe: Anlo dialect)

//:Mea de yi vedu yo ge

Woade nu do.://

Enugbe yi la

Megbe ago mado o.

Mea de yi vedu yo ge

Woade nu do.

**Literal Translation**

Someone who goes calling on the gods

Should put his/her mouth on to the ground  
(Show humility and reverence).

A person who goes on a divine mission

Never refuses to knock (to seek permission)

Someone who goes calling on the gods

Should put his/her mouth on to the ground  
(Show humility and reverence).

If one wishes to seek the help of the gods, they need to be approached with reverence and humility. The theme of the above song expands not only the need for spiritual blessing but also social hierarchy, respect for age, and authority. This socio-cultural value exhibited here is inherent to Ewe culture, specifically in what I call the *agoo/ago-ame* concept.

**3.2.3.2 *Agoo...Ame...!* “Knocking:” An Ewe Socio-Spiritual Concept**

*Agoo...! Ame...!* is an Ewe indigenous social, ethico-moral and spiritual cultural concept that has been adapted by many other ethnic groups and people in West Africa and beyond. As an indigenous Ewe lexical item “*agoo*” means knock, permit, give way, and/or excuse. “*Ame*,” which is its indigenous response, on the other hand means human being. Etymologically, *Ame* is a diminution of *amegbeto* which is derived from the expression “*ame 'gbagbe to*” (lit., human living entity/being/one: *ame* = human; *gbagbe* = living/live; *to* = entity/being/one). Although many people beside the Ewe are now using “*Agoo...! Ame...!*” in many different contexts, and sometimes with different connotations, it is an important cultural concept among the Ewe. For the indigenous Ewe, *Agoo...! Ame...!* is used in and understood from three contexts and perspectives—social, ethico-moral, and spiritual contexts—all of which could be implied in one and the same event.

From sociological and ethico-moral perspectives, for example, to enter a neighbor's abode in any Ewe society, one needs to announce his/her presence, identity, and intentions with *Agoo...!* (knock/permission). Usually the one entering the new territory says:

Call: *Agoo...!* (Knocking/Permission!)  
Response: *Ame...!* (Mankind/Human being/Person)

It may be rendered in different and sometimes longer forms, hence my indication of "...". For example, one of its longer versions is:

Call: *Agoo na mi/wo* or *Medo agoo na mi!* or *Mede agoo de mia dzi!*  
("Knock on/for you" or "I knock on you" or "I ask permission of you!")

Response: *Gbeto neva* or *Ame negede 'me* or *Agoo neno kpogodo, ame negede me*  
("Living being should come" or Human should enter/come in" of "Knock should be left outside, so human being may come inside")

Sociologically, the *Agoo...!Ame...!* concept is a way to connect and associate with, recognize and acknowledge other people and their spaces. Ethico-morally, it is a way to show respect and observe social protocol. Spiritually/philosophically, it is a way to differentiate between physical and metaphysical entities, declare and/or interpret intentions, and accept or reject good or evil. For example, the proverbial expression "*Enugbeyila megbea ago mado o,*" (He/she who is on an errand or entering someone's abode cannot refuse or avoid knocking or seeking permission), as used in the song above underscores this value of respect for authority—a social, ethical and moral obligation. From the philosophico-spiritual perspective, Ewe believe that such an act "*Agoo...! Ame...!*" identifies a human being (distinguished from a spirit), as well as discloses his/her intentions (as good or bad). In contrast, Ewe also believe that a ghost or someone with bad intentions does not announce his/her presence when entering someone's territory. Hence, by declaring "*Agoo...!*," the entity states that he/she is human and has no bad intentions; and by the host responding "*Ame...!*" (person/mankind), he/she signals acceptance and recognition of the

visitor. The song above advises those who would call upon the gods for help to do so with circumspection, humility and utmost respect. “Anyone who invokes the spirits, mentions the name, or seeks the services of a deity/divinity should not only beware of the consequences of their actions but also do so with *nudededo* (humility). One should never contact the spirit world without first performing the rituals,” the composer emphasizes. As indicated, *Agoo...! Ame...!* is associated with and conceptually linked to *nudededo/adegbefofo/tsifodi* (spiritual communication) concepts as well as to the concepts of *novi* (sibling), *amedzro* (stranger/visitor), and *gbedoname* (greeting).<sup>561</sup> All of these concepts are expressed verbally (in speech, song, poetry, proverbs, etc), non-verbally (drum text, kinesthetics), and in other artistic forms. Below are a few more song texts exhibiting this concept:

**Song 9: *Medo Ago Na Mi***

***Akpalu/Agoha*** (Text in Ewe: Anlo dialect)

*Agoo loo medo ago na mi hee*  
*Nane le asi wo ee*  
*Wotsiatsu be ago*  
*Yede ago de miadzie*  
*Nane le asi wo nawo hee*

**Literal Translation**

Knocking, I seek permission of you  
 Do you have something to do  
 Wotsiatsu says, knocking  
 He/she seeks permission of you  
 If you have something to do, do it

**Song 10: *Mede Ago De Miadzi***

***Ageshie*** (Text in Ewe: Anlo dialect)

*Mede ago de miadzie a ee*  
*Afe ya me towo de*  
*Edu ya me towo de*  
*Mede ago de miadzie loo!*

**Literal Translation**

I knock on you/ask permission of you  
 People of this household  
 People of this town/community  
 I knock on you/ask permission of you

Below are two popular preludes that are commonly used in Northern Ewe musical genres such as *boboobo/akpese*, *Zigi*, and *Gbolo*. They also contain this cultural value of knocking as a sign of respect.

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<sup>561</sup> See chapter 6 for detail discussion of *novi*, *amedzro*, and *gbedoname* concepts.

**Song 11: *Hafi Nayi Fiafeme***

**Boboobo** (Text in Ewe: Ewedome dialect)

*Hafi nayi fia feme la*

*Agoo!*

*Agoo na mi*

*Medo agoo nami*

*Fiafemetowo agoo*

**Literal Translation**

Before you enter the abode of the King,

Knock! (Seek permission)

Permission from you

I am seeking permission from you

Members of the palace your permission

**Song 12: *Agoo***

**Zigi** (Text in Ewe: Ewedome dialect)

*Agoo, agoo ee! Agoo!*

*Miatame miano kesie*

*Vovlowo petepete (fetefete)*

*Togbetogbeawo*

*Miekla mi loo*

*Kusie, kusie*

*Agbe/dagbe ye loo, ayee*

*Mieyo mi loo,*

*Kusie, kusie*

*Agbe/dagbe ye loo, ayee*

**Literal Translation**

Knock! (Asking for permission)

Our heads, our great mothers, peace

All you spirits (all you in the spirit realm)

All you Great Ancestors

We sought your permission (call on you)

Peace, peace

It is for life/goodness intentions, oh yes!

We have called upon you (asking of you)

Peace, peace

It is for life/goodness intentions, oh yes!

The following are other preludes belonging to socio-recreational genres (*modzakadevuwo*) that fall under *sohevuwo/egbevuwo* (youth/modern musical traditions). The first two are *babashiko* preludes while the third is a *bobo* opening song.

**Song 13: *Mewoge Ne Miakpo*<sup>562</sup>**

**Babasiko** (Text in Ewe: Anlo dialect)

//:Mewoge ne miakpo

*Mewoge ne miakpo hee*

*Asee eyie ee://*

*Heno Kodzo be nukuno ne no to dzi*

*Tokuno na bo nu*

*Ne ga na do ga gbe ee*

*Asee eyie ee*

*Emiawoe nye Fiadenyigba Babasikoviawo*

*Aho deke meli agbe mia 'wo Adzigodua ee*

*Miele wiliwili, miedzea ame nu o ee*

*Miele nyamenyame, miedzea ame nu o ee*

**Literal Translation**

I will do it so you would see

Yes, I will do it so you would see

(Onomatopoeic expression) an affirmation

Composer Kodzo says, the blind should listen

The death should be silent/the 'unmusicals' be quiet

So the bell would speak the voice of a bell

(So the music would sound authentic/good)

(Onomatopoeic expression) an affirmation

We are members of Fiadenyigba Babasiko

There is no war that can break our Adzigo town

We are very tiny, we are often underrated

We appear insignificant, often underrated

<sup>562</sup> Song composed by Openo Gabienoo (Anlo Afiadenyigba, Ghana)

*Gake ee, ne miekpe le mo adewo nu o ee*

*Ekpo kple agbali'wo toshishie*

*Mieshi gee e*

*Aye dzie ee; be aye dzie ee*

But, when we meet at some intersections  
(performing/competitive grounds/platforms)

It's leopard and *agbali*'s type of swimming

That we shall swim (power competition)

It is a cunning, it's a cunning strategy

**Song 14: *Nya Medo Agoo*<sup>563</sup>**

***Babasiko*** (Text in Ewe: Anlo dialect)

//:*Nya medo agoo*

*Nye koe do agoo*

*Babasiko vua*

*Do agoo hee*

*Gbe le miawo nu hee://*

*Mava gbloe ne miase*

*Koklo ku ato mele ha dzi ee*

*Be nu de dzo ee*

*Mava gbloe miase ee*

**Literal Translation**

I ask for permission (I knocked)

It is I only seek permission (knocks)

The Babasiko dance-drumming group

Asks for permission (knocks)

We have a voice (we come praying/singing)

I have come to tell you

By rooster's crow at dawn, I was on song

Something happened (there is some news)

I have come to tell you

**Song 15: *Mitoe Ne Togbiawo***

***Bobo*** (Text in Ewe: Anlo dialect)

//:*Mitoe ne Togbiawo*

*Newo no te kpo mi*

*Mitoe ne Mamawo*

*Newo no te kpo mi*

*Ne game sua miayo deviawo dae*

*Boboe, emiawoe gbona ee*

*Mido woezo na wo://*

*Dodzhawoe gbo na*

*Miawo gbo na ee*

*Mido woezo na wo*

*Tsawolawoe gbo na*

*Miawo gbo na ee*

*Mido woezo na wo*

**Literal Translation**

Tell the paternal ancestors

To look over us (protect us)

Tell the maternal ancestors

To look over us (protect us)

When its time we would call in the children

Bobo musical group, we are coming

Welcome them

It is Dodzi's group that are coming

It us (Dodzi's Bobo group) that are coming

Welcome them

It's the stylish performers that are coming

It us that are coming

Welcome them

The indigenous communicative process, *tsifodi* or *nudededo* (act of prayer, reverence and permission, and/or offering), functions not just as a religious act but also as a socio-cultural, artistic, and moral obligation in Ewe perception. Hence it is carried out in various forms and through various media including songs, drum language, dance patterns and in verbal speech. It is

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<sup>563</sup> Song composed by Openo Gabienoo (Anlo Afiadenyigba, Ghana)

a symbolic act that transcends religious affiliations and is expressed in the regular socio-cultural activities of the people.

### 3.2.4 *Amegbeto*: The Concept and Constituents of the Human Being

It has been established in various pieces of scholarly literature that every culture produces, holds, and perpetuates a dogmatic conception of human personality in the form of an accepted formulation of the physical and psychical constitution of humankind.<sup>564</sup> The system of thought in Ewe indigenous society, like that of other African societies, produces elaborate (but on a few occasions conflicting) dogmas of the constitution and nature of a person, including various forms of *amegbeto* (the human being). There exists a wider African acceptance that the human being consists of more than one entity. The African philosopher Kwame Gyekye agrees when he wrote that “[t]he African philosophy of the person is, in my view, rigidly dualistic: The person consists of body and soul.”<sup>565</sup> He further explains that: “However, the common conception of the soul varies widely in its details. In some cases the soul is conceived as having three or even more parts, as, for example among the people of Dahomey.”<sup>566</sup>

The Ewe creation story or narratives about human creation have been formulated into what some called creation myths and are told in various forms. Although the mythological ontology has some inconsistencies, underlying tenets emphasize Ewe cosmology and further inform their philosophical thought. In popular Ewe perception, every *amegbeto* (human being)<sup>567</sup>

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<sup>564</sup> Parrinder (1951), Abraham, W. E. (1962), Forte and Dieterlen (1965), Mbiti (1990), Wiredu (1980, 1991, 1992, 1996), Gyekye (1987, 1995, 1996, 1997), and Adjaye (2004)

<sup>565</sup> Gyekye (1995: 198). See also M. Fortes and G. Dieterlen, eds. *African System of Thought* (1965: 122) and Mbiti (1990)

<sup>566</sup> Gyekye (1995: 198).

<sup>567</sup> Note that *amegbeto* (human being) is also called *ame* (person) or *gbeto* (person) in short.

is believed to have been sent by Mawu/Se/Bomeno (God/Creator/Mother of *Bome* the place or origin of life)<sup>568</sup> into *kodzogbe* (mortal life or the world of the living)<sup>569</sup> with unique characteristics for a particular purpose. After the fulfillment of the purpose, the individual returns to join the ancestors in *tsiefe* (eternity).<sup>570</sup> *Amegbetɔ* (human being: i.e. *ame* = human; and *agbagbetɔ* = the living one/thing), literally meaning a “living being” consists of three elements, *luvo* (soul), *gbogbo* (spirit-breath), and *nutila* (body)—the Triality of a person.<sup>571</sup> It is these three entities that Mawu/Se (Supreme God) puts together to form the human being in Ewe ontology.

*Luvo* (soul) is believed to be that which constitutes the innermost self, the essence, of an individual person. It forms the personality of an individual, for which reason some researchers refer to it as the “personality-soul”<sup>572</sup> *Luvo* (soul) is the embodiment and transmitter of the individual’s *dzogbese* (destiny/fate). It is that whose presence together with *gbogbo* (spirit-breath) in the body means *life* and whose absence means *death*.<sup>573</sup> On the other hand, *gbogbo* means spirit or breath (spirit-breath) both, from the Ewe metaphysical and linguistic perspectives, are necessary for the individual to be alive.<sup>574</sup> In addition, in Ewe ontology, *gbogbo* generically refers to the activating principle—all metaphysical, mystical, and unperceivable beings and forces—in the individual. In discussions within the domain of Ewe ontology, I translate and use *gbogbo* as “spirit-breath,” a coinage that captures its holistic meaning as used in Ewe ontology. *Gbogbo* causes the soul to breathe and is the divine bit or the spark of the Supreme Being

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<sup>568</sup> See chapter 2 for other names or terms for God or Supreme Being in Ewe.

<sup>569</sup> *Kodzogbe* is also known as *agbeme* (in life/life), *xexeme* (on earth/earth)

<sup>570</sup> *Tsiefe* is also known as *tsie*, *yome/yofe*, *kuwode* (home/land of the dead)

<sup>571</sup> *Triality*: the state of being three; three entities united in one.

<sup>572</sup> See Fiagbedzi (1977) and Parrinder, E. G. 1951. *West African Psychology*. London: Lutterworth Press.

<sup>573</sup> I presume that in Ewe metaphysic, either *luvo* (soul) or *gbogbo* (spirit-breath) must be present in the body to keep the person alive. In dreams, one of these metaphysical entities leaves the body and wanders in the super natural world while the other remains in the body hence keep the individual alive. In death, both metaphysical entities desert the body.

<sup>574</sup> See Parrinder (1951), Fiagbedzi (1977). See also Gyekye (1995) and Adjaye (2004) for similar Akan examples.

(*Se/Mawu*) in every human being.<sup>575</sup> *Gbogbo* (the noun form of *gbo*, to breath) as “spirit-breath,” is the tangible manifestation or evidence of the presence of *luvo* (the soul). Thus, *Luvo* with *gbogbo* is described as divine and as having an antemundane existence with *Se/Mawu* (the Supreme Being).<sup>576</sup>

It takes, in indigenous Ewe conception, the active presence of the combined forces of *luvo* (soul) and *gbogbo* (spirit-breath) to ensure *agbe* (life) in every living being. The departure, therefore, of the soul and the spirit from the body means the death of the person, and so does the cessation of breath; hence Ewe expressions such as *gbogbo tsi* (lit. the breath has stopped), *gbogbo dzo* (lit. the spirit is gone), and *luvo dzo* (lit. the soul is gone) all mean “the person is dead.” Indigenous Ewe believe that when the individual dies, neither the *luvo* (soul) nor the *gbogbo* (spirit-breath) perishes when *nutila* (the body and the material component of the person) disintegrates. This is because unlike *nutila* (body), which is made up of the physical matter that decays into *Miano-zodzi* (Mother Earth), *luvo* and *gbogbo* are metaphysical entities that desert the physical body at death and return to join *Mawu/Se/Bomeno* (God) and other ancestors in *tsiefe* (eternity). From my field research interviews and literature review, it is obvious that anthropological, philosophical, and sociological accounts of the nature of the person give the impression of a Triality conception of a human being in Ewe ontology.<sup>577</sup> Thus, the human being consists of two kinds of metaphysical entities and one kind of physical embodiment:

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<sup>575</sup> Ibid

<sup>576</sup> See Gyekye (1995) and Adjaye (2004) for detail discussion of a similar phenomenon among the Akan of Ghana.

<sup>577</sup> Personal communications (interviews) with Ewe thinkers, theologians, elders, scholars and philosophers including Tgbui Bokoga Logosu, Hon. Eku M. Ahiable, Bokoga Kodzo Kumedzro, Midawo Asafo Azafokpe, Prof. (Awuno) Datey-Kumodzie, Very Rev. Prof. N. K. Dzobo, Boko Kumedzro, and Togbi Konu B. S. Lamadekoo (See appendix E for interview dates). See also Gaba (1965, 1969, 1997), Fiawo (1959, 1998), Fiagbedzi (1977, 1997), Parrinder (1956, 1961, 1970, 1986), Mbiti (1990), Gyekye (1995, 1996, 1997), Wiredu (1980, 1991, 1992, 1996), Adjaye (2004), Abraham, W. E. 1962. *The Mind of Africa*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, Danquah, J. B. 1944. *The Akan Doctrine of God*. London: Lutterworth, Awoonor (1976), Dzobo and Amegashie-Viglo (2004), Gavua (2000),

1. *Luvo* (soul) metaphysical, immaterial, immortal, spiritual.
2. *Gbogbo* (spirit-breath) metaphysical, immaterial, immortal, spiritual
3. *Nutila* (body) physical, material, mortal, non-spiritual.

The three-part process can also be found in the life journey of the individual (life circle or process). Life begins at *amedzofe* or *bome* (human origin), literally meaning place of human creation.<sup>578</sup> It continues through *kodzogbe* (earth) into *tsiefe* (eternity). The mythical explication of Ewe ontology of human beings postulates three levels, spaces, and periods of existence. (1) *amedzofe* (place of human origin), where *Bomeno* (the Creator God) puts together the three entities or parts of the human being; namely *nutila* (the material body), *luvo* (the personality-soul), and *gbogbo* (spirit-breath/life). (2) *kodzogbe* (mortal life/earth), literally meaning ‘an arid desert,’ or ‘a savanna plain/field of poverty,’ refers to life on earth among the living where the individual fulfills his/her vows and assigned purposes.<sup>579</sup> (3) *tsiefe*, an abbreviation of *tsi nye fe* or *nye tsi fe* (literally meaning my final resting place/home or my ultimate home), refers to eternity and ‘the world of the dead.’ Nissio Fiagbedzi summarizes one version of the Ewe creation mythology as:

Originally, each human lived in a spirit world known as amedzofe, a place of creation. Amedzofe is thought to be a garden with a tall logo tree of redwood standing on one bank of a river, on top of which each spirit lives. Beneath the tree are seven huts. Prior to entering *kodzogbe*, each spirit descends the tree and enters one of the huts. There the spirit takes a vow (dea adzogbe) before *Se* by making a series of existential choices with regards to what it would do on earth, including the time and manner of death, after which the spirit crosses the river into *kodzogbe* as a human being.<sup>580</sup>

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<sup>578</sup> *Amedzofe* (human origin) is also called *Bome* (farm or place of ‘human’ cultivation), *Se* (*Se*’s home/place/abode), and *Mawufe* (Mawu’s home/place/abode)

<sup>579</sup> See Fiagbedzi (1977)

<sup>580</sup> Fiagbedzi (1977: 98)

A closer look at the Ewe terms for the three stages or planes of existence of the individual reveals a clear philosophical conception that underscores Ewe beliefs (1) of creation as the origin of human life; (2) of life on earth as transitory and terminal; and (3) of life after death as eternal, permanent, and everlasting.

First, the terms *amedzofe* or *bome* (the origin of humankind) and the term *bomeno* (mother of *bome* or mother of the place of creation) refer us to the *place* and *beginning* of the cycle of life where an originator, the Creator God, creates human life. Ewe think of the time they spend on earth (*kodzogbe*, also called *xexeme* “in the outside world”) as the second stage of life. Earth is, therefore, a place where we only stay for a short period; a place where we manifest our destinies; where we fulfilled our vows and earthly missions and thereafter go back to our place of origin, which we called *tsiefe* (everlasting home/eternity). According to Fiagbedzi the use of the term *xexeme* (earth) to designate mankind’s second stage of the life cycle suggest that *earth* is a counterpart of more inclusive, enclosed, and self-sufficient “isolated island world.” This world is bounded by the river that the incarnating spirit crosses to enter *kodzogbe* (mortal life) and *tsiefe* (eternity). Also, the deeper meaning of *tsiefe* as in *tsi nye fe* or *nye tsi fe* (my final resting place/home or my ultimate home) emphasizes that life still continues in eternity making this third phase of being, to the Ewe, the most permanent stage of life.

### **3.2.5 Dzogbese: Ewe Concept of Destiny/Fate**

According to many African scholars and theologians, while the absolute and ultimate being in African metaphysics, God, constitutes the controlling principle in the world, fate or destiny remains an integral part of the African metaphysic. “Running through the African conception of

God is a clear sense of fate or destiny,” writes Malcolm J. McVeigh.<sup>581</sup> Writing on the African ideas about the works of God, John Mbiti wrote: “God not only continues to create physically, but He also ordains the destiny of His creatures, especially that of man.”<sup>582</sup> Kwesi Dickson notes that “The concept of destiny is quite widespread in Africa; certainly the literature on West Africa suggests that many of its peoples have some ideas which may be put down under the heading [of] Destiny.”<sup>583</sup> Meyer Fortes, however, makes a distinction in that the concept of destiny is held only in West African religions. He writes, “Indeed one of the characteristics marks of West African religions, as compared with other African religions (for example: East and South African Bantu religions)...is the occurrence of the notion of Fate in them.”<sup>584</sup> Further research has however shown that Eastern and Southern African religions accept the notion of fate. Mbiti, for example, noted that “Similar notions of predestination are found among people like the Ila, Tswana, Bacongo, Barundi, Yao and others,”<sup>585</sup> all of whom are people in Eastern and Southern Africa.

*Dzɔgbese* is the Ewe word for destiny or fate. It is a combination of three words *dzɔ* (to originate, generate, or come into being/existence), *gbe* (day or voice) and *se* (law, force, power, or God).<sup>586</sup> My discussants and collaborators<sup>587</sup> agree that every human being, in indigenous Ewe conception, has a destiny that is fixed before birth and is held by the soul of every individual. According to them, before the soul sets out to enter this world, it takes leave of or

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<sup>581</sup> McVeigh (1974: 130 and 144)

<sup>582</sup> Mbiti (1990: 52)

<sup>583</sup> Dickson (1977: 3)

<sup>584</sup> Fortes (1983: 19)

<sup>585</sup> Mbiti (1990: 52)

<sup>586</sup> *Dzɔgbese* (destiny/fate) is also rendered in various short forms including *Dzɔgbe* and *Se*

<sup>587</sup> Ewe sages, theologians, and philosophers including Hesino Vinoko Akpalu (as indicated in his songs), Prof. (Awuno) Datey-Kumodzie, and Very Rev. Prof. Komla Dzobo have demonstrated the above assertion through various means such as song texts, in interviews and scholarly works. See for example *Akpalu fe Agohawo* (Akpalu’s philosophical songs), Dzobo and Amegashie-Viglo (2004), Gaba (1965, 1969, 1997), and Gavua (2000)

bids farewell to Mawu/Se/Bomeno (God). It is at this time the soul receives from God the message that will determine the course of the individual's life on earth. From the onset, the individual is to do the will of his/her destiny as expressed in the following sayings and songs:

*Dzogbesenye fe gbe dzie mele*  
(I am on the mission of my destiny)

*Nenye Sewoe doe nawo la, ne eyia nano anyi kpo; gake nenye amegbetoe doe nawo la ke ne eyia nabia hloe.*

(If it's your destiny that caused it [your death], then when you go stay calm; however, if its human being that caused it, when you go revenge).

*Ne Se mewu wo o la, gbeto mawu wo o.*  
(If destiny does not kill you, human being cannot kill you)

*Ekusike Mawu tso na ame la eyae woku na.*  
(The death that God has given you is the one that you die)

The song below alludes to the human predestination concept with a clear wish and desire of the individual to have a different destiny.

**Song 16: Mete Se Wogbe**

*Afa-Dzisa* (Text in Ewe: Anlo dialect)

*Se wogbe dzie mele*

*Ne de mekpoe nyuia*

*Nenyo wue*

*Se wo gbe mete*

*Ne de mekpoe*

*Ha nenyo wu.*

*Mete Se wogbe ne de mekpoe*

*Mete Se wogbe ne de mekpoe*

*Mawu mawo o fide yenu*

*Ne de mekpoe nyiua nenyo wue*

*Se wogbe mete*

*Ne de mekpoe nyuia*

*Mawoe woanyo wue*

**Literal Translation**

I am following the word/mission of *Se*,

If I had found a better one

It would have been great

I am destined by the word of *Se*,

If I had found a better one

It would have been great

Preordained by *Se*'s prescriptions;

Preordained by *Se*'s prescriptions;

If I had found a better one

I am destined by the word of *Se*

If I had a better one

I would have done better things/job

The composer of this song, according to Midawo Asafo Azafokpe, expresses his belief that the destiny of the individual is preordained, and so he/she lives according to those prescriptions. "I

know I was not meant for possession of great material wealth in this life, though I would have been glad if I had been destined like others. But, contrary to how those so destined have ‘misused’ their ‘better’ opportunities, I would have used it in a more ‘profitable’ way,” Midawo explains.<sup>588</sup>

Writing on Akan ontology, Kwesi Wiredu and Kwame Gyekye both agree that the belief in destiny is not peculiar to any one particular human society, people, or culture. “The question of destiny is of great import for human beings, and hence has been raised and explored by thinkers and theologians in all philosophies and religions.”<sup>589</sup> Gyekye reiterates the fact that destiny or fate is connected with legitimate philosophical constituents such as determinism, free will, punishment, morality, concept of being, and other metaphysical tenets. To establish and further substantiate his reasons and conviction for the universal belief in destiny Gyekye outlines two observations.

Gyekye’s first observation is based on the relationship between language and cognition, as well as conception and metaphysics. That is, “there is some kind of reality antecedent to language that language is developed to express or depict.”<sup>590</sup> Drawing on opinions of his field research collaborators and discussants Gyekye concludes that: “Language or linguistics structure...reflects a deep-lying structure of reality (or being)...Thus, a well-known discussant stated that ‘if there were no accident (*asiane*), the word *asiane* would not exist in the Akan language... [and that] the situation or matter that is not real has no name.’” In other words, he says, “anything that is named must be presumed to be real.”<sup>591</sup> Although Gyekye and Wiredu’s

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<sup>588</sup> Midawo Asafo Azafokpe (Interview: See appendix E)

<sup>589</sup> Gyekye (1995: 105)

<sup>590</sup> Ibid

<sup>591</sup> Ibid

researches focus on the Akan of Ghana, many of their findings and conclusions are relevant and true of many other African and world cultures.

The second explanation of the universality of belief in destiny is derived from creationist theory and belief that humans are the product of a Creator and are fashioned in a way that determines their inner traits (including their inclinations, dispositions, talents, etc). Different African cultures establish this belief in different ways. The following maxims in Ewe are some examples among others. The Ewe would say:

*See do ame da ameto ameto*

(The Creator God [Destiny] has sent/created human beings, each one with unique/individual characteristics)

*Alesi Senye wom, nenemae mano.*

(The way my Creator has created me, so I will be)

The Ewe may also sing:

**Song 17: Mawu Wo Mi**

*Akpese* (Text in Ewe: Ewedome dialect)

*Mawu wo mi*

*Gake nonome vovo*

*Yae Mawu wo mie*

*Alesi wo wom la*

*Eyae nyo nam loo*

*Nye matso nye nonome*

*Atso dolie towo o*

*Ee, Mawue wo mi loo*

*Gake mesiamе kple toe*

**Literal Translation**

God has created us

But with different characters traits

That God created us with

The way He/She created me

It's what is good for me

I will not take my character

And exchange it with yours

Yes, it is God that created us

But each with his/her unique traits.

The song and sayings above establish one concept in Ewe ontology. That is, all people are created by one Creator, but with unique character traits. They have basic likeness as human beings, but they differ in their inner characteristic traits, fortune, luck, unique features, capacities, and capabilities. "It is your destiny (*dzogbese*) that makes you you, and my destiny

that makes me. The destiny of a person is unique and idiosyncratic, as we have seen in the sayings and song,<sup>592</sup> says Dr. (Awunor) Dartey Kumordzi. The song below reiterates his point:

**Song 18: *Nonome Vovo***

***Akpese*** (Text in Ewe: Ewedome dialect)

*Nonome vovo*

*Yae Mawu womi*

*Alesi mele*

*Yae nyo nam loo*

*Nyematso tonye*

*Atso/ako dolie to wo o*

*Ne nya wum ha la [Ne Mawu lo ko la]*

*Edzi ko mado [Anyo na nye ha]*

*Edzi ko mado [Anyo na nye ha]*

*Ne nya wum ha la [Ne Mawu lo ko la]*

*Edzi ko mado [Anyo na nye ha]*

**Literal Translation**

It is with different personality traits

That God has made us

How I am (my character)

That is good for me

I will not take mine (my personality trait)

And exchange (it) with yours

Even if I am overwhelmed with issues

[If God permits]

I will only keep heart (be enduring/steadfast)

[It would be well with me]

I will only keep heart (be enduring/steadfast)

[It would be well with me]

Even if I am overwhelmed with issues

[If God permits]

I will only keep heart (be enduring/steadfast)

[It would be well with me]

**Song 19: *See Do Ame Da***

***Boboobo*** (Text in Ewe: Ewedome dialect)

*See do ame da*

*Ameto, ameto*

*Dzoghese e do ame da*

*Ameto ameto*

*Eyata maxo desiade*

*Kple akpe*

**Literal Translation**

It is Se (God) that sends humans forth

Uniquely, with individual fortune

It is Destiny that sends humans forth

Individually (with individual fortune)

So, I will accept whatever comes my way

With thanks

Both songs above (possibly composed by different individuals at different times) reiterate the same conception and belief. The musicians believe that, because human destiny is preordained, and because every individual has his/her uniquely destined characteristics, one has no choice than to accept what he/she is. “What and who I am is the best for me. I need to be thankful for whatever happens in my life, for that is my destiny.”

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<sup>592</sup> Datey-Kumodzie (see appendix E)

Explaining similar belief among the Akan further, Gyekye uses analogies to underscore the universal notion of pre-appointed destiny and creationism as well as the Western theory of evolution. He writes, “Just as the maker of a car can determine its speed, size, and shape, so the Creator can determine a number of things about human beings. The notion of pre-appointed destiny therefore may also have arisen in this way.”<sup>593</sup> Quoting from Corliss Lamont’s *Philosophy of Humanism*,<sup>594</sup> Gyekye indicates that the issue of destiny might not have arisen if man were supposed to have evolved and not been created by a Creator.

Thus, Western humanism that maintains ‘that man is an evolutionary product of the Nature of which he is part’ goes on appropriately to deny ‘that there is any overarching fate, either in the form of a Divine Providence or a malignant Satanism that is either helping or hindering man’s progress and well-being.’<sup>595</sup>

To the Ewe and many other creationists and believers in the “nature determined and pre-appointed theory of fate,” the reasoning behind the concept of destiny lies in their everyday life experiences. Boko Kumedzro states that “*Amegbeto fe agbenono kple nu siwo kata tefe wokpo le agbe me ye na miatogbiwo xoese be nuse ade li si wone be amesiame no agbe de mo ade nu.*”<sup>596</sup> (Human livelihood and all that the individual experiences in life provide the reason for our ancestors to believe that there is some super power that controls and directs the way every individual lives). Human life and experiences (*amegbeto fe agbenono kple nutefe kpokpo*) provide a practical and nurturing setting for their thoughts. Kwame Gyekye, using Akan examples explains further. In his view, the following help to define the characteristic results of destiny. (1) Continued or repeated misfortunes and fortunes, (2) Consistently unpredictable

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<sup>593</sup> Gyekye (1995: 106)

<sup>594</sup> See Corliss Lamont, *The Philosophy of Humanism*, 8<sup>th</sup> edition (with gender-neutral references by editors Beverley Earles and Beth K. Lamont). NY: Humanist Press, 1997

<sup>595</sup> Gyekye (1995: 106)

<sup>596</sup> Personal communication with Amega Setsofia Seshie (see appendix E)

events in an individual's life over a period of time, (3) Failures and successes at points in individual lives that cannot be explained by humans.

Other factors related to the belief in destiny include persistence of excessive actions on the part of individuals, and negative or positive behavioral traits that prove unchangeable and unexplainable. For example, the following song demonstrates the frustration in an individual's life after series of failures; failures that the individual could neither explain nor change, and could only attribute it to destiny.

**Song 20: *Alesi Senye Wom***

*Akpese* (Text in Ewe: Ewedome dialect)

*Alesi Senye wom*

*Nenemae mano*

*Ga makpomakpo*

*Vi madzimadzi*

*Sronyui makpo de*

*Dzidzo makpomakpo*

*Nuka fe nuxaxae*

*Le dokuinye nu*

*Dewohi nenemae*

*Senye dom da*

**Literal Translation**

The way my Creator has created me

So I will be

Without riches (never getting rich)

Without childbirth (with no child)

No good spouse to marry (unsuccessful marriage)

No happiness

What is the basis of the sadness

About my plight (myself)

Perhaps that is the way (that is how)

My destiny has sent me (I was destined).

Ewe do not only believe in destiny but also believe that it is preordained and cannot be changed. So, if one cannot change how they are created, then the best thing they can do is to accept the natural progression of events. That is exactly what the *Akpese* song above is saying about Ewe conception of destiny.<sup>597</sup> "I am neither fertile nor successful at marriage; hence, I have no happiness in life. Why should I keep worrying when I know very well that I have been destined to be as I am? A condition I cannot change!"

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<sup>597</sup> It should be noted that this conception is not peculiar to the Ewe. See for example Wiredu (1980, 1996), Adjaye (2004), and Gyekye (1995, 1996, 1997)

### **Song 21: Xexemenyawo**

**Akpalu/Agoha** (Text in Ewe: Anlo dialect)

### **Literal Translation**

1. *Xexemenyawo zu*

Life's difficulties have become

*Ganami mefa*

Hyena faeces (droppings) into which I have stepped

*Metutui medidim o*

I have washed it off, but it still smells on me

4. *Dzogbese lisae wo num alea*

It is Destiny God that put a spell on me

*Tsom do atsi glamawo dome*

Placing me in crook trees (awkward sites)

*Totro yi megbe megali o*

Making it impossible to retreat/reverse

7. *Ngogbe yiyi ha zu do na ye loo!*

But going forward/advancing is also a difficult task

*Xexemenyawo zu*

Life's difficulties have become

*Ganami mefa*

Hyena faeces (droppings) into which I have stepped

10. *Metutui medidim o*

I have washed it off, but it still smells on me

*Lamanye ade ye yeda*

It is an unknown animal that I have hunted

*Vinoko be*

Vinoko says

13. *Lamanye ade ye yeda*

It is an unknown prey that I have hunted

*Ku loo, agbe loo yeda ee*

Whether it is life or death, I have shot it (preyed it)

*Akpalu wu la ade*

Akpalu has hunted (shot) a prey

16. *Wozu adeshimadui*

That turned to be his wife's inedible prey

*Adekploviwo ka le ye nu*

Hunters apprentices have deserted him

*Xexemenyawo zu*

Life's issues (difficulties) have become

19. *Ganami mefa*

Hyena faeces (droppings) into which I have stepped

*Metutui medidim o*

I have washed it off, but it still smells on me

In the above song, the individual's inability to reverse or change his destiny is likened to the very bad smell of a hyena's droppings. The composer, Hesino Akpalu, used the maxim (as in line 1-3) as a metaphor to draw analogies between trying to change one's destiny with trying to get rid of a very bad smell on one's body. Akpalu, using himself as an 'ill-fated' Ewe, enumerates his life's challenges including irreversible misfortunes, as in hunting an inedible prey and being deserted or ostracized by comrades and relations (line 15-16).

With the strong belief in the inalterability of one's destiny, the Ewe individual struggles to continue accommodating mishaps and misfortunes in life while wishing his/her destiny is reversed or changed. Although knowing very well that such a change is unrealistic, the individual, nevertheless, expresses that desire, as in the following *Afa* and *Boboobo* songs.

**Song 22: *Esenye Lo****Afa* (Text in Ewe: Anlo dialect)*Esenye lo**Midoli senye nam**Magbodzo ee**Dzogbese**Ese nutoe wom alea**(Kpoli) dzogbese**Ese nutoe wom alea**Dzimadedi le senye gbo**Mexe le aya du mee**Senye le aya dum (mem)**Esenye lo**Midoli senye nam**Magbodzo ee***Literal Translation**

My destiny

You (plural) change my destiny for me

So I can relax (so I would be free)

Destiny

It's my destiny that has made me as I am

(Existential vow) destiny

It's my destiny that has made me as I am

Uneasiness with my destiny

And I am suffering/miserable

My destiny is responsible for my misfortune

My destiny

You (plural) change my destiny for me

So I can relax (so I would be free)

The lamentation here blames fate and existential vow (*kpoli*: see next page). "I am such an ill-fated individual that I can barely relax in life. I believe my plight is because of a combination of my destiny and my existential vow I made. Uneasiness, suffering, and misery are my lots. I wish people can help change my plight just as community does for individuals in desperation."

**Song 23: *'Gbeme Nuawo Ken Li****Kpegisu* (Text in Ewe: Anlo dialect)*'Gbeme nuawo ken li de**Senye metso deke nam o**Ye wo se tso hadzidzia**Dea 'si nam de**Ha ko madzia?**'Gbodaze gblo be ha ko yadzia?**Eha menye nu woduna o de**//: Made asi le ha ya nua?://**Miyo Agbodazehawo da**Woaxle funyewo nam de**Eha menye nu woduna o de**//: Made asi le ha ya nua?://***Literal Translation**

All of life's great things are there (available)

My destiny gives none to me

My destiny puts singing

In my hands (endow me with musical talent)

Is it only song that I will sing?

Gbodaze says is it only song that I will sing?

Song is not a thing (food) that can be eaten

Should I (can I) release this song from my hands (can I avoid/stop being a composer)?

You (plural) call Agbodaze's people over

To count my sufferings for me (to describe or recount my misfortunes)

Song is not something (food) that can be eaten

Should I (can I) release this song from my hands (can I avoid/stop being a composer)?

The socio-economic status of musicians may differ from culture to culture. However, research indicates that in many cultures and societies musicians are often not the most contented

professionals. There are many Ewe indigenous musicians, who have expressed in their works, their discontent and dissatisfaction with their 'profession.' Often it is here that concepts of destiny come into play. For example, in the *Kpegisu* song above the singer blames *Se/Dzoghese* (destiny) for making him a composer. "Composition/singing, for that matter, musicianship is not one of the great professions that bring 'food,'" the song implies. David Locke, who conducted his research among the Anlo Ewe, comments on this same song in his book on the *Kpegisu* war dance. From the Ewe musician's perspective, Locke writes "When you sing, you gain nothing, only problems (ritual obligations, social duties). People ask you to sing about their problems but will give you only drink for your efforts. Moreover, at your funeral who will sing? Destiny could have given him [the composer] many things, but his was to be a poor composer."<sup>598</sup> Locke's interpretation accurately summarizes the basic conception of musicianship in its relation to destiny in Eweland. It should be noted that as in many human societies and cultures, both Ewe musicians and the communities they serve know and variously recognize the important value of musicians and their products and indispensability in cultural sustenance. However, as it is only natural, Agbodaze, the apparent composer, wished he were destined with a 'better and more productive' profession.

As may be noted, the issue of destiny is commonly pronounced, projected, and highlighted when individuals and societies face challenges and failures in life. Although successes may be assigned or credited to fate, Ewe (like others) easily and readily blame their failures and life's difficulties on their *Dzoghese* (destiny). Despite the Ewe belief that the preordained destiny is unalterable, the desire for change becomes real when the individual is

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<sup>598</sup> Locke (1992: 62)

faced with what may seem to be the manifestations of the negative traits of one's fate.<sup>599</sup> On the other hand, although the individual disproportionately attributes his/her extreme and continuous successes and happy lifestyle to destiny, he/she never ever calls for its change. Certain ontological tenets are obvious in both cases including the belief in the existence of individual destiny, the concept of its pre-determinacy, and its inalterability. It is in such features, the "apparent inalterability and inexplicability of elements in one's character, the inexplicability of events in the life of an individual, the apparent irremediability of particular failures in the life of an individual, the constancy of one's good fortunes, and so on,"<sup>600</sup> that constantly surfaces in their experiences and underscore their belief in the existence of fate.

The Ewe believe also that in addition to destiny the individual is equipped with extra powers including *gbetsi or kpoli*, and *aklama*.<sup>601</sup> *Gbetsi/kpoli* refers to vows that the individual's soul takes (*tsi gbe* or *de adzogbe*) before taking leave of Mawu/Se (the Creator God) by making a series of existential choices regarding what it would do on earth, including the time and manner of death.<sup>602</sup> This is believed to be a positive spiritual vow that complements the individual's destiny, which is responsible for the birth, life, death, and reincarnation. It is also believed that *gbetsi/kpoli* (existential vow), is preexistent, taken prior to the individual's arrival in *kodzogbe* (life), and may have tremendous influences on one's activities in life. Their functions and manifestations may be complementary. Below is an *afa* song exploring these terms, *dzogbese*

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<sup>599</sup> While it is certain that the concept of irreversibility of fate is not peculiar to the Ewe, it is not clear if there are some African societies that believe fate could be altered or reversed. See for example Mbiti (1969, 1970, 1975), Mazrui (1974), Diop (1974, 1978), Orika (1975, 1978, 1990), Hountodji (1983, 1996), Makinde (1988), Oladipo (1988), Horton (1977), Hountondji (1983), Gyekye (1988, 1995, 1996, 1997), Wiredu (1980, 1990, 1991, 1996), Dzobo (1973, 1997, 2004, 2006)

<sup>600</sup> Gyekye (1995: 107)

<sup>601</sup> In some cases, Ewe use *dzogbese* (destiny/fate) and *gbetsi/kpoli* (existential vow) interchangeably

<sup>602</sup> Fiagbedzi (1977: 98)

and *kpoli*, interchangeably, but also commenting on contradictions or conflict between destiny and existential vow.

**Song 24: *Senye Melo O***

**Afa** (Text in Ewe: Anlo dialect)

//:Nu ya medo de ta nutsi be mawo

*Senye melo o*

*Metsi gogoligo://*

//:Nu ya medo de ta ntsi be mawo

*Kpolinye melo o*

*Metsi gogoligo://*

*Kpolinye melo o*

*Metsi gogoligo*

*Senye melo o*

*Metsi gogoligo*

**Literal Translation**

The very thing I have planned to do

My destiny does not agree

I am stranded

The very thing I have planned to do

My existential vow does not agree

I am stranded

My existential vow does not agree

I am stranded

My destiny does not agree

I am stranded

Ewe ontological conception also shows that, besides being destined by *Bomonor*, *Se* or *Mawu*, an individual takes an existential vow, outlining some of his/her wishes in life. However, existential manifestations show that, when one's *kpoli* (existential vow) conflict with one's *dzogbese* (destiny/fate), the latter takes precedence over the former. The above *Afa* song alludes to this epistemological presupposition. *Nu ya medo de ta nutsi be mawo Senye melo o Metsi gogoligo*. "The very thing I vowed to do in life conflicts with what I have been destined to be or do on earth. I am stranded and helpless since I cannot change my destiny," the individual laments. The flexibility between each of these terms, *se* and *kpoli*, may be widely agreed upon.

<sup>603</sup> However the message they give regarding destiny is important and cannot be overlooked. *Aklama* (fortune), on the other hand is the guardian spirit of the individual. As the guardian spirit, *aklama* is an invisible gift from *Se/Mawu* (Creator God); its task is to assist the individual in all of life's pursuits. In indigenous Ewe society some individuals provide sculpture (carving)

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<sup>603</sup> My collaborators (discussants) including Togbui Bokoga Logosu (Klikor), Bokoga Kodzo Kumedzro (Dzodze), Midawo Asafo Azafokpe (Dzogbefime), Amega Setsoafia (Aflao), Kila Fiebor (Anlo Afiadenyigba), Huno Shiabi (Dokplala), Kodzo Tagbolo (Dzodze), and Toboko Tublu (Dzodze) agree on the above point. They all served as my primary sources (interviewees) for deeper insight into *afa* songs and other Ewe indigenous ontological concepts.

as physical representation of otherwise a metaphysical entity. The sculpture, also called *aklama*, provides a point of visible or physical contact with the owner's fortune and guardian spirit. We may see the *aklama* concept and belief in such expressions as follows:

*Aklama di na wo*  
(Literally, your guardian spirit has sounded for you)  
Actually, it means your guardian spirit has saved you or you are fortunate

*Aklama me le nu nye o*  
(Literally, my guardian spirit was not by me)  
Actually meaning, I am not fortunate

*Aklama medina na ame zi eve o*  
(Literally, one's guardian spirit does not sound for one two times)  
Actually meaning one should not always expect to be fortunate

While all these spiritual embodiments and vows of the individual are believed to be positive spirits and choices, they may have their negative ramifications as well. In both cases, individuals may make special prayers, sacrifices, and promises periodically to their spirit (*dzogbese/gbetsi/kpoli*). While believing and acknowledging the fact that his/her life's challenges are as a result of destiny and/or vows made before birth, the individual may wish his/her choices are reversed as a result of such sacrifices.

In Ewe ontology, as in many indigenous African societies, we understand and hold destiny to be that which determines the uniqueness and individuality of a person. There is no mystery surrounding the Ewe concept of destiny. Like other philosophical reasoning, as Kwame Gyekye points out, the reasoning behind the concept is inductive and it is based on experience. *Dzogbese* is a concept and belief that is reached through a profound reflection upon and thorough analysis of the experiences and realities of individual human life. In Ewe indigenous

conceptions, each human being is unique and possesses peculiar character traits.<sup>604</sup> Hence, one is often cautioned to do what is within the reach of one's capabilities as in the following proverbs:

*Dadivi la afivie wolena*  
(The small/young cat catches a small mouse)

*Amesiame kple efe agbemoe*  
(Each individual with his/her own life's path)

*Amenutoe yoa efe akplekoe be akpleko*  
(It is you who would call your own small deeds, great deeds)

### **3.2.6 *Ku* and *Tsiefe/Yome*: Ewe Concept of Death and Eternity**

It is an ontological fact that human beings are mortal. In human existence, there is time to live and time to die. Death, more than, but not unlike birth, has remained one of the mysteries of being and existence and has been a subject or phenomenon that all societies try to explain in their various ways. The Ewe, as other societies, have tried to explain what death is, how, why, and for what purpose it entered the circle of existence in our world. The Ewe word for death is *ku*. A detailed analysis of the etymology and semantics of the Ewe word *ku* may help us in understanding indigenous Ewe conception of death.

*Ku* (death), with the same spelling, pronunciation, and intonation, also means seed as in *atiku*.

*Ku* may also refer to species, kind, and type as in *ameku*.  
*Atiku* (*ati* = plant/tree; and *ku* = seed) refers to the seed of a plant.

Similarly:

*Ameku* (*ame* = human; and *ku* = seed/kind/species) refers to human kind or human species.

Further, in Ewe:

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<sup>604</sup> See Gyekye (1995, 1996, 1997)

*Ati la ku (atia ku)* means “The tree is dead”  
*Ati ku la (atikua)* means “The seed (of a tree)”  
*Atikuku (ati kuku)* means “A dead tree/plant”

Likewise:

*Ame la ku (amea ku)* means “The person is dead”  
*Ame ku la (amekua)* means “The human seed (human species/kind)”  
*Amekuku la (ame kukua)* means “The dead person”

Literally, therefore, *ku* has two main meanings; namely “death” and “seed/kind/species”

However, in Ewe ontology, *ku*, either as seed or death, conceptualizes both phenomena, the temporal transformation of existence or being. *Ku* is packed with deeper meaning that may facilitate understanding about the Ewe indigenous approaches to life and death. In Ewe philosophical thought, *ku*, whether as the terminal point of life on earth, as a propagative part of a plant, is conceptualized as the temporary stopping of the dynamic flow of life’s energy. *Ku* (death) is a process of temporarily returning living things including the human personality-soul to the *ku* (seed) stage of existence where it is planted or buried (*fae/di*), and later germinates into the soul (by reincarnation or rebirth) or is accepted into the supernatural world as a spirit. If life is considered as the dynamic flow of creative energy in living things, then death stops that flow.

The Very Rev. Prof. Komla Dzobo explains this in an interview. He points out that:

*Agbe kple ku fe gomesese ma kee nutie Yesu fo nu tso abe alesi wonloe de Biblia me ene* [it is in terms of this same understanding of life and death that Jesus talked about as written in the Bible] ‘I am telling the truth: a grain of wheat remains no more than a single grain (*ku* in Ewe) unless it is dropped into the ground and dies (*ku* in Ewe).’<sup>605</sup>

In addition, Ewe word for burial also supports the above conception of life and death. In Ewe *dzra do* or *di* means “to bury.” Literally and figuratively, *dzra do* means “to store away” or

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<sup>605</sup> In a personal communication with the Rev. Prof Komla Dzobo (Interview: see appendix E). Dzobo is the former Moderator of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Ghana and a professor of philosophy and African culture, See also Dzobo and Amegashie-Viglo (2004)

“safely keep.” Although *di* also means bury or put into the soil, *dzra do*, is the indigenous proverbial expression of burial in Ewe. *Dzra do* (burial) reiterates the understanding that at death (*ku*), the individual soul becomes a seed (*ku*) which is then carefully and securely stored away/buried/planted (*dzra do/di*) for later use or continuation of life in the third stage of existence. “Here again...” Dzobo reiterates as he code switched and code mixes Ewe and English.<sup>606</sup>

*Le miatogbiwo fe nu gomesese deto nu la, ku (death) menye agbe gble nu o* [from our forefather’s point of view, death is not life destroyer] by that I mean death is not an annihilation of life, but a safe keeping of life in its seed stage; so life (*agbe*) becomes a process of moving through various growth stages...That is...by the seed philosophy of death, *ku* (death) is an invitation to *agbe* (life) to come out of death. *Susu ma fomevie tae Kristotowo gblo bena ‘yodo la dzifo fe agbo wonye* [it is a similar concept that Christians express when they say ‘the grave is a gate or entrance to heaven’<sup>607</sup>

If death is so clearly described and explained in Ewe conception, then why do the Ewe fear death so much? Almost unanimous answers came from those interviewed indicating that even with the above idea of conception and the deeper understanding of death, it still remains a frightening mystery among all humans. Its unpredictable nature around all those living exacerbates human feelings about it. The Ewe express this fear and uncertainty of the death phenomenon in various ways including names, songs, and proverbs. Examples of personal names<sup>608</sup> include but are not limited to:

*Kugbemanya*  
(Day of death is unknown)  
It is uncertain when death would strike.

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<sup>606</sup> The above kind of code mixing and switching is a communicative style (normally ‘unintentional’ but common and prevalent) among Western educated Africans.

<sup>607</sup> Komla Dzobo (see appendix E).

<sup>608</sup> Although above names may be used as first names, nowadays, they are mostly last or family names.

*Kulilim*

(Death has taken me by surprise)

Since death is so unpredictable, humans are often taken unawares by death.

*Kugbeadz*

(Death has refused to be bribed)

Death, being a natural phenomenon and a consequence of life is can never be stopped; not even when offered the most enticing incentives.

*Kugblenu*

(Death has destroyed thing)

Although, they believe it is the consequence of life, it is always seen as a destroyer of existence.

*Kumawu*

(Death cannot be killed)

Death is a killer that can never be killed.

*Kudolo*

(Death has expressed/planted a proverb)

The inhumane nature of death, its lack of mercy, and indiscriminate activities can only be expressed in proverbs. Proverbs are believed to have the adequate linguistic depth necessary to capture death's atrocities.

*Kumedzro*

(Visitor death) or (death is a visitor)

Due to its very nature, death is and will ever remain an unwelcome visitor/guest on earth.

*Kumordzi*

(Death's path)

The journey to eternity, though conceptualized as the way to permanent existence (*tsiefe*), still remains the road/path that nobody wishes to tread on.

Proverbs include:

*Ku melea nu woxone le esi o*

(One cannot take from death what it has captured).

*Tsie menye asi woyina gbona o*

(Eternity is not a business trip that one goes and comes back from).

*Agbenokaka megbea seye nanyi o; blewu miade afe*

(Longevity does not prevent transition to eternity; we would gradually get home)

One of Akpalu's philosophical songs reminds us of the fact that no one is immune to death, not even the legendary Tsali who is believed to be one of the Ewe's powerful and mystical leaders.

**Song 25: Kuvi****Akpalu** (Text in Ewe: Anlo dialect)//: *Kuvi medina ame deka dzi o hee**Nu hewo Akpalu miekpo dzidzo**Kplamadaviwo heko na**Tsali se bo, mesa gbogboametsie o**Ne ewo de kpokpo ha, ku wu wo ge://*//: *Megbloe be meva dzesi ame gede**Vinoko be meva dzesi ame gede**Ame adewo fe dome fa de nun ye**Ame adewo fe dome vena**Amega xoxo medoa devi wo ku o**Ne 'ka atam gawo de ye nu ee://**Kuvi medina ame deka dzi o hee**Nu yia wo Akpalu miekpo dzidzo**Tsali se bo wogblo, mesa gbogboametsie o**Ne ewo de kpokpo ha, ku wu wo ge***Literal Translation**

Death's grief is not limited to an individual

That you may rejoice over Akpalu's misfortune

And Kplamada's children to laugh over

Tsali has magical powers, but not the return-from-eternity magic (not resurrection magic)

Whatever you may do, death would kill you

I say I have come to know many people

Vinoko says I know many people

Some people are kindhearted to me

Some people are acrimonious towards me

An elderly man does not wish a child's death

Lest he swears the great oath against himself

Death's grief is not limited to an individual

That you may rejoice over Akpalu's misfortune

Tsali has magical powers, but not the return- from-eternity magic (not resurrection magic)

Whatever you may do, death would kill you

The following shorter songs are some of the common expressions in proverb and songs that explain the same phenomenon:

**Song 26: Yome Safi****Boboobo** (Text in Ewe: Ewedome dialect)*Yome safi me le asinye o**Gake meyi loo, nye ma ga gbo o***Literal Translation**

I do not have the key to eternity

But, I am gone I will not return

In addition:

**Song 27: Kakla****Boboobo** (Text in Ewe: Ewedome dialect)*Kakla nye nu sese**Meyi loo, nye ma ga gbo o***Literal Translation**

It is difficult to say goodbye

I am gone and I am will not return

Death is a means to get to the third stage of existence, eternity. The Ewe have different concepts or meaning for this third stage. The most commonly held concept of it is that *tsiefe* (eternity) is a final permanent resting place devoid of all the difficulties and challenges of life.

The names, proverbs, and song above sometimes seem to negate or contradict the Ewe conception of death (as a temporary stoppage of the dynamic flow of life's energy and not as

destroyer). However, their philosophical import underscores a fundamental human concept—uncertainty and uneasiness with what is conceptual, unpredictable, and metaphysical. To humans, life on earth and its manifestations are physical and experiential but largely unpredictable. The Ewe conception of *ku* is a philosophical thought based on life’s experiences rather than on prophetic religious belief. There is a profound way of trying to lessen the negative impact of the uncertainty associated with the metaphysical, the intangible, and the unpredictable.

*Tsiefe* (eternity) is also called *awlime*, *yome*, or *agume* all literally meaning ‘the spirit world’ or ‘spirit home’ and *kuwode* literally meaning ‘the home of death.’<sup>609</sup> Defining this concept using the synonyms for *tsiefe* (eternity) is the understanding that eternity:

- (1) Is a place that one lives forever (*tsi* = permanently stay; *fe/afe* =place/home)
- (2) Is a spiritual world/a place for the spirits (*awli* = mystical/spiritual; *me* = realm/inside/in)
- (3) Is ‘womb’ of mother earth (*yo* = abdomen/womb; *me* = inside/in)

Irrespective of which term the Ewe uses, the idea of returning to a permanent (mystical/spiritual) home is present throughout time. Since *gbogbo* (spirit-life) is believed to be a bit of Mawu/*Se* (Creator God) in everyone, which deserts the body and joins the Creator at death and since *tsiefe/bome/amedzofe* (human origin) is the home of the Creator and of spirits, Ewe believe that when we die we go back ‘home’ as spirits and not as physical bodies. *Gbogbo* (spirit-life), also referred to as *amea nuto* (the real person), is the dynamic energy that flows back to where/whom it comes from i.e., to *Se/Mawu/Bomeno* (the Creator God) at death. Soon after death, *luvo* (soul), which is often believed to have lived a pre-earthly existence prior to its

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<sup>609</sup> *Yome*, when pronounced with a low tone on the first syllable may mean eternity or spirit world. When it is pronounced with a high or even mid tone, it may mean ‘womb’ in the same context. In Ewe ontology, there is a correlation between womb and eternity. Both may connote *miano zodzi* ‘mother earth’ the source of human life; womb out of which we came and eternity into her we go back, according to Ewe indigenous cosmology.

manifestation in *kodzogbe* (life on earth), joins the company of the ancestors to live a post-earthly life in the spiritual world, *tsiefe* (eternity). In view of this, “the Christian missionary,” in McVeigh’s words, “does not go to Africa to inform the people that there is a spiritual world or that the personality survives the grave. Africans know this from their own experience.”<sup>610</sup> Komla Dzobo also recounts the Ewe mythology of the third stage of existence:

The belief among the Ewe is that there is a river of life and death called *Kuwotosisi* [lit. death’s river], which we cross when we go from this life to the other and vice versa. The boatman who ferries the dead across is called *Kutiami*, the messenger of death. The river of life and death has two crossing points, the one on the side of the living is called *Agbetonu*, the crossing point of life and the one on the side of the dead is *Kutonu*, the crossing point of death.<sup>611</sup>

Elsewhere, he recounts an old funeral rite that is performed for the dead during burial, which underscore the belief of the journey across the river. During burial:

Just as the coffin is about to be closed, people come around and put money into the coffin as tolls for crossing the river, *Kuwotosisi* [death’s river], and also to be used by the departed to buy water to drink on the journey to the land of death. This final funeral rite is done to show one’s care and love for the departed and psychologically to facilitate emotional disengagement from the departed.<sup>612</sup>

When accepted as an ancestor in *tsiefe* (eternity), the soul may use its greater power to aid the living. The individual may soon return to *kodzogbe* (life on earth) by reincarnation in the event where it has not fulfilled all vows. In the abode of the illustrious dead as an ancestor, if accepted, the soul lives and enjoys “life” in *tsiefe* (eternity). It is at this point, *nutila* (the material body), from which the metaphysical entities (soul and spirit) have departed, decays and returns to the womb of mother earth (*yome* of *miano-zodzi*) from which it came. Therefore, at the end of the third stage of existence, the three parts of the human being; namely, the soul, the spirit, and the body go to their original places of origin. For this reason, in good times and in bad times

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<sup>610</sup> Ibid: 37

<sup>611</sup> Dzobo and Amegashie-Viglo (2004: 44)

<sup>612</sup> Ibid

individuals and even the community call on the ancestors. Also, when the community and/or individuals are troubled in life, they find solace in eternity with the hope and conception that eternity is their forever resting place as Hesino Akpalu expresses in the following song:<sup>613</sup>

**Song 28: Agbefu Wo Ye**

**Akpalu** (Text in Ewe: Anlo dialect)

*Agbefuwo wo ye, ku nyo wu  
Yomee nye dzudzofe na amegbeto  
Vuviawo dee! Miakplom ne madzo  
Buno kple efe koe zona  
Akpalu mele agbe no ge  
Akpo koklo fe ava o  
Agbefu wo ye, ku nyo wu  
Yome enye dzidzofe na amegbeto  
Nye wo se medzom nyuie o  
Vinoko be  
Ye wo se medzo ye nyuie o  
Nanye amedahe, ganye kono  
Nuvoe, mayo ndie.  
Vinoko meglone tso ganoa etefe o.  
Tu 'wo kara le ye wom  
Nado do ame vi  
Dzilawo nagbe,  
Emae nye agbe dovuh ha?  
Agbefu wo ye, ku nyo wu  
Yome enye dzudzofe na amegbeto.*

**Literal Translation**

Life troubles befall me, death is better  
Eternity is the resting place for mankind  
Vuviawo!<sup>614</sup> Lead me so I can leave (depart)  
It is the poor and his poverty that walk (together)  
Akpalu would not be alive  
To witness the cock's (rooster's) penis<sup>615</sup>  
Life troubles befall me, death is better  
Eternity is the resting place for mankind  
My Destiny God has not created me well  
Vinoko says  
His Destiny God has not created him well  
To be poor, and at the same time childless  
Is evil/sinful, and not be mentioned at dawn<sup>616</sup>  
Vinoko does not say it and witnesses it  
The difficulties that befall me  
To ask for help from someone's child  
Only for the parents to refuse (reject)  
Is that life worth living (is that a worthy life)  
Life troubles befall me, death is better  
Eternity is the resting place for humanity

This song contains elements of the preordained theory of destiny and eternity as a permanent, peaceful, and everlasting home for humans. It reiterates the meaning of *xexeam* and *kodzogbe* as Nissio Fiagbedzi interprets; i.e., an arid desert or a savanna plain/field of poverty; a

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<sup>613</sup> See Nayo (1964: 191-192)

<sup>614</sup> *Vuviawo* refers to members of the musical group (i.e., Akpalu, the composer's group) or all people who sing his song—the masses. *Vuviawo* is also used contextually to refer to any musical group.

<sup>615</sup> To be able to see the penis of a rooster is seen as an impossible (or at least a very difficult and rare) task or experience.

<sup>616</sup> In Ewe conception, human mouth that eats salt and pepper has the potential to ruin one's life and the world. It is believed that whatever one says first as one wakes up from bed at dawn may affect all of one's activities of the day. Hence, people try not to start the day with a negative expression.

place where one faces hardships and troubles.<sup>617</sup> The composer-poet Hesino Akpalu (who portrays himself as an ill-fated person—poor and childless) depicts eternity as a friendlier place; a place where humans would have rest and never have to worry about “life’s troubles (*agbefuwo*).” The hope that life on earth would be better in the future is, in Akpalu’s thought, analogous to hoping that one may someday easily see the rooster’s penis—improbable event or, at least, “one that may not happen in Akpalu’s life time (the near future).” Obviously, Akpalu’s portrayal of death and destiny is informed by the Ewe ontological concept of being. His depiction of poverty and childlessness as “evil/sinful” is a direct invocation of the stigma attached to barrenness as thematized in many African texts.<sup>618</sup> Irrespective of one’s reproductive, economic, or social status, Ewe culture, like that of many other indigenous African cultures, encourages children to be helpful to everybody. Hence, life for an individual is not worth living if, in an Ewe community, parents prevent their children from helping someone in need. In that case, the individual, like Akpalu, wishes a speedy departure to eternity.

In indigenous Ewe culture, acceptance to ancestorship is, however, not an easy matter. In separate interviews, Bokor Kumedzro, Amega Setsoafia Seshie, and Komla Dzobo all indicate that there is always the rite called *agbamekpokpo* or *agbakaka* (literally meaning ‘unpacking wares/luggage’). It is a ritual in which the dead recounts or narrates his/her news of life on earth to *Bomeno* or *Nolimetasi* (the Creator God) and ancestral predecessors in eternity. While this is not a “judgment” as in Christian beliefs, it serves as another kind of rite of passage to verify whether the individual has satisfactorily fulfilled its vow or life’s mission on earth. If the individual’s account is unsatisfactory, he/she is sent back to earth (by reincarnation) to fulfill it completely. Again, the individual soul is neither ‘punished’ nor sent to ‘hell’ since the concepts

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<sup>617</sup> See Fiagbedzi (1977)

<sup>618</sup> See Agawu (1995: 139)

of ‘hell’ and ‘heaven’ do not exist in indigenous Ewe ontology. “The concept of hell,” says the Very Rev Dzobo, “is not part of an African [Ewe] world-view.”<sup>619</sup>

According to Boko Kumedzro and Midawo Asafo, those souls that may not be “accepted” into eternity are ostracized, i.e. they are sent out of *tsiefe/boame* (eternity) to *kodzogbe* (mortal life on earth) by the process of reincarnation or left to wander in the cosmos. So, even in eternity, according to Ewe world-view, “ostracism then is equivalent to the temporary punishment for unfulfilled life” says Togbi Lamadeku.<sup>620</sup> However, my interviewees indicate that ostracism of the unfulfilled soul is often temporal. This is because the spirit of the ostracized soul manifests itself in the daily life activities of the living, usually in very negative ways, which prompts the living to offer sacrifices of atonement on its behalf. As soon as the sacrifice is made, the soul is either accepted back into eternity to have communion with earlier departed souls or reassigned back to life by reincarnation.<sup>621</sup> In view of this conception and belief, the Ewe try not only to live well but also to die well and be buried respectfully since moral values are attached to the ways a person dies and is buried. Besides that, how an individual lives, dies and is buried are all pre-requisites for ancestorship. It should be noted that the individual does not do that to be free from “sin,” for the concept of “sin,” as defined and preached by Christian theologians, is not indigenous to the Ewe. Therefore, communion with the living and the dead is a quintessential spiritual value of the Ewe and indeed many Africans. The following songs reiterate the various conceptual tenets of the third stage of existence *tsiefe* (eternity) in Ewe ontology. They exhibit the concept of *tsiefe* (eternity) as home inhabited by family, relatives, friends, and acquaintances.

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<sup>619</sup> Dzobo and Amegashie-Viglo (2004: 45)

<sup>620</sup> Togbui Konu B. S. Lamadekoo (Interview: See appendix E)

<sup>621</sup> Interviews with Bokoga Kumedzro, Mr. C. K. Kudjordjie, Very Rev. Prof. Komla Dzobo, Prof. Datey-Kumodzie (see appendix E for details)

**Song 29: Amenye Wogbo***Avihe* (Text in Ewe: Ewedome dialect)*Amenye wogbo**Nye mable o**Makpo nofe**Amenye wogbo**Nye mable o**Makpo dzefe*//: *Ne medo amenye wogbo la**Nye mabu o**Makpo mofle://***Literal Translation**

In the abode of my people

I would not be stranded (ostracized)

I would be accommodated (welcome)

In the abode of my people

I would not be stranded (ostracized)

I would get a place to settle

When I get to the home of my people

I would not be lost

I would get a place to sleep

**Song 30: Gbolete***Afa* (Text in Ewe: Anlo dialect)//: *Gbolete be ame vo ye nu ee**Mayi tsiewode**Mado ame me://***Literal Translation**

Gbolete says his has lost all his people

I would go to eternity

So I can be among people

The two songs above portray eternity as home and a community. The composers/singers take the perspective of a deceased person who is on a journey to eternity. In the first song, the singer expresses the hope that he/she would be welcome and accepted to join the ancestral world. “Life is not worth living without a community of people to be with. I better go to eternity, where there is a community of illustrious ancestors, so I can be a social person,” says the composer in the second song.

In the following songs, composers comment on the need not only to live well but also to die well and be buried respectfully since moral values are attached to the way a person dies and is buried. One of the common wishes of Ewe is to be accorded a ‘fitting’ burial and funeral rites when one dies. It is therefore a big insult to the living when they are not able to give their departed relative a respectful and honoring funeral rite when they die.

**Song 31: Gbeyigbe Meku La***Kpegisu* (Text in Ewe: Anlo dialect)//: *Gbeyigbe meku la**Koshi be, “miga kom de zavu**Ne miadi o***Literal Translation**

The day that I die

Koshi says, “Do not put me in a night lorry to bury” (do not bury me clandestinely)

*Dakpo nano ta na ma  
Ye dilawo miga nlan be di o, he?  
Du nku nakpo miawo o://*

*//:Sakpate woku ame wum he!*

*Deviwo kua wo nublani://*

With partial hair on my head (partly shaved)  
My buriers do not forget me alone, ok?  
For the town's eyes to look at us (for us to  
be in the public eyes/talk of the town)  
Sakpate's (the god of smallpox) death is  
killing people (smallpox disease is deadly)  
Children's death is miserable/sympathetic

Among the Ewe there are two kinds of deaths. There is a “good” or “natural” death (*dzodzomeku*) and there is a “bad” or “dangerous” death (*kuvo/dzomeku*). While it is difficult to define what a “good” death is, it is much easier for an Ewe to point out what constitute a “bad” death. Usually “bad” deaths include death from certain kinds of sickness, physical injury, or accident. “Bad” deaths are believed to be caused by violation of the proper ways-of-living (i.e., morally, spiritually, socially, etc). Such violations and infractions, for example, may cause gods to bring “bad” death or misfortune to an individual, a household, a family, or even a community. For instance, in the song above, the image of *Sakpate* (the god of disease) killing innocent children with smallpox is distressing to the people of a community. In the past, indigenous Ewe believe that gods including *Sakpata* associated with smallpox were enforcers of traditional customs, ethical values, and moral standards. The death of children through smallpox was blamed on the violation of the proper ways-of-living.

When bad death occurs, specific rituals must be performed as part of the burial ceremony. The burial usually takes place at night with certain procedures to follow that are different from regular rites of a “good” death. For example, there is no shaving of the deceased's head; the hair and nails are not saved for a later (second) honorific interment during a grand funeral and memorial service. There is also no public funeral celebration of the deceased. This is done to prevent such deaths from occurring and to prevent the spirit and soul of the deceased from reincarnation thus bringing back to life a bad omen.

The *kpegisu* song above alludes to a bad death. The song expresses the emotional impact that a “bad” death causes as well as a huge negative moral impact as found when families and relations of the deceased are not able to give a “proper” and honorary burial and funeral rites. Anything short of a fitting burial and funeral is a disgrace to the family. Besides that, the soul of the deceased faces yet another task of a possible rejection in the ancestral realm and higher possibility of reincarnation. In the song above, Koshi contemplates the day of her death and wishes she did not die a “bad” death. She pleads, “If I die, please empathize with me and bury me honorably,” she pleads. The importance of the song is to impart an implicit didactic message: live a proper moral life and avoid this miserable fate.<sup>622</sup>

**Song 32: *Adzino Kugbe***

***Boboobo*** (Text in Ewe: Ewedome dialect)

*Adzino kugbe la*

*Tu medi o*

*Ha medi o*

*Adzino kugbe la*

*Tu medi o*

*Ha nadia*

*Yodoa ade yenye adzino woto*

*Gake egbeviwo wonlo esia be*

*Na woanya be ame ade ye noa*

*Wo nu dzom le agbe sia me*

*Gake adzino kugbe doa*

*Tu medi o*

*Ha medi o*

**Literal Translation**

On the death of the mother of life (a parent)

There was no sound of gunfire (gun salute)

There was no sound of songs (dirge in memory)

On the death of the mother of life (a parent)

There was no sound of gunfire (gun salute)

Let alone the sound of songs

The grave (passage to eternity) is for parents (befitting burial is the least we could do for those who give birth to us)

But children of today (modern kids) have forgotten about these (all important rite)

Let them know that it was someone (their parents) who has been

protecting them in this life

But On the day of the death of mother of life (a parent)

There was no sound of gunfire (gun salute)

There was no sound of songs (dirge/song in

Memory and praise)

This song reiterates the need not only to honor and respect your elders in life but also when they die. Parents (*adzinowo/dzilawo*) must be honored with good music, firing of guns and

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<sup>622</sup> See Locke (1992)

musketry by their offspring on the day of their death,” says the composer. “Unfortunately, children of modern times have forgotten about this important moral, socio-cultural, and humanistic value. They have forgotten that it was somebody (their parents) that has nurtured them in this life. The least they could do is to recognize and acknowledge them by saluting them with songs and musketry.” Although posthumous, honorable funeral celebrations are cherished, highly valued, and largely promoted. The Ewe, like many other Africans believe that honoring the dead is honoring oneself in life. It is also a way of helping the deceased in his/her smooth journey to eternity as well as showing his/her socio-economic status and that of the family. For the living, it is an opportunity to begin preparing the grounds for one’s own funeral in the future. Different activities including musical performances and firing of guns and musketry are used as symbolic activities that denote a great and honorific burial and funeral celebration. That is, the more the music and firing of musketry and their related activities, the greater the honor to both the dead and living members of the deceased family.<sup>623</sup>

The *Avihe* song below complements the *Boboobo* song above. It emphasizes the same value and need to bury the dead with honor.

**Song 33: *Nyino Di La***

**Avihe** (Text in Ewe: Ewedome dialect)

*Nyino di la me le o*

*Nye nuto mato asi ako*

*Ne madi nonye*

*Mitsoe de xome na ma*

*Nye nuto mato asi ako*

*Ne madi ee*

*Wola le no di gbe*

*Asisiewo la le no di gbe lo*

**Literal Translation**

There is no one to help bury my mother

I will stand chest out (stand ready)

And bury my mother

Put her in the room (casket) for me

I will stand chest out (stand ready)

And bury her

They (community) will bury your mother

The customers will bury your mother

The singer, knowing how important it is to honor his/her deceased mother, pledges to do everything possible to bury his/her mother honorably. It is obvious the singer is concerned that

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<sup>623</sup> See Adjaye (2004)

people might not help in the mother's funeral. However, there is the final assurance that at least her mother's customers are ready to help give the mother a fitting burial.

In a tragic death, such as that of a young person dying, composers express their grief by lamenting on the possibility of the individual's soul being rejected in eternity because he/she has not finished their predestined job on earth. These deaths are not only a sudden loss to the living family and friends but also to the departed.

**Song 34: *Nuka Tutue Meva Wo***

***Ageshie*** (Text in Ewe: Anlo dialect)

*//:Nuka tutue mevawo*

*Le agbe ya me*

*Hafi yi na tsiawo de ha?*

*Afi ya mieva la*

*Nuawo me nyonyom o*

*Senye fe nyae*

*Nuka tutue mevawo*

*Le agbe ya me*

*Hafi yi na tsiawo de ha?*

**Literal Translation**

What really have I come to do

In this life (on earth)

Before returning to eternity

This place that we have come (life on earth)

Things are not going well

It is an issue with my destiny

What really have I come to do

In this life (on earth)

Before returning to eternity

In the song above, the composer and the living (singers) assume the position of the departed individual in lamenting their sudden departure. The lamentation shows the individuals unwillingness and unpreparedness to die. The deeper and underlying meaning is that life on earth is such a big struggle that it never really gives the desired reward. It is full of dissatisfaction and displeasures that the composer assigns to his/her destiny. The song also indicates the individual has had an unfulfilled life. This opens the possibility of "disqualification" from joining the illustrious ancestors and the consequence of reincarnation, thus adding to the uneasiness of the soul, as the song depicts.

From the discussion on the three stages of existence so far, we can deduce a contrast between *amedzofe* (human origin), *tsiefe* (eternity) and *kodzogbe* (life on earth). Thus, unlike *kodzogbe* (life on earth, where we only come to fulfill our vows), the two spiritual worlds of

*amedzofe* (human origin) and *tsiefe* (eternity) represent a beginning and a terminal point of the life circle.<sup>624</sup> Fiagbedzi notes “the two planes [*amedzofe* and *tsiefe*] would seem to have been more suitable for habitation than *kodzogbe*, for the latter literally means ‘an arid desert or a field of poverty.’”<sup>625</sup> That again goes to support many song texts and the conception that among the three stages of existence in Ewe thought, life on earth is the most difficult and therefore serves as the indigenous Ewe equivalent of “hell” as compared to Christian and other religious beliefs.

### **3.2.7 *Agbelekusi*: Life and Death Complementarity**

From the previous analysis, we have found that in Ewe cosmology *agbe* (life) and *ku* (death) are deeply connected. In conceiving *agbe* (life), *ku* (death) readily comes to mind. Dominique Zahan, in his book *The Religion, Spirituality and Thought of Traditional Africa* states that “life and death are both ‘given’ to man/woman by the creator; they are fundamental terms of existence and so are closely linked that one cannot be conceived without the other.”<sup>626</sup> Although life and death are given together like day and night, it is very easy to deduce that in Ewe conception *agbe* (life) precedes *ku* (death) and that *agbe* (life) is always at the mercy and expense of *ku* (death). According to Zahan, “death...enjoys the incontestable advantage over life in that it is necessary, for it was not inevitable that life be given, but as soon as it appeared death had to follow.”<sup>627</sup> For the Ewe, therefore, *ku* (death) is an inescapable consequence of life. In Ewe, I would say *Ne wome dzi agbe o la, womafo ku fe fu o* that means “If life is not given birth to (born), death would not be conceived.” Thus, if there is no life there would surely be no death. This concept of

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<sup>624</sup> See Dzobo and Amegashie-Viglo (2004) and Fiagbedzi (1977)

<sup>625</sup> Fiagbedzi (1977)

<sup>626</sup> Zahan, Dominique. 1979. *The Religion, Spirituality and Thought of Traditional Africa*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, page 36.

<sup>627</sup> Ibid: 36

life-death dialectic may be seen in Ewe names, songs, and proverbs. It should be noted that Ewe names have not only deeper meanings but are also based on societal, family, and individual philosophical thoughts, life's events, and especially circumstances that surround the origination/creation of the entity being named. Below are six out of many personal names (mostly last/family names) that conceptualize life-death logical argumentation in Ewe ontology. In most cases, life is portrayed as subordinate to death.

*Agbelekusi* or *Elekusi* [noun (n)]<sup>628</sup>; *agbe le ku fe asi me* [as a verbal phrase (vp)]  
(Life is at the mercy of death) or (Life is in the hands of death)

*Kumedzina* (n); *Kue medzi vi la na* (vp)  
(I procreate for death) or (I give birth to a child for death)

*Edzoneku* or *Agbedzonaku* (n); *Agbe dzo na eku* (vp)  
(Life [He/She] was created for death) or (life was procreated for death)

*Agbeziodekunu* or *Eziodekunu* or *Ziodekunu* (n); *Agbe zio de ku nu ti* (vp)  
(Life leans on death) or (It is on death that life leans)

*Agbemasiku* (n); *Agbe mesina ku o* (vp)  
(Life does not fear death) or (Life is not afraid of death) or (Life is not afraid to die)

*Agbematsriku* or *Matsriku* (n); *Agbe metsria ku o* or *Agbe matsri ku o* (vp)  
(Life does not forbid death) or (Life cannot avoid death or Life would not shun Death)

*Agbefeavi/Agbefavi* (n); *Agbe fe avi ko mefa* (vp)  
(Life's cry) or (Tears for life) or (I am praying for life [to live longer]) or (Praying and wishing for longevity)

If we put the Ewe concept of life and death in broader perspective the question that comes to mind is which of the two is inevitable? Life? Death? Or both? According to Komla Dzobo, Dominique Zahan thinks that popular Western opinion argues that life is not necessary

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<sup>628</sup> Note that 'E' for example as in *Elekusi* is a pronoun. When it is pronounced with a high tone it is third person singular (He/she/It); if it is pronounced with a low tone then it is second person singular (you). In the example above, it represents *Agbe* (life). It may also represent any other entity that contains life eg *vi* (child), *ame* (person), *me* (I), etc.

but rather death is inevitable because as soon as life appears death must follow.<sup>629</sup> Dzobo, however, believes that both life and death are two aspects of the same phenomenon and are given at the same time. “As soon as you mention one you imply the other. And so even though we may find this truth about our human existence distasteful yet any time we pray for life we are praying for death at one and the same time.”<sup>630</sup> This life and death dialectic is particularly characteristic of indigenous African (Ewe) ontological teachings in which emphasis is placed on the perception that the creator gives both life and death as the fundamental terms of human existence. By drawing on his background as a trained and “balanced” theologian (in African and Western-Christian traditions) the Very Rev. Komla Dzobo draws parallels between indigenous African perspective and “Judeo-Christian tradition” (as he calls it).

The Judeo-Christian tradition, however, creates the impression that only life is given by God and death has entered the world through the sin of disobedience of the first human beings (Adam and Eve) but has been removed by the second Adam, Jesus Christ. This Judeo-Christian thinking about death is possible because of the logic of either ...or, it must be either life alone or death that is given at any one time, while the African dialectic of thought is both...and, so it is both life and death, which are given. This African dialectic of thought is more realistic and explains satisfactorily the continued experience of death in our world in spite of the ‘death-conquering’ work of salvation by Jesus. The first fundamental preposition of the doctrine of life is that both of them are given like day and night as the fundamental terms of our existence and they are the basic possibilities of our human nature.<sup>631</sup>

Directly relating to Dzobo’s quotation are the Ewe names above, especially *Agbefeavi*. Although death (*ku*) is not mentioned in the name *Agbefeavi*, it is implied and invoked. The name *Agbefeavi* indirectly acknowledges the existence, power, and threat of death to life. Why should we cry or shed tears for life (*agbe*) if there is nothing intrinsically and readily threatening its

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<sup>629</sup> See Zahan, Dominique. 1979. *The Religion, Spirituality and Thought of Traditional Africa*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. See also Dzobo and Amegashie-Viglo (2004)

<sup>630</sup> Dzobo and Amegashie-Viglo (2004: 40)

<sup>631</sup> Ibid

survival? Why should we pray for life if we are not concerned about the immediacy of death's (*ku*) presence and actions? When we pray for life we inadvertently recognize the existence and instant threat of death (*ku*) and further invoke its power over life (*agbe*).

### 3.3 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have outlined the existence and detailed the characteristics of some aspects of Ewe belief and thought system. The chapter discussed the various parameters and paradigms by which indigenous Africans in general, and Ewe in particular, categorize, identify, acquire, and use various forms of knowledge, wisdom and philosophy. It demonstrates the presence and importance of Ewe belief and thought system apparent in the song texts and proverbs. It argues that, for the Ewe, knowledge involves knowing and expressing something in the hand, in the heart, as well as in the head. Knowledge is greater than knowing some facts and procedures, hence forms of transmission transcend books, written sources, and lectures. Knowledge, wisdom, and other indigenous philosophical thoughts are lived, preserved, and transmitted, among other things, through musico-verbal art forms.

The chapter discusses the issue of the existence and belief in one Supreme God. My discussions, backed by Ewe musico-literary works and references to works of scholars, show that not only do the Ewe know and believe in one Supreme God but also they worshiped him/her long before the advent of European encounters and later Christian crusades. To him/her and through many lesser divinities, the Ewe communicates. The indigenous socio-spiritual communication process, *tsifodi* or *nudededo* (act of prayer, reverence and permission, and/or

offering), functions not just as a religious act but also, and most importantly, as a socio-cultural and moral obligation and artistic act.

Further, the chapter analyzes other ontological concepts. First is the triality/tripartite conception of existence and being; i.e. *amedzofe/bome* (place of human origin) as pre-earthly life, *kodzogbe* (mortal life) as life on earth; and *tsiefe* (eternity) post earthly-life. Second is the triality/tripartite conception of the person; i.e. the human being consisting of *luvo* (soul) the personality-soul, *gbogbo* (spirit-breath) the life in the person, and *nutila* (body) the physical material of the entity. None of these triality/tripartite concepts is in any way connected to, influenced by or fashioned according to the Western-Christian concept of the “holy trinity.” Third is the concept of life-death dialectics. The three issues nevertheless, revolve around the person (soul, spirit, and body). The soul and the spirit are considered as the immaterial part of a person that survives after death. The body, the material part, goes back into the womb of Mother Earth, from whom it came. The spirit, which is a breath of Mawu/Se in every human being, joins Him/Her. The chapter concludes, therefore, that the concept and/or doctrine of “heaven,” “hell,” and “sin” as prescribed, propagated, and preached by Western-Christian religion are not indigenous to the Ewe. The “heaven-hell” concept currently predominant among Ewe is a Christian (Western) religious ideology/belief that has been pumped into the ontological consciousness of Ewe and many other Africans since the mid 15<sup>th</sup> century.

It has also been established in the chapter’s discussions that every human being, in indigenous Ewe conception, has a destiny (*dzogbese*) that is fixed before birth and is held by the soul of every individual. Everyone’s destiny determines the course of the individual’s life on earth. From the onset, the individual is to do the will of his/her destiny. The chapter illustrates the complimentary nature of *agbe* (life) and *ku* (death); and that the creator gives both life

and death as the fundamental terms of human existence. It concludes that although life and death are given together, in Ewe conception *agbe* (life) precedes *ku* (death) and that *agbe* is always at the mercy and expense of *ku*.

In conclusion I wish to emphasize that the Ewe indigenous knowledge system, values and philosophical thoughts including those identified and discussed in this chapter have not been confined to pure conceptualization. Ewe indigenous knowledge and philosophical thoughts, as may be seen, are equally and extensively expressed or reflected in song texts and other socio-cultural practices. Proverbs, song texts, myths, aphorisms, and other cultural expressive forms are the wise sayings of individuals with acute speculative intellects including musicians. Through their musical products, musicians help us to understand that the Ewe, like many other Africans, believe in the soul, spirit, and body—and hence in the triality of the nature of existence—which leads directly to their belief in an ancestral world inhabited by departed souls. The logical relationship between the belief in the constituents of the human being, destiny, and the ancestral world and the belief in the complementarity of life and death is one of dependence strengthening the belief system of the Ewe. Undoubtedly, as in all aspects of Ewe life, there was, and still is, indigenous Ewe belief and thought systems despite camps of foreign religions including Christianity and Islam in Africa. Admittedly, today there do exist some contemporary Ewe, like other Africans, who abandoned their indigenous concepts, belief, and faith. The Ewe faith remains even for these Ewe Christians an anchor of hope especially when faced with the crisis of death. They often revert to the Ewe traditional worldview and use it to understand life and cope with death. More importantly, beyond the origins of faith, it is imperative to realize that Ewe belief systems derive social respectability, emotional satisfaction, and feeling of security in the daily activity of indigenous societies.

Undoubtedly, the song texts, proverbs, and other artistic practices discussed above have contributed to the preservation of the knowledge and philosophical thoughts discussed. Musicians and their products, therefore, serve as a powerful tool in aid of memory, means of documentation, and archive of Ewe indigenous metaphysical knowledge system and cultural values. The creation and performance of these songs, therefore, serve as traditional means of education and define the roles of their practitioners as sages.

#### **4.0 HISTORICAL KNOWLEDGE AND NARRATIVES**

It has been established in the scholarly literature that musical practice, resources, and traditions serve as viable and reliable sources of historical data. However, not much has been used of Ewe music to shed light on the history of the Ewe.

This section does not aim at revealing any ‘new’ Ewe historical fact (one that historians and archeologist have not yet known). Rather, it attempts to show how much historical information is contained in song texts and how well Ewe musicians have tried to capture the salient historical points, figures, places, and items in some historical narratives, particularly before and after their migration from Notsie and after their settlement at their present home. I have tried to summarize the historical narrative I have gathered from my fieldwork, as well as those available via historical literature. I have also translated and transliterated indigenous song texts to reveal their content and their deeper meanings. With these, we are able to access not only the content of the songs, but also the deeper meanings and are able to see how much they contain and reveal specific historical events, times, figures and places. Based on that, we can ostensibly see the extent to which music can contribute to a better understanding of the Ewe historical past.

#### 4.1 EWE MIGRATION ROUTES: FROM KETU AND BEYOND

According to oral tradition coupled with scholarly research works,<sup>632</sup> the Ewe migrated from the east—more precisely Ketu.<sup>633</sup> However, there are interesting, sometimes conflicting, accounts as to their relationships with and connections to other ethnic groups in Ketu and its environs. Ketu (Ketou in French), presently located in the Republic of Benin, is also called Amedzofe (birth of mankind/source or origin of human beings) or Mawufe (home of God). According to Westermann,<sup>634</sup> Ketu was founded by the Ewe and Yoruba no later than the tenth century. Amenumey, Asamoah, and later Agbodeka<sup>635</sup> all associate with this claim and further add that besides the forebears of the Ewe, the Yoruba and the ancestors of the Aja/Adza, Fon, and Ga-dangme dwelled in Ketu.<sup>636</sup> Lack of written historical sources notwithstanding, archaeological materials provided data that illuminates Ketu's early political development. Geoffrey Parrinder<sup>637</sup> attributes the founding of the Ketu city polity to King Ede (a Yoruba king) from Ile

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<sup>632</sup> Scholarly works on the history of Ewes include Spieth (1906, 1910), Crowther (1927), Westermann (1930), Parrinder (1949, 1970), Ellis (1966), Manouskian (1952), Herskovits and Herskovits (1958), Boahen (1966), Mamattah (1978), Amenumey (1986), Agbodeka (1965, 1997), Asamoah (1986, 2000), Greene (1996, 2002), Akyeampong (2001), Dzator (1998), Gavua (2000), and Lawrance (2005)

<sup>633</sup> It should be noted that Ewe history is sometimes traced back to earlier times, and sometimes, mythological locations. Popular among the varied accounts of the earlier origins of the Ewe is the one that has Ewe with the Yoruba, Ibo, Hausa, Ga, and Adangbe, crossing the Sahara from the East to set up the different Sudanese and West African empires of history (see for example Crowther 1927; Westermann 1930; Parrinder 1949, 1970; Ellis 1966; Mamattah 1978; Amenumey 1986, 1989; Dzator 1998; Agbodeka 1965, 1997; and Gavua 2000). Some scholars indicate that population pressures further forced the Ewe together with the Fon, Yoruba, and other Dahomean ethnic groups to move to Oyo (in present day Nigeria), and later to Ketu in Benin, formerly Dahomey (see Asamoah 1986). Shedding light on this account, Agbodeka states that “some students of Ewe history have tried to push this supposed points of origin further back to Belebele which is in turn identified with ‘Babel’ of the Bible (see Agbodeka 1965, 1997). Others have suggested Mesopotamian, Egypt, etc., as their point of origin. There is however, no scientific basis for all these claims.”

<sup>634</sup> See Westermann (1930)

<sup>635</sup> See Amenumey (1986), Asamoah (1986), and Agbodeka (1997: 15)

<sup>636</sup> Ewe, Yoruba, Aja/Adza, Fon and Ga-dangme are now different ethnic groups in West Africa. The Yoruba are in Nigeria; Aja/Adza and Fon in Benin (formally Dahomey) are the closest “relatives” to the Ewe. To some degree the three languages (*Ajagbe/Adzagbe, Fongbe, and Wegbe*) are mutually intelligible and some linguists see them as dialects of the same language, Gbe. Ga-dangme (now Gas and Adangme) are in Ghana. See Crowther (1927); Manouskian (1952); Herskovits and Francis (1958); Amoaku (1975); Amenumey (1986, 1997)

<sup>637</sup> See Parrinder (1956)

Ife in the tenth century. Asamoia<sup>638</sup> quotes Parrinder's confirmation that "the present elders at Ketu believe that the aborigines were Fon people, the people of the later Dahomey kingdom, related to the Ewe, who for centuries were neighbours and finally destroyers of Ketu."<sup>639</sup>

Parrinder's assertion contradicts other researchers<sup>640</sup> who believe that Ketu was inhabited by what they called "Ewe-stock" which included Adja, Fon and the present Ewe before the arrival of King Ede in the tenth century. However, Parrinder states that traces of ancient dwellings (such as old graves, mounds, cisterns, ruined fortifications, fragments of pottery, and old villages) in the region of Ketu inform his conclusion that the Ewe were not part of the Yoruba group that founded Ketu in the tenth century. He believes that they may have arrived several years before the Yoruba "intrusion." Other historical accounts indicate that population increases, coupled with conflicts, led the Ewe to migrate westward. As Amenumey asserts, "it was the expansion of the Yoruba that pushed the Ewe and related peoples westward."<sup>641</sup> The emigrants went to live at Tado in present day Togo, later dispersing in various directions. Some returned east to settle at Alada from where they founded the Aja/Adza Kingdoms of Alada, Whydah, Popo and Jakin, and later the Fon Kingdom of Dahomey (see maps on the next two pages below).

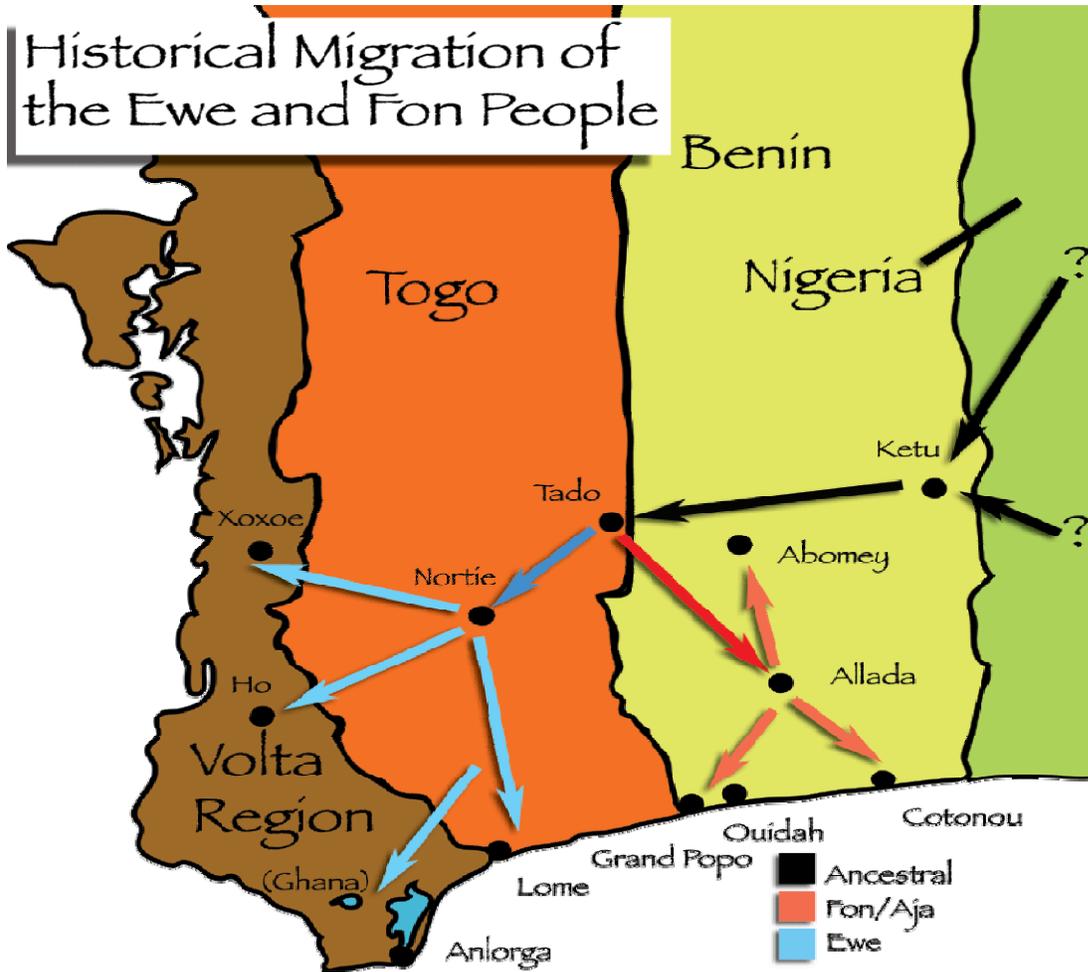
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<sup>638</sup> See Asamoia (1986)

<sup>639</sup> Ibid: 3

<sup>640</sup> Including Westermann (1930), Asamoia (1986), Amenumey (1986), and Agbodeka (1997)

<sup>641</sup> Amenumey (1997: 15). See also Parrinder (1956: 16)



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Figure 4-1: Historical Migration Routes and Settlements of Ewe and Fon

<sup>642</sup> See <http://www.atidekate.com/Volta/Ewemigration.gif> (Accessed: 04/01/05)

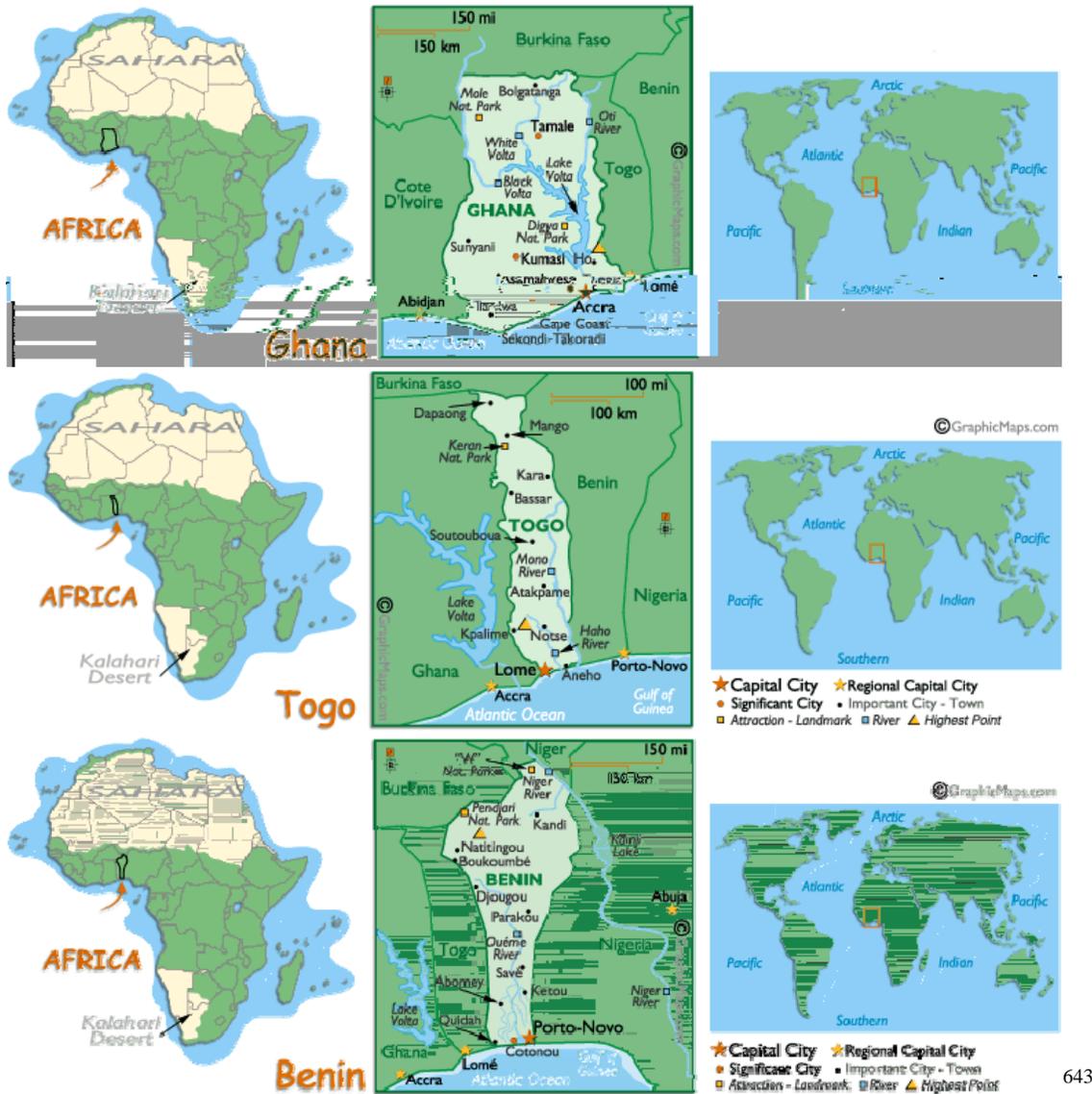


Figure 4-2: Maps Showing the Present Location of Ghana, Togo, and Benin

Amidst some disagreements and somehow conflicting accounts, one thing is certain; that the Ewe once lived in Ketu around the tenth century. These data, and the evidence that the Ewe, Yoruba, Fon, and other related ethnic groups once lived together in Ketu, are emphasized by all

<sup>643</sup> See [www.worldatlas.com](http://www.worldatlas.com) (accessed: 01/21/08)

historical accounts (both oral and written). These claims are clearly underscored by musical and dance practices as well as linguistic elements that use the names of these sites and other related narratives as song texts, drum language, and dance movements.

From Ketu, the Ewe and kinfolk migrated westward to Notsie. The date of the Ewe migration from Ketu is not clearly demarcated in historical records. However, the process and routes of migration are clearly described in Ewe oral tradition. Contrary to many other estimated accounts, Adu Boahen, one of Ghana's pre-eminent historians, suggests that the Ewe might have left Ketu in the early fifteenth century along with the Ga.<sup>644</sup> Other accounts, including Ansa Asamoah, estimate that the movement from Oyo through Ketu to Notsie (waves of migrations) happened between the eleventh and twelfth centuries.<sup>645</sup> It is obvious that the westward migration from Ketu took many years and that the Ewe had many temporary settlements on their way to Notsie.<sup>646</sup> According to Francis Agbodeka (an authority on Ewe history), oral tradition confirms that the Ewe "left Ketu in two major groups as a result of constant wars and raids in the area."<sup>647</sup> Earlier, Ansa Asamoah cites J. Spieth, one of the earliest writers on Ewe history, who claims that "the groups were originally two numerically strong sibs."<sup>648</sup> Spieth, according to Asamoah, indicates that one sib inhabited two areas in what is now central eastern Togo, namely Tado along the Mono River and Notsie between the Haho and Zio rivers. The other group that had also moved in a westerly direction settled at Adele as the new home territory with Dogbonyigbo as their most important settlement. Asamoah emphasized that the Anlo, Be, and Fon

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<sup>644</sup> Boahen (1966: 64)

<sup>645</sup> Asamoah (1986: 5)

<sup>646</sup> See Mamattah (1978: 45)

<sup>647</sup> Agbodeka (1997: 15)

<sup>648</sup> Spieth (1906, 1910) and Asamoah (1986)

were sub-groups of the Dogbonyigbo. The Fon left them after series of conflicts and built a new township called Wla (Allada).<sup>649</sup>

The ancestors of the present day Ewe in Ghana went to live at Notsie, which was a walled city. Ruled by the king of Notsie, the entire community, known as Dogboawo, lived together, each unit in its individual ward under its own head. The early kings ruled well and the kingdom expanded. Trouble began when Togbi Agokoli, believed to be either the third or fifth king of Notsie, ascended the throne. Because of his harsh and tyrannical rule, the people decided to escape. The Ghanaian Ewe and some Togolese Ewe had to make this major movement “in order to escape the draconian rule of the wicked Notsie king called Togbi Agokoli.”<sup>650</sup> Many historians agree that the Ghanaian Ewe settled in their present home around the late sixteenth to early seventeenth centuries.<sup>651</sup> The entire history of the migration from Ketu to Notsie and from Notsie to their present home in coastal Ghana is embedded in the song texts of much Ewe traditional music, which forms an integral part of their daily life. Below is one of such songs composed by Hesino Akpalu, an illustrious Anlo Ewe philosopher, composer, and historian. According to N. Z. Nayo, Akpalu, born in 1888, composed the song in 1962 to commemorate the first *Hogbetsotso Za*, an Anlo Ewe annual historical festival during which the historical migration events are reenacted.<sup>652</sup> Nayo, who is the first to have conducted a full scholarly research on Akpalu, when the subject was still alive, was amazed at the quality and quantity of historical information embedded in Akpalu’s songs. In his diploma thesis he wrote:

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<sup>649</sup> Asamoah (1986: 5)

<sup>650</sup> Dor (2001: 41)

<sup>651</sup> See Spieth (1906, 1910), Boahen (1966), Mamattah (1978), Asamoah (1986), Amenumey (1986), Agbodeka (1997), and Gavua (2000)

<sup>652</sup> See Nayo (1964), Mamattah (1978), Agbodeka (1965, 1997), Amenumey (1986, 1989), Asamoah (1986), Avorgbedor (1994, 2001a/b), Greene (1996, 2002), Akyeampong (2001)

Just before the Festival of Hogbetsotso which the Anlos [Ewe] celebrated in November of 1962, a festival which marked the arrival of the Anlos from their ancestral homes of Ketu and Notsie, Akpalu was commissioned by the Paramount chief [King] at Anloga to compose and sing a song at the final [d]urbar that was to end the celebrations. Akpalu prepared for the occasion. He sang and there was great applause.<sup>653</sup>

Here is one of Agoha-Akpalu songs:

**Song 35: Woawo Blemanuawo**

**Akpalu** (Text in Ewe: Anlo Ewe dialect)

*Woawo blemanuawo woade go loo!*

*Woanye aza nyuia de*

*Miano dudum!*

*Anlotowo le aza gaa de du ge*

*Ame tso Hogbe fe aza*

*Kluvi neso, kosivi neso hee!*

*Woawo blemanuawo woade go*

*Woanye aza nyuia de*

*Miano dudum!*

*Mebena Ketu ye nye afe na wo*

*Wotso Ketu 'a, wova Adzadu me*

*Adza wotsoa, eye wova Dogbo*

*Dogbo wotsoa, eye wova Atando*

*Wotso Atandoa, ye wova Notsie*

*Afima wova kaka le*

*Amesiwo to dusime*

*Wozu Eweawo*

*Afobuawo*

*Tsi Amu to*

*Dedi va te fia nu*

*Wobe yeanlo*

*Ye wozu nko wotso na du la ee!*

*Kotsiawo*

*Le aza gaa de duge loo*

*Wonye ametso Hogbewo fe aza*

*Kluvi neso, kosivi neso hee*

*Woawo blemanuawo woade go*

*Woanye aza nyuia de*

*Miano dudum!*

**Literal Translation**

May the old customs be performed properly!

Let it be an authentic festival that

We shall be celebrating forever!

Anlos are going to celebrate a great festival Wonye

Which is festival of migration from Hogbe

Let master be, let servant be (all unite)

To perform ancient customs authentically

Let it be an authentic festival that

We shall be celebrating forever!

I say Ketu was their (ancestral) home

When they left Ketu, they came to Adza

When they left Adza, they came to Dogbo

From Dogbo, then they came to Atando

When they left Atando, they came to Notsie

There they separated and dispersed

Those who traveled to the right direction

Became the Northern Ewe

Afobuawo (Those who lost their way)<sup>654</sup>

Remained on the banks of river Volta

The king (of Anlos) became wearied and

He wished to rest

(Nlo) which became the name of the State

The Kotsis (an Anlo appellation)

Are going to celebrate a big festival

Which is festival of migration from Hogbe

Let master be, let servant be (all unite)

To perform ancient customs authentically

Let it be an authentic festival that

We shall be celebrating forever!

<sup>653</sup> Nayo (1964: 106)

<sup>654</sup> According to N.K. Nayo who personally interviewed the composer, by *Afobuawo*, Akpalu was referring to the Akwamu people, one of the Ghanaian ethnic groups that share common boundary with the Ewe. Some historians also indicate that the Akwamu were one of the ethnic groups that migrated southwest as part of the general movement of many West African at that time.

Nayo, a native of Buem (one of the smaller ethnic groups in the Volta Region of Ghana), who was so impressed about the historical information contained in the song wrote:

Before I heard this song for the first time, I never knew of Adza, Dogbo, and Atando, as places of settlement by the Eve [Ewe] on their south-westerly march from Ketu through to their present places. I knew only of Ketu and Notsie. Akpalu [who never had formal Western education, hence could not read or write] said he knew of the movement of the Eve [*sic*] from conversations he had been having from childhood with old men [elders].<sup>655</sup>

In analyzing the content of the song, Nayo said:

There is a lot that can be derived from this single song about the history of the Eves... It confirms the old history books' accounts that the ancient home of the Eves was KETU. It says that on their way down to the south in the general migratory movement of many West African people, the Eves moved along with the Akwamus. They (Akwamus) settled along the Volta [river], as they had 'lost their feet' ('Afobuawo' he called them as they could not go on)...The song continues to confirm the historical accounts of how when the Eves of the south arrived at Anloga [the political capital of the Anlo Ewe], their leader [King] Venya, who was old and very tired wanted to rest a while.<sup>656</sup>

Below is a summary of the Anloga settlement and its culmination into the Anlo Ewe State.

Until the settlement at their present home, there was no group of Ewe known as Anlo. Hence there was no song that uses the term "Anlo." In the course of their migrations,<sup>657</sup> the Ewes were known by as many names as places they settled. These names include Adzawo, Foawo, Dahumeawo, Dogboawo, and Eweawo. Although different sub-groups within these general groups were known by other names, none was called "Anlo" before their arrival at Notsie and until they left. One of the three groups that escaped from Notsie later became known as Anlo Ewe. The etymology of the word is traced to one historical narrative. It maintains that when the southern group of the Ewe migrants from Notsie reached the present state capital (Anloga) of

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<sup>655</sup> Nayo (1964: 108)

<sup>656</sup> Ibid

<sup>657</sup> These include migrations from Ketu in present day Benin (formally Dahomey) and also from Ketu to Notsie in the present day Republic of Togo.

Anlo,<sup>658</sup> their leader at the time, Togbi Wenya, was quite old and too tired to continue the journey. Sensing his physical weakness and the rapid deterioration of his health, he declared to his subjects “*Nye ya menlo; afi adeke yiyi mega le nunye o*” literally meaning, “I have coiled (*nlo*); I cannot go any further.”<sup>659</sup> Being the political leader and one of their spiritual leaders as well, his followers could not abandon him. Instead, they decided to settle there. This first place of settlement became known as Anloga meaning “Big Anlo.” It became the traditional center and seat of Awomefia, (King of Anlo), and the people then became known as Anloawo (Anlo Ewe).<sup>660</sup>

The presence of the word “Anlo” in any song text or historical narrative is a clear indication that the event that led to its use took place after the Notsie Migration (for example, Akpalu’s song above). Nevertheless, this is not to say that any musical genre or style in which the term “Anlo” is featured evolved or was created after the migration. It should be noted that the creation of new songs and other activities that accompany old musical genres such as *yevevu*, *afavu*, *atrikpui*, *atamga* and many other *blemavuwo* and *ametsitsivuwo* did not cease or remain unaltered after their initial evolution or creation. These new songs that form part of the changes that continue to occur in the performing art and the culture as a whole make use of the new name “Anlo.”<sup>661</sup> Cultures continue to evolve, change, and grow as human beings continue to live. The use of “Anlo” in song texts of older Ewe musical genres is an example of cultural change and evolution.<sup>662</sup>

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<sup>658</sup> Anloga is the present state capital of Anlo.

<sup>659</sup> See Awoonor (1974) and Mamattah (1978)

<sup>660</sup> See Awoonor (1974: 13-14)

<sup>661</sup> See Gbolonyo (2005)

<sup>662</sup> See Clark (1971: 181), and also Grinker and Steiner (1997: xxiv)

Pitching the foregone settlement narrative against Akpalu's song, therefore, one can easily see the extent to which Akpalu has preserved history through song. The chronological near accuracy of the migration routes as well as the events of the last place of settlement underscore not only Akpalu's historical insights, but also the extent to which musical data can help in historical documentation and dissemination. The song has since been part of many Anlo Ewe musical repertoires performed on various occasions, especially during historical events. Some of the notable musical genres and groups that usually perform this and related songs include *akpalu*, *agoha*, *nyayito*, *leafelegbe*, *dekonyanu*, and *atsigo/atigo*.<sup>663</sup>

#### 4.2 NOTSIE NARRATIVE: AN EWE HISTORICAL EPOCH

Narratives about life in Notsie, the undisputed last ancestral home of the now scattered and fragmented Ewe, are the most frequently articulated and documented historical events, not only in songs and other musical practices, but in other form and means. Traveling through hostile territories during their sojourn from Ketu, the Ewe either defeated or escaped their enemies until they settled at Notsie in various groups (including the Ewe in Ghana) where they were referred to collectively as *Dogboawo*.<sup>664</sup> Notsie, a major economic and political regional center from at least the mid fifteenth century was walled and gated for two main reasons; (1) as a symbol of spiritual, religious, political and major economic power and center; and (2) for defense and

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<sup>663</sup> All these genres are varieties of dance groups that fall under Akpalu's musical tradition. Also, note that *akpalu* has since become a name of the musical groups under the genre in honor and memory of the founder and composer Hesino Vinoko Akpalu.

<sup>664</sup> See Amenumey (1997: 15); also Akyeampong (2001 : 24)

security against both internal and external attacks.<sup>665</sup> From archeological and historical sources, there were two walls within Notsie. The bigger wall called *agbogboga* (big gated wall) built around the kingdom has been estimated to measure about 15, 000 kilometers at its perimeter and enclosed over 14 square kilometers even though it was never finished.<sup>666</sup> The second wall, which was the inner and smaller wall, was called *agbogbovia* (the small gated wall). It is said to have concealed some of the principal deities of the kingdom as well as its rulers. According to C.M.K. Mammattah, the *agbogbovia* was “an internal wall of security, designed to protect and to confine the King’s own household.”<sup>667</sup> Mamattah also added that “the walled city at Notsie was meant to afford protection against the incursions from hostile external forces but Agorkoli used it latterly to torture [sic] his own people.”<sup>668</sup>

During the series of migrations and settlements from Ketu in Dahomey to Notsie, the Ewe were ruled by many leaders and kings, among whom were Togbui<sup>669</sup> Kundo, Gemedra, Ago, Agokoli, Wenya, and Sri, to name just a few.<sup>670</sup> At Notsie, there were petty squabbles among the various groups. C.M.K. Mamattah<sup>671</sup> indicates that one of these tensions was fueled by Sri, who believed that his installation as chief after he was nominated by Wenya was delayed unduly by King Agokoli.<sup>672</sup> A dispute erupted between the Notsie and the Dogbo during a

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<sup>665</sup> See Mamattah (1976), Amenumey (1986, 1989), Agbodeka (1965, 1997), and Kumassah (2005)

<sup>666</sup> While some say it was built only for defense, others maintain it was both for defense and a symbol of Notsie’s status as a major economic power and spiritual center within the region. See Greene (2002: 15). See Ibid, and also Greene (1996, 2002), Akyeampong (2001)

<sup>667</sup> Mamattah (1976: 114)

<sup>668</sup> Ibid

<sup>669</sup> ‘*Togbui*’ is a title meaning King, Chief, Elder, Grandfather, Great-Grandfather or Ancestor. In this context, it is being used as a title of a king.

<sup>670</sup> These names have been preserved in many forms. Besides song texts, they are contained in many historical narratives. Historical monuments, and places as well as families and individuals bear these names. One usually grows to know all these names as one acquires historical, musical, cultural, and other traditional education, training and orientation.

<sup>671</sup> See Mamattah (1976)

<sup>672</sup> Ibid p. 83, and also Akyeampong (2001: 25)

drumming session in the Dogbo quarter of Notsie.<sup>673</sup> In the course of the fracas, Aga, an elder of Dogbo, was severely injured by a relative of Togbui Agokoli and was reported dead after a few days. The Ewe law of vengeance (*hlobiabia*, “lit. asking the clan”) demands that the chief or elder of the clan hand over a ‘killer’ for execution in compensation for the loss and as a punishment for taking someone’s life.<sup>674</sup> Later, after the execution was carried out, King Agokoli found out that the elder who died was not the injured Aga. This came to light during the final funeral rites of the allegedly ‘dead Aga’ when another elder, purportedly drunk, jokingly but proudly remarked “*Miawoe nye Adza fe viwo tso Adzatome, amemakumaku fe hlobialawo*”, which literally means “we are the children of Adza from Adzatome, the avengers for the living.” This expensive and uncalled-for diplomatic blunder, emanating from drunkenness, led to drastic changes and vengeful tyranny from Agokoli on his subjects in Notsie. In Mamattah’s words among many other atrocities:

Agokoli compelled his subjects to carry water for mixing the *swish* from a tributary of the HAHO River, which was three miles away. Agokoli’s own children as first settlers took lead of the Dogbos and dug the earth for swish. While piling it up they concealed and mixed up the swish, hedgehog bristles, thistles and prickly thorns and broken pots. The Dogbos beat gong-gong and turned out in their hundreds for communal labour. They worked the swish with all their might and main to appease an angry tyrant. The Dogbos returned home limping and seriously injured...they felt Agokoli had set a trap to destroy them.<sup>675</sup>

Sensing danger and realizing the degree of the King’s anger against them, the Dogbos tried to plead for forgiveness. Sources indicate that their plea was not taken. Rather it gave Agokoli the opportunity to reveal the reasons for his anger and maltreatment. According to Mamattah, Agokoli said “*Ne miele anyia nya ge o la, midi ame nam ne mawu de tonye tefe*”

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<sup>673</sup> Mamattah (1976), Akyeampong (2001)

<sup>674</sup> *Hlobiabia*, ‘Vengeance’, which literally means ‘asking the clan’, is a cooperative responsibility and law of clan retaliation which was deeply enshrined in Ewe custom and traditional culture and has proved pivotal to Anlo history at several junctures.

<sup>675</sup> Mamattah (1976: 115)

(find me a human substitute to be killed in replacement for my murdered man).<sup>676</sup> Since the Dogbos could not satisfy the King's human request, the atrocities continued.

Walled in with their now primary adversary King Agokoli, the people knew neither rest nor peace thereafter. Among other things, Agokoli asked the Dogboawo to weave ropes/cords from clay (*anyika*) for him to be used to tie the rafters in position for roofing a new building they had completed. In Mamattah's words: "The idea of making ropes of swish was most repugnant to all in the realm: Dogbos, Tados, Notsies, for it was without parallel in history. It was but a figment of Agokoli's warped mind and his inflated ego."<sup>677</sup> Smart as they were, the Dogbos consulted their last remaining elder, Tegli Adzafia (known to be wise and witty), who advised them to ask Agokoli for a sample. "*Xoxoanue wo gbea yeyeawo do*" (it is by the old that the new is made or woven), retorted Tegli to Agokoli. In other words, leadership is by example; so, the subjects may well make ropes with clay if Agokoli is able to provide a sample of such a rope that history has made, since in Ewe philosophical thought many new productive ideas are often based on or spring from old ones. Togbui Agokoli was infuriated. It was impossible for the King to find clues and traces of such ideas from the past let alone provide a sample. Out of disappointment and anger King Agokoli continued with his tyrannical tactics in various forms and ways.

Infuriated by and fed up with their king's attitudes and treatments, the Dogbo once again turned to Tegli Adzafia for advice. After deliberations, the consensus was an escape from the kingdom. Tegli asked the women to continuously throw wash water against the giant wall until it was wet enough to afford their escape. When it was wet, Tegli Adzafia instructed the people to have an all-night performance to disguise their plan. Ewe narratives indicate that famous Anlo

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<sup>676</sup> Ibid. See also Kumassah (2003)

<sup>677</sup> Mamattah (1978)

hunters and spiritual leaders such as Sri, Akplomada, Tsali, Tsala, Amesimeku, and Tsatsu Adeladza had discovered a fertile, arable and uninhabited or sparsely populated vast land—the areas of southeastern Ghana (the present Anloland).<sup>678</sup> To conceal their intentions, they drowned the tumult of their escape in vigorous musical performance—drumming, dancing, and hysterical singing.<sup>679</sup> On that fateful night, when the other communities went to bed and the city-state was silent, they brought Tegli from his hideout to the wet part of the wall. He raised the *gligbayi* or *adekpui* (a ceremonial sword)<sup>680</sup> and invoked the name of Mawu, the deities, all divinities and ancestral spirits for guidance and said, “*O Mawuga Sogbolisa, Kitikata adanu wo to; Wu agboa na mi ne mia do go adzo*” (Oh great God Sogbolisa, Kitikata, the great wise/craftsman, open the gate for us to leave.) With this spiritual invocation, the life of the Ewe was changed forever. Tegli thrust the sword into the wall and bored a hole into it, after which the entire wet part of the wall was pushed down to create a good passage to ‘freedom.’<sup>681</sup> Oral tradition indicates that the older men, women, and children left while the *misego/husago* (tighten your belt) music continued.

As Mamattah puts it, “in their heart of hearts the Dogbo composed and sang secret songs.”<sup>682</sup> To avoid being traced by a search party, the last group and the musicians amidst the *adekpetsi* and *husago/misego* music danced and walked backwards into freedom. The backwards steps/movement (strategy) was to disguise their footsteps—to show as though people (steps/footprints) walked *into* the kingdom and not (steps/footprints) *out* of the kingdom. As the

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<sup>678</sup> See Akyeampong (2001: 26), Mamattah (1976), Kumassah (2005), and also Aduamah (1965: 20)

<sup>679</sup> Mamattah (1976: 119-120)

<sup>680</sup> In describing the ceremonial sword, Mamattah indicate that he has personally seen this sword during his research fieldwork. He wrote that: “TEGLI, with his legendary ‘exculibur’ GLIGBAYI or ADEKPUI or scimitar in his hands (this mysterious dagger is one and a half foot long as shown to me at Ho-Bankoe [Volta Region, Ghana], and Tsevie in Togo)...” See Mamattah (1976: 118). It is unclear whether what Mamattah was shown in Ho and/or Tsevie is the original sword used in breaking the wall or a replica of it.

<sup>681</sup> See Manouskian (1952: 12-13), Mamattah (1976), and also Kamassah (2005)

<sup>682</sup> Mamattah (1976: 113)

migrants hurriedly moved, they made conspicuous but secret marks on items at strategic points (such as on trees, river banks and crossings, path junctions, and on termite hills) along the way with the aim that those kins who may follow later would not be lost but would find their way.<sup>683</sup>

Below are a number of songs that allude to these narratives. The song texts include names of settlements, chiefs, kings, spiritual leaders, dances and other expressions of historical importance.

**Song 36: *Wo Nutoe Wo Nua***

*Yeve* (Text in Ewe: Anlo dialect)

*Wo nutoe wo nua, Agokoli*

*Yata nye ha megbe wo*

*De nenyā nu si wo ya*

*Ne le wowom de nu nye la*

*Tonyea wu la*

*Nye me le dzodzo ge le gbowo o*

**Literal Translation**

You have caused it, Agokoli.

That is why I have also rejected you.

If you had known what you

Have been doing against me,

If mine was worse,

I would not have left you.

This song speaks directly to Agokoli. The composer wishes to communicate to all and to document for posterity, while registering reasons for the departure of those groups of Ewe from Notsie. “Agokoli, you caused it all. The blame is yours; by your atrocities, you forced us to leave you. Had you known how hateful of you your subjects had grown lately and turned over a new leaf, we would not have fled from your wrath.” The song seems to imply.

The songs below comment on the wittiness of Tegli Adzafia (the wise elder) and on his expressions and ideas.

**Song 37: *Gbea Wodo***

*Yeve* (Text in Ewe: Anlo dialect)

*//:Gbea wodo lo o gbea wodo*

*Gbe ya Adzafia doa*

*Gbea menye gbevo o://*

**Literal translation**

The language he used (what he said)

The language (what) Adzafia used (said)

The statement is not a bad one (critique)

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<sup>683</sup> See Aduamah (1965: 20), Mamattah (1976), Amenumey (1986), Akyeampong (2001), Greene (2002) Kumassah: (2005)

//:Xoxoa nue wogbuina ka yeyeawo do  
 Gbea wodo  
 Gbea menyé gbevo://  
 Gbea wodo lo o gbea wodo  
 Gbe ya Adzafia doa  
 Gbea menyé gbevo o

It is by the old that the new ropes are made.  
 The language he used (what he said)  
 The statement is not a bad one (critique)  
 The language he used (what he said)  
 The language (what) Adzafia used (said)  
 The statement is not a bad one (critique)

**Song 38: Miato Gawo De**

*Yeve* (Text in Ewe: Anlo dialect)

*Miato de gawo de*  
*Mebe misego*  
*Edze nya yeye ade ga va*  
*Afeto Dzibosu be nya ade ga va*  
*Be misego loo*  
*Miatowo misego*  
*Adzaviwo do gbe*  
*Be ka xoxo ko dim yewo le*  
*Be yewoagbe yeyea de nu*

**Literal Translation**

Our father has done it again  
 I say tighten your gird  
 There is some breaking news up again  
 Mr. Dzibosu says there is some news again  
 So tighten your gird, yes  
 Comrades, tighten your gird  
 Children of Adza have spoken  
 That all they want is an old clay rope  
 By which they would make a new one

In the two songs above, while the first one concentrates on Adzafia’s wise saying, the composer of the second, Afeto Dzibosu,<sup>684</sup> announces this bold step (of talking to Agokoli) as breaking news, but advises *Adzaviwo* (children of Adza) whose voice Adzafia is projecting, to tighten their gird and get ready for any eventuality. “*Xoxoanu wogbia yeyeawo do*” (it is by the old that the new is made), a proverbial expression which is the theme of this *yeve-misego/husago* song, reminds all Ewe of Notsie narratives. *Gbe* (lit. voice and/or language) is used in this song to mean expression or statement. “The statement made by Adzafia is never a bad one; we just need to see a sample of a clay rope that our forebears have made so we can do the same as you requested, Togbui Agokoli. This cannot be taken as an affront,” the composer tries to explain in his song.

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<sup>684</sup> I refer to *Afeto Dzibosu* as the composer based on the fact that Ewe composers indicate their ownership rights of a song by inserting their names into the song or as part of the lyrics. See Dor (2004)

**Song 39: *Kaxoxoa Nue****Akpoka* (Text in Ewe: Anlo dialect)*Ka xoxoa nue wogbea yeyeawo do**Ne ameade le kome**Nedo va mikpo**Ka xoxoa nue wogbea yeyeawo do***Literal translation**

It is by the old ropes that the new are made

If there is someone within the wall

He/she should come (out) before us.

It is by the old ropes that the new is made

In the above *akpoka/atrikpui* song, the composer seems to figuratively throw a challenge, possibly to Agokoli and/or his warriors and advisors to come out with a possible answer or solution to their request. “*Ne ame ade le koa me, nedo va mikpo*” (if there is someone within the wall [wise enough to provide a sample], he/she should come out with the solution).

**Song 40: *Wofia 'Da****Atrikpui* (Text in Ewe: Anlo dialect)*Wofia 'da Ago to glo Gawo fia 'da**Ago to glo**Kiniwo fia 'da Ago to glo**Amawoe fia 'da Ago to glo**Dzo kae dze miadzie ye**Madze Agowo dzie vo ada do me hee**'Dzafia, nu glo viwo wo Ago [to] glo!***Literal Translation**

They vowed revenge, Great ones are fed up with Ago

The braves vowed revenge,

The masses are fed up

What befalls us that

May not befall the Agos'

Dzafia, your children are fed up with Ago

In “Ago To Glo” above, the composer comments on the popular opinion and mass disapproval of Agokoli’s attitudes towards his people. The song registers the breadth and depth of not only the anger and suffering of the masses but also the extent to which the king’s atrocities have affected the great and brave men of the kingdom. “The ‘greats’ as well as the ‘braves’ have registered their vows to defy your orders. For, your subjects can no longer take it. They believe that whatever befalls them befalls you as the king and your clan,” the composer reiterates.

There is usually a point when people under oppression defy all odds and revolt against the powers that be. The case of the Ewe in Notsie was no different. The agitation to leave Notsie and the wrath of Agokoli was overwhelming, hence the people used all means, including music

and dance, to register their protest and plan their strategies for escape.<sup>685</sup> In the songs below the composer(s) demand the warriors and guards of Notsie to open the gates and permit the people (who were eager to return to Dahomey, their previous ancestral home prior to settlement in Nostie) to leave.

**Song 41: Mivu Agboa Mayi**

*Akpoka* (Text in Ewe: Anlo dialect)

*Mivu agboa mayia*

*Kaleawoe!*

*Dahume aklasuawoe*

*Mivu agboa mayi*

*Kaleawoe*

*Mivu agboa mayi*

*Dahume*

**Literal translation**

Open the gates for me to go (to leave)

The brave warriors!

The Dahomey (vultures) mysterious fighters

Open the gates for me to go (to leave)

The brave warriors!

Open the gates for me to go (to leave) to

Dahomey (an ancestral home)

**Song 42: Agbome Miele**

*Atrikpui* (Text in Ewe: Anlo dialect)

*Tsalidada be agbomee miele*

*Vo be kue tso*

*Sui [Agboli] ya fe ta tso yi afe*

*Kue nye nu xoxo*

*Agbome mie le*

*Ne gble, Agbome miele*

*Ne nyo, Agbome miele*

*Agbome miele*

**Literal Translation**

Tsalidada says we are within the wall

But death has taken

Sui's [Agboli's] head into eternity

Death is an old phenomenon,

We are within the wall

For a bad cause, we are within the wall

For a good cause, we are within the wall

We are within the wall

**Song 43: Agokoli Be Mile Kpo Gba Ge**

*Atrikpui* (Text in Ewe: Anlo dialect)

*Agokoli be mile kpo gba ge*

*Mimu Ago miaxi*

*Ako ve nam*

*Dogboawo yi, ke asi de edzi*

*Be yewoaxi*

*Ke edze wo dzi ha*

*Honde fia ada*

*Gake Ago to glo*

*Wobe dzo si dze de dzia*

*Medze Ago ya dzi o*

*Ada do vle ye*

**Literal Translation**

Agokoli says you would break the wall

Dismantle Ago (Ago's wall), arrest him

And bring him to me

The Dogbos went, spread their arms over it

Aiming to break it and capture him

But it turned on them (the wall fell on them)

Honde vowed furiously

But Ago's cup is full (Ago has gone too far)

They say what has befallen some

Has not befallen Ago

Anger is high now (its time for action)

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<sup>685</sup> For examples of music as an instrument of protest in contemporary Ghana and for other modern forms of songs of protest in Ghana, see Kwesi Yankah in Adjaye (1997).

The next song is perhaps one of the most (if not the most) popular songs that comment on the Notsie historical narratives, especially with regards to the migration. This song is popular because it is one of the songs that are commonly used by people of all ages (especially the youth and children) in their historical reenactments. It also belongs to a musical genre, *boboobo/akpese*, that is performed by all Ewe (even though it is indigenously a Northern Ewe genre) irrespective of their location, sex, or religious affiliation. As in *husago*, this *boboobo* song is sometimes accompanied with a special dance movement or style in which the dancers move and take steps backwards to demonstrate and reenact the backward steps taken by their ancestors during their escape from the walled kingdom.

**Song 44: *Togbi Agokoli Fe Nutasese***

***Boboobo*** (Text in Ewe: Ewedome dialect)

//:Togbi Agokoli fe nutasese ya ta la

Viawo kata wodzo le egbo://

Esi wodze mo, wozo megbemegbe

Wode dzesi ati wo

//:Bena ame mamleawo magabu o://

**Literal Translation**

Due to King Agokoli's tyranny

All his children(subjects) left him

When they fled, they walked backwards

They marked the trees on the way

So that those behind them may not miss their way

The Notsie migration was not only captured in song texts, but also in dance and other art forms.

Among the dances, *husago* (also known as *misego*, meaning 'tighten your gird' and/or 'get ready for any eventuality') dance is the most elaborate and significant representation of this historical

event.<sup>686</sup> *Husago* is one of the major dance movements in the seven-suite dance form in *Yeve* (an

Ewe traditional religion associated with the god of thunder and lightning).<sup>687</sup> *Yeve* is believed to

be the original setting in which *husago* was first performed.<sup>688</sup> The origin of *husago* dates back

to early fifteenth century.<sup>689</sup> *Husago* has since remained a dance form that symbolizes this

dramatic escape and has been performed in its 'original' form (dancing backwards) ever since by

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<sup>686</sup> See Fiagbedzi (1977), Mamattah (1978), Avorgbedor (1987), and Gbolonyo (2005)

<sup>687</sup> Ibid, and Amoaku (1975)

<sup>688</sup> Fiagbedzi (1977), Mamattah (1978), Avorgbedor (1987), and Gbolonyo (2005)

<sup>689</sup> Fiagbedzi (1977), Avorgbedor (1987), and Gbolonyo (2005)

all southern Ewe of Ghana, Togo, and Benin. The actual dance movements are traditionally performed by women while the men provide the music (as it was done during the escape). According to my discussants and collaborators in the field,<sup>690</sup> although it is a movement in *Yeve*, because of its historical significant and religious connotations, *husago* is largely used as an introductory movement to many Southern Ewe traditional musical performances. “Because of its role as a music and dance symbol of the Notsie historical migration, its performance is permitted in other dance-drumming genres such as *afa*, *agbosu*, *koku*, *atsibлага*, *bobo*, *adekpedzi*, etc.”<sup>691</sup> Whether or not the performance is religious, *husago* may be performed as a prelude to signify this historical event, pay homage to the ancestors, and also serve as a form of historical reenactment and education. Beside the backward dance movement, there are other activities that remind the people of these historical events and are reenacted during *husago* performances especially at festive occasions.<sup>692</sup>

### 4.3 SLAVE TRADE

The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade impacted Ewe settlements. This historical issue of slavery did not escape Ewe traditional musicians who made sure they commented and/or documented any event that affected their people. In fact, Ewe communities served as one of the major slave markets along the coast of the Gulf of Guinea in the Atlantic Ocean. Due to its central position in the human trade, the coastline (stretching from the eastern corner of the Benin-Nigerian border to

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<sup>690</sup> Personal communication with Minawo Akosonshie Agbalekpor, Midawo Asafo Ahiakpa, Boko Kodzo Kumedzro and Midawo Zate; All are traditional Yeve, Agbosu , and Afa religious high priests. See Appendix E for interview dates and places

<sup>691</sup> Boko Kodzo Kumedzro (personal communication: see appendix E). See Gbolonyo (2005)

<sup>692</sup> Gbolonyo (2005: 93)

the Volta estuary in present day Ghana) occupied by different Ewe communities was then called the Slave Coast. According to historical reports,<sup>693</sup> the Ewe first settled on the shores of the Atlantic Ocean. The proximity of the settlements to the sea, however, exposed them to frequent raids for slaves by European slave traders who would navigate their ships easily to these shores for their human cargo. Ancestors of some Ewe who now live on islands between the sea and the Keta Lagoon fled their coastal homes partly because of the frequent raids by European slave traders. They migrated north to lagoon islands to avoid becoming slaves in some strange land. The shallow waters of the Keta Lagoon (which was central to the early evolution of the Anlo Ewe traditional state) made navigation by large slave ships impossible, and therefore served as a much-needed buffer-zone between the settlers and the aggressive slave traders. The memory of these raids and the loss of entire settlements have been deeply imprinted on the Ewe consciousness through oral tradition such as folklore, myths and songs. The following *adzohu/adzogbo* and *koku* songs comment on these events.

**Song 45: *Kom Da De Gbe Adewo Dzi***

***Koku*** (Text in Ewe: Anlo Ewe dialect)

*Kom da de gbea 'dewo dzi de*  
*Koku ya do bada kplim loo*  
*Kom da de gbea dewo dzi de*  
*Koku ya blua gbe me nam loo*  
*Yevu ya kple kalea wo kpe*  
*Kalea do gbe na 'vu*  
*Meto o*  
*Yevua tso to ha mila woe*  
*Yevua tso no ha mila woe*  
*Konkon nedo gbe*  
*Na mila se*  
*Kom da de gbea dewo dzi de*  
*Koku ya do bada kplim loo*

**Literal translation**

Take me to the wilderness (foreign land)  
 This Koku<sup>694</sup> has inflicted pain in my heart  
 Take me to the wilderness  
 This Koku has distorted my life  
 This White man and the warrior met  
 The warrior greeted White man,  
 He never responded  
 If White man brings father we shall do it  
 If White man brings mother we shall do it  
 Let the powers of the spirits sound  
 For us to hear  
 Take me to the foreign land  
 This Koku has inflicted pain in my heart

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<sup>693</sup> Reports from both oral and written sources as mentioned in previous chapters. See chapters 1 and 2.

<sup>694</sup> Koku is the name of a male born on Wednesday and also the name of the spirit of a traditional god. In this song the name Koku refers to the Europeans who, with the collaboration of other Africans, chased people with the intention of enslaving them—an evil act, Anlo Ewes believe.

**Song 46: *Atsom Do Gbexo Mi Yia***

*Adzohu Kadodo* (Text in Fon)

*Atsom do gbexo mi yia*  
*Dzogbe Mawunye do bada do ye de ha*  
*Atsom do gbexo mi de*  
*Dzogbe Mawunye do bada do ye de ha.*  
*Xovile kple kanumawoe kpe*  
*Kanuma do tana 'xovile*  
*Azasu to ha mi la kpe*  
*Atsom de gbexo mi la yia*  
*Ame de yo gbetsenye woa dzua*  
*Atson de gbexo mi de*  
*Mawunye do bada do ye lo*

**Literal Translation**

You take me to be inferior  
My Destiny God, now I'm really cursed  
You take me to be inferior  
My God, now I'm really cursed  
The indigenes and the strangers have clashed  
There the strangers cannot overcome the people  
The day has come, we shall clash in battle  
You take me to be inferior  
Somebody has called an insult to my forefathers  
You take me to be inferior  
My God, now I'm really cursed

The musicians, in the songs above, comment on issues concerning the effects of colonial activities and the opinions of both parties. “You strangers (Europeans) regard and treat my people as inferiors, but I am not impressed by what I see you do. If you say we are inferior to you, God forbid, we are in trouble (danger). By your attitudes, you have insulted my forefathers and that is considered a grievous offence. Now is the time for us to meet in battle,” the composer reiterates. Victors or conquerors often see their opponents as inferior. This was the opinion Europeans in West Africa and in other parts of the world held of the people they conquered and/or colonized. It is one of the subjective perspectives that underpin the use of numerous demeaning labels such as “tribes,” “primitive people,” and “savages” to describe societies other than their own.<sup>695</sup> At best, the indigenous people were considered “wayward kids” who needed to be tamed and strictly controlled through colonization, and at worst, strong, aggressive, and primitive savages requiring enslavement and treatment as sub-humans.<sup>696</sup>

The experiences were real and bitter. Though the survivors did not follow the captured to learn what went on in the unknown land, they made sure that what took place on their own

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<sup>695</sup> Any notion that these opinions and perspectives are colonial should quickly be abandoned because the same ethnocentric biases are being perpetuated in modern Western media, political ideologies, and policies.

<sup>696</sup> Grinker and Steiner (1997)

shores was preserved for posterity. If the elders forgot to relay the history, or did so inaccurately, somehow, the historical event was preserved in the stories and poems by the poets, carvings and other art works of the sculptor and the artist, and most importantly, songs and other musical activities of the musician.

Among many compelling reminders of the atrocities that Ewe suffered during the slave trade (including activities, figures, sites, names, dresses, clothing, and stories), songs are the most common and frequently used. Though many of these songs belong to *amegaxoxovuwo* that are either infrequently performed or most often performed by the elderly, some of the songs have become very common among all generations and are sung by individuals at any time. *Klilinue Mieke Do Vo*, an *atrikpui* song, is one of such examples. Recounting some of the historical events in his book *The Ewes of West Africa*, C.M.K. Mamattah gives a vivid interpretation of this song.

When the slaves of Yofe first saw the blue waters of the Atlantic, and realized that their fate was sealed and that they were leaving home and kin for good for a journey into the dark unknown, one of them was borne on the wings of song, and granted the gift of a visionary; he instinctively composed the words and tune to this most moving of Ewe *atrikpui* war songs.<sup>697</sup>

**Song 47: *Klilinue Mieke Do Vo***

*Atrikpui* (Text in Ewe: Anlo dialect)

*Klilinue mieke do vo*

*Adatsia ge*

*Miato nutsuvio*

*Klilinue miedo do vo*

*Adatsia ge, (ne)*

*dzi mele fo (wo)*

*Nagbugbo*

**Literal Translation**

We have now reached Klilinu (the wharf)

Tear is fallen

My brethren (brother-men/ brave men)

the wharf have we reached

Tear is fallen,

for if you are not strong at heart (cannot endure)

Then better retreat

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<sup>697</sup> Mamattah (1978: 11)

**Song 48: *Mila Yi Ahoe***

**Akpoka** (Text in Ewe: Anexo dialect)

*Mila yi ahoe/afe*

*Dukowo la yi afe/ahoe loo*

*Ne game sua mila yi afe/ahoe*

*Ne aza gbe su vo koa*

*Miagase mia nko*

*Ke mino to dzi miase nyawo*

*Ne game sua mila yi afe/ahoe*

**Literal translation**

We shall go home

The state shall go home

When time is due, we shall go home

When the day of reckoning is come

You would hear from us

So be on your guard and listen to the messages

When time is due we shall go home

The composer of the first song speaks from the perspective of a captive, a potential slave. “Beholding the wharf, we now know we have come face to face with inevitable realities of fate. Here we are at the mercy of unknown faces sharing tears. It is not a matter of weeping but rather a situation of the survival of the fittest. My brethren, it is better to die if you are not strong enough to endure the hardships of the journey to the land of the unknown.” Historical narratives indicate that it was those who escaped from the European slave traders who came home with such songs. While they mourn their colleagues who were either not fortunate or brave enough to escape, they also celebrate their victory over the enemy by performing and singing these songs.

The second song expresses the hopes of the sufferer and his longing for home “freedom.” The composer poses as one of the captives, sufferers, or the oppressed. His/her sentiments indicate their knowledge of or hope for *aza* (a D-day), an end to their sufferings, and hope that soon they would be more powerful and capable of facing their oppressor(s). While some narratives attribute the second song to Agokoli’s atrocities and Notsie narratives, indicating its origin and existence prior to Anlo State establishment, others believe it is linked with European encounter, slavery and colonization. Cross examinations point to the fact that the song might have been in existence before the European encounter but was used extensively during slavery and colonial oppression with some textual modifications. Whatever the origin may be, the musician has registered his opposition to oppressive rule—either against the tyranny of his own

King Agokoli or against the foreigner's intrusion and domination—and contributed to historical narrative.

As a young boy living with my uncle and going through the difficulties of life, I used some of the traditional songs to comfort myself, and to encourage my personal spirit to continue the struggle, hoping for an end to all the hardships I was enduring. The songs included many of the above, but especially the last two above *Mila Yi Ahoe* (We Would Go Home) and *Klilinue Miekedo Vo* (The Wharf/Castle We Have Reached). Little did I know then that these were some of the songs that served as a source of encouragement, hope, aspiration, prayer and comfort for my ancestors, not only under the tyrannical rule of their own King, but also from their colonial oppressors. Not until later in life did I get to know the deeper meaning of these songs and the roles they played in the lives of my forebears.

#### 4.4 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The chapter traces the routes and events of the migration of the Ewe from Ketu to their present homes. From the historical discussion, it is clear that although the forebears of the Ewe may not have developed the art of writing as in Western cultures, they have documented historical events and other daily activities in other forms and by other means. Musicians, as illustrated in the chapter's discussions, were some of the agents of documentation and their products were some of the means by which they achieved their goals. These songs and many others remind all Ewe of the historic events discussed above.

These songs were frequently invoked during the struggle to escape from Notsie as well as during the escapes from being sold as slaves. The musical traditions of Anlo Ewe, which form an

integral part of their general cultural heritage, are, and should be considered and treated as a repository of their historical events. Due to their functionality, citizens need not consciously memorize these songs to be able to tell their stories. As the music is performed and the songs are sung, the story is told as well, and generations are informed and educated.

## 5.0 POLITICAL KNOWLEDGE AND CULTURE

*“Fia neno ame nu ne du nenyo”*

(Kingship/leadership is necessary for the good/development of a nation)

The Ewe adage and song text quoted above sums up the aim of this chapter—the Ewe concept of “politics.” The upshot of the adage is that politics is not only good but also necessary for the development and growth of a society. This chapter, therefore, will investigate and explore, from musical perspectives and resources, traditional Ewe ideas and values of politics with the intent of identifying what may be described as the democratic features of the Ewe indigenous system of government. I discuss politico-military personalities, institutions, and processes, including traditional democratic foundations, norms, ethics, the relationship between the ruled and the rulers, as well as the democratic values that are cherished and preserved in traditional Ewe society through musical practice

The modern political landscape in post-colonial Africa has not been the best. It is a fact that Africa in general has faced difficulties in political practice within its modern nation-states. Since the mid 1950s, African nations have had many conflicts and more failures than successes in their post-colonial political processes. Obviously, the political institutions and models that the colonial masters handed over to the modern African politicians, as well as those democratic constitutions that the new African politicians fashioned according to Western models and ideologies, did not function well. Many scholars have tried to explain the African politicians’ constant failure to rule by formally established constitutional procedures. One explanation often

cited is the lack of ability, on the part of Africans, to effectively operate government institutions that are alien to them; “institutions that had not taken root in—and so had not become part of—their political culture and, consequently, failed to elicit cultural understanding and legitimacy, institutions that they had no emotional, ideological, or intellectual attachment to and whose nuances could not be fully appreciated.”<sup>698</sup>

In view of this and other explanations, there is often the question of why viable modern political structures cannot be forged in the furnace of Africans’ own tradition of political rule. Many scholars agree that there is a need for incorporation of indigenous African political principles and processes into modern constitutional political institutions and governance. This realization and conviction results from the claim and conviction by some researchers that the African indigenous system of governance has some democratic features and values that may be useful in modern political systems. In view of this, for example, at a 1993 conference on the future of Africa, participants agreed that “it is important that traditional cultural values be integrated into the process of developing better governance.”<sup>699</sup> To be able to pursue this agenda, we must first identify the various democratic principles and general indigenous political practices in various African societies. It is only when we know what they are, where and how we can find them, and how they have been and are being practiced, that we can take the positive, applicable, and valuable principles and practices and integrate them into our modern political system.

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<sup>698</sup> Gyekye (1997: 115)

<sup>699</sup> World Bank. *Findings*. Special Issue, African Regional Studies Program. Washington, D.C., September 1993, p. 1.

## 5.1 INDIGENOUS POLITICS: KINGSHIP AND “DEMOCRACY”

Although the Ewe in Ghana are one people culturally, linguistically, historically and, to some extent, politically, they are sometimes divided into different sub-ethnic groups under (hierarchical) political authorities at different geographical locations. However, political knowledge, cultural values, and process among all Ewe have similarities as well as differences. Hence it is possible to talk about “Ewe” political knowledge as a cultural phenomenon of an ethnic group—one society—while pointing out the differences that exist as a result of sub-ethnic characteristics.

When the Ewe reached their present locations on their migratory routes from Notsie, they settled in various communities (see chapters 1 and 4). These initial settlements gradually expanded and the descendants of the founders occupied the surrounding lands. The region then came to be divided into many *dukowo* (sub-ethnic groups or divisions), *duwo* (towns or subdivisions), and other units of Ewe political organization.<sup>700</sup> Writing on Southern Ewe socio-cultural changes in his dissertation, Dzigbodi Kodzo Fiawo states that “[a]t the turn of the [twentieth] century each of the following units represented a state, enjoying a measure of autonomy of independent political status with a separate paramount ruler: Anlo, Avenor, Dzodze, Some, Klikor, Apife, Aflao, and Penyi.”<sup>701</sup> As a result of different settlement patterns and the extent of expansion and location, Ewe polities differed considerably in size. This diversity is also reflected in their territorial organizations; political power; the duties, functions, and number of political positions and figures; and the level of political ceremony and pageantry.

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<sup>700</sup> See Bluwey (2000)

<sup>701</sup> Fiawo (1959: 24). See also Chapman (1944) and Nukunya (1969)

It should be noted that even though the Southern Ewe region is considered one entity, Ewe researchers try to point out subtle local differences and feeling of indigenous power.

One of the fundamental facts of the Ewe society...is that the Ewe political system is based on a number of independent territorial communities which are closely related...It will never do to force one independent but closely related Ewe community under another...It must be emphasized that although all the various Ewe groups are closely related, one group will never wholeheartedly accept subordination to another group.<sup>702</sup>

This regional autonomy is represented and expressed in many activities among the people. Prominently discernible are the different forms of choreographies that are associated with some music and dance forms—for example, in *Atsiagbekor*, a musical war genre, for which each village has its own unique heritage that it proudly preserves.<sup>703</sup>

The political exposition in this dissertation concentrates on Southern and Northern Ewe political structures. While using the Anlo system as a representation of the Southern Ewe, I draw examples from different Northern Ewe polities to explain their general principles that differ from that of the south. Anlo state, the largest political entity of the Southern Ewe, has a centralized political system since it provides for a constituted executive authority, an administrative system, and a judicial institution. Although this statement refers to Anlo in particular, it is applicable to all Ewe polities including the Tonu (Tongu) and Ewedome. Though centralized, the degree of centralization within the general Ewe political system is considerably limited, since much autonomy is given to the towns and villages.

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<sup>702</sup> Chapman (1945: 1-3) as quoted in Locke (1978: 26)

<sup>703</sup> See Locke (1978)

### 5.1.1 *Awomefia/Fiaga*: Ewe Highest Political Authority

In the south, *Awoamefia* (lit., the king who lives in spiritual abode: *Awome* = a sacred place associated with political gods and spirits; *Fia* = king) is at the apex of Anlo political authority. In the north, *Fiaga*, (lit., big king: *Fia* = king; *ga* = big)<sup>704</sup> is at the top of the political hierarchy among the Ewedome (Northern Ewe).<sup>705</sup> The *Awoamefia* or *Fiaga*, whose symbol of authority is the *fiazikpui* or *fiakpukpo* (kingship stool or throne), is the supreme political leader, the chief executive, and the top judicial officer of the state. His role is largely ceremonial and sacred, but he has an important practical function as the dispenser of justice.<sup>706</sup> He has many attributes of a divine king. In the past, he was secluded and rarely appeared in public. Concurrent with this seclusion and sacredness is his prerogative of not going to war (especially in the case of *Awomefia*). In the case of *Fiaga* among the Ewedome, according to Tsiamiga Agbedeza, the king may be the chief warrior who actively participates in combat.<sup>707</sup> By custom, *Awomefia* must not see a dead body since this would spell disaster for his people. As both a king and a high priest, he had to remain at home to perform sacrifices for success in war.<sup>708</sup> As he lived in seclusion, matters came to him through the three senior chiefs (discussed in the next paragraph below), who had first discussed them with local chiefs under them. Usually, only serious and appeal cases came before the *Awoamefia* or *Fiaga*. Conversely, external affairs (foreign issues) were communicated to him before they were referred to the chiefs and their subjects. The king was traditionally assisted in his duties and deliberations by three main councils: The

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<sup>704</sup> It should be noted that in Ewe *Fia* is also a term that refers to “chief,” a political position that is lower in rank compared to “king.”

<sup>705</sup> See Nukunya (1997) and Bluwey (2000)

<sup>706</sup> See Yegbe (1966), Nukunya (1969, 1997) and Bluwey (2000)

<sup>707</sup> Interview with Tsiamiga Agbedeza (see appendix E)

<sup>708</sup> See Yegbe (1966), Nukunya (1969, 1997)

*awalogomefiawo* (military wings council) consisting of the three or four divisional chiefs and war leaders, *dufiawo* (the council of chiefs) and *dumegawo* (the council of elders), who are the representatives of all the clans in the state. According to G. K. Nukunya, particularly with the Anlo Ewe system, “the council of elders appears to have been the more active of the three, partly because it represented the people and partly because its members, as clan heads, were all normally resident at Anloga [the capital of Anlo], thereby providing a more regular forum for discussion than the military council.”<sup>709</sup>

### **5.1.2 *Awalogomefiawo*: Military Wing and Divisional Kings**

Beneath the *Fiaga* or *Awoamefia* are three or four senior divisional chiefs, who commanded the three or four wings or divisions—right wing, center or forward, left wing, and back or rear (among some Ewedome)—of the indigenous military formation. In the Ewedome (Northern Ewe) system, the heads of the divisions are usually designated as *Dusimefia* (right wing chief), *Miamefia* (left wing chief), and *Ngogbefia* (lead or forward chief) also called *Domefia* (central chief).<sup>710</sup> In the Anlo Ewe system, the right and left wing commanders/chiefs have the title *Awalogomefiawo* (lit., war divisional chiefs/wing commanders) with *Dusimefia* being the right wing commander and *Miamefia* the left wing commander. The leader of the central division, the *Avadada* (lit., war mother, though always a male) is the field marshal and the *Domefia* (central commander/chief). He takes charge of the day-to-day administration of the Anlo State. In the Ewedome system, according to G. Bluwey, some of the states including Gbi Dzigbe (Hohoe), Ve, Anfoega, and Alavanyo have added a fourth division designated as *Megbefia* (lit. rear or

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<sup>709</sup> Nukunya (1997: 64)

<sup>710</sup> See Bluwey (2000: 63)

back chief/commander).<sup>711</sup> He also noted that Peki, another Ewedome state, uses Akan terminologies for these divisions, thus *Adontehene*, *Benkumhene*, *Gyasehene*, and *Osiehene*.<sup>712</sup>

Though these divisions or wings were originally military positions, they came to be incorporated into the traditional political system. Hence, with the exception of *Avadada*, each *Avalogomefia* has his own political territory—usually a town or village under his jurisdiction. In Anlo, *Dusimefia* is the chief of Woe and *Miamefia* is the king of Vuti (Whuti). In this capacity as leaders of political units, wing commanders act just like any other king or chief as far as their towns, villages, or political entities are concerned. The *Avadada*, commander of the central wing and most senior of the three Anlo Ewe divisions, is also the general commander in times of war, and expected to administer all military operations on behalf of the *Awoamefia*. However, unlike the *Avalogomefiawo*, the *Avadada* is not a king or chief of any particular town or village. Besides his duties as the central commander, he also takes charge of the day-to-day administration of the Anlo state as the direct assistant to the *Awomefia* (King of Anlo). Ideally, no matter could go to the *Awomefia* without first passing through the *Dufiawo* (town and village chiefs), the *Avalogomefiawo*, and then the *Avadada*.<sup>713</sup>

The next level of political authority is the *Dukomefia* or *Dufia*, (paramount chief of a town). *Dufia* are positions that belong to the chiefs of the various smaller territorial divisions including wards. There are many *Sa/To* (wards) and *Toko* (divisions) within every town and village, each with its own political head, *Samefia* or *Tokomefia* (sub-chief or divisional chief). Still beneath these sub-chiefs are *Dumegawo*, the leaders and elders of the various clans,

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<sup>711</sup> Ibid

<sup>712</sup> These Akan designations underscore the profound Ashanti political influences on Peki State in particular and Northern Eweland in general. See Bluwey (2000: 63)

<sup>713</sup> See Chapma (1944), Fiawo (1959), Yegbe (1966), Nukunya (1969, 1997), and Bluwey (2000)

lineages, and individual families. These elders are usually the oldest members within the lineage or family and its most prominent and public-spirited figure.

### **5.1.3 *Tsiami*: The King's Meta-linguist, Councilor, and Counselor**

Apart from the territorial heads mentioned above, the king's court has many functionaries. The most important of these is *tsiami* or *tsimi*, the king's meta-linguist, councilor, counselor, and spokesman, commonly called "the linguist."<sup>714</sup> Until recently, Ewe society, like many other traditional African societies, was a pre-literate society. Hence the spoken word, in the form of axioms, songs, and stories, is part of the repository of Ewe customs and values. Therefore, a complete mastery of proverbial lore artistry, combined with an eloquent and insightful way of conveying it, is considered the mark of intellect of highly esteemed individuals. Dor indicate that: "A typical Ewe linguist (*tsiame*) eloquently but critically uses indirect statements over which his audiences would have to ponder in order to construct significations of deeper structural level of the language."<sup>715</sup> Those who possess this knowledge and an articulate command of language may be appointed as *tsiamiwo* (court linguists), the most important non-royal court officials. Court linguists among the Ewe, Akan, and other West African societies play an invaluable role in circles of leadership. Their vast knowledge and superior diplomacy make them essential as counselors, ambassadors, legal experts, and historians, and most traditional rulers keep several in their employ.<sup>716</sup>

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<sup>714</sup> See Kludze (2000), Bluwey (2000), and Adjaye (1994, 1997, 2004)

<sup>715</sup> Dor (2000: 206)

<sup>716</sup> See Fiagbedzi (1977), Kludze (2000), Yankah (1995), Bluwey (2000), and Adjaye (2004)

As in most indigenous African societies, Ewe kings and chiefs do not officially speak directly to their subjects or any addressee, especially during political duties, ceremonies, and at public events.<sup>717</sup> This is done through the medium of *tsiami*, who then becomes the king or chief's speech surrogate. It is therefore expected of the *tsiami* (traditionally a male) to be not only articulate, eloquent, highly knowledgeable, and steeped in tradition and culture, but also be a quick thinker and a man of great wit. Though traditionally a hereditary position, being a *tsiami* requires an extensive knowledge of cultural history and practices, fluency and articulation. According to Bluwey, "the official position is that the chief says 'nothing wrong,' it is the *tsiami* who may be wrong. The *tsiami* must therefore polish and sweeten the words of the chief or face the consequences."<sup>718</sup>

The *tsiami* is also responsible for making sure that everything is in place at the court. The *tsiamiti/atikplo/fiatikplo* (the linguist's staff), which usually bears a design carved on top of it, is the symbol of the authority of *tsiami*'s political office. The symbolic design carved and displayed on top of the staff is often part of the king's, chief's, and/or the community's politico-philosophical statement. The finials of these staffs also commonly illustrate proverbs that assert the king's or chief's legitimacy and capabilities or praise the linguist's experience and sagacity. Whenever a *tsiami* is on an official errand—especially to transmit or deliver an important message on behalf of the king, either to his people or to someone outside of his jurisdiction—he carries the staff to prove his and the king/chief's authority and the authenticity of his message.<sup>719</sup> *Atikplo/fiatikplo/tsiamiti*, traditionally carved of wood and often covered in gold or silver foil,

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<sup>717</sup> See Yankah (1995), Bluwey (2000), and Adjaye (2004)

<sup>718</sup> Bluwey (2000: 65), See also Yankah (1995) and Adjaye (2004)

<sup>719</sup> See Adjaye (2004), Yankah (1995), and Bluwey (2000)

are said to be modeled after the cane used by the first court linguist.<sup>720</sup> Below are some examples:



**Figure 5-1: *Atikplo/Tsiamiti Eto* (Three kinds of linguist staffs)**

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<sup>720</sup> See The Metropolitan Museum of Art <http://www.metmuseum.org/home.asp> and Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History <http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/ht/11/sfg/ht11sfg.htm> Accessed: 12/16/08

## 5.2 POLITICAL PROCESSES AND PRACTICES

“*Amee koa fia; fia adeke koa edokui o*”  
(It is the people that carry a king; no king carries himself)

In many indigenous African societies, the king of a state, town, or a chief of a village is traditionally both the politico-military head and the religious/spiritual head. Hence, the process of enthronement of a ruler involves both political and military ceremonies as well as religious/spiritual rituals. *Fiazikpui/Togbuizikpui/Togbepukpo*, the stool (throne) he occupies is believed to be an ancestral stool.<sup>721</sup> This belief is the source of the great dignity, respect, and veneration with which he is always treated. The taboos relating to the conduct and mannerisms of the king or chief are all intended to remind him, his subjects, and others that the position he occupies is sacred. Some of the musicians, musical instruments, and genres associated with his political office, military standing, and spiritual activities are considered equally sacred and are often revered. In this section, I look at the process of installing a king/chief and discuss the democratic elements in the process of enthronement as well as the traditional musician's

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<sup>721</sup> A “stool” in Ewe (and in some other West African) kinship context is not just any piece of chair—a piece of furniture. *Fiazikpui/Togbuizikpui/Togbepukpo* (kinship stool) is a special, sacred, and symbolic political seat, chair, or piece of furniture that represents the sovereignty and political throne of a ruler (king, chief, or queen mother). Beside kinship stools, Ewe (and some other Ghanaians) have ancestral stools (*Togbezikpui*) as well as stools for some gods. Kinship stools, ancestral stools, and stools for divinities are treated with similar reverence and awe. Among the Ewe and in various ethnic groups in Ghana and West Africa, most kings, chiefs, and queen mothers are enstooled (i.e., they are installed/enthroned and seated on stools—symbols of power, wisdom, royalty, and sovereignty). Kinship stools also hold great indigenous aesthetic qualities, functions, and ceremonial importance. Due to their sacred nature, symbolism, and power, the process of making kinship stools differ from that of ordinary stools. As in the processes of carving drums (especially ceremonial, sacred, and warrior drums), one does not just cut down a tree to produce a stool. To begin the process of carving a kinship, ancestral or divinity stool, libation is poured and special prayers and sacrifices are made to the gods and the spirit of the tree. Stools are carved from special woods and are often designed with special sacred symbols, rituals, bearing in mind their special purposes of honor and power of political leaders, ancestors, and gods. Usually, every king/chief has a stool name (name of the throne), which is identified by the proverbial/philosophical symbolic design carved on the stool. Stools are only brought out of their sacred storage (shrine, palace, ancestral house, sacred groove) during special occasions including festivals and during installation of political leaders. Due to their sacred nature and power, individuals that carry stools had to be cleansed in special rituals to be worthy and spiritually fit for the act. See for example Kludze (1973, 1988, 2000), Ayitsey (1991), Yankah (1995), Nukunya (1996), Abotchie (1996), Adjaye (1997, 2004), Bluwey (2000), Algotsson and Davis (1996), and Dzansi-McPalm (2002).

contributions to the process and substance of indigenous democratic principles and political values that are cherished and upheld in traditional Ewe politics.

### **5.2.1 *Fiadodo* (Installing a King): An Indigenous “Democratic” Process**

*“Due doa fia; fia medoa du o”*

(It is the people who install/enhance a king; a king does not install/enhance the people)

The above maxim underscores the Ewe concept of leadership and principles of democracy in indigenous Ewe society. It has been established, through scholarly research, that in most traditional African states, a king or chief is elected or chosen from among the members of the royal family: the family that by history and custom was recognized and accepted by the people as such.<sup>722</sup> Among the Ewe, every king and chief including *Awomefia* and *Fiaga* hails from a royal house (*fiasa*) or royal family (*fiafome/zikpui fome*). A royal family is usually a clan “whose ancestors are believed to have been either the original founders of the state, town, or village, or have been rewarded with the right of rulership for valor or distinguished service to the people.”<sup>723</sup> In addition, many Ewe political rulers were both males who hail from royal families and also trace their ancestry through a patrilineal descent, since all Ewe practice patrilineal inheritance. It is therefore, in general, an exclusive right of the male descendants of a royal family to ascend to the kingship throne or occupy the political stool of the community. There are, however, a few communities (states, towns, or villages) where the right of ascendance to a throne has been extended to males of matrilineal or female descent as well.<sup>724</sup>

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<sup>722</sup> See for example Kludze (2000), Mamattah (1976), Rattray (1929/1969), Fiagbedzi (1977), Nukunya (1969, 1997), Asamoah (1986), Kumassah (2005), Gyekye (1996, 1997), Asamoah (1986), Gaba (1997), and Bluwey (2000)

<sup>723</sup> Bluwey (2000: 63)

<sup>724</sup> See Mamattah (1976), Fiagbedzi (1977), Locke (1978), Nukunya (1969, 1997), Asamoah (1986), Kumassah (2005)

For example, the occupancy of the Anlo Ewe kingship throne or stool alternates between two principal clans: the *Adzovia* clan and the *Bate* clan. Historically, the *Adzoviawo*, whose ancestors (Togbi Wenya and his nephew Togbi Sri I) originally founded the state, are the legitimate and lawful owners and custodians of the Anlo kingship throne by their right of patrilineal descent.<sup>725</sup> The *Bateawo*, on the other hand, gained the right of ascendancy to the throne/stool by valor and distinguished service. It has been recorded that in their hurry and secrecy of their departure from the wall kingdom, the Anlo Ewe left behind the stool, the political power and symbol of the throne, at Notsie. In their new home in Anlo, the absence of the stool was keenly felt. According to Agbotadua Kumassah<sup>726</sup> and other historical sources, Sri's sons, backed by their mothers, refused to return to Notsie to retrieve the stool. Knowing the importance of the stool to the political survival of the new state, Togbi Sri I sent a delegation led by his nephew, Tsatsu (Sri's sister's son, who later became King Adladzea I), who went back to Notsie, used trickery and ruses, and brought the stool back to Anloga. Togbi Sri I and the elders then decided to reward Tsatsu Adladzea the right to ascend the throne as *Awomefia* after his (Sri's) death. Since then, it became the tradition that the descendants of Sri's nephew Adladzea (matrilineally related to Togbi Sri I who was the founder of the *Bate* clan) alternate the kingship with descendants of *Adzovia* clan (founded by Togbi Sri I). Distinguished service, therefore, has high value and legitimacy, equal to descent from original founder(s). It must be pointed out that in addition to kingship and chiefship, several other political functionaries that exist to help in

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<sup>725</sup> Separate interviews with Prof. Datey Kumordzie, Agbotadua Kumassah, and Mr. C. K. Kudjordji (see appendix E for details). See also Mamattah (1976), Nukunya (1969, 1997), Fiagbedzi (1977) and Asamoah (1986)

<sup>726</sup> Personal communication with Agbotadua Kumassah (see appendix E)

running the affairs of many Ewe political entities are vested in specific lineages and ascent to many of them is hereditary and patrilineal.<sup>727</sup>

It may seem that the indigenous Ewe (and for that matter, traditional African) political system and right to rule is often limited and exclusive. But because in all states, towns, and villages, the authority of the king or chief usually derives, functionally, from the people, there is a close relationship between the ruler and the ruled in matters of the exercise of regal or political power (*fiadudu* or *dukpokplo*). Hence, (limited and exclusive right to rulership notwithstanding) the Ewe indigenous political system is seen generally as the rule by the people. Even though the people do not directly choose their ruler, the processes involved in the selection or election of Ewe rulers, as well as the sayings of the citizenry, suggest that the people regard themselves as partners in the exercise of kingship/chiefly authority. This is because the consent of the people is required in the exercise of the king's/chief's authority.<sup>728</sup>

In many cultures around the world, governance has never been the single-handed operation of any one individual. In Ewe society, therefore, many other functionaries, who are vested in specific patrilineal lineages, are involved in the day-to-day political operation of the polity. These functionaries include *zikpuito* (stool father) or *fiato* (king father), *hlotato* (clan elder), *dumegawo/dumemetsitsiwo* (council of state/town/village elders), *afedomemetsitsiwo* (council of family/lineage elders). It should be noted that *fiato* (lit. king father) is not the biological father of the king or chief. Similarly, *zikpuito* (lit. stool father) may neither be the father of the person who holds the office nor the very person who founded the stool. However,

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<sup>727</sup> Interviews with Prof. Datey Kumodzie, Agbotadua Kumassah, and Mr. C. K. Kudjordjie (see appendix E). See also Mamattah (1976), Fiagbedzi (1977), Kludze (1973, 1988, 2000), Ayittey (1991), Yankah (1995), Locke (1978), Nukunya (1969, 1997), Asamoah (1986), Kumassah (2003), Nukunya (1996), Abotchie (1996), Adjaye (1997, 2004), Bluwey (2000), Algotsson and Davis (1996), and Dzansi-McPalm (2002).

<sup>728</sup> See Fiawo (1959), Nukunya (1969, 1997), Asamoah (1986), Gyekye (1985, 1995, 1996, 1997), Gaba (1997), Bluwey (2000)

according to my discussants the *fiato* or *zikpuito* lineage usually has close ties, in terms of blood relationship, with the royal family.<sup>729</sup> According to Bokoga Kodzo Kumedzro and Togbui Dey III, *zikpuito* is, among other things, the high priest and spiritual father of the stool—and, for that matter, the king/chief.<sup>730</sup> Elsewhere, Bluwey indicates that *zikpuito* “...purifies the stool, conducts all the ritual required for the sanctification of the stool and shares with the royal house responsibility of the custody of the stool.”<sup>731</sup> *Zikpuito* is also responsible for organizing and supervising the enstoolment ceremony of a new king, especially all ritual and spiritual aspects.<sup>732</sup>

The process of making a king is called *fiadodo* in Ewe. Literally, *fiadodo* (*fia* = king; and *do* = install or *dodo* = installation) means enthroning or installing a king on a political stool or enthronement to a political power. Unlike most monarchies in the world, where the next occupant of the throne—the heir apparent—is obvious to everyone in the state, there is no obvious next candidate for king or chief in traditional Ewe political system. This is because the royal lineage comprises of extended family lines in which there are always several eligible men, and each of them has practically equal claim to the throne. Kingmakers, who are elders of the royal lineage, have several candidates to choose from. With the exercise of their greatest judiciousness and wisdom, the kingmakers elect the king/chief from among several eligible men in the royal lineage who have equal claim to the throne. A council of elders, led by the designated head of clan and royal house (*hlotato/fometato*), constitutes the body called the

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<sup>729</sup> Personal communication with Prof. Komla Amoaku; interview with Tsiamiga Agbedeza, Togbui Konu B. S. Lamadekoo, Bokoga Kodzo Kumedzro, an *Afa* High Priest and Togbui Dey III, chief of Dzodze-Afetefe (see appendix E)

<sup>730</sup> Interview with Bokoga Kodzo Kumedzro and Togbui Dey III (see appendix E). In explaining the relationship between the king/chief and his stool father, Togbui Dey (the chief of Apetepe division/ward of Dzodze) traced the blood relationship between us (the chief himself and the author who belongs to the Dey stool father lineage).

<sup>731</sup> Bluwey (2000: 64)

<sup>732</sup> Interviews with Boko Kumedzro, Prof Komla Amoaku, and Togbi Dey (see appendix E)

kingmakers (*fiadolawo*). The council of kingmakers is the only body that can validly nominate an eligible individual to be considered for enthronement as a king or chief of any rank.<sup>733</sup>

In putting an individual forward for the position of a king or chief, the electors have to exercise judiciousness and wisdom, for their choice has to be acceptable to the people as a whole. A great deal of consultation, therefore, takes place before a candidate is nominated so as to ensure the individual finally elected will be acceptable to the whole body of citizenry. Individual kingmakers consult secretly with *hlomemegawo kple fometatowo* (heads of clans and families), other indigenous governing functionaries, as well as prominent statesmen and women. The wide range of consultation is to cultivate a widespread goodwill for the new king and to ensure high legitimacy for the incumbent of an office that is held for life. This method of choosing a king/chief requires that the electors consider the wishes of the people to whom the elected person is to be presented and who have to accept him as their ruler. Beside the primary qualification prerequisites or criteria as mentioned earlier, a candidate must also “be at least, prepossessing enough not to be a laughing-stock to neighboring ethnic groups.”<sup>734</sup> That means the candidate must be hardworking, very brave, roundly educated by traditional standards, be intelligent and morally upright and strong, be averagely good looking and without any physical or mental deformity, and have no criminal record.<sup>735</sup>

In modern times, in addition to all the above, higher education (including Western education) and success in a chosen profession and/or business are highly preferred qualifications. In the absence of some of the above elements, there may be objections to the nominee. If there would be widespread opposition to the choice of the kingmakers, the person elected would have

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<sup>733</sup> Ibid. See also Bluwey (2000), Nukunya (1969, 1997), Gyekye (1997), and Kludze (2000)

<sup>734</sup> Manoukian (1952) also quoted in Bluwey (2000: 64)

<sup>735</sup> In separate interviews with Togbi Dey, Prof. S. Datey-Kumodzie, and Prof. Komla Amoaku (see appendix E) See also Mamattah (1976), Manoukian (1952), Asamoah (1986), Nukunya (1964, 1997),

to be replaced by another person, also from the royal lineage.<sup>736</sup> Therefore, it can be said that the indigenous Ewe political system makes it possible for the citizenry to choose their own ruler, insofar as they have a say in the suitability of the person chosen to rule them, even if the initiative is taken by some representatives, including kingship functionaries.

Various sayings that establish the people's concern, participation in the election of the king and their expectations of his conduct and duties abound in Ewe verbal arts, songs, and in other artistic expressions. Here are a few of them: Women chant them during enthronement (and, rarely, dethronement) ceremonies:

**Song 49: Amee Doa Fia**

*Adzoha/Fiaha* (Text in Ewe)

*Amee doa fia  
Eye amea koa fia;  
Fia ga adeke medoa edokui o  
Alo fia woda de wokoa edokuia?  
Amee doa fia, amee koa fia*

**Literal Translation**

It is the people that enthrone a king  
And it is the people that carry a king  
No great king enthrones himself  
Or does a wild (brave) king carry himself?  
It is the people who make and carry a king

W. Blege, one of the Ewe's accomplished composers of contemporary Ewe art music, wrote the song below based on an indigenous adage.

**Song 50: Ame Ye Koa Fia**

**W. Blege** (Text in Ewe: Ewedome dialect)

*//:Ame ye koa fia  
Ame, ame  
Ame ye koa fia://  
Dumegawo ne wo se  
Ne woagase ke da be  
//:Ame ye koa fia  
Ame, ame  
Ame ye koa fia://  
Fiagawo nese  
Ne woagase ke da be  
//:Ame ye koa fia  
Ame, ame  
Ame ye koa fia://*

**Literal Translation**

It is the people that elevate the king  
It is the people, the people (the citizenry)  
It is the people that carry the king  
The council of elders should listen  
And listen again and again; that  
It is the people that elevate the king  
It is the people, the people (the citizenry)  
It is the people that carry the king  
The great kings should listen  
And listen again and again; that  
It is the people that elevate the king  
It is the people, the people (the citizenry)  
It is the people that carry the king

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<sup>736</sup> In separate interviews with Togbi Dey, Prof. S. Datey-Kumodzie, and Prof. Komla Amoaku (see appendix E ). See also Mamattah (1976), Manoukian (1952), Asamoah (1986), and Nukunya (1964, 1997)

The following are Ewe proverbial expressions that underscore the above concept. Although they are used in everyday speech, they are particularly invoked during enthronement and other political events in which the authority and function of the king/chief is highlighted.

*Fiae noa du gbo; du menoa fia gbo*

(It is the king that lives with the community; the community does not live with the king)

Or expressed differently, but connoting the same concept:

*Du menoa fia me o. Fiae noa du me.*

(The community does not live in [with] the king. It is the king who lives in the community.)

*Fiae no na ame gbo; ame menoa fia gbo o*

(It is the king that lives with the people; the people do not live with the king)

In a similar vein:

*Due doa fia; fia medoa du o*

It is the people who install/enthroned a king; a king does not install/enthroned the people

Others go as:

*Fia menoa edokui nu o; du nue fia no na*

A king does not rule himself; it is the people that he rules

*Fia madotodu la, womedoa toe o*

(A king that never puts his ear [listens] to the people, is not listened to)

*Fia neno ame nu ne du na nyo*

(A king should lead the people so that the community would be good)

The above texts are open and direct expressions of the people's concept of political rule and their prescriptions of the conduct of a king. The sayings and songs describe important principles of political rule or exercise of political power. They tell us that the king depends on his subjects for the stability of his rule and throne; that the king must listen, respect, and serve the wishes of his subjects; that he could not rule without the consent of the people; and that there are limits or checks and balances on the exercise of power by the king.

The indigenous coronation of an Ewe king entails many functions and processes, many (if not all) of which *zikpuito* (stool father) is responsible for. It begins with nomination processes (as mentioned earlier) that include widespread but absolutely secret consultations led by *zikpuito* and the head of the royal family. In the tradition of the Anlo Ewe *Awomefia* monastery, G. K. Nukunya indicates that the rotational principle (between the *Adzovia* and *Bate* clans) is strictly adhered to, “but primogeniture is not the rule.” He adds “usually the various segments of the clan, each presenting its own candidate, compete with one another for some time before a candidate acceptable to all emerges.”<sup>737</sup> Bluwey, in his chapter on the political system of the Northern Ewe (Ewedome), summarizes the gist of what follows after a candidate is nominated. Although he wrote specifically on Northern Ewe, many of the practices and procedures are the same among all Ewe. Thus, his exposition is more or less applicable to any Ewe monarchy. Where necessary, I insert popular variations.

Until recently, the candidate was not informed and he was ‘captured’ by a party chosen by the *Zikpuito*. The leader of the party, on capturing the candidate, besmears him with clay or talcum powder previously consecrated by the *Zikpuito*. The leader then invokes the spirits of the ancestors to protect the ‘captive’ and keep him safe throughout the week-long confinement which begins immediately after the capture. The spirits are also enjoined to vent their anger and wrath on the ‘captive’ and to make him wretched and deprived if he should refuse to occupy the stool. A new chief spends seven days and seven nights [in modern times, but longer in the past] in confinement under the protection of the *Zikpuito* [or *Fiato* and other functionaries]. During this period, the chief-[king]-to-be is instructed in the history, culture [military strategies, security and defense] and laws of the people. He is also taught court protocol and receives spiritual fortification against future enemies. He eats and drinks only what the *Zikpuito* offers him.<sup>738</sup>

In his description of the Anlo Ewe enthronement process, Nukunya suggests a longer period of confinement or seclusion of the king. He states: “a period of seclusion lasting between

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<sup>737</sup> Nukunya (1997: 63)

<sup>738</sup> Bluwey (2000: 65)

six months and one year [in the past] during which he [the *Awomefia*, King] is well tutored and ritually strengthened.”<sup>739</sup> Remember that Ewe kings are not just political leaders but are also spiritual fathers as well as military leaders.<sup>740</sup> Even though the *Awomefia* or *Fiaga* does not go to war himself, he is not only the commander-in-chief but also, more importantly, the spiritual figure that sanctions and strategizes any war.<sup>741</sup> In addition, he is the chief justice. Hence, his spiritual fortification, power, and judicial knowledge are as important as his political knowhow. It should be noted that, in the past in Anlo Ewe State, all military leaders, that is, *avakplolawo* (war leaders/captains) and *agbotaduawo* (deputy war heads/lieutenants) were installed on battlefields. Hence they were not confined to secret rooms or groves as were other leaders (kings/chiefs). Today, leaders or kings who occupy such positions are carried on guns from a designated grove outside the community to symbolize the battlefield installation process.<sup>742</sup>

Writing further on the enthronement process, Bluwey adds that:

On the eighth day of confinement the candidate is outdoored and he swears the oath of office and allegiance to his people. The various functionaries also take their turn to swear allegiance and obedience to him. He is then declared a chief [king] by the *Zikpuito* [or *Fiato*]. Depending on his rank, he may appear subsequently before those senior to him in rank to pledge his loyalty and obedience. The paramount chief [or king, *Fiaga/Awomefia*], on the other hand, sits in state to receive homage and pledges of allegiance and obedience from his subordinate chiefs.<sup>743</sup>

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<sup>739</sup> Nukunya (1997: 64)

<sup>740</sup> According to my discussants as Nukunya also indicated, in line with the *Awomefia*'s position as the high priest and king, no firing of musketry is allowed at any point of his installation. However, in other cases including the installation of lower ranking chiefs and military commanders, musketry is fired at the appropriate times. Interviews with Agbotadua Kumassah and Togbi Dey (see appendix E). See also Nukunya (1997)

<sup>741</sup> In the case of the Anlo Ewe tradition, the *Awomefia* (the King) in consonance with his status as the high priest does not go to war. By custom, he must not see a dead body at war since that would spell disaster for his subjects. He is rather enjoined to stay at home to perform sacrifices for success in war. See Mamattah (1976), Manoukian (1952), Nukunya (1969, 1997), Asamoa (1986) and Kamassah (2005)

<sup>742</sup> See Nukunya (1969, 1997), Mamattah (1976: 239-241), Manoukian (1952), Asamoa (1986) and Kamassah (2005)

<sup>743</sup> Bluwey (2000: 65)

The swearing of oath is an important part of the coronation process. Once the subjects have accepted their newly elected king/chief, he is obliged to take the oath of office publicly (*ka atam* or *de/fia adzogbe*) on the occasion of his formal, final ascension to the throne before all functionaries, his councilors, and the citizenry. Among other pronouncements, he promises rule of law and to rule according to customs and institutions of the land; and that should he renege on the oath, he stands condemned by all divine spirits and the people and will be liable to dethronement. During the formal enthronement, through the *Tsiami* (the king's spokesman) and acknowledged by him, series of public injunctions are pronounced before the new king. They outline the wishes and expectations of the people with regard to his rule, conduct, and the socio-political relationship that is expected to be maintained between him and his subjects. The injunctions publicly submitted by the people to the chief and publicly accepted by him are tantamount to a contract between him (the king) and his subjects (the citizenry). During such ceremonies, the song below is one of the many songs and verbal pronouncements and interjections by the public through the medium of music.

**Song 51: *Togbia Do Do Mi***

*Adzoha/Fiaha* (Text in Ewe: Anlo dialect)

//: *Togbia do do mi*

*Kamina, miewo ge ne loo, kamina://*

//: *Hoyohoyo kamina://*<sup>744</sup>

*Miewoge ne lo kamina*

**Literal Translation**

The King has assigned us (asked as to work with him/ seeks our collaboration)

Certainly, we would do it for him (we would comply/cooperate with him), absolutely

With popular acclamation and certainty

We would do it for him (we would absolutely cooperate with him)

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<sup>744</sup> *Kamina* and *hoyohoyo* are onomatopoeic words that do not have specific meanings by themselves but gain meaning from the context in which they are used. In this song *kamina* symbolizes agreement and assurance and *hoyohoyo* represents a situation of popular acclamation, agreement, or participation. Hence I translate it as “certainly” and/or “absolutely” so as to capture what it indigenously connotes in this context.

This and other songs are sung not only to serve as a public form of endorsement and acknowledgement of the king's petitions, promises, and pledges, but also to register the public's pledge and support for his government and readiness to collaborate with his rule. "By his oath, *Togbi* (the King) accepts our confidence in him and therefore seeks our cooperation in the discharge of his political duty: By our injunctions, we as a people assure the king of total collaboration if he lives by us and by our indigenous political values," the song indicates.

Kwame Gyekye, writing on similar procedures in Akan culture, indicates that the orally established contract between the king and his subjects becomes a constitutional "document" which, in practice and in theory, makes it impossible for the king to cleave obstinately to "his own views, policies, and actions if they are opposed by his councilors and subjects."<sup>745</sup> Earlier, R. S. Rattray observes in *Ashanti Law and Constitution*<sup>746</sup> that: "The injunctions, combined with custom, so severely curtail the political authority of the chief that the chief in reality was expected to do little or nothing without having previously consulted his councilors, who in turn conferred with the people in order to sound popular opinion."<sup>747</sup> Although both Rattray and Gyekye wrote on Asante (Akan) traditional politics, there is no doubt that the indigenous political processes in Sub-Saharan Africa have great similarities due to the high level of cross-cultural influences, exchanges, and borrowings, especially among Ghanaian and West African ethnic groups. Hence, Rattray and Gyekye's descriptions and discussions are, to a large extent, applicable to the indigenous political processes of the Ewe.

It is therefore obvious that in the indigenous Ewe (African) democratic processes, the will and voice of the citizenry are crucial, for the king rules by the will and with the consent

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<sup>745</sup> Gyekye (1996: 114)

<sup>746</sup> Robert Sutherland Rattray, *Ashanti Law and Constitution*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1929 [Negro Universities Press, 1969, a reprint of the 1911 edition]

<sup>747</sup> Rattray (1969: 87). See also Nukunya (1992, 1997) and Gyekye (1996, 1997).

of the electorate. “In the event of the chief’s failure to make his rule reflect the popular will, he can be defiled or even deposed,”<sup>748</sup> says Gyekye. Writing on the Anlo Ewe, Nukunya reiterates the power of the people in indigenous African politics. He indicates that:

...as the direct representatives of the people, the clan leaders occupied an important position in the political structure, since the Anlos [Ewe] have always believed that the king’s power derived from the people. *Du meno fia me o. Fiae no du me.* (The people do not live with the king. It is the king who lives with the people.) The prominence of the people in the political structure was also institutionalized in the conditional tone of their oath of allegiance sworn to him during his installation. They would give him their obedience if he ruled in their interest, but could be deposed if he lost their confidence.<sup>749</sup>

Thus, in indigenous Ewe politics, generally the people, and not only the rulers, were the basis of all properly constituted authority. Just as the will of the people is highly taken into consideration in the electors’ choice of candidate during the nomination process, so also is it most crucial in determining the success and continuity of a king’s reign. In accordance with indigenous political practice, as has been indicated, the people have the power to demand the dethronement of the king by the appropriate functionaries through the kingmakers.<sup>750</sup> My collaborators and discussants indicate that the aggrieved party may bring their grievances, including complaints and accusations against the king, to the kingmakers. “Upon investigation, if the charges against the king are found to be true and are such as warrant his dethronement according to the customary laws regarding the conduct of a king, the appropriate action is taken by the appropriate functionaries designated and authorized by the kingmakers,”<sup>751</sup> Boko Kodzo Kumedzro describes in an interview.

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<sup>748</sup> Gyekye (1997)

<sup>749</sup> Nukunya (1997: 64-65)

<sup>750</sup> See Rattray (1969 Nukunya (1992, 1997), Gyekye (1997), Bluwey (2000: 63), Kludze (2000)

<sup>751</sup> Interview with Boko Kodzo Kumedzro (see appendix E).

Although some scholars indicate that African history has many cases of popular defiance, displeasure, and deposition resulting from the ruler's actions and policies not reflecting the wishes of the people, it is evident that such cases rarely happened in Ewe political history.<sup>752</sup> Nukunya states that: "...destoolment at the level of the *Awomefia* was rare. Only one case of destoolment of an Anlo king is on record, that of Togbi Adzanu Fiayidziehe, who reigned during the end of the eighteenth century."<sup>753</sup> According to Mamattah, Togbi Kofi Adzanu, who hails from the Bate clan, became Awomefia in 1750. His reign became unpopular; he fled to Keta-Koda near Anexo (Anecho) across the River Gbaga in Togo; he never returned.<sup>754</sup>

### 5.2.2 *Fiadudu* (Kingship): Indigenous Principles of Popular Governance

*"Fia menoa edokui nu o; du nue fia no na"*  
(A king does not lead himself; it is a community/people that he leads)

It has been well documented that the principles of popular government were long-established and rooted in indigenous African political practice. Reports by scholars and travelers who witnessed firsthand African indigenous political practices support the notion. In 1853, the British colonial administrator in the Gold Coast (now Ghana), Brodie Cruickshank, made the following remark with regards to the effective role of the will of the people in indigenous governance:

"But among none of those chiefs living under the protection of the [British] government, is their authority of such consequence as to withstand the general opinion of their subjects; so that with all the outward

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<sup>752</sup> See Ndabaningi Sithole, *African Nationalism*. London: Oxford University Press, 1958, page 98. See also Mamattah (1976), Asamoah (1986), Nukunya (1997), and Kumassah (2005)

<sup>753</sup> Nukunya (1997: 65)

<sup>754</sup> See Mamattah (1976: 627)

display of regal power, the chief is little more than a puppet moved at the will of the people.”<sup>755</sup>

Commenting on the people’s participation in general community and public assemblies and their free expression of opinion on and contribution to political deliberations, Cruickshank wrote “Anyone, even the most ordinary youth, will offer his opinion or make a suggestion with an equal chance of its being favorably entertained as if it proceeded from the most experienced sage.”<sup>756</sup>

In 1915, a French scholar, Adolphe L. Cureau, writing about the people of central Africa in his book *Savage Man in Central Africa: A study of Primitive Races in the French Congo*, translated by E. Andrews, observed that “over the free citizens the chief’s authority is valid only insofar as it is the mouthpiece of the majority interests, lacking which character it falls to the ground.”<sup>757</sup> In 1922, Dugald Campbell, a British scholar, made the following remarkable and elaborate observation in his book *In the Heart of Bantuland*. He wrote:

All government is by the will of the people, whether it be the choice and coronation of a king; the selection of man to fill a new chieftainship; the framing, proclamation, and promulgation of a new law; the removal of the village from one site to another; the declaration of war or the acceptance of terms of peace: everything must be put to the poll and come out stamped with the imprimatur of the people’s will. No permanent form of negro government can exist save that based four square on the people’s will.<sup>758</sup>

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<sup>755</sup> Cruickshank, Brodie. *Eighteen Years on the Gold Coast of Africa Including an Account of the Native Tribes and their Intercourse with Europeans*. London: Hurst and Blackett, 1853 vol. 1, page 236 [2nd edition with a new introduction by K. A. Busia was published in New York by Barnes & Noble, 1967]. See also Gyekye (1996)

<sup>756</sup> Cruickshank (1853: vol. 1, page 251)

<sup>757</sup> Adolphe L. Cureau, *Savage Man in Central Africa: A study of Primitive Races in the French Congo*, trans. E. Andrews. London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1915, page 279 as quoted in Gyekye (1996)

<sup>758</sup> Dugald Campbell, *In the Heart of Bantuland: A Record Of Twenty-nine Years' Pioneering In Central Africa Among The Bantu Peoples, With A Description Of Their Habit*. New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969, 42 [first published in London by Seeley Service 8s Co., 1922]. Also quoted in Gyekye (1996)

The British anthropologist, R.S. Rattray, who lived in the Gold Coast (now Ghana) and researched some ethnic groups including the Akan, made the following interesting comparative observation concerning the democratic and participative character of the Asante political practice and then drew an analogous conclusion:

Nominally autocratic, the Ashanti constitution was in practice democratic to a degree. I have already on several occasions used this word 'democracy', and it is time to explain what the term implies in this part of Africa. We [the British] pride ourselves, I believe, on being a democratic people and flatter ourselves that our constitutions are of a like nature. An Ashanti who was familiar alike with his own and our [i.e., British] constitution would deny absolutely our right to apply this term either to ourselves or to our constitution. To him a democracy implies that the affairs of the Tribe [state] must rest, not in the keeping of the few, but in the hands of the many, that is, must not only be the concern of what we should term 'the chosen rulers of the people,' but should continue to be the concern of a far wider circle. To him the state is literally *Res Publica*; it is everyone's business. The work of an Ashanti citizen did not finish when by his vote he had installed a chief in office. ...The rights and duties of the Ashanti democrats were really only beginning after (if I may use a homely analogy) the business of the ballot-box was over. In England, the Government and the House of Commons stand between ourselves and the making of our laws, but among the Ashanti there was not any such thing as government apart from the people.<sup>759</sup>

From the above evidence and discussions, it is obvious that the notion of popular will or popular opinion was not only valued but well practiced in indigenous African politics long before the arrival of the Europeans in Africa with their idea and form of democracy. Although Rattray's comments and that of others were made (in some cases) with particular reference to specific ethnic groups like that of Asante, they apply to the Ewe. Like the Asante (Akan), the Ewe and other Ghanaian ethnic groups, who undoubtedly borrowed some elements of governance from the Akan, see democracy as a continuous, active, and direct participation of all

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<sup>759</sup> Robert Sutherland Rattray, *Ashanti Law and Constitution*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1929, pages 406-7 [Negro Universities Press, 1969, a reprint of the 1911 edition]. See also Gyekye (1996)

citizens in the affairs of government.<sup>760</sup> For, “*dukpokplo* [lit., leading/ruling a state] meaning governance, as the Ewe calls it, is everyone’s business, requiring the constant attention, input, and interest of every citizen.”<sup>761</sup> As the Ewe saying goes, *ame deka mekploa du o* (one person does not govern a state/town) or *ame deka menoa du nu o* (one person does not lead a state/town).

The indigenous democratic system establishes, ensures, and fosters important political values that include but are not limited to: (1) the active participation of the people in running the affairs of the state; (2) citizens’ easy access to the royal palace—the seat of political power; (3) a close relationship between the ruler and the ruled with no bureaucratic distance between the chief and his subjects; (4) open governance and easy communication between the citizens and the indigenous government; (5) mutual tolerance and respect for the authority and opinion of citizens; and (6) consensus building: involving and operating at all political levels from the king to the extended family head, through councils’ and assemblies’ open deliberations and decisions with the people, with every citizen (irrespective of social status) having the right and freedom to contribute to consensus formation. Each individual sees himself/herself as being part of the governing body and process. Citizens also see, feel, and express the sense of belonging to the political system. The following song, usually sung during installation ceremonies, expresses the above popular sense and feelings.

**Song 52: *Togbia Vivim***

***Adzoha/Fiaha*** (Text in Ewe: Anlo dialect)

//: *Vivim loo; Togbia vivi ma*

*Nye nuto tonye://*

**Literal Translation**

It is sweet; kingship (governance) is pleasant

It is my own (government/kingship)

(I am part of the process/system/lineage)

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<sup>760</sup> See Nukunya (1992: 67-80)

<sup>761</sup> Datey-Kumodzi (see appendix E)

*Eto go me*<sup>762</sup>  
*Nye nuto tonye*

*Eno go me*  
*Nye nuto tonye*

*Vivim loo, Togbia vivi ma*  
*Nye nuto tonye*

Patrilineally (by paternal ancestral descent)  
It is my own (kingship/government)  
(I am part of the process/system/lineage)  
Matrilineally (by maternal ancestral descent)  
It is my own kingship/government  
(I am part of the process/system/lineage)  
It is sweet, kingship (governance) is pleasant  
It is my own (government/kingship)  
(I am part of the process/system/lineage)

The song not only underscores the sense and concept of governance by the people, but also expresses the need to have a government, as well as the value of the people identifying with such broad based governance. “It is good to have a ruling body. If I do not relate to the king or governing body through my paternal ancestral line, I do so maternally: I am part of the government in one way or the other and I must make it work,” the composer reiterates. By relating to the government paternally or maternally, the composer does not necessarily mean in terms of blood relations. Rather, that statement is used in the broader and deeper Ewe concept of the *novi* (mother’s child; i.e., sibling) relationship, whereby every individual is believed to be a “sibling” of everyone else (see chapter 7). It should also be noted that *eto go me* (through paternal lineage) and *eno go me* (through maternal lineage) may be substituted by other kinship terms such as *evi go me* (by offspring/through my children), *esro go me* (by marriage/through spouse), *edo go me* (by occupation/profession), etc. The use of these terms by the composer underscores the cherished values of the complex and almost endless relationship structure characteristic of indigenous Ewe society. It also, most importantly, reiterates how each and every individual in the society is connected to and has important roles to play in governance—in the success or failure of the king. By highlighting the “sweetness” of governance and the sense

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<sup>762</sup> *Eto go me* (patrilineally) and *Eno go me* (matrilineally) may be substituted by other kinship terms such as *Evi go me* (by offspring/through my children), *Esro go me* (by marriage), *Edo go me* (by occupation/profession), etc.

of every individual's relationship with and belonging to the governing body, the musician is propagating some basic democratic tenets, including participatory democracy.

The contribution and effect of these and other values of pre-colonial indigenous system on political practice cannot be overemphasized. The general effect of this system is that it evokes in the individual citizen a sense of personal commitment to the affairs and well-being of the state, a firm belief that the success of the state is the success of the individual, and any communal setback will negatively affect the individual—an underscoring of the equal interplay and relationship between the African communal and individualistic value system.<sup>763</sup>

As has been pointed out in previous chapters, Ewe believe that knowledge and wisdom are such limitless phenomena that no one individual can claim to have it all (see chapter 3). For example, this is depicted in the proverb *Nunya adidoe, asi metu ne o* (knowledge is like a baobab tree, no one person's hands can embrace its girth). It is only when individual members of a community join hands and ideas that they can embrace the girth (trunk) of a baobab tree—a symbol of limitlessness of knowledge and wisdom. They therefore believe that it takes the community to think about and reach a consensus on matters of state interest, for it would be presumptuous for one person, including the king, to assume the right to think or deliberate for all others. Hence, the wise would often proverbially say or sing *ta deka meda adanu o* (one head does not go into council). Clearly, the proverbial song text *ta deka meda adanu o* reiterates the fact that wisdom is not in one person's head. This proverb underscores the political value of consultation, deliberation, conferring, and consensus building, the conviction that discussion and deliberation by many heads (minds/thoughts) on public issues are the best options. Neither the king nor his councilors can alone, or by themselves, claim the right to make the best decisions

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<sup>763</sup> Nukunya (1992), Wiredu (1996), Adjaye (2004), Gyekye (1996), and Yankah (1995)

for the state without conferring with the citizens, since (philosophical) sagacity is not the sole preserve of rulers. Obviously, the indigenous process of arriving at political decisions by consensus was born of the quest for the social goal of solidarity. As Gyekye states, consensus building “is, with justification, considered vital to the practice of democracy. For it allows everyone a chance to speak his mind and promotes patience, mutual tolerance, and an attitude of compromise—all of which are necessary for democratic practice.”<sup>764</sup>

The above processes notwithstanding, some scholars have indicated that African indigenous political culture lacks the concept of opposition. While it is true that there are no organized opposition “parties” with clear dissenting political ideologies, there are always entities that share differing views and interests in any indigenous political system. In fact, the existence and practice of consensus in itself presupposes that there are dissenting views; i.e., those “opposing views that are, or need to be, reconciled. If there were no opposition” says Kwame Gyekye, “it would be senseless to talk of reaching a consensus. This is a conceptual truth.”<sup>765</sup> The following songs show the fact that some voices or opinions are rejected or not listened to in an Ewe political deliberation or communal assembly discussion.

**Song 53: *Futowo Fe Nya Gbogblo***

**Zigi** (Text in Ewe: Ewedome dialect)

*Futowo/Hiatowo fe nya gbogblo*

*Medzea me nu o*

*Futowo fe nya gbogblo*

*Medzea me nu o*

*Koleawo de be ya gblo nya de*

*Susu nyuie de le eme*

*Wobe “zi dodui kpo*

*Doto kaba, fiawo le nu fom”*

*Wobe “zi dodui kpo*

*Doto kaba, gawo le nu fom”*

**Literal Translation**

Dissenters’/poor people’s speech (opinion)

Is often not valued (not taken seriously)

Opposing speech (dissenting voice)

Is never appreciated (not taken seriously)

A poor wishes to say something

There may be some good sense in it

They say “be quiet (keep mute),

Stop talking instantly, rulers/kings are talking”

They say “be quiet (keep mute)

Stop talking now, the great/rich ones are talking”

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<sup>764</sup> Gyekye (1996: 117)

<sup>765</sup> Ibid (1997: 130)

Clearly, the song indicates that the voices and opinions of the opposing parties (enemies, poor) and the less affluent are not only discarded but may sometimes be silenced. The common exclusive political tactics of “if you are not with ‘us’ then you are against ‘us,’” is alluded to in the song. In the song, the opposition party is cast variously as poor, enemy, and needy, while the ruling party is characterized as rich, great, king, etc and so are their opinions. It should be pointed out that this song might be interpreted on the basis of social-economic class and structure. Irrespective of how one interprets it, the issue of “us” against “them” is obvious. Also, although material and financial riches are often neither part of the prerequisites of qualification for kingship or a criterion for choosing a political ruler, they are undoubtedly a big part of our political system.

The next song comments on the situation in which some entities either do not wish to or do not have the means to express their opinions for various reasons. This song metaphorically expresses the inability of a “dumb” person to voice a vital opinion and contribute to public discussions.

**Song 54: *Nya Le Mumu Fe Dome***  
**Zigi** (Text in Ewe: Ewedome dialect)  
 //: *Nya le mumu fe dome*

*Gake nu meli woagblo o de://*  
*Ne woke nu, huun!*  
*Nya le mumu fe dome*  
*Gake nu meli woagblo o de*

**Literal Translation**

There is word in the stomach of the dumb  
 (the dumb has much opinion to express)  
 But there is no mouth to say it (cannot express it)  
 When they open the mouth, *huun* (they only sigh)  
 There is word in the stomach of the dumb  
 But there is no mouth (voice) to express it

Usually, when people are either not given the platform to express their opinion or do not have the means to do so, they resort to other symbolic means (audible and non-audible gestures, signs, and actions) that are culturally meaningful and equally but indirectly expressive of their opinion. For example, a deep and audible sigh *huun* or *hum* by a generally quiet and passive

participant in a discussion is enough to signal some form of concern, usually a disagreement or doubt. It may also signal the wishes of the individual to contribute to the discussions, but he/she has either not been given the opportunity to do so or feels that his/her opinion may not be considered. Hence, the composer/singer likens the individual, who could not contribute to public discussions or express his views, to the dumb person who may have constructive suggestions and opinion to offer given he/she has the means to do so.

Again, while organized opposition almost absent in Ewe indigenous political practice, individual and group dissenting voices do exist. In fact, the mere presence of opposing voices, irrespective of the status of the individuals or groups in opposition and their opinions, indicate the existence of dissenting voices—opposition. Whether or not opposing individuals or groups are given the opportunity to air their views is a different thing—a phenomenon common to all political establishments, whether traditional or modern.

### **5.3 POLITICO-MILITARY ORGANIZATIONS AND DIVISIONS**

*“Eyatsie fiana xonu de fe ame”*

(It is a windy rainstorm that determines where one locates the entrance of a house)

The Ewe fled from their adversary Togbui Agokoli in Notsie, their ancestral home, but had to face the realities of conflicts with their new neighbors and foreign intruders. The early history of their settlement indicates that concern for their security was one of the prime elements of establishing and maintaining a strong and peaceful society. This was due to the constant danger and military confrontation that characterized the period of the exodus from Notsie to the beginning of the twentieth century. As a society that had fought many wars in the history of its previous settlements, the Ewe established and maintained their new settlements in combat

readiness for a possible enemy attack; as the proverb goes *eyatsie fiana xonu de fe ame* (it is the direction of a windy rain that determines where one locates the entrance of a house). Hence, the distribution of the population's settlements was informed by their past military expediency and partly followed the old pattern in which Ewe townships had fighting divisions which later became known as the Ewe military units. This hereditary division was a model established for purposes of effective and controllable military precision in defense and attack when war erupted.

The three divisions are: (1) Southern Ewe/Anlo: *Lashibi* or *Mia* (left), *Dome* or *Adotri* (center), and *Woe* or *Dusi* (right); and (2) Northern Ewe/Ewedome: *Dusime* (right wing), *Miame* (left wing), and *Ngogbefia* (forward/lead) also known as *Dome* (center wing).<sup>766</sup>

These divisions, in which the entire population was regimented, formed the bedrock of the military sub-culture, incorporated various institutions and skills, and were responsible for the security of the traditional state, her people, and her values. In tracing the history of this formation, some researchers indicate that this military system was influenced by or adapted from the Akan political arrangement. According to G.K. Nukunya, the Anlo Ewe military formation can be explained as a simplified adaptation of the Akan one. "And it is no accident that the central or the main fighting body of the Anlo army is called *Adotri* which is, in fact, derived from the Akan word *Adonten*."<sup>767</sup> G. K. Bluwey, on his part, writing on Northern Ewe, states:

In general, the three-fold division and decentralization of political power and authority is a common feature of all the states in Northern Eweland. The head-chiefs of the Divisions are usually designated as *Dusimefia*, *Miamefia*, and *Ngogbefia*. A few of the states, such as Gbi (Hohoe), Ve, Anfoega and Alavanyo, add a fourth Division designated as *Megbefia*. [rear king] The state of Peki, on the other hand, uses Akan designations namely: *Adontehene*, *Benkumhene*, *Gyasehene* and *Osiewhene*.<sup>768</sup>

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<sup>766</sup> See Nukunya (1992, 1997), Kludze (2000), and Bluwey (2000)

<sup>767</sup> Nukunya (1992: 71)

<sup>768</sup> Bluwey (2000: 62-63)

Bluwey did not explicitly state whether or not the Northern Ewe adapted the political division from the Akan. But, by indicating that the Peki Ewe state uses Akan terminologies, he implies some Akan influence, if not complete adaptation. With regard to Nukunya's assertion, while the similarities in the names in question (*Adotri* and *Adonten*) are obvious, there is not such a clear similarity or correlation between the Anlo Ewe three-wing military divisions and the Akan multiple politico-military divisions, as Nukunya discussed elsewhere.<sup>769</sup> In fact, G. F. Kojo Arthur and Robert Rowe, writing on the Akan military divisions, clearly state the multiplicity of the Akan military divisions:

The *asafo* is a political-military institution of the Akan...The *asafo* companies forming the national [Akan] army were organized into main fighting divisions thus: *adonten* (vanguard - main body under the *adontenhene*), *twafu* (advance guard), *kyidom* (rearguard - under the *kyidomhene*), *nifa* (right wing under the *nifahene*), *benkum* (left wing under the *benkumhene*), *akwansra* (scouting division), *ankobea* (home guard under the *ankobeahene*), and *gyaase* (the king's bodyguard under the *gyaasehene*).<sup>770</sup>

The multiplicity of the Akan system, as Athur and Rowe's points show, leaves one wondering why, if at all, the Ewe chose to adapt only three out of the many divisions of the Akan system.

Earlier, C.M.K. Mamattah traces the history of the Ewe three-wing military formation far back to earlier kingdoms, once inhabited by many ethnic groups in West Africa, an indication that both the Akan and the Ewe have a common historical source to which they could possibly

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<sup>769</sup> See Nukunya (1992: 68-70). See also de Graft Johnson, J. H. 1932. "The Fanti Asafu." *Africa*, 5(3): 307-322; Fortes, M. and E. E. Evans-Pritchard. 1967. Editors. *African Political Systems*. New York: KPI.; Datta, Ansu. 1972. "The Fante asafu: A re-examination." *Africa*, 42(4): 305-315.; Sutherland-Addy, Esi. 1998. "Discourse and Asafu: The Place of Oral Literature." *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana*. New Series, 2: 87-100

<sup>770</sup>G. F. Kojo Arthur and Robert Rowe: <http://www.marshall.edu/akanart/asafo.html> (accessed: 05/02/08). See also Adjaye (2004), Yankah (1995), De Graft Johnson, J. C. 1932. "The Fanti Asafu." *Africa*, 5(3): 307-322; Fortes, M. and E. E. Evans-Pritchard. 1967. Editors. *African Political Systems*. New York: KPI.; Datta, Ansu. 1972. "The Fante asafu: A re-examination." *Africa*, 42(4): 305-315; Datta, Ansu and R. Porter. 1971. "The Asafu System in Historical Perspective." *Journal of African History*, 12 (2): 279-297; Sutherland-Addy, Esi. 1998. "Discourse and Asafu: The Place of Oral Literature." *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana*. New Series, 2: 87-100

trace this common politico-military arrangement and the philosophy supporting it.<sup>771</sup> Mamattah indicates that *Adotri* or *Dome* (central wing) was the only military wing of the Ewe group that was led by Wenya and located, at the time of arrival, at their present home where they became known as Anlo. Among other things, one may speculate that not only was *Adotri* in existence in Notsie (also called Hogbe or Glime), but also there were other military divisions or wings in Notsie and that it was the centre division (already called *Dome* or *Adotri*, according to Mamattah) that migrated to the southwest under Togbi Wenya. Mamattah wrote:

When the Anlos arrived from Hogbe [Notsie], they had only one military formation, the DOME or ADOTRI (centre wing). A later development created a second wing, the DUSHI or WOE (right wing), which was placed under the command of the Agudzawo, now Some state. Before the Agudzawo left Anlo to become 'SOME' the descendants of an Anlo elder AMEGA LE alias TETE had arrived from Aklobome (Kroboland) and assumed command of a third military wing MIAVALOGO or LASHIBI (left wing). On the occasion of the mass exodus or secession of Some from Anlo, the Anlos were left with only two wing formations—Adotri and Lashibi. The gap created in the battle formation was closed through a merger of the Adotri and Lashibi wings. Since then, the wing formations have remained constant as: ADOTRI — Center, Dome, Akota, Titina; LASHIBI — Left, Mia, Aklobo; WOE — Right, Dushi.<sup>772</sup>

Later, Mamattah gave more details and contradictory accounts that, in part, give some credence to Nukunya's indications of a possible Akan influence, although Mamattah rejects the theory of an Anlo imitation of Akan military formation.

The military strategy of the Anlos at inception consisted in the circular method of attack. Later, the military strategy changed to the two-prong method of attack—the LASHIBI and the DOME. After the Agudzawa when the Agudzawo or the Ketawo (now the SOME State) who then constituted the Anlo right-wing had left Keta for good, the Anlo military formation was regrouped into three formations and a Left Wing was created from the split of the Dome and the Lashibi wing. *The initiative for this innovation may have come from BAKAI (Bake) and the Tete Agbi group of warriors from Akwamu [Akan] who contributed in no small measure to the Anlo victory over Some. After Anlo military alliance with Akwamu and the Asante, the Anlo military strategy involved launching an offensive using*

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<sup>771</sup> See Mamattah (1976: 226-228) and Kludze (2000: 67-69)

<sup>772</sup> Mamattah (1976: 217). See also Kludze (2000)

*the three-prong method of fighting: (a) The Spearhead — Adotri, Dome, Akota, Titina, Atsifoanunolawo, Agave. (b) The Right Flankers — Dusi, Woe. (c) The Left Flankers — Mia, Lashibi. The Anlo State has a wing formation, which is neither an imitation or copy nor a relic of the Akan war formation.*<sup>773</sup>

Despite Mamattah's indication of doubt about the "Anlo adaptation of Akan system" theory, as some scholars, including Nukunya, indicate, Mamattah's accounts give more detail but complex (and to some extent, confusing) historical perspective that demands further research and clarification. Also, Mamattah's research underscores a military alliance between the Anlo Ewe and the Akan (Akwamu and Asante), which under some favorable circumstances could possibly have triggered cross-cultural military influences—a phenomenon that is common not only between Ewe (especially Northern Ewe) and Akans, but also among other ethnic groups in Ghana.

The uncertainty of adaptation and influences notwithstanding, the important point for my research has been established: that all Ewe have the basic three-wing politico-military divisions.<sup>774</sup> According to C. K. Ladzekpo, at their specific locations, each Ewe unit established their homesteads at the geographical position they would defend on the occasion of an attack.<sup>775</sup> Usually at the center of any Anlo Ewe settlement are households of members of *Adotri*. They are known as the *Domelogo* (central wing); they are led by *Domefiaga* (central commander/chief) and are responsible for the central position during war. *Lashibi* unit occupies the east and is referred to as the *Dusimelogo* (right wing). They have a *Dusimefiaga/Dusifiaga* (right wing commander/chief) and are responsible for the defense of the eastern end of the community. The third unit, *Woe*, which has a *Miamefiaga* (left wing commander/chief) settles at

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<sup>773</sup> Ibid (226-227) italics is mine.

<sup>774</sup> Whether or not there has been adaptations, imitations, or influences is not really the focus of this work, although it is an interesting issue to be researched into further. See for example Mamatta (1976), Nukunya (1992), Kludze (2000), and Bluwey (2000)

<sup>775</sup> Ladzekpo (<http://bmerc.berkeley.edu/people/ladzekpo/Intro.html#>) accessed: 05/16/08

the west or the left wing and takes charge of the security of that side during any attack.<sup>776</sup> The following song alludes to the functions of the divisions and summons members to step up and defend the land.

**Song 55: *Nyemano Nu Ava Na Sim O***

**Gadzo** (Text in Ewe: Anlo dialect)

//:Nyemano nu ava na sim o://

*Ewoeawo, Adotriawo, Lashibiawo hee*

*Mizo do miakpo sokpoanu da*

*So hoe de mi loo*

*Nyemano nu va na sim o*

**Literal Translation**

I would not be awake and be defeated in war

The Woe, the Adotri, the Lashibi

Let's move to the battlefield (see the war god)

The war of the spirits (serious war) befalls us

I would not be awake and be defeated in war

The message in the above song is clear: “We cannot be this organized [with well functioning military wings] and yet be defeated in war.” The composer calls on the three wings to stand to their duties and respond to the war that has besieged them. The seriousness of the war and the perceived formidable strength of the enemy are alluded to in the expression *So hoe de mi loo* (it is the war of the god of thunder that befalls us).

With the disappearance of inter-ethnic warfare, however, this military system appears obsolete. The military wings have now been preserved mainly as political institutions and divisions. These positions have not only been retained, they have become incorporated into the traditional political system. Hence, the three military wings are now the largest political divisions that fall directly below *Awomefia* or *Fiaga* (the King). It is under each one of these three divisions and leaders that we have the various towns, villages, lineages, and family chiefs and heads; and it is through these leaders that all cases of all citizens pass before reaching the king (*Awomefia* or *Fiaga*).

Generally, some of the most common traits associated with the Ewe are their bravery and spirituality. Historical narratives, war dances, musical instruments, songs, and artifacts that

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<sup>776</sup> See *ibid* and also Nukunya (1969, 1997), Mamattah (1976), Kumassah (2005), Gorlin (2000)

document the numerous wars they fought and spiritual feats they attained attest to these assertions. History indicates that Ewe began to fight their enemies spiritually and often from home before they stepped out to the battlefield. The spiritual preparations often began with the *Awomefia* of the Anlo Ewe (being the spiritual war leader) or *Fiaga* of the Northern Ewe state being both the spiritual and physical war commander-in-chief.<sup>777</sup> The King, together with the state priests, performs the necessary rites and sacrifices to the war gods and their embodiments (including *Nyigbla*, *So*, *Adabatram*, and *Yali*) and other deities. Afterwards, they give the spiritual signals to the army to go into *awome*, *zume*, *bo* (spiritual realm, state, war shrine) to prepare for the war.<sup>778</sup> In the state of *awome*, *zume*, and *bo*,<sup>779</sup> sacred and secret ceremonies are conducted, including spiritual fortification and purification of warriors, revelation of spiritual and battlefield secret codes, and the swearing of *atamga* (the great oath), among others. The *Awomefia/Fiaga*, *Du/Ava Tronuga* (the State High/War Priest)<sup>780</sup> and the *Avadada* (Central Divisional Commander) often lead the ceremony. “After the days of purification are over, the priest and the *Avadada* daub the entire militia comprising the entire effective male population in the camp with clay. It is then possible at this final ceremony,” says Mamattah, “to spot out and weed out those doomed to death on the battlefield.”<sup>781</sup>

It is therefore common to hear many war songs that contain themes and references to divine powers, most frequently to *So* (the God of Thunder), which in some cases is synonymous with war, gun, knife, and other war implements. Other powers include *Sabla Dzesu* or *Ku Azagidi* (the god of death), *Yali* (god of wind), *Nyigba* (Anlo war god), *Adabatram* (Ewedome

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<sup>777</sup> See Mamattah (1978: 239) and Bluwey (2000)

<sup>778</sup> Ibid

<sup>779</sup> *Bo*, *zume*, and *awome* are all terminologies referring to a sacred spiritual place or realm (also sometimes referred to as *awogame* or *atsifome*.)

<sup>780</sup> In the Anlo State, the State High/War Priest was *Togbi Nyigbla Tronua*

<sup>781</sup> Mamattah (1976: 228)

war drum god), *Afa* (god of divination), and *Kpoli* (an *Afa* god of divination's manifestations). Below is one of the songs, or spiritual chants, that is sung during the fortification and purification ceremony in the state of *bo* (spiritual realm). In modern times, this song is used as an introit to heightened spiritual states in *Yeve*, *Agbosu*, *Koku*, and other religious ceremonies.

**Song 56: *Aho Dzo Miyo Bo***

*Yeve-Adavu* (Text in Ewe: Anlo dialect)

*Aho dzo*

*Miyi bo, Aye ee he lo ho*

*Veduwo, aho dzo*

*Miyi bo*

*Yali vedu aho dzo*

*Miyi bo*

*Aho dzo*

*Miyi bo, Aye ee he lo ho*

*Veduo 'ho dzo*

**Literal Translation**

War has started (war is upon us)

Let's enter the state of *bo* (spiritual realm)<sup>782</sup>

Divinities, war is upon us

Let's enter the state of *bo* (spiritual realm)

Yali<sup>783</sup> divinity, war is upon us

Let's enter the state of *bo* (spiritual realm)

War has started (war is upon us)

Let's enter the state of *bo* (spiritual realm)

Divinities, war is upon us

The role of divinities among Ewe literary arts has no limit. The Ewe believe that the outcome of a battle largely depends on the helpful intervention of divinities, and the harmony between their politico-military leaders and the gods of war. Fiwawo states that:

The Asafohene and the ordinary soldier in the field gained the psychological satisfaction that the performance of ritual in the *Awogame* and the *Atsifome* will spell victory. They fight with confidence and when victory crowns the show they are sure to ascribe it to the timely intervention of Nyigbla through the Awome Fia and the Awadada...<sup>784</sup>

In view of the belief in their significant roles during war, they (divinities) are the first to be called upon in such instances. The composer and singers of the above song inform the deities, their leaders (religious, political, and military) and all citizens of the eruption of war on the land and pray that the necessary action is taken. The song reminds and prepares the community

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<sup>782</sup> *Bo* is a spiritual state of power, protection, and preparedness.

<sup>783</sup> The wind god

<sup>784</sup> Fiwawo (1959: 101)

morally and emotionally, especially the warriors in the spiritual state of *bo*, for the war. In the state of *bo*, *tronuawo* (priests) prepare and call on the divinities, including *Yali* (the wind god), to deflect evil spirits, enemy supernatural powers and other misfortunes that may befall the warriors. “Disaster is upon us; divinities, we are at war; oh divine *Yali*, war has befallen us, let’s enter the state of *bo* so that you prepare us spiritually so we would be protected from harm,” the song implores.

It might also be said that the Ewe believe the gods do not only guide their war leaders, but also command the entire army through their leaders. This concept is contained in phrases including *So de gbe* (*So* has commanded) and *So wogbe dzie miele* (we act according to the command of *So*). These phrases are used as song texts, including the following *Atsiagbeko* song.<sup>785</sup>

**Song 57: *Badagao Za Do***

*Atsiagbeko* (Text in Ewe and Fon)

//:*Badagao za do*

*So de ’za gbe*

*Ne badagae atsio mina doa?*

*Aza so gbe*

*Badagao za do*

*So de za gbe*

*Ne badagae oo://*

//:*Tu mano ali dzie loo hoo*

*He mano ali dzie ee://*

//:*Ema du katsa kotso://*

*Sokpe dze nu dzi*

**Literal Translation**

A night of fury has fallen (danger in view/war is on us/war is imminent)

So has given the day’s command

How can we dress up/gorgeously with danger in view (war on us)?

This is the day/now is the hour of action

A night of fury has fallen (war is on us)

So has commanded

There is danger/war in view

Gun rest not on the loin (weapon ready)

Knife rest not on the loin

We shall destroy completely whatever comes our way (any obstacle)

*So*’s stone has fallen on something (*So*’s gun has shot the enemy)<sup>786</sup>

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<sup>785</sup> See Locke (1978, 1992)

<sup>786</sup> See *ibid*

“When war is imminent, the enemy is attacking, and the spirit of war has indicated (commanded) that we should go and fight, there is no point to dress up gorgeously and relax. The day of *So*’s command is the day to take action. We need to get our arms and ammunition ready, go to war and fight with the spiritual bullet of *So*,” the composer reiterates. Thus, at the face of a fierce battle that has begun, it would be absurd to be concerned with personal affairs when the state is under attack. The warriors believe that when they listen to the spiritual commands of *So* given through their war leaders, they will win the war.

Loyalty to the leaders of the various wings and the well-defined hierarchical order and leadership structure is as important in Ewe military culture and success in war as spiritual efficacy. In view of that, war songs regularly remind warriors and emphasize the importance of the army’s loyalty to the commanders and hierarchy of the military. The following song metaphorically alludes to this:

**Song 58: *Tsie Lafo Miawoa?***

*Atsiagboko* (Text in Ewe and Fon)<sup>787</sup>

//:*Tsie lafo miawoa*

*'Go domea ee?://*

*Eee, ago dome ee*

*Tsie mafo miawo o*

*Le ago dome o ee*

**Literal Translation**

Will rain beat us

Under the date palm tree?

Really, under the date palm tree

Rain will not beat us

Under the date palm tree

*Agoti/agotsi* (date palm tree, shortened in the above song as *'Go* or *ago*) is one of the largest and strongest trees on the grasslands of the southern Ewe coastal plains. Its wood is used for many things due to its resilience and durability under different weather conditions. The Ewe appreciate its strength and usefulness. *Agoti* (date palm tree) symbolizes endurance, resistance, bravery, experience, toughness, and ingenuity—good leadership characteristics. The song

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<sup>787</sup> See also Locke (1996: 187)

reiterates the army's commitment and loyalty to their leader who is symbolized as the date palm tree. The warriors proclaim that rain, symbolized as the enemy, cannot beat them when they are under the shelter of *ago*, symbolized as their commander.: "Under his leadership, protection, and command, nothing can harm us; no enemy would defeat us if we listen to and obey the commands of our great leader."

As mentioned earlier, the Ewe, like other indigenous Africans, place value on knowledge gained through experience. Thus the old proverb and song text: *ame le toxo/tome megblo na be dome lo dum, ame le godzi kadie o* (a person in a river does not say the crocodile is suffering from stomachache, the person on the bank doubts or challenges it). That is to say, a person who has not experienced an event, or has only observed an event from afar, should not doubt the veracity of a report from someone who actually had a first hand experience of the event or has lived the experience. In dangerous and serious circumstances, including issues concerning life and death, the value of knowledge gained from experience becomes even more valuable. Thus, inexperienced people who have not undergone the rigors of war are cautioned not to doubt their elders' and leader's opinions and judgment especially in battlefield. The song below reiterates the point.

**Song 59: Fowo Lable Miawoa?**

*Atsiagbeko* (Text in Ewe and Fon)

//:Wobe ame le toxoe gblo be  
*Dome lo dum*  
 'Mekae lano go ahado adika me?  
*Oho, Fowo lable miawoa?://*  
 //:Wo ada tso, ada dzo be do mia  
*Fowo fiada, 'da dzo be oo://*  
 //:Ame no ada to be vena nefia ada  
 'Ho mashi gboe  
*Fowo lable mio*  
*Oho, Fowo lable miawoa? ://*  
*Egboe dzi ku ne agbo haa?*

**Literal Translation**

They say the person who is in the river says  
 The crocodile has stomachache  
 Who, on the bank would challenge (doubt) this?  
 Oh, will the Fon deceive us?  
 Though wildly courageous, courage deserted them  
 The Fon are furious, but courage deserted them  
 The courageous encourages others to be furious  
 It is a war from which you must not run,  
 Will the Fon deceive us  
 Oh, will the Fon deceive us?  
 Is it the goat that caused the ram's death?

*Woyiyee, ahomeku nyo wu*  
*Wobe gbotsue*  
*Do ku ne agbo hee*  
*Woyiyee, ahome nyo nuto be yiyee*  
*Ale mawo?*  
*Negble, ahome nyo nuto be yiyee*  
*Ale mawo?*  
*Migo mano afea?*  
*Gbe mado kitia,*  
*Afe mado kiti*  
*Fowo lafia da*  
*'Ho mashi gboe*  
*Fowo lable mio*

Actually, it is better to die in war  
 They say it's the he-goat  
 That caused the ram's death  
 Actually, to die in war is good, really  
 What shall I do?  
 At worse, to die in war is good, really  
 What shall I do?  
 To allow me to stay at home?  
 If there is no peace in the bush (on the battlefield),  
 There will be no peace at home  
 The Fon will be furious  
 It is a war from which you must not run  
 Will the Fon deceive us?

The song above entails symbolism, metaphor, and allusions. First, the song underscores the fact that experience is a better teacher by the proverb “you do not doubt the news about the crocodile’s stomachache if it is reported by someone who lives in (or has much experience with) the river.” The Ewe are not just close kin to the Fon, but also relied on them for spiritual assistance and collaborations in war and other situations. In the past (and to some extent, today) Ewe often visit Dahome<sup>788</sup> (Fonland, and ancestral home of the Ewe) for spiritual revitalization, uplift, and military ritual ‘upgrading’ (in the case of their war leaders).<sup>789</sup> The song, therefore, alludes to the confidence the army had in their leaders and the Fon allies. “We cannot doubt any strategic report by the Fon or our leaders who have been fortified by them. We would disappoint them if we did not pay heed to their report (of imminence of war on us) and be courageous enough to take on our enemy” (it should be noted that in Ewe history, Fon, one of the closest Ewe kindred, are cast both as enemies and friends; see chapter 6). In Ewe culture, the goat is often associated with daringness and persistence, while the ram/sheep symbolizes dullness,

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<sup>788</sup> Dahomey is now the Republic of Benin.

<sup>789</sup> Kinship ties, spiritual, and military collaborations notwithstanding, the Ewe and the Fon have clashed on many political grounds and have fought against each other on some occasions in their long history. See, for example Locke (1978, 1992), Fiagbedzi (1977), Mamattah (1976)

peace, and calmness. Hence, the song alludes to those characteristics by stating that “if our enemies (goat) are daring and persistent, we cannot be the ram/sheep and just be inactive, sit down in the name of peace, and allow the enemy to take our land. After all, it is heroic to die in battle; and if there were no peace on the battleground, there would be no peace at home. So, if we decide to play the peace card by sitting at home while our enemies raid our sovereignty, we would not only lose our land but would have disappointed our leaders and our allies,” the composer emphasizes.

Furthermore, the song underscores a complex awareness of the relationship between events in the larger territory surrounding a village and the village itself. It states in lines 17 to 20: *Ale mawo; migo mano afea? Gbe mado kitia, afe mado kiti* (what shall I do; to allow me to stay at home? If there is no peace at the battlefield, there will be no peace at home). In writing on *atsiagbekor*, a genre in which the above song is used, David Locke rightly indicates that the statement could be an argument between what he calls “isolationist” on one hand and “internationalist” on the other.<sup>790</sup> In other words, there were those Ewe who wished to ignore any imminent trouble that threatens the state from afar and coiled inwardly and cowardly to the community. On the other hand, there were those who believed that the security of one small community is connected with the security of the bigger state. The latter group urges that the threat be faced and dealt with from afar (nipped in the bud) before it escalates.

Also, cohesiveness and coordination is vital in any military institution and strategy. The *atsiagbeko* song below emphasizes the cohesive network between the divisions and the effect of working together as one community.

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<sup>790</sup> See Locke (1978: 104)

**Song 60: To Ya Woe***Agbeko-Hatsiatsia* (Text in Ewe and Fon)*To ya woe tovi lado xo ha**To ya woe miawo lado xoe**To ya woe, du ya woe**To ya woe, miawoe lado xoe**Hoya eho yo**To ya woe, miawo lado xoe***Literal translation**

In this circle, our people are the oldest/mightiest.

In this circle, we are the oldest/greatest

In this circle, in this community

In this arena, we are the oldest/mightiest

We fall (lose) together; we win together

In this state, we are the oldest/mightiest

“We are one strong, cohesive society which works together for success. It is *we/us* but not *me/I* or *you*. We can only succeed if we work as a group. When we fall, let’s fall together and when we win, let’s win as a community,” as explained by Afeto Agudzemega of Dzogadze and Fevlo of Dzodze. This song underscores not only Ewe community spirit and war tactics, but also largely reflects African societies’ community and social cooperation.<sup>791</sup>

**5.4 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

In this chapter I have tried to chart the profile of political life in the traditional setting of Ewe in Ghana. Among other things, I have also attempted to point out, both institutionally and conceptually, what may be regarded as the democratic features of the indigenous political life of the Ewe, and how musicians and musical practice have helped in propagating and documenting these bodies of indigenous knowledge for younger generations. In summary, I wish to emphasize certain points. Traditionally, Ewe political rulers hail from royal lineages and trace their ancestry through a patrilineal descent (barring a few exceptions where the right of ascendance to a throne has been extended to males of matrilineal descent). An Ewe king or chief is, traditionally, chosen by kingmakers from a pool of eligible candidates. By the mandate of the

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<sup>791</sup> See Gorlin (2000)

people's political will and power, kingmakers exercise their judiciousness and wisdom in their selection. This process, in my opinion, is one of the indigenous democratic principles.

An Ewe king or chief is both the politico-military head and religious head. The stool (throne) he occupies, which is the symbol of his political power, is believed to be an ancestral stool. This partly accounts for the spiritual or sacred aspect of the throne. This belief is the source of the great dignity, respect, and veneration he is always accorded. The taboos relating to his conduct and mannerisms are all meant to remind him, his subjects, and others of the secrecy and sanctity of the position he occupies. From the preceding song texts and discussions, in the process of choosing a ruler, it is incumbent on the electors to consider the wishes of the people to whom the elected person would be presented, who have to accept him as their ruler, and whom he would rule. Consequently, insofar as the citizens have a say in the suitability of the individual chosen to rule them, it can be surmised that the traditional Ewe political system provides for the people to participate in choosing their rulers (even if the action is taken by few people, namely, the kingmakers). This in my view is a sign and act of participatory democracy.

Another democratic tenet within the indigenous political knowledge body that musicians have documented and/or commented on is consensus building. In Ewe society consensus formation operates at all political levels. Although the king holds the central position, his power is severely limited and he cannot embark on any action without the consent of the people. The constitutional "document" here is the orally established contract—injunctions—between the king and his subjects during the installation process. By the injunctions, the king has to respect the wishes of the people and he has to rule in accordance with their will. The people have the moral right to remove a bad ruler or have him removed by those who elected him. The will of the people is, therefore, politically effective. The method of arriving at decisions, reflecting respect

for the individual, is that of consultation and consensus, freedom of expression, and openness of deliberation at public meetings and assemblies. These practices are important elements of the democratic principles. Irrespective of social status, every citizen, male or female, has the right and freedom to participate in politics in one way or another and to contribute to consensus formation. Musicians often use the medium of songs to propagate and urge citizens to play active roles in politics. Certainly, consensus is one of the features of the decision-making process in the traditional Ewe political practice. The values of equality, reciprocity, respect for others, and mutual recognition are implemented through consensus formation. It seems appropriate, therefore, to assert that the principle of popular government, though not that of popular sovereignty, is firmly established in the Ewe tradition.

The chapter also suggests that the distribution of the Ewe population's settlements upon their arrival at their present location was informed by their past military expediency—a model established for purposes of security. The three divisional politico-military distribution units later became absolute political units in absence of frequent wars. The three main military wings—Right Wing, Central Wing, and Left Wing—are now the largest political divisions that fall directly below *Awomefia* or *Fiaga* (the King). Below these three divisions are the paramount and sub-chiefs of the various towns, villages and lineage and family heads. The indigenous Ewe political hierarchy, therefore, follows from the family head (*fometato/fomemetsitsi*) at the bottom to the king (*Awomefia/Fiaga*) at the top.

In the middle of all this political theater is the musician and his/her multiple intellectual and artistic skills. The Ewe musician, armed with his/her products, serves as one of the regular, most reliable and accessible media through which all the policies are disseminated. In this traditionally pre-literate society, musicians and their products serve as the repository of much of

Ewe indigenous political processes, principles, and publicity and/or agitprop machinery. I conclude therefore that Ewe indigenous principles of “democracy” are enshrined in Ewe music and musical practice. Also, the Ewe master drummer plays as much and important political and judicial roles as do other indigenous political functionaries, including *tsiami*.

We cannot lose sight of the fact that musicians, by nature, sometimes base their compositions on their creative imaginations, thereby not always “documenting” what happens, but rather creating models from their “fantasies.” They may also use their creative and imaginative skills to set standards by which the society may strive to live. Nevertheless, much of what they produce—either by documenting and/or commenting on reality or by mere imagination—contributes tremendously to understanding the indigenous knowledge system and values of an oral society. This is because even the wildest imaginative fantasies of a composer are based on or informed by his/her experiences in real life, for, every imagination has some amount of reality. Indigenous musicological contributions to unraveling, documenting, and transmitting the indigenous knowledge systems of pre-literate societies are therefore as relevant as the volumes of literary works to a literate society. However, it is only when we take a closer look at the indigenous musical products and practices from indigenous theoretical perspective, frameworks, holistic indigenous methodological approaches that we may be able to discover the quantity, quality, and depth of information they contain.

In this chapter, song text and proverbs have helped shed light on the fact that never is a chief imposed on an Ewe community, a fact of which contemporary African politicians, the self-imposed military rulers, and other aspiring political candidates of Africa today must take note of. Also, because of the structured, established, and acknowledged method of choosing the king or chief—the highest political authority in a village, town, or state—questions of political

legitimacy rarely arise in the traditional Ewe political practice. This is yet another lesson for modern African politicians. I have no doubt that many other African societies have musical and other artistic forms that contain much of their political tenets.

The indigenous knowledge and values must be exhaustively and critically researched, analyzed, and sifted out in a sophisticated manner. Those ideas that seem to be unclear and fuzzy, but that can nonetheless be considered worthwhile, must be explored, refined, and given a modern translation. The political landscape of Africa would surely improve if only our modern politicians would take some time to listen to and digest the indigenous knowledge and values embedded in some of their traditional artistic products one at a time. As suggested elsewhere by earlier scholars,<sup>792</sup> what we need to focus on, in our quest for modern democracy and political stability, is to find and tap indigenous ways and means, including musical practice, to revitalize the autochthonous democratic elements, incorporate them into our modern political institutions and constitutions, and harmonize them with those inherited from foreign cultures. With prudence, common sense, imagination, creative spirit, and a sense of history, we would be able to utilize indigenous political knowledge and viable democratic forms in modern political settings. It is important that we integrate these indigenous knowledge systems, holistic methodological approaches, and techniques into our modern educational policies, curricula, and processes so as to insure that younger generations and others that would follow may see, understand, appreciate, and be guided by these values in their quest for modern nation-state political power.

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<sup>792</sup> See World Bank. *Findings*. Special Issue, African Regional Studies Program. Washington, D.C., September 1993, p. 1.; Oyugi, W. O and A. Gitonga, eds. 1987. *Democratic Theory and Practice in Africa*. Nairobi, Kenya: Heinemann, and Gyekye (1996, 1997)

## 6.0 MILITARY KNOWLEDGE AND CULTURE

### 6.1 MUSIC AND MILITARISM

*Ayisu fo nu mefoa 'ziza le kome o*  
(A hawk may whisk away many things but never a fairy in an anthill)

According to historical documents and oral accounts, the Ewe have been involved in many wars since 1650.<sup>793</sup> In the latter part of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the Ewe battled both their neighbors and European invaders. In these wars, musicians and their products were used and relied upon heavily. This chapter focuses on the role and practices of musicians in Ewe military culture. Contents include discussion of songs and other musical activities related to general military activities as well as specific historical and spiritual events associated with Ewe military.

The presence of many music and dance genres associated with war and military culture among Ewe attests to their war-like past. Ewe military dance-music includes (but is not limited to) *atamga*, *adabatram*, *tu*, *dum-kalevu*, *zagada*, *atripkui*, *kpegisu*, *gadzo*, *adzohu/adzogbo*,<sup>794</sup> and *atsiagbekor*.<sup>795</sup> Some of the dances are performed before war, to prepare for war, review war

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<sup>793</sup> See for example Ward (1948), Chapman (1950), Fiawo (1959), Agbodeka (1965, 1997), Reindorf (1966), Amoaku (1975), Mamattah (1976), Fiagbedzi (1977), Locke (1978, 1992), Amenumey (1986, 1989), Younge (1992), Bluwey (2000), and Gorlin (2000).

<sup>794</sup> Also refers to a deity associated with war where virgins of both sexes served as medium of communication between the priest and the spirit of the deity of *adzogbo/adzohu*. See Locke and Agbeli (1980: 32), and also Gorlin (2000: 35)

<sup>795</sup> See Amoaku (1975), Fiagbedzi (1977), Locke (1978), Younge (1992), Badu (1992, 2002), Amegago (2000), and Agawu (1995)

strategies, and invoke the ancestral spirits and gods for protection. Others are performed after war, to celebrate victory, mourn defeat and loss of lives and property, and to thank the spirits. Yet other dances were performed during war, on the battlefield and at home, to communicate, keep morale and emotions of both the soldiers and the community high and in some cases, frighten the enemy. For example, one of the popular Ewe war dance-musical genres, the *atsiagbekor*, includes dance movements and drum patterns (*vugbewo*), replete with war motifs. “The original function of *atsiagbeko* was the dramatic reenactment of battle scenes and/or the kindling of war-like enthusiasm in its participants,” wrote David Locke, whose research focused on *atsiagbeko*. Indeed most (if not all) *atsiagbeko* songs have war themes including bravery, courage, loyalty, death, cowardice, sorrow, and invincibility.

In their songs, drum patterns and dance steps, Ewe musicians recount history, describe scenes of battles fought, key actors in specific wars and battles, preparatory events and aftermath of battles as well as codify the names and deeds of powerful rulers and warriors. They also cite names of enemies and places where battles were fought. George Dor indicates that: “The name of *Fia Tenge* (King Tenge), for example, dominates Anlo war songs (*kalehawo*). The deeds of this celebrated Anlo warlord and king are recalled in songs...”<sup>796</sup> (See section 6.3.4. below for details on Fia Tenge).

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<sup>796</sup> Dor (2000: 205)

### 6.1.1 Ewe Musicians, Musical Resources, and Military Culture

*“Nyonu kpo ga medoa awavu/agblovu o; towoe nye atsibla”*  
(A rich woman does not establish a war musical genre; yours is socio-recreational genre)

In traditional Ewe society, the roles and duties of the musician in times of war are crucial and delicate. According to my discussants, although most musicians are warriors, not all musicians play all instruments during war.<sup>797</sup> That is, some musicians are specifically designated to play special roles and instruments during times of war. Such is the case among the Ewe. In indigenous Ewe culture, warrior musicians or musicians who played sacred instruments associated with the military were given special musico-military training and were also spiritually fortified. This was necessary since some military musical instruments were not only sacred but were considered war gods in their own rights. According to Kodzo Gavua, these instruments, which were mostly drums and horns and usually were many decades (if not centuries) old, were spiritually fortified and “initiated in ancient times for military and political purposes.”<sup>798</sup>

According to Tsiamiga Agbedoza,<sup>799</sup> *awavuwu* (war drums) are believed to have powerful military spirits derived from the souls of war captives, prisoners, and enemies killed in previous wars. Often draped around these instruments as spiritual embodiments and military or war decorations and “prizes” are objects believed to be human skulls, bones (limbs), and other war trophies usually wrapped in white or brown pieces of cloth or plant fiber. Not only are successes in war attributed to these instruments and their sacred and military-spiritual

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<sup>797</sup> Interview with Tsiamiga S. Agbedoza and Kodzo Ashiabi (see appendix E)

<sup>798</sup> See Gavua (2000: 90)

<sup>799</sup> Tsiamiga S. Agbedoza is the present main linguist of Togbi Kodzo Deh, King of Peki State

decorations, but they also symbolize the military prowess of the state, people, and warriors.<sup>800</sup> According to my investigations, the spiritual and military power and purpose of these sacred instruments necessitates they are kept in shrines or warrior king's palaces. During war and/or other serious and important occasions, they are played by designated warrior musicians (usually with very strong personal gods) or by those chosen by the spirits of the instruments.<sup>801</sup>

Besides their sacredness, the unique and precise drum patterns and rhythms provide specific signals and transmit important messages so crucial that only well-trained and initiated warrior musicians are allowed to play these roles. One of the principal roles of the musician and the entire dance-drumming culture and repertoire is to emotionally and spiritually prepare the human community and the spirit world (supernatural and ancestral spirits) for battle. In fact, Kobla Ladzekpo indicates that:

The repertoire of *atrikpui* dance-drumming is replete with centuries of valued Anlo Ewe war-fighting tactics and military codes of honor. Through the text, texture and choreography of *atrikpui*, the military valor and skill (prowess) of ancestral heroes are invoked in exhorting their descendants to emulate.<sup>802</sup>

Also, through the text, texture, and choreography of these war dance-drumming genres (for instance *atamga/atsiagbeko*,<sup>803</sup>), warriors are instilled with necessary physical training and skills as well as psychological preparedness for war. Writing about *atsiagbeko*, David Locke transliterates his 1976 research fieldwork as follows:

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<sup>800</sup> Interview with Tsiamiga S. Agbedozza (Interview: See appendix E). See also Amoaku (1975), Agawu (1995), and Bluwey (2000).

<sup>801</sup> Personal communication with my discussants including interviews with Bokor Kumedzro, Togbi Dey, Tsiamiga Agbedozza, Mr. C. K. Kudjordjie, Togbi Lamadeku (see appendix E for details). See also Amoaku (1975), Mamattah (1976), Agawu (1995), Bluwey (2000)

<sup>802</sup> Ladzekpo, [www.cnmt.berkeley.edu/~ladzekpo/Intro.html](http://www.cnmt.berkeley.edu/~ladzekpo/Intro.html). Accessed 03/04/2004.

<sup>803</sup> *Atamga* means "great oath and/or sacred taboo," depending on the usage. The name is derived from the highest oath of loyalty and patriotism among the Ewe. It is also a generic name for an older war dance-drumming genre, which later became known as *agbeko* meaning "life is safe or life is clear." *Agbeko* is also called *atsiagbekor* with the prefix *atsia* (lit. style/decoration) being a stylized dance form that was later added to *agbeko*. See Fiagbedzi (1977, 1997), Locke (1978), Chernoff (1979), Younge (1992), and Badu (1992)

According to Kpogo Ladzekpo of Anyako, in the former times when the dance was really a war dance it was known as *Atamuga*, which means the great oath. (Interview with Kpodo Ladzekpo, May 7 and 8, 1976.) It is said that before going to battle the warriors would gather with the war leaders at the stool house and swear an oath to the ancestors on the sacred sword that they would obey their leaders and fight bravely for their community. The oath swearing was a serious and emotional occasion, an intergral part of the preparation for battle. The fact that the dance was given the name *Atamuga* indicates the important role it had in customs associated with war and the seriousness with which the Anlo approached the dance.<sup>804</sup>

Most importantly, however, is the readiness for reconciling themselves (the warriors) with breaking the sacred taboo (i.e., taking human life) before going into battle as indicated in some of the songs. For as Locke states, “it is in the song texts that the meaning of *atsiagbeko* is most clearly expressed. As befits the original function of *atsiagbeko*, the song texts largely concern circumstances of military conflict and stress such themes as courage, loyalty, invisibility, death cowardice and sorrow.”<sup>805</sup> The following is one such song in which the warriors swore to fight.

**Song 61: *Atamga***

*Atamga/Atrikpui* (Text in Ewe: Anlo dialect)

**Literal translation**

*Atamga ya de mie gbloe dzro*

The great oath we have sworn (in vain)

*Ego koe miedo*

We have just clashed (on the battlefield)

*Asi mado glae loo.*

We cannot stand and stare (aloof)

*Atamgayia de mie gbloe be*

The great oath we have sworn that

*Dzadzalidza kaka*

So long as the enemy persists

*Asi mado glae hee*

We shall not stand aloof (we would fight)

The song reiterates the essence of swearing the great oath (*atamga*). Kodzo Agbalekpor, one of the oldest *atrikpui* dancers (*atrilola*) of Dzodze, and Kila Fiebor, the leader of Anlo Afiadenyigba *gadzo* war dance, both reiterate the deeper meaning of the song in separate interviews. Impersonating a warrior during an interview, Kodzo Agbalekpor sang the above song and explained: Although they (the warriors) have sworn not to take human life, death and

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<sup>804</sup> Locke (1978: 45-46)

<sup>805</sup> Locke (1978: 85)

bloodshed may not be avoided under those (war) circumstances. The great oath they have sworn but were about to break was due to the circumstance in which they found themselves. “We cannot and must not stand and stare while the enemy attacks us. So long as the enemy persists, we shall not stand aloof but continue to defend our sovereignty even to death (until the enemy gives up). That is what the song emphasizes,” he added.<sup>806</sup> *Atamga* (Great Oath) as used in the above song is one of the dance-drumming repertoires of the military culture. Its drums, songs, dance, and general texture draw directly from and depict valued Ewe military strategies, remarkable and memorable operations and feats, and the prowess of traditional heroes in dramatic and inspirational dance-drumming episodes. Besides the general responsibilities outlined above, *atamga*’s institutional roles in those days were preparing warriors for battle and debriefing them for a smooth transition into normal life after battle.

*Gadzo* is yet another Ewe war dance-music genre. *Gadzo* is associated with training, initiating, and preparing men for battle as well as debriefing them to “normal life” after war. Hence, it is traditionally performed before and after war. The following song comments on the unspoken realities of *gadzo* training, including initiation as a warrior and preparation for war.

**Song 62: *Etu Akpo Bete Akpo***

***Gadzo*** (Text in Fon and Ewe)

*Etu akpo bete akpo*

*Mieyi gadzo do ge*

*Enu dzo*

*Etonye ku vi*

*Nonye ku vi*

*Mieyi gadzo do ge*

*Enu dzo*

*'Mewo be yewo malo o*

*Tovi do dea 'ho me*

**Literal Translation**

My body (power) defies guns and swords.

We went training in *gadzo* (war dance)

And (mysterious) things happened

Father was concerned

Mother is concerned

We went training in *gadzo*

And (mysterious) things happened

The people say they would not agree (not allow)

Brethren to perish in war

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<sup>806</sup> Personal communication with Kodzo Buku Agbalekpor (see appendix E). Kodzo Agbalekpor (the late maternal uncle of the author) was one of the oldest *atrikpui* war dancers in Dzodze at the time of the interview in 2005. He passed away in 2006 after a short illness.

*Yewo malo*  
*Tovi do dea 'ho me*  
*Etonye ku vi*  
*Nonye ku vi*  
*Mieyi gadzo do ge*  
*Enu dzo*

The people say they would not agree (not allow)  
Brethren to perish in war  
Father was concerned  
Mother is concerned  
We went training in *gadzo*  
And (mysterious) things happened

Using the above song as an example, Kila Fiebor explains that full *gadzo* performance is frenzied, potentially dangerous, and frightening. When young men learned *gadzo* and were initiated, they experienced intense spiritual and physical exercises, and were transformed tremendously. Their test performance at home drew criticism from those frightened by what they saw. The composer here speaks for the newly initiated warriors: “If we are in the spirit of *akpo*,<sup>807</sup> our bodies defy gun shots and effects of swords. Though our relatives are concerned about our safety, we are not scared. The process of learning *gadzo* has transformed us into adults and warriors. Woe unto those enemies that may meet us in war.”

The use of, reliance on, and belief in spiritual power and potency in preventing casualties and ensuring victory is predominant among the Ewe. One of the most common themes in Ewe war songs is the invisibility of the warriors (i.e., the army) in combat. “Time and again singers [warriors] boast of their courage and emphasize that they cannot be defeated in war,”<sup>808</sup> David Locke observes. He also adds that at least thirty of sixty-six *atsiagbeko* songs collected during his fieldwork contain this theme of courage/invisibility. The predominance of this theme is as a result of the spiritual preparatory rituals and fortification the warriors experience and their belief in the efficacy of their spiritual power and its superior potency over the enemy. The expression of spiritual power and the theme of invisibility are neither limited to *atsiagbeko* nor to Anlo Ewe war songs. Such expressions abound in many Ewe military musical genres, including *adabatram*,

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<sup>807</sup> *Akpo* is spirit believed to have the power that protects the body from gunshot, spear, and sword.

<sup>808</sup> Locke (1978: 89)

a Wedome (Northern Ewe) spiritual and politico-military genre. Following are two examples of *adabatram* songs. The first warns the enemy combatant that his weak spiritual power, *dzo/dzoka* (juju), will deceive him and eventually he will be killed. The second expresses the capture and execution of young inexperienced warriors—enemy combatants.

**Song 63: *Dzo Ble Ame***

*Adabatram* (Text in Ewedome dialect)

*Dzo ble ame*

*Ame kue*

*Dzo ble ame*

*Ekue woe do*

*Dzo ble ame*

*Ame kue*

*Dzo ble ame*

*Ame ku woe do*

**Literal Translation**

Personal god (juju spiritual power) deceives

Person (man/the individual) is dead

Personal god (juju spiritual power) deceives

It is time for you to die

Personal god (juju spiritual power) deceives

Person (man/the individual) is dead

Personal god (Juju spiritual power) deceives

It is time for man to die

**Song 64: *Yowo Si Dexle***

*Adabatram* (Text in Ewe: Ewedome dialect)

*Yowe si dexle*

*Adabatram towe*

*Si dexle de gbe*

*Yowe wu ame de*

*Adabatram towe*

*Wu ame nyui de gbe*

**Literal Translation**

They have harvested premature palm nuts

*Adabatram* group members (warriors)

Have harvested premature palm nuts today

They have killed someone

*Adabatram* group members (warriors)

Have killed a key person today

The warriors boast of the capture of an enemy fighter whom they saw as a military novice, unprepared or too weak to fight them. They use “*si dexle*” (harvest premature nut) as a metaphor to express the weakness, capture and execution of their enemy combatant.

### 6.1.2 *Dzogbeku*: Pride, Pretence, Qualm, and the Ultimate Price

*“Kale menoa afe tsia ade o; adzadza belebele/velele”*

(A valiant does not sit in the comfort of his home and brag about his hunting/warrior prowess; he must be soaked in the wet morning dew)

This section examines the feelings of Ewe warriors about the consequences of war. Using evidence from song texts, discussion will focus on warriors’ pride, pretense, and qualm regarding the ultimate price in battle—death—and other uncertainties of war. Obviously, one of the serious consequences of war is death; however, researchers have shown that warriors sometimes take pride and honor (or pretend to) in dying at the battlefield. In some instances, warriors express their preference for dying in action on the battleground to dying from sickness. *Dzogbeku menyenukpe o* (dying in the wilderness/battle is not a shame) and *ahomeku/kaleku dewo vivina* (war/heroic death is sweet) are classic examples of such expressions among Ewe warriors. Such heroic feelings are particularly common among Ewe warriors as all the present study’s discussants indicate using song texts as one of their evidences. In an interview, C. K. Kudjordjie asserts that “*Eweawo mevoa ava me ku o. Tso blema ke ko la, enyo ne Ewevi be yeaku avameku, yi ke wogayona be dzogbeku alo kaleku, tso wu be yeaku de doba dzi*”<sup>809</sup> (The Ewe do not fear war death. Since ancient time, it is better for an Ewe to die a war death, which is also called a death in the wilderness or a brave death, than to die in sick bed). This belief partly underpins the Ewe concept of “good” and “bad” death.<sup>810</sup> In his field research, C. M. K. Mamattah also wrote: “In the past every true son of Anlo, not excepting some brave female warriors, preferred to die in active service to the motherland than to taste death normally at home. Death on the battlefield

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<sup>809</sup> Interview with Afetor C. K. Kudjordjie, an Ewe musician, and historian (Interview: 06/18/07).

<sup>810</sup> Under the Ewe concept of death and eternity, this type of death is considered a “good” death. See Chapter 3 for further discussion of the Ewe ontological concept of death, life, and eternity.

was more honourable and preferred to death at home.”<sup>811</sup> The popular Anlo Ewe saying *Anlovi mesina ku o* (An Anlo Ewe child does not fear death) referring specifically to death in war reiterates this assertion. The following is a *gadzo* song expressing the same belief. It is used either as an introductory warriors’ invocation or as an interlude between two dance pieces.

**Song 65: Dzogbeku Menye Nkpe O**

**Gadzo** (Text in Ewe: Anlo dialect)

//:Dzogbeku menye nkpe o de

Ahomeku menye nkpe o://

Miawoe nye Anloawo

Miatogbuiwo tso Afrika

Kekea ’meyibonyigba fe dziehe ke

Avae miewo na,

Kaledo koe miewona.

’Va netso dzi ha

’Va netso ’nyi ha

Miawo koe le wo ge

Anlo kotsieklololo

Naketsi deka no dzo me bi nu.

Ame akpe wodu he

Du no ’me

Mase ’me nya o hee, du(za) fitikoli

Mebe kaleku menye nkpe o de

Avameku menye nkpe o

Deavaku menye nkpe o de

Dzogbeku menye nkpe o de

**Literal translation**

Death on the battlefield is never a shame.

War death is never a shame(its heroic to die in war)

We are the Anlo Ewe

Our ancestors came from Africa<sup>812</sup>

As far as the northern part of the black land

War is what we do (we are warriors)

Bravery act (work) is what we do (Warriors we are)

War may come from heaven (top)

War may come from earth (down)

(It does not matter where the attack is from)

It’s only we shall do it (We shall fight it)

Anlo *kotsieklolo* (Anlo mysterious)

Single firewood in the fire cooks the meal

For thousands of people to eat

A state in which one lives

Without ever knowing her secrets, *zafitikoli*.

I say warrior’s death is never a shame.

War death is never a shame (its heroic to die in war)

Going to war to die is never a shame.

Death on the battlefield is never a shame

In general, the song may be considered a state military pledge, invocation, or anthem of the Anlo Ewe. The song text comprises some important state praise names and expressions—appellations, proverbs, and invocations—that outline qualities such as bravery, wisdom, and intelligence, as well as historical events. Anlo *kotsieklolo* (mysterious) is the state *ahanonko*

<sup>811</sup> Mamattah (1976: 239)

<sup>812</sup> Obviously, certain words and/or expressions in the song suggest that it is either a modified version of an older piece or it is a song composed after the Ewe encounter with the Europeans. For example the use of Afrika (Africa) and *ameyibonyigba* (black land) here suggests that the song was composed or modified after Anlo State has been established and the people have acquired those concepts of identity which they did not know or show before their settlement. The mention of “Afrika” shows their knowledge of the continent, which is a sign of European contact since, like many “Africans,” the Ewe had no concept of the term “Africa” before their contact with the West.

(praise/heroic name/appellation) and *naketsi deka no dzome bi nu ame akpe wo du* (literally: single log of firewood in the fire cooks the food for thousands of people to eat) is one of the state appellations usually recited or invoked together with the praise name. *Du no eme mase eme nya* (literally: a state in which one lives in without ever knowing her secrets) is yet another appellation sometimes used as part of the state appellation above and/or other times as a separate appellation to Anlo *godogolifii* (circumventing). On the other hand, *Du/za fitikoli* is an appellation for Anlo state (as *du*) and sometimes replaced with or likened to night (*za*) and all the unseen/secret and sacred things that happen at night. The composer draws on all these expressions to instill pride, bravery, and power in the warriors and in all citizens.

It should be noted that the entire appellation may be, and often is, recited together as: *Anlo kotsieklolo, Anlo godogolifii; naketsi deka no dzome bi nu ame akpe wo du; du no eme mase eme nya, du/za fitikoli!* (Anlo mysterious, Anlo circumventing; single log of firewood in the fire cooks the food for thousands of people to eat; a state in which one lives in without ever knowing her secrets; State/Night unseen, unknown). The song asserts the pride in, and sense of belonging to, a strong and unified state. The praise names and appellations are believed to originate in specific historical and cultural events.<sup>813</sup> For example, in separate communications during the current study's field research, Dartey Kumordzi and C. K. Dewornu confirmed the oral historical accounts associated with the praise names *Anlo godogolifii* and *Anlo kotsieklolo* and their appellation; *naketsi deka no dzome bi nu ame akpe wo du* as narrated by Kofi Anyidoho. His summary is as follows:

There was a war on Anlo in which the winning battle was fought single-handedly by one Anlo elder. The invading army, who were believed to be unused to dealing with such a large body of water as the Keta lagoon, found themselves stranded and wondering how to cross and attack the various island towns in the lagoon.

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<sup>813</sup> See Mamattah (1976), Anyidoho (1997: 129)

One Anlo elder showed up in a canoe and was compelled to ferry the army across the lagoon in batches. He yielded to their demands and began to make his several trips. He dumped each canoe load of enemy warriors in a deep part of the lagoon that had earlier been covered up with grass by a detachment of the Anlo army.<sup>814</sup>

Dewornu and Kumordzi added that, by his cleverness and bravery act, the alleged Anlo Ewe elder made history for the Anlo State and a great name for himself. The name has since been adopted and dubbed into the praise name and appellation of the state. So, *naketsi deka...* (a single log of firewood...) refers to the said elder (one person) and “...*no dzome bi nu ame akpe wo du*” (...in the fire cooks the food for thousands of people to eat) refers to the act of defeating (killing by drowning) the entire enemy battalion and saving the entire Anlo state from attack.<sup>815</sup>

Warriors’ expression of joy in combat is evident in some songs. As David Locke states, “Another way in which this most prominent theme of bravery is expressed is sheer exultation in the joy of combat.”<sup>816</sup> The following *atsiagbeko vutsotsoe* song provides such example.

**Song 66: *Mumuna***

*Atsiagbeko* (Text in Fon and Ewe)

*Mumuna*

*Soga mumuna nuto*

*Mumuna*

*Gakpa mumuna nuto*

**Literal translation**

Valiantly pleasant/sweet,

The war god/spirit is very pleasant/sweet

Valiantly pleasant/sweet

Putting on war belt/implement) is very satisfying

It should be noted that *mumuna* has different meanings in Ewe. It may mean intoxicating, stench, and/or disgusting; however, in Fon and *Yevegbe*,<sup>817</sup> it may mean valiantly sweet, satisfying, or pleasant. In the context of this song and war, the song expresses the satisfaction warriors derive from victory at war and their ability to defend their sovereignty against foreign

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<sup>814</sup> Anyidoho (1997: 129)

<sup>815</sup> Interviews with Mr. C.K. Dowornu and Prof. Datey-Kumodzie (see appendix E)

<sup>816</sup> Locke (1978: 92)

<sup>817</sup> See Chapter 2 for information on the relationship between Fon language, *Yeve* secrete language (*Yevegbe*) and Ewe language.

attack. The sentiment being expressed here by the composer then is that it is therefore “sweet and pleasant” for warriors to put on their war implements (arms and ammunition) and make war.

Among the Ewe, every male who qualifies for and has been accepted as a warrior is expected to swear an oath of allegiance, *du So nu* or *du za nu*, literally meaning “to partake in So’s spiritual meal” or “to partake in the night meal.” This “meal” is part of the ritual performed at the war gods’ shrines to fortify and prepare men spiritually for battle. Once one has taken this “meal” (oath), one may not be excused from going to war, barring serious ill health. My discussants indicate that sometimes men took the oath, yet refused to go to war. This might be because the uncertainties of battle discourage some men from going to war. Apart from that, sanctity of human life is the most cherished moral value among the Ewe and is enshrined as an essential component of a normal state of mental health. Although taking human life, including that of the enemy, is taboo in this culture, the belief is set aside in times of war, particularly at the battleground. The Ewe believe warfare has devastating consequences for both the victor and the vanquished. Loss of human life is one of the most severe consequences. Emotional disorder suffered by the warriors as a result of breaking the sacred taboo is another critical consequence. Due to these unfortunate realities, some warriors reluctantly give up and refuse to fight. Ewe society, however, condemns cowardice and foolhardiness in everyday life, particularly during war. Both male and female musicians often used music to urge men to go to war to defend the land. One of the most effective means of convincing them was through songs and drum language. The following war songs record and remind the warriors as well as ordinary citizens about these values. They also reveal to generations that followed and others yet to come how their forebears survived.

**Song 67: *Emo De?****Atrikpui* (Text in Ewe: Anlo dialect)*//:Fika dzie Nyaxo (Togbi) to**Yi adzogbe; emo de?://**'Mekae dua 'va/So nu**Tso/he gbea 'va mayi?**Gbayiza/Ayisa woe be 'mo lae menyoo**'Mekae be mo le menyoo?**'Mekae du va/za nu**Tso/he gbea 'va mayi?**Emo lae nye yi!***Literal translation**

Where did Nyaxo (our warrior king) pass

To war; where is the way (the techniques)?

Who has partaken of war/*So*'s meal

(The spiritual concoction)

But refuses to go to war?

The cowards say the way is not good (safe)

Who says the way is not good (not safe)?

Who has taken the war/night meal<sup>818</sup>

But refused to go to battlefield?

This is the way (to fight is the way)

**Song 68: *Akonta Bo Wui Ga****Atsiagbeko* (Text in Fon and Ewe)*Akonta bo wui ga**Edada awuito de lia**Gbe so/aho made ee?**Afeto ade lia**Aho va ee**Awuito ade lia**Gbe so/aho made ee?**Aza (o ebo) wui gbe loo**Afeto ade lia**Aho va ee**Akonta bo wui ga**Edada awuito de lia**Gbe so/aho made ee?***Literal Translation**

Akonta, the great war leader

Is there any miserable/coward man

Who is refusing to go to war?

There was a homeowner (were citizens)

Then war came (who were attacked)

Is there any miserable/coward man

That refuses to go to war?

This is the day (today is the day for war)

There was a homeowner (were citizens)

Then war came (who were attacked)

Akonta, the great war chief

Is there any miserable/coward man

Who is refusing to go to war?

In the above songs, the composers wonder how and why the forebears (including Togbi Nyaxo Tameklo) fought gallantly while some men of their time are not willing. They caution those who have sworn the warrior's oath and partaken of the war god's meal (concoctions), but refuse to go to war. The warrior composers lament and ponder over the past while challenging their "men" to be men as their forebears. The first song (*atrikpu*) states: "What exactly did our forefathers do to have won all those wars for us? How dare you take the great oath and refuse to

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<sup>818</sup> *So*, is the god of thunder and lightning and is used here as the god of war. It should be noted that *So nu* (*So*'s meal), *za nu* (night meal), *'va nu* or *ho nu* (war meal) all refer to the same thing, a spiritual concoction/meal. Musicians use them interchangeably.

defend the land. Here is the way...you can't say it is not safe! Once you have taken part in *So's* meal, (sworn the oath and partaken of war spiritual meal), you've got to defend the land." The second song (*atsiagbeko*) calls upon a war commander, Akonta, to use his powers to get men to fight. The composers of both songs stress the need for men to accept their tasks by alluding to the Ewe saying *nyonu du ahia nu, megbea ahia gbo nono o* (literally a woman who enjoys the good fruits of courtship cannot refuse to stay with the date/suitor). In other words, "you cannot be a woman who feeds on a suitor but refuses to commit to the marriage," for Ewe culture frowns on cowards and opportunists. One cannot claim the glory of war without sacrificing for it.

Below is yet another *atsiagbeko vulolo* song mocking cowardly men in Ewe society.

**Song 69: *Du Xoa Gba***

*Atsiagbeko* (Text in Fon and Ewe)

//:Du xoa gba  
 Ne dada dokpo be  
 So tu mada  
 Emitso ne midzo  
 Du koa gba  
 Ne dada dokpo be  
 Aho mawo  
 Emitso ne midzo://  
 //:Woyi woe ee!  
 Emitso ne midzo://

**Literal Translation**

You ate so much (over fed)  
 But have failed and refusing/saying  
 You cannot fire *So's* gun (cannot fight)  
 Stand up and let's go (to war and fight)  
 You ate so much (over fed)  
 But have failed and refusing/saying  
 It's a war that cannot be fought (refusing to fight)  
 Get up and let's go (to war and fight)  
 There they go, cowards!  
 Get up and let's go (to war and fight)

"He is such a coward, so fond of comfortable life at home that he cannot fight in war," says the song. This song is a mockery to the cowards who are seen as not fit to be accorded manhood status and privileges in Ewe society. A person may be successful as a man in other spheres of life, but as an Ewe, if a man is not ready and courageous enough to go to war when there is the need (with the exception of those disqualified on moral and spiritual grounds), he is not a man in Ewe understanding. On occasions of war, one must not only be fully ready to show his manliness, but also face the consequences of one's actions. This responsibility is also

expressed in many allusive rhetorical statements, such as *amekae du So nu hegbe 'ho mayi* (who has eaten *So*'s meal and refuse to go to war)?<sup>819</sup> If one believes in and worships *So* (the God of Thunder and War), it is incumbent and imperative to accept his help while responding to his calls and meeting his demands. The *atsiagbeko hatsiatsia* song below reiterates similar sentiment.

**Song 70: Dzengo Do Tome**

*Atsiagbeko* (Text in Fon and Ewe)

*Dze ngo do tome*

*Manya wo ha?*

*Adza hanya yi hanya yi.*

*Sabla dzesue dze lifo me*

*Mizo belebele*

*Sodoto de made atsia ee*

*'Mekae du So nu*

*Magbe wa made(so made) ha ee?*

*Adza hanya yi hanya yi.*

*Sodoto de made atsia ee*

*Adza hanya yi hanya yi.*

**Literal Translation**

Led (first) in entering the dance arena,

But can't do anything?

Just trembling and trembling

It is death that is on the way

Walk cautiously

One on horse back never shows off

Who has taken *So*'s meal (war spiritual concoction)

And refuses to go to war (refuse to marry *So*/war)?

Just trembling and trembling

One on horse back never shows off

Just trembling and trembling

“At the sound of the warriors’ drums, you were the first to declare your readiness. But after taking the great oath you are overcome by fear, and endlessly trembling. But now that you have, or pretend to have, what it takes to go to war and have come face to face with its realities, you cannot retreat,” the song indicates. In explaining the knowledge, meaning and lessons embedded in these songs, Afeto Avemega of Dzogadze indicates that young warriors rarely concern themselves with the consequences of war until it is too late. He explains that “entering a war dancing ring or arena” is an analogy for going to war. The song describes a novice warrior who has hurriedly gone to war, but upon facing the realities of fierce battle, is overcome with fear and retreats. By the proverb *sodoto de made atsia o hee* (One on horse back does not show off), Afeto Avemega explains that the composer cautions that one should not do foolish things

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<sup>819</sup> The same statement could be expressed differently as: *amekae du aho nu magbe ho mayi* (who has eaten war meal but and refuse go to war); or *amekae du ava nu hegbe ava mayi* (who has eaten the battle food but refuses to go to the battlefield)?

nor be complacent in dangerous situations. While one might be the best horse rider (i.e., highly skillful, brave warrior, and spiritually fortified), nothing should be left for chance in matters of security and safety.

Using an Ewe proverb and an *adevu* song text quoted under subsection title 1.1.2 above, Tsiamiga Agbedeza illuminates the relevance of indigenous military knowledge and importance of songs and their deeper meanings in defense, security, and stability in traditional Ewe society. He explains the proverb/song like:

*Kale menoa afe tea so o; adzadza belebele/veleleve*  
(A valiant does not stay home and swear the god of thunder; he must be soaked in the wet morning dew)

Or expressed differently;

*Kale menoa afe tsia ade o; adzadza belebele/veleleve*  
(A valiant does not sit in the comfort of his home and bluff about his hunting/warrior prowess; he must be soaked in the wet morning dew)

This is a direct message through music to the warriors, a message that challenges individuals and groups of men to act, stand up to their duty, show their manliness, and defend their motherland. The song insinuates, “if one is really a valiant, it is at the battlefield that one displays it and not mere talks at home.” It is easy for people, especially the young with warlike passions, to misconstrue the realities of war, adds Tsiamiga Agbedeza<sup>820</sup> Thus, the composer of the song who is also a warrior prepares the community’s emotional state of mind and psychologically entreats warriors to get ready; “this is an essential part of pre-war rituals,” he says. The exposure to pre-war rituals helps military commanders and elders to accurately discern those men capable of withstanding war. During these pre-war and pre-battlefield rituals and ceremonies, songs are sung with appropriate warrior and battlefield chants and texts. These songs invoke various

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<sup>820</sup> Conversation with Tsiamiga S. Agbedeza (05/15/07, Peki, Ghana)

feelings and elevate the warriors to different states of mind, thereby helping the commanders identify cowards and the “never say die.”

The *atrikpui* song below, typically sung before war, attests to the above assertion while underscoring additional values.

**Song 71: Moxenu Bla Agbadza**

*Atrikpui* (Text in Ewe: Anlo dialect)

*Maxenu (Moxenu) bla agbadza*  
*To ka mee loa le yedo ee*

*Maxenu (Moxenu) bla agbadza*  
*Gbe ka dzie kua wum le*  
*Mido ame de dumegawo gbo*

*Newoa tso tu kple kpe*  
*Ne woawu lo nam loo*  
*Mido ame de 'zagugawo gbo*

*Newoa fo awayivuo*

*Newoa si awa nam loo*  
*Maxenu bla agbadza*  
*To ka mee loa le yedo ee*  
*Maxenu bla agbadza*  
*Gbe ka dzie kua wum le*

**Literal translation**

Maxenu has put on his war implements (to fight)  
In which river would the crocodile attack me  
(Where is the next possible battlefield)?  
Moxenu (Moxenu) has put on his war implements  
Where would death kill me?  
Send people to the rulers/elders of the land  
(Petition the king and his council of elders)  
So they'll take arms and ammunition (prepare)  
So they'll kill the crocodile (defeat the enemy)  
Send people to the master drummers  
(Petition the master musicians)  
So they'll sound the war drums  
(Announce war and summon the warriors)  
So they'll defeat the war for me (defeat the enemy)  
Maxenu has put on his war implements  
In which river would the crocodile attack me  
Maxenu has put on his war implements  
Where would death kill me?<sup>821</sup>

This is an announcement, a declaration, and a call to duty. The musician intends to send a clear message: their enemies have a hidden agenda, a clandestine motive. He informs all stake holders to get ready to act immediately, suggesting they take the battle to the enemy before the enemy attacks them at home. He reiterates; “what use is it to be a man if you are not ready to

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<sup>821</sup> Maxenu (also called Moxenu) is a name of a person, probably one of the Ewe historic warriors (Interview with Killa S. Fiebor: see appendix E). The use of river and crocodile in this song is metaphorical. The ‘crocodile’ sometimes refers to the Whiteman and the ‘river’ refers to the sea. One oral explanation of this historical element in this song asserts that because during the slave trade, the traders normally come aboard ships on the Atlantic Ocean to attack and capture or buy the people into slavery, they are likened to the crocodile that lives in water and attacks people on land. Another source likened it to the Sagbadre (swallow) war between the Anlo state and the Dutch around 1780.

defend your motherland in times like this? Well, if strong men are reluctant to face realities, weaker ones are ready. Where are the brave warriors?” The musician continues, “Let us petition the leaders of this land so that action is taken now! ‘Weak/ordinary’ men are ready; they have put on their war implements and wherever the attack would come from, they would face it.”

“The composer of this song, like in many other songs, indirectly speaks to both the unwilling men and the powers that be (the rulers of the land),”<sup>822</sup> explains Asomo Seku in an interview. As a composer-poet, Asomo asks rhetorically; “can strong men stand and stir while weak and ‘uncertified warriors’ humiliate them through songs? Not among us [Ewe],” he answered. “For it is even more painful and unbearable for the Ewe to be insulted through music than to be verbally abused. This is because the song lives on for generations; so does the insult,” he added.<sup>823</sup> According to Asomo, a popular Anlo Ewe composer-poet and lead singer, musical activity is a reliable means of documentation that lives for posterity. Every Ewe would avoid being negatively portrayed in song. As the composer of the *atrikpui* war song below portrays. “I would rather fight, die in war and be buried in white calico than to be humiliated in song.” It is a common practice to portray people in song (positively and negatively) in Ewe and many other indigenous African societies. It is an effective tool, a reliable corrective measure, and serves as both punishment and reward.<sup>824</sup>

While some “qualified” men often refuse to go or are not interested in going to war, some “unqualified” ones struggle to get permission to fight. Though traditionally, every male in the community is a potential and/or an eligible warrior and is expected to go to war, restrictions exist. Any male whose moral, social, and spiritual character is questionable is not qualified to be

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<sup>822</sup> Asomo Seku (see appendix E)

<sup>823</sup> Ibid

<sup>824</sup> See Locke (1978, 1992), Avorgbedor (1994, 2001a, 2001b), Agawu (1995, 2007), Dor (2001)

a warrior. Traditionally, women do not go to war among the Ewe; however, women in general and mothers in particular have the right and judgment to determine whether a man is qualified for and fit to go to war. According to this researcher's discussants, including C. K. Kudjordjie, this judgment is often based on biological, physical, emotional, psychological, and socio-moral factors. Abnormalities at birth and other questionable circumstances surrounding the individual's rite of passage at different points in his life may be used as one of the selection criteria. For example, a boy who cries excessively and uncontrollably during his circumcision and/or discharges too much blood in the process may be prevented from going to war by his mother or any elderly woman in either family line. Women, especially mothers, understand those signs and can tell from an early age whether a boy would not be a warrior or could be easily killed in war. As discussed earlier, circumcision is not only an important rite of passage and criterion of manhood in Ewe conception, but also a prerequisite for qualifying as a future warrior (see chapter two). Unless circumcized, an Ewe male is not considered a "man," would not be a warrior, and may never be accorded all the privileges and respects of a man. Able-bodied men who have experienced the necessary rites of passage and are seen to be morally, socially, and mentally sound are expected to fight during war. The following *akpoka* and *atrikpui* war song is a lamentation of a warrior who has been stopped from going to the battlefield for one or more of the above reasons.<sup>825</sup>

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<sup>825</sup> Interview with C. K. Kudjordjie (see appendix E)

### Song 72: *Mebe Mayi*

*Atrikpui* (Text in Ewe: Anlo dialect)

//:( *Yaono*) *Mebe mayi, wobe nyemega yi o*

*Nuka nutie?://*

*Klibosu*

*Mebe mayi, wobe nyemega yi o*

*Hoto/gbeto fle nu*

*Meflea 'gbe le ku si o*

*Avutsu wo ada (le nu)*

*Melea kpo le dzogbe o*

*Meyina 'ho tua nu loo*

*Kaleawo aho lem loo*

*Meyina 'ho tua nu loo*

### Literal Translation

(Yao's Mom) I want to go, they said I should not go  
Why (for what reason)?

Klibosu (Ewe war leader in history)<sup>826</sup>

I want to go, but they said I should not go

The rich person who buys (everything)

Does not/cannot buy life from death

The brave/wild dog that preys (catches)

Does not/cannot prey the tiger in the wilderness

I am going to the battlefield (to face the war guns)

Warriors, I am besieged (I am under attack)

I am going to the battlefield (to face the war guns)

The song highlights that the individual has been stopped from going to fight and indicates that the individual is trying to show he is courageous and motivated to fight. However, Yaono (a mother) and Klibosu (a war commander), both representing Ewe female and warrior powers, know it is probably not right for the young man to fight, despite his bold and courageous rhetoric. The song also reiterates Ewe conception of human strength, capabilities, power and its limitations. It uses two proverbs to metaphorically draw analogies between life and death and between the strength of two animals. First, the proverb *hoto/gbeto fle nu meflea 'gbe le ku si o* (the rich person who buys everything cannot buy life from death) underscores the life-death relationship discussed in Chapter 3. In reality, nothing (and no one) can buy life from death. Death is portrayed as the owner of life and one can pay death to spare life. Secondly, the proverb *avutsu wo ada/le nu melea kpo le dzogbe o* (the brave wild dog that preys on many things cannot/does not prey on the tiger in the wilderness) underscores self confidence. Metaphorically from the perspective of the singer, the rich man/the wild dog is the enemy; the singer is death

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<sup>826</sup> Yaono meaning Yao's mother (Yao being a male born on Thursday and *no* means mother) and Klibosu, an Ewe warrior and chief are (or may be) substituted with different names, usually mother's, warrior's or king's names. Since women have a strong say in disqualifying men as warriors, a female title is often used in this song. Again, as mentioned in chapter 2, most Ewe traditional politico-military and social titles are feminine; hence invoking names of war commanders (*avadawo*) in such songs lends much credence to the lamentation of the disqualified warrior.

and the tiger; and wild/wilderness is the battlefield. Thus, the singer disqualified and disgruntled young man, uses these metaphorical analogies to indicate he is so formidable that the enemy cannot overcome him. He tries to use this analogy to dispel concern over his possible death in war and his disqualification.

Again, warriors may declare their readiness to die in battle even when defeat is obvious. True warriors would rather exchange their life for victory than give up for life as this song indicates.

**Song 73: *Klala Me Mado***

*Atrikpui* (Text in Ewe: Anlo dialect)

*Klala me mado*

*Adzo tso nutsuvio*

*Klala me mado*

*Klala me mado lo ho*

*Adzo tso nutsuvio*

*Klala mee mado*

**Literal Translation**

I shall sleep in calico

Sons of men are under attack

I shall sleep in calico

Sons of men are under attack

I shall sleep in calico

Sons of men are under attack

This is an inspirational song of the early Anlo Ewe militias (*avagbatetsolawo* “mercenaries,” as Mamattah calls them).<sup>827</sup> As with other songs discussed earlier, it is usually sung to prod warriors to go to war and to fight on when times are difficult. Indigenously, when warriors and heroes die or when people lose their life in active heroic service, their bodies are wrapped in *klala* (calico: a plain white cotton cloth) and carried home or buried. In such instances, it is an indigenous symbol of heroism to be wrapped in *klala/aklala*.<sup>828</sup>

This warrior’s song not only contains indigenous military knowledge and information; it also, and very importantly, teaches about an aspect of Ewe concept and use of color—an

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<sup>827</sup> See Mamattah (1976: 224) and also Younge (1992: 15-16)

<sup>828</sup> In a personal communication, Professor Joseph Adjaye indicates that the Fante of Ghana also refer to calico as *krada*. The linguistic similarity between the Ewe *klala* and the Fante *krada* are intriguing. Beside semantic similarity (meaning or referring to the same item) and reference to code of color, they have similar phonological constituents. This could possibly be a cross-linguistic borrowing, adaptation, and appropriation of lexical item or a mere cultural/linguistic coincidence.

indigenous Ewe color-code. In Ewe culture, as in some other West African societies including the Akan and the Ga of Ghana, white color symbolizes victory, success, freedom, purity, joy, happiness, and peace.<sup>829</sup> Although war is generally represented with red and black colors symbolizing danger, anger, and enmity, death in war is often seen as a heroic act and an act of being at peace with one's soul. Hence the society honors the individual who perishes in a heroic act by a victorious color in appreciation for the sacrifice of his/her life for the community. For the Ewe warrior, victory is won when the white color is used—whether one is dead or alive. Ewe would not display white color when they are still faced with danger; however, a warrior would be wrapped in *aklala* in honor of victory for which the individual sacrificed his/her life, even when war continues and danger is not over.<sup>830</sup> Hence the expression “*aklala me mado*” (I will sleep in calico), as in the song above, is a deeper metaphorical way of showing one's readiness and declaring that one is ready to die for the victory and peace of his community. Ewe musicians, therefore, use this song to empower warriors when needed.

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<sup>829</sup> With one's soul, spirit, accomplishments, and that of others.

<sup>830</sup> The Ewe's use and conception of white color especially in war may contradict color codes and symbolism in other cultures. For instance, in some cultures including North American, by raising the white flag in battle, one may be signaling submission to the enemy, defeat, and readiness to give up a fight. Ewe may not use the white during war unless victory is worn. But for the warrior who happens to die in war gets the benefit and the honor of victory by being wrapped in *aklala* (calico: a plain white cotton cloth), whether or not the war is over. It should be pointed out that, Ewe concept and use of white colors in general and white color in particular goes beyond what I have described here. Ewe color-coding, as in many African cultures, may be seen in different forms and activities and are never conceptualized from one perspective. As with many African cultural phenomena, colors are integral part of the holistic indigenous knowledge of the people. Understanding Ewe and African color-codes requires knowledge of other cultural elements and entities.

### 6.1.3 *Zewuze*: Our Strength and Their Weakness

*Ze wu ze la eto gboe wokpne lena*  
(The difference in size of two pots is seen at the riverbank)

*Zewuze*<sup>831</sup> is an Ewe indigenous theoretical assertion that one cannot proclaim his/her superiority over the other until practically proven. *Zewuze* in Ewe military diction refers to the comparison of a group's strength with their enemy's weakness—one of the common themes of war, bravery, and military brags projected by Ewe musicians in their songs. *Zewuze* include military superiority, fearlessness, invisibility, formidability, weakness and vulnerability of the enemy, and ability to seek retaliation/vengeance. These ideas are expressed in many ways through songs, sometimes explicitly while othertimes allusively and coded. By far the most important means of favorably comparing one group's strength with their enemy's weakness is through proverbs and other forms of allusive speech used in songs. These colorful forms of intensified speech express this key idea in vivid and memorable artistic images.

The next song cautions people who attack the Ewe or their properties thinking they would be left free and also about the possibility of revenge especially those who underrate the Ewe's strength and ability to face attack or intrusion. It also reminds those who have offended the State without receiving any immediate response. As the composer states, "it is not because we have forgotten all about your intrusion and harm you caused us, but that it is only in course of time that we shall respond." As the saying goes; *si amea nlo be; gake abito fe nku le edzi* (hurt/wound

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<sup>831</sup> *Zewuze* is an Ewe indigenous theoretical assertion that one cannot proclaim his/her superiority over the other unless practically proven. *Zewuze* is the root word of the adage "*Zewuze la eto gboe wokpne le na*" (the difference in size of two pots is seen at the riverbank). Literally, it means "it is the volume of water that a pot holds that would determine its actual size as against another pot." Indigenously, Ewe, like other Africans, draw water from streams, wells, and rivers into clay pots and gourds for their domestic use. Hence it is in the process of filling two different pots with water at the riverbank that one could tell which pot is bigger. However, in a deeper sense and in the context in which it is used in this military scenario, *zewuze* is an invocation and proclamation of the ability to defeat one's opponent in a real context—in this case in battlefield.

a victim and forget; but the victim always remembers). It is commonly believed that Ewe in general and Anlo Ewe in particular had a war-like past. This notwithstanding, they are quite cautious in engaging in war, even when provoked. Again the popular Anlo Ewe states *Anlonola* (*Anloyila*) *meyona ne ava o* (anyone who lives in or goes to Anlo State is never in hurry or impatient of going to war). When one is in Anloland, sooner or later he would go to war, since they historically have a high frequency of warfare. Ewe never let go of their integrity, sovereignty, citizenship, or property—they would fight for it. However, they also believe that to win a war, one needs to win every battle—a task that demands thorough preparation. The following songs illustrate the points further.

**Song 74: *Nesim Nlobe***

**Gadzo** (Text in Ewe: Anlo dialect)

*Nesim' a nlobe ha*

*Nye nku le edzie.*

*'Vakale (wokale) ntsua nesima nlobe*

*Nye nku le 'dzi.*

*Anlawo metsi na gbe o de,*

*Miegbona go do.*

*Anlowo 'nu metsi na gbe o de*

*Miegbona go do*

*Nesima nlobe ha*

*Nye nku le 'dzie*

*'Vakale (wokale) ntsua nesima nlobe ha*

*Nye nku le 'dzie.*

**Literal translation**

You wounded me and forgot (about it)

But I still remember.

A warrior man, you wounded me and forgot

But I still remember.

Anlo are never stranded (in wilderness)

We are surely coming (would attack/retaliate)

Anlos' belonging/property is never forsaken

We are surely coming

You wounded me and forgot (about about it)

But I still remember

You brave man, you wounded me and forgot

But I still remember

Below is a song in which the composer/warrior ridicules the weakness of the enemy and calls for a challenge.

**Song 75: *Avu Mato Dzo***

**Atsiagbeko** (Text in Ewe: Anlo dialect)

*Avu (de) mato dzo*

*Dewoe lawum ha?*

*Dewoe aa?*

*Dewoe lawum ha?*

*Avu (de) matodzo*

*Dewoe lawum ha?*

**Literal translation**

A hornless dog (a weak enemy)

Are there any greater/stronger than I am

Any at all?

Are there any greater/stronger than I am

A hornless dog (a weak enemy)

Are there any greater/stronger than I am

“My enemies are like hornless dogs. They are weak and cowardly. Is there anyone out there that is stronger and braver than I am? The thought that someone is greater than me is as absurd as the idea of a dog with a horn. And if ever a dog should have a horn it would be such a weak one for dogs are not naturally created to have horns; so are my enemies—who are not naturally valiant as I am.” Through this and the following allusive text, the composer ridicules the opposing army and projects their own forces as superior and powerful enough to face and defeat any enemy.

**Song 76: *Ahogbo Lado Kitsigbo***

*Atsiagboko* (Text in Ewe: Anlo dialect)

*Ahogbo lado kitsigbo*

*Agbo le Dahume*

*Do kitsigbo*

*Agbo negba ha?*

*‘Meke laxo miawo sro/ahia ha?*

*Agbo negba ha?*

*Agboko ladze afeto dzi*

*Agbo negba!*

**Literal translation**

War blockade may be formidable and impenetrable

There is a blockade/gate in Dahomey

That is formidable and impenetrable

Should the blockade be broken through?

Who can take our wives/concubines?

Should the blockade be broken through?

Agboko will possess the master (the commander)

Possessed by the spirit of Agboko/war

The blockade be broken through!

“As people ready for war we have strong blockades, barriers and protective armory that is so formidable and impenetrable for the enemy. At such a gate, like the one in Dahomey, the enemy cannot defeat us and take our wives and property. If it comes to the critical scenario, we would be possessed by the war spirit; and if we are in that spiritual state of mind, we have no fear and we would break any blockade or barriers of the enemy and protect our wives and land,” the composer/singer declares. In many cases, the blockade alluded to in the song is not a physical barrier, but rather a spiritual power and fortification. Warriors believe they are

formidable enough, physically and spiritually, to face any enemy attack. “*Tu Nedi*” is yet another song reiterating this power.

**Song 77: *Tu Nedi***

*Atsiagbeko* (Text in Ewe: Anlo dialect)

*Tu nedi*

*Miahee de alada me*

*Le hewo nu*

*Miahee de alada me*

**Literal Translation**

Let the gun sound (fire the gun)

We shall turn it upside down (destroy it)

At the tip of knives

We shall turn it upside down (destroy it)

“When we are attacked, all we are left to do is to fight. It is cowardice not to respond to an attack,” the song indicates.

Though focusing on *atsiagbeko* drumming and rhythm, David Locke saw the relevance of song texts to Ewe history and military culture. His discussions on songs are relevant to this study and help the reader understand *atsiagbeko* in its holistic terms. Drawing from song texts, he wrote:

...although southern Ewe sometimes faced armies comprised of several Africa ethnic groups allied with Europeans and undoubtedly were outnumbered, they fought bravely. *Atsiagbeko* song texts make reference to such lopsided encounters, stressing that even if outnumbered; we will do the best we can.”<sup>832</sup>

As in songs such as this *atsiagbekor vulolo*:

**Song 78: *Adzonu Made Gbe Za***

*Atsiagbeko* (Text in Ewe: Anlo dialect)

*Adzonu made gbe ee za*

*Konu ha de gbe ha*

*Mayi so, mayi ho*

*Miele 'to, 'to*

*Miele ene, ene*

*Ene nu wo ge*

*Mayi so, mayi ho*

**Literal translation**

Adzanu (the commander) has given the command

Even if Konu gives a counter command

I will go to the spirit realm, I will go to war

Should we be only three, three

Should we be only four, four (even outnumbered)

We would do what four can do

I will go to the spirit realm, I will go to war<sup>833</sup>

The composer/singer declares his loyalty and obedience to the commander Adzanu, one of the Anlo Ewe kings. He vows that, even if they are outnumbered, he would take the

<sup>832</sup> Locke (1978: 92)

<sup>833</sup> See Locke (1978: 225)

commander's orders. "In case of a counter command, be it spiritual or physical, I will obey your judgment and fight on," he pledges. "Our army may be small in size; but when we get into the spiritual realm, it may not really matter," he encourages. Through songs and battle cries, the Ewe warrior group strongly affirms its allegiance to their commander.

**Song 79: Vo De Mi Nu**

**Atsiagbeko** (Text in Fon and Ewe)

//:Vo de mi nu

Mami So o

Milaw<sub>o</sub>e:// Ayee ha?

Ayee milaw<sub>o</sub>e!

//:Awoe ado tsi me ha://

Ezoka gb<sub>o</sub>lo mats<sub>o</sub> fo ha?

Axo le dza xoto me ha

Hesino Hoyo va to me

Wode aye ha

Ayee milaw<sub>o</sub>e

**Literal translation**

A python swallows many things

But not So (god of thunder/a distasteful plant)

We would dare to do it, truly?

Yes (truly) we would dare to do it

Do it and perish in it (dare till we die in war)

What can mere supernatural magic/juju do?

A more serious case has arisen

The composer Hoyo come to the arena

And they shouted, truly!

Yes, we will dare it/do it

**Song 80: Du De Masi Du De**

**Atsiagbeko** (Text in Ewe: Anlo dialect)

//:Du de masi du de loo hoo

Du de masi du de://

//:Howoto de lia

Nye So ho to://

Ayisu fo nu

Mefoa 'aziza le kome o

Wotakla nasi gbeto

//:Kini dza do gbe

Ooo hoto dza do gbe://

**Literal translation**

One town cannot defeat another (one) town

One town cannot defeat another

Is there a warrior

Who can fight So (Can a man defeat a god)?

A hawk can whisk away many things

But not a fairy in an anthill

A badger has to fear man (powerful warrior)

The lion (wild animal) runs amuck (amok)

The warrior runs amuck (amok)

(Two adversaries run amuck)

**Song 81: Nakefoto Mefoa Adzido O**

**Atsiagbeko** (Text in Fon and Ewe)

//:Nakefoto

Mefoa dzido hee

Ko ade lado anyidi ha 'fo haa?

Nuglo!://

//:Ameade lado anyidi ha 'foa?

Eglo!://

//:Ela bada do kini kini://

//:Afa do ngo ee

Ngo eglo

**Literal translation**

A firewood collector

Does not collect firewood from a baobab tree

Who can trace the footprint of an ant?

It is an impossible task

Can someone trace the footprint of an ant?

It is impossible

A wicked animal like lion runs wild

The Afa divinine spirit has gone ahead

Its impossible (for the enemy) to advance

*Kpolia do ngo*  
*Ngo eglo://*  
*Ame ade matso So wotu*  
*Ade miada?*  
*//:Nakefoto*  
*Mefoa dzido hee*  
*Ko ade lado anyidi ha 'fo haa?*  
*Nuglo!://*

The Kpoli spirit has gone ahead  
Its impossible (for the enemy) to advance  
Who can get us So's gun (the spiritual gun)  
So we may fire?  
A firewood collector  
Does not collect firewood from a baobab tree  
Who can trace the footprint of an ant?  
It is an impossible task

In the first song above, the enemy is likened to a python that preys on and attacks many creatures. Yet as powerful a predator as the python (the enemy) may be, it cannot prey on an army likened to *So* (the God of Thunder and war) or to a very bitter and distasteful spiritual herb.<sup>834</sup> In the second song, the enemy is likened to a hawk who, though it preys on many animals, cannot prey the singer-warrior likened to a fairy (*aziza*, a symbol of mystical spiritual power).<sup>835</sup> The message in both songs is that the enemy may be powerful and defeat others, but not the Ewe army. “We, like *So* and *aziza*, are mysterious, invisible, distasteful, and too powerful for any acclaimed enemy to face. When our spiritual composer-leader invokes the spirits to join us at the battleground, we would dare it, fight it until we die,” the songs portray. The third song alludes to tasks almost impossible within normal human activity.<sup>836</sup> The warriors indicate in the song that “unless by some spiritual intervention, it is as difficult for the enemy to defeat us as it may be for human beings to trace the footprint of an ant. Even in the spiritual realm once our Afa divination spirit is consulted and its Kpoli manifestations are known in advance, we have spiritual advantage over our enemies. They cannot advance beyond our Afa spirits divinations.

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<sup>834</sup> See Locke (1978: 280)

<sup>835</sup> See *ibid* (250)

<sup>836</sup> See *ibid* (268)

Like the seasoned firewood collector who knows that it is of no use trying to collect firewood from the baobab tree, the enemy knows it is in vain they try to defeat us.”<sup>837</sup>

This section highlights specific indigenous information regarding Ewe military code and warfare propaganda. Additionally, it illuminates the relevance of indigenous military knowledge and the importance of songs and their deeper meanings in defense, security, and stability in traditional Ewe society. Musical practice in general and songs in particular serve as media through which coded and uncoded military messages are disseminated. Songs insinuate, educate, direct, petition, prepare the community’s emotional state of mind, and psychologically boost warriors’ morale. Musical activities are vital parts of Ewe pre-war and post-war rituals. Songs and other musical practices associated with militarism not only serve military purpose but also continue to be reliable sources of historical, political, and socio-cultural information. Since military musical practices live on long after warfare, so does the information they contain.<sup>838</sup> Hence, musical activities are believed to be reliable documentation that remains over time. Ewe women are not usually combatants; however, military titles are feminine and certain women take part in the selection and disqualification of combatant. Music plays vital roles in Ewe military culture and songs document this indigenous knowledge.

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<sup>837</sup> It is culturally abnormal to try to collect firewood from the baobab tree. Not only does firewood from baobab tree uneconomical and energy inefficient, but also, baobab tree has a massive girth and few branches and hence it is really stupid to try to collect firewood from it.

<sup>838</sup> Ibid

## 6.2 MUSIC AND HISTORIC WARS

“*Ava si ame mesia kpoti o; kpoti dede ya neno anyi ne du na nyo*”  
(A war that defeats a person does not defeat *kpoti*; *kpoti* should exist for the good of the community)<sup>839</sup>

Although scholarly research and oral accounts indicate that Ewe have fought many wars, especially from the mid seventeenth century through the late nineteenth century, only a few of those wars and the warriors who led in fighting have written documentation on them.<sup>840</sup> In this section, I discuss some of those wars as well as historic warriors and kings that led in the various battles as reported by historians, song texts, and other oral narratives.

From the early seventeenth century the Ewe, especially the Anlo Ewe, were engaged in many wars against their neighbors including the Ada, Akwamu, Ga, Adangme, Akwapim, Asante, Akyim and many European armies. The Volta River,<sup>841</sup> the lagoons, and the Atlantic shore served as the main artery of bulk trade in local and foreign commodities<sup>842</sup> and set the scene of frequent raids and dispute between the Ewe, their neighbors and European traders.<sup>843</sup> There were many petty conflicts between the Anlo Ewe, the Ga and the Ada from 1700 through 1776.<sup>844</sup> In the earlier part of the seventeenth century, the Ewe had battled against the Ga (Accra) settlers at Anexo (Anecho, Togo), Little/Grand-Popo, and Quida in Dahome (now the Republic of Benin). According to William E. F Ward, when the Ga were forced to flee their land as a result of an Akwamu attack, the Ga King, Tackie Tawiah I, led his people in an exodus through

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<sup>839</sup> *Kpoti* is a tree (plant) that is traditionally used to fence a house. It is a plant that withstands different weather conditions.

<sup>840</sup> These wars include Sagbadre “swallow” War (1782-1784)

<sup>841</sup> The Volta Rive serves as a common boundary between the Ewe on the Eastern bank and her neighbors, the Ada, Akwamu, Ga, Adangme, Akyim, Asante, and Akwapim on the west bank. See chapter 2 for details.

<sup>842</sup> Commodities include sheabutter, palm kernel, salt, European goods, and slaves.

<sup>843</sup> See Ward (1948: 216), Fiawo (1959), Reindorf (1966), Chapman (1950: 89) and Mamattah (1976)

<sup>844</sup> See Mamattah (1976: 614-615)

Anlo Ewe territory to the eastern part of Togo on the border of Dahomey (now Benin). It was during their passage through southern Eweland that they battled with the Anlo.<sup>845</sup>

In their efforts and attempts to comment on and document military events, Ewe musicians do not only describe their experiences and/or fantasies of battle scenes but they also invoke names of warriors and kings that led their people. In the *atsiagbekor* song below the composer poetically and sensationally invokes pre-war scenery and a siege as he/she describes the Anlo-Ga battle under their leaders of the time.<sup>846</sup>

**Song 82: *Dzi Hoe Xa Yewo***

*Atsiagbeko* (Text in Ewe: Anlo dialect)  
(*Dada*) *dzi 'hoe xa yeo loo hoo*

*Dzanadowoe malo o hee*  
*Sokpe dze tu dzi*

*Tu nefa kpiti miyia*

*Etua do dada ko*

*Geawoe/Fowoe menye de hee*

*Gefia Tatsiwoe*

*Tsi alota*

*Miyia!*

*Dzi hoe xa yeo loo hoo*

*Dzanadowoe malo o hee*

**Literal translation**

(Mother) we are besieged from the sky

(We are under serious attack)

Dzanado's army is unwavering

So's stone has fallen on the gun (the God of

Thunder/war declares, it is time for action)

Fire (open) the gun and let us go

The gun is ready to be fired (it is time/we go to war)

They are the Ga/Fon (enemies) and no other

The Ga king Tatsi

Is on the arm (wounded and being carried away)

Let's charge on

We are besieged from the sky (under serious attack)

Dzanado's army is unwavering/would not succumb

The song evokes the fury of the battle. The Anlo Ewe army, led by Dzenado, is under serious attack by King Tatsi and his Ga forces. By “*dzi hoe xa ye wo*” (it is a war from the sky that has besieged us), the composer states the seriousness of the attack as if it was by the gods themselves (spiritual attack). In that case, the Anlo Ewe must also call on their war gods, including *So*, the war god of thunder and lightning, to “fire its gun” and give the army strength to fight the enemy. The song shows that the Anlo fought bravely, wounded or killed the Ga king

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<sup>845</sup> See Ward (1948: 99-100), Reindorf (1966: 37), and Mamattah (1976)

<sup>846</sup> See Fiagbedzi (1977: 58)

who was carried away from the battleground.<sup>847</sup> While the names of the leaders of both sides, Dzanado of the Anlo army and King Tatsi of the Ga, help us to situate this particular war in time and space, the musician's description of the battle scene gives us some sense of the nature of the attack and casualties suffered thereby adding more military-spiritual insight to the historical knowledge.

The Ewe also had many conflicts with Europeans. One of the wars Anlo Ewe fought against European invasion was the Sagbadre “swallow” War (1782-1784).<sup>848</sup> Oral narratives and reports from historical documents indicate that the war—the first clash between the Anlo Ewe and the Danes (Danish)—began in 1782 when an Anlo Ewe man attacked a Danish trader.<sup>849</sup> As C. M. K. Mamattah records in his monograph on Ewe history, the Sagbadre War began when “an Anlo party molested and robbed by violence on the Volta a Danish merchant, SALVADORE whom the Anlos nicknamed ‘Sagbadre’ meaning ‘swallow.’”<sup>850</sup> With the “molestation” incident serving as the immediate factor, the Danes were determined to “punish, crush, and tame the Anlos.”<sup>851</sup> Historical documents show that the Danish Governor of Christiansburg at the time secured forces among the Ga, Ada, Krobo, Akwapim and the Adangme, all of whom are neighbors and had by then become traditional enemies of the Anlo due to earlier disputes. “A

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<sup>847</sup> Dzenado is believed to be one of the earlier powerful warrior Ewe kings whose exact place in history not very clearly known. *Gefia* Tatsi is the Anlo rendition of the Ga leader King Tackie Tawiah I, who led his people to cross through Ewe territory around 1680. My discussant and other historical sources indicate that he was seriously wounded during the Anlo-Ga battle but his army managed to save his life and took him away. Interview with Agbotadua Kumassah (March 18, 2003). See also Ward (1948) and Chapman (1950), Reindorf (1966), Mamattah (1976), Fiagbedzi (1977), Locke (1978), and Amenumey (1986)

<sup>848</sup> Mamattah (1976: 630)

<sup>849</sup> See Reindorf (1966: 123-130), Mamattah (1976: 630-633), and Locke (1978 20-21),

<sup>850</sup> Mamattah (1976: 630-631). It is worth noting that in her controversial booklet Korsiwor Weduahlor ascribed the name or term “Sagbadre” to Sergeant Nez, whom she described as a Danish political officer. Part of her accounts is as follows: “In 1782, Sergeant Nez (Sagbadre) who had indulge in an indecent affair was badly treated at Keta...The Danish Political Officers wasted no time and declared war on Anlo. They were assisted by their African Allies. On 30<sup>th</sup> March 1784 (sagbadre war) or Sergeant Nez war was launchd...” Weduahlor, K. A. 2006. *Anlo Kotsiklolo: The Rise and Fall of Anlo State, Part One*. Accra, Ghana: Frank Publishing Ltd.

<sup>851</sup> Mamattah (1976)

combined army of over 4,000 troops led by Chief Otoo heavily defeated the Anlo who were led by Tsyiopo Shikabli.”<sup>852</sup> According to Mamattah, in one of the first major battlefield engagements at Srogboe battleground, Elo Doe Dzata, an Anlo war leader, was killed. The war raged on and the Anlo fled and sought refuge with Weta (Wheta), Klikor and surrounding villages in turn.<sup>853</sup> A number of Anlo towns were burned including “Srogboe, Wuti (Vuti), Atoko, Woe, Tegbi, Alakple, and Anyako.”<sup>854</sup> Sources indicate, “the Anlo country was completely overrun and conquered. The enemy savagely destroyed by fire and looted the eight settlements referred to earlier.”<sup>855</sup> The *akpoka* song below alludes to the war and the defeat suffered.

**Song 83: *Fika Eloviawo Yi?***

*Akpoka* (Text in Ewe: Anlo dialect)

//:’*Fika Eloviawo yia?*

*Dzo dze afe*

*Glikpowo tsi anyi hee://*

//:*Elo wo ga yi dzo tsi ge://*

’*Lo kple Dzata/Adzakpa woyi*

*Dzo tsi ge le Gbaganu*

’*Loviawo yia*

*Dzo dze afe*

*Glikpowo tsi anyi*

**Literal Translation**

Where are the children of Elo (Elo’s army) gone?

The community is on fire (attacked)

And the houses are empty (community is deserted)

The Elo’s are gone to put off fire (fight the enemy)

’Lo and Dzata/Adzakpa are all gone

To put off fire (fight) at Gbaganu<sup>856</sup>

Lo’s children (army) are gone,

The state/community is on fire (under attack)

And the houses/blocks are empty

(the community is deserted)

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<sup>852</sup> See Mamattah (1976: 631), Reindorf (1966), Locke (1978), and Amenumey (1986)

<sup>853</sup> Both Anlo towns located farther away from the areas attacked in this particular war.

<sup>854</sup> Mamattah (1976: 631)

<sup>855</sup> Mamattah (1976: 631)

<sup>856</sup> Gbaganu (shore/bank/delta of Gbaga) refers to the stream/delta of Gbaga Lagoon located in the southeastern part of Togo between Anexo (Anecho) in Togo and Little Popo in the Republic of Benin. Gbaga Lagoon extends from mid-southern Togo to the southeastern border between Togo and the Republic of Benin, where it forms into a stream/river and flows into the Gulf of Guinea (See: <http://www.geonames.org/2366592/gbaga.html> and also <http://www.traveljournals.net/explore/togo/map/m2137244/gbaga.html> Accessed: 12/10/08). Gbaga (also called Baga or Boga River) serves as a source of livelihood as well as battlefield for the Ewe in historic times. Even till today, Gbaga Lagoon and stream/river is one of the main sources of livelihood to the inhabitants of the area. In view of its historical resourcefulness, Gbaganu has remained not only an important and memorable historical location in memories of many Ewe, but also, and more importantly, it symbolizes a spiritual destination—an ancestral spiritual home or eternity to the Ewe in Ghana. Hence, the use of “Gbaganu” in the above song refers to that spiritual home—ancestral eternity—that Elo Doe Dzata, the fallen hero is believed to have gone and continue to fight the enemy.

The song laments on the war, the defeat of the Anlo and the towns and villages that were burned by the combined forces. The composer questions the whereabouts of Anlo warriors at the time villages were set ablaze by the enemy forces. The defeat led to Anlo giving in to a peace treaty that was signed in June 1784 on “the Danes dictated terms,” giving the Danes the right to construct Fort Prinzenstein at Keta. The actual date on which the treaty was signed falls between June 18 and June 22, 1784. While Mamattah records it to be “18<sup>th</sup> June 1784,” Weduahlor puts it at “22<sup>nd</sup> June 1784.”<sup>857</sup> Under the peace treaty provisions the Danes secured the right to build a fort at Keta and a free passage through Anlo. They also obtained the permission to set up a trading post at Anloga, the Anlo capital which had to be rebuilt, which allowed for free passage by land and water through Anloland and kept roads open for trade. The Anlo were also made to sign new provisions in the treaty with the Danes that limited trade with European nations to Denmark, and prohibited canoe use at sea.<sup>858</sup> According to Mamattah, “the Anlos were to deliver up ten of their principal people as hostages to ensure the carrying out of the agreed terms of the treaty. The hostages would be sent out of Anloland as slaves in the event of a breach.”<sup>859</sup> These stipulations demonstrate ulterior motives behind the war—for the Danish to control Ewe politics, prescribe trade terms, and dominate commercial activities. Most importantly the terms of the treaty aimed at one thing—to make Danish commerce predominant in the Ewe area.

The past war-like characteristics of the Ewe and the Akan of Ghana are apparent throughout their histories. In their (Ewe/Akan) oral and recorded histories, there is much evidence of numerous Ewe vs. Akan<sup>860</sup> military conflicts as well as crushes with their other neighbors and Europeans. In the *kpegisu* song below, the composer comments on an Ewe-Asante

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<sup>857</sup> See Mamattah (1976: 632) Ward (1948), Chapman (1950), and Amenumey (1986), and Weduahlor (2006).

<sup>858</sup> Mamattah (1976: 632-633). See also Reindorf (1966: 123-130) and Locke (1978: 21)

<sup>859</sup> Mamattah (1967: 632)

<sup>860</sup> Particularly the Akwamu, Akyim, Akwapim, and Asante

conflict from an Ewe perspective. He/she used Ewe familiarity with water (river/sea) and salt mining as metaphor to mock the Asante army. By their geographical location, the Southern Ewe are predominantly fishermen and lagoon salt miners. On the other hand, the Asante, who dwell in the rain forest belt of Ghana, are predominantly food and cash crop farmers most commonly cocoa and coffee. As the Asante are not as familiar working with water and salt as the Southern Ewe, musicians harp on this occupational difference as a metaphor of Asante military weakness and/or ‘inexperience.’

**Song 84: *Amu Medea Dze O***

***Kpegisu*** (Text in Ewe: Anlo dialect)

*Amu medea dze o lo*

*Tumfo be*

*Yeade dze de*

//: *Aho dze aho dzi*

*Bluawo yi demagbo nu gbe he://*

*Tumfo gblo na viawo be*

//: *“Miva mide dze*

*Le Amu mea!”://*

*Ye wobé Kodzaledzie tsi Amu me*

*Kodzaledzie tso mo na Kpogo*

*Be Kodzaledzie tsi Amu me tegbee*

**Literal Translation**

Amu (River Volta) does not produce salt

Tumfo (Otumfo, an Asante king) says

He wants to collect/mine salt

War is upon war (two warrior states crash)

The Blus (Akans) are on a no-return journey

Tumfo told his children (warriors) that

“Come and lets collect/mine salt

In Amu (River Volta)!”

And they said Kodzaledzi drowned in Amu

Kodzaledzi crossed the road for/ambushed Kpogo

That Kodzaledzi was drowned in Volta forever

Salt is not found in the Asante area. The song suggests that although Akan (whom the Ewe called “*Blu*” singular or “*Bluawo*” plural) know that the Ewe get salt from water, they are not aware of its lacking availability in some water bodies, including Amu (the River Volta). The Southern Ewe, who live between the River Volta, the Atlantic ocean/sea (*Atsiafu*), and the Keta Lagoon (*Keta Tagba*) get their salt from the lagoon but not from Amu (River Volta) as the Asante may have thought. The song implies that the Asante king, Tumfo (Otumfo in Akan) asked his people to imitate the Ewe and try to get salt from River Volta. In a deeper sense, the Ewe musician is mocking the Asante for trying something that can never work—mining salt from a fresh water river. The narrative, however, is a metaphor. The composer alludes to one of

the battle conflicts between the Ewe and the Akan (Asante) during which the Akan commander was killed. We may analyze the metaphor from the composer’s perspective as follows: *dze* (salt), a valuable commodity and one of the essentials in life, represents a formidable Ewe army. “*De dze* or *dze dede*” (mine salt/salt mining), a vibrant economic activity at the time, represents success/victory. Amu (River Volta) represents the battleground. The song therefore implies that, the Asante king sent his army to the battleground with the aim of defeating the Ewe in their own territory. Unfortunately for the Asante, the Ewe knew very well that they cannot be defeated on a familiar battleground. In the final analysis according to my discussants, this song compares the impossibility of getting salt from a river with the likelihood of the Asante defeating the Ewe.<sup>861</sup>

Another war that is present within *kpegisu* songs is the Datsutagba war. Believed to be fought between 1869 and 1874,<sup>862</sup> the following are two songs retelling its stories. Although there are conflicting reports regarding the cause of the war and the dates, both written and oral historical evidence indicate that the war involved multiple parties—the Ewe, Asante, Akwamu, Ga, Akyim, and the British.<sup>863</sup> The songs comment on a clash between the Ewe and the Asante at Datsu, one of the battlefields.

**Song 85: *Gbemagbe Nye Gbemagbe***

***Kpegisu*** (Text in Ewe: Anlo dialect)

*Gbemagbe nye gbemagbe*

*Miedo Datsua me*

*Yaluvikponue nye Bedzamo befe*

*Si miakple Bluawo*

*Mieno dudia ke ma*

*Ke glawo tsi asi*

**Literal Translation**

That day was the real day (day of action)

When we got to the Datsu field

Yaluvi’s fence was Badzamo’s hideout

When we and the Akan

Were racing/battling it out

Then jaws were in hand (people killed)

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<sup>861</sup> See also Locke (1978, 1992) for further Ewe metaphorical expression of the “us versus them” theme, which is prevalent in the *atsiagbeko*, *kpegisu*, *atrikpui*, *gadzo*, *akpoka*, and other Ewe military musical genres. Also see Reindorf (1966) for vivid descriptions of inter-ethnic warfare in Ghana.

<sup>862</sup> See Ward (1948), Chapman (1950), Yegbe (1966), Mamattah (1976), Locke (1978, 1992)

<sup>863</sup> See *ibid.*

*Tawo tsi asi*  
*Yevutuawo zu afi kple aka*  
*Bluawo miakpoe de enu*

Heads were in hand (people beheaded)  
The Whiteman's guns became ashes and charcoal  
Akan, you must learn from this

**Song 86: Yofega Wo Nya**

**Kpegisu** (Text in Ewe: Anlo dialect)

*Yofega wo nya le vovo de*  
*Bluawo de 'o dzi*  
*Dome ko yi afee*  
*Danyi, de Yofega 'o nya le vovo ha*  
*Bluawo de dzie domea he*  
*Devie menye de*  
*Mekpo nuawo ken tefe*  
*Gbemagbe miedo de (miekpe le) Datu la*  
*Yeluvikponue Bedzamo be do*  
*Mi kple Bluawo mino dudia ke ma*  
*Wodo tefe de*  
*Megbe yi ge mia lae*

**Literal Translation**

Yofega's story is a different (unique)  
The Akan removed his heart  
From his stomach and took it home  
Danyi, Yofega's story is a different one  
Akans removed his heart from his stomach  
I was a child/novice but  
I have witnessed all events happened)  
That day we got to (clash at) Datsu  
Yaluvi's fence was Bedzame's hideout  
While we and Akan were racing (fighting)  
When it reaches the climax (of real action)  
Do we have to retreat?

The songs comment on a horrific battlefield from an Ewe perspective. The composer/singer of the second song remembers that when he was either a child or young warrior there was a fight between the Ewe and the Akan. At the Datsu (Datsutagba) battlefield, beside the many casualties both sides suffered, the Akan captured and killed an Ewe brave warrior, Yofega. Narrating the horrible event to Danyi, the singer indicates how horrifying it was to see their warrior killed. Although it is clear in the first song's text that many people were killed and beheaded, the way Yofega's body was treated by the Akan, i.e., "...*Bluawo de 'o dzi*..." ("...Akan removed his heart...") in the second song, that really frightened some fighters including Bedzamo. The narrator added that after seeing the event, Bedzamo, an Ewe fighter, was horrified and sought a hideout.<sup>864</sup> "Bedzamo hid at Yaluvi's fence and ran away at the

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<sup>864</sup> It should be noted that in Ewe, the common expression "*de dzi le fo*" (lit. remove the heart from stomach) means to scare, frighten, and/or discourage. So, one may be tempted to interpret the expression "*Bluawo de 'o dzi*..." (The Akan removed his heart...) as in the first song above thus "scared him away or fearfully discouraged him." However, it is the preceding statement "*Yofega wo nya le vovo de*" (Yofega's story is a different/unique) and the concluding part of the description "...*Dome ko yi afee*" (...from his stomach and took it home) that put the

climax of the battle. As a warrior, you do not retreat just because things are getting tough. Bedzamo’s act of cowardice contradicts *atamga* (Ewe bravery act and warrior’s oath),” the composer/singer implied. The concluding statement in the first song “*Bluawo miakpoe de nu*” (“Akan, you must learn from this”) indicates that the Akan also suffered many casualties; hence the narrator sees it as a bitter lesson for the their enemy, the Akan.<sup>865</sup>

In other songs, composers/singers emphasize their courage by scorning the enemy’s ineptness, or by boastfully asking the rhetorical question “who can defeat us?” They also ridicule the strength and technological advantages of Europeans and their local allies who fought against the Ewe. Below are two of such songs.

**Song 87: *Yevutua Do Mada***

*Atsiagboko* (Text in Ewe: Anlo dialect)

*Yevutua do mada hee*

*Mada o loo, mada o loo*

**Literal Translation**

The Whiteman’s gun cannot fire/fail to fire

It cannot fire, it would not fire

This song alludes to colonization. The composer mocks the European gun implying that despite the Whiteman’s gun—technological advancement—they could not defeat the Ewe. There is an implication that the Ewe gods have rendered the Whiteman’s gun inoperative. The Ewe believe that there are spiritual and mystical powers that can prevent the gun from firing or killing them in war. They believe that they can spiritually fortify their bodies with herbs and magical concoctions against gunshot. This song is an example of the expression and belief in such a concept.

Below is a song that indicates not only Ewe/Fon awareness of the complexity of their physical and spiritual environment, but also how they use their ecological knowledge and belief

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description in actual context. It indicates that the composer was using those statements to graphically describe what had happen—and not to implied just fear.

<sup>865</sup> See also Mamattah (1976), Locke (1978, 1992), Kumassah (2005)

as an advantage against their enemies.<sup>866</sup> As usual, the entire song, in a mixture of Fon and *Yevegbe*, is coded in metaphor.

**Song 88: *O Miya Wu***

*Adzogbo* (Text in Fon)

*O miya wu ha kumi ye*  
*To melo wuili degbo he*  
*Miya wu ha kumi ye*  
*Elo wuili degbo he*  
*Tomelo mano yiago*  
*Egeli mano hoeso*  
*Miya wu ha kumi ye*  
*Elo wuili degbo he*

**Literal Translation**

Oh, come and see a miracle  
A crocodile has attacked a hippopotamus  
Oh, come and see a miracle  
Crocodile has attacked a hippopotamus  
A crocodile cannot live on land  
A cow cannot live in water  
Oh, come and see a miracle  
A crocodile has attacked a hippopotamus

The song comments on an abnormal phenomenon—a crocodile attacking a hippopotamus. A crocodile does not normally attack a hippopotamus. The hippo is stronger, well adapted to water and has the potential of putting up a stronger fight against the crocodile. It would be much easier for the crocodile to defeat a cow since the cow would be defenseless once it is dragged into water. In the song, the composer implies that the Ewe see their army as hippopotamus (not a cow). The crocodile, therefore, represents their enemy, possibly the British. “You mistakenly underrated our strength. You have attacked us thinking we would be an easy defeat. Not this time round. We know our land and can adapt to any battlefield—either on land or on water—better than any stranger; hence, we cannot be defeated easily,” the composer reiterates. When the enemy forces attack the Ewe/Fon, they think they are going to have an easy victory. They are mistaken, implies the composer. Instead, they encounter an army, which is well knowledgeable about their environment, fights bravely, and defeats the enemy. This song underscores some of the strategies and ecological knowledge—adaptation and knowledge of the

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<sup>866</sup> See Akyeampong (2001), Dor (2001), and Greene (1996, 2002)

environment and technology—Ewe used to outwit and defeat their neighboring and foreign enemies (Europeans).<sup>867</sup>

Beside the graphic descriptions of the atrocities of battle the conveying of moral lessons is also a motive behind the songs. The composer(s) of these songs use their artistic ideas and skills to teach the following moral lessons: (1) Endurance: one should continue to go ahead strongly no matter what the consequences; (2) Casualty: war has very devastating and dehumanizing consequences for both sides; and (3) Consequence: there is never a real winner morally. War is always costly to both sides and often leaves both the victor and the vanquished mentally, emotionally, spiritually, and physically handicapped. Descriptions and documentation of song texts, whether based on actual reality or imagined reality, based on oral historical narratives, give the singer, listener, and reader a clear picture of the history, philosophy, politics, defense and belief systems of the Ewe and their Fon kindred.

### 6.3 MUSIC AND HEROIC WARRIORS

*“Kale menoa afe tsia ade o; adzadza belebele/velele”*

(A hero/hunter does not sit at home and brag about his prowess; he must be soaked in the wet morning dew)

In many societies, all who have achieved remarkable feats are not just recognized as heroes but also have their names, figures, memories, and deeds enshrined in various forms to serve as historical monuments. The Ewe use music, especially songs, to celebrate the remarkable deeds of their heroic warriors and ancestors. This section focuses on a few Ewe politico-military leaders

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<sup>867</sup> See Ward (1948), Chapman (1950), Yegbe (1966) Mamattah (1976), Locke (1978, 1992), Younge (1989, 1991) Dor (2001), Gorlin (2000), and Kumassah (2005)

whose heroic acts and leadership roles have contributed tremendously to Ewe society and Anlo Ewe State in particular. Among the many-noted Ewe warriors and leaders are Kundo, Akplomada, Tsali, Wenya, Afede Asor, Sri, Akoe, Saa, Axolu, Asianu, Tenge, Adedze, Eko, and Adeladza. Their reign expanded over seven centuries, i.e., from the late thirteenth century through the late nineteenth century.<sup>868</sup> The section discusses how musicians cast the names of Togbi Kundo, Togbi Abofrakuma I, Avadada Adzika Axolu, and Togbi Tengey Dzokoto Gligui—all Anlo Ewe politico-military figures.

### 6.3.1 Togbi Kundo Hossu Bowelle Behanzin

*“Atsiligeli, nye me to ha yi ge o; nye me go ha yi ge o, dodoklele!”*  
(*Atsiligeli* I will not go (further) to sea; I will not go to shore, deadlock!)

Togbui Kundo/Kondo, a Fon-Ewe warrior king, is regarded as one of the most successful, powerful, and revered politico-military and spiritual personalities. Indigenously known as Togbi Kundo Hossu Bowelle, Kundo, considered the eleventh King of Dahomey, changed his name to Behanzin<sup>869</sup> soon after he was enthroned in 1889 in Abomey, Dahomey (now the Republic of Benin). He succeeded his father, Glele (Gligli) Hossu and ruled from 1889 to 1894.<sup>870</sup>

Believed to have possessed mystical spiritual powers, Kundo’s army was rarely defeated by their rival West African neighbors or by European forces. He is said to be the brain behind many of the Fon-Ewe victories over their enemies in Dahomey, especially against the French.

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<sup>868</sup> See Crowther (1927), Manoukian (1952), Ellis (1966), Mamattah (1978), Amenumey (1986), and Kumassah (2005)

<sup>869</sup> See Pakenham (1991), Harris (1998), and UNESCO (1990), Haskins (2005), and <http://www.assatashakur.org/forum/shoulders-our-freedom-fighters/19885-king-behanzin-abomey-king-shark.html> (accessed: 02/15/09)

<sup>870</sup> See UNESCO (1990), Boahen et la (1987), Pakenham (1991), and Harris (1998)

Musical historiography evidence indicates that *adzohu/dzohu/adzogbo*, one of the spiritual and mystical dance-drumming genres associated with the Fon and Ewe military institutions, emerged from legendary struggles of Torgbui Kundo against local enemies and later European intrusion.<sup>871</sup> According to my discussants, Torgbui Kundo is believed to be the most famous king of ancient Dahomey (Dahome). Some sources indicate that he sometimes did not go to the battlefield personally, but rather commanded his army from the shrine associated with *adzogbo* god, *Adzo*.<sup>872</sup> During war, the “virgins of the shrine” revealed battlefield situations to Kundo. Virgins of the shrine were pre-adolescents of both sexes who served as media of communication between the priest and the deity. These virgins became possessed by *adzogbo*, and danced and sang messages to their commander Togbi Kundo, who intend interprets the messages for his army.<sup>873</sup>

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<sup>871</sup> See Locke and Agbeli (1980) and Badu (2002)

<sup>872</sup> See Locke and Agbeli (1980) and Gorlin (2000)

<sup>873</sup> Ibid. See also Gorlin (2000: 35), <http://ecologylab.cs.tamu.edu/chains/adzogbo.html> (Accessed: 12/10/08) and <http://www.marshalldancecompanydt.org/repertoryoutreach> (Accessed: 12/10/08)



**Figure 6-1: Togbi Kundo Hossu Bowelle Behazin**

According to historical narratives, Torgbui Kundo was never really conquered by his enemies at war.<sup>874</sup> Indigenous oral stories differ on what actually led to the warrior's demise. Oral narratives indicate that his wife revealed his most powerful secret that "his magic and spiritual powers would desert him or become impotent or powerless if a woman's undergarment touches him or was held before him."<sup>875</sup> Other popular historical narratives indicate that Europeans (probably the French) kidnapped him while signing one of the numerous treaties.<sup>876</sup>

The narrative states:

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<sup>874</sup> See Amoaku (1975), Mamatta (9176), Fiagbedzi (1977), Locke and Agbeli (1980), and Badu (2002)

<sup>875</sup> Boko Kodzo Kumedzro (see appendix E)

<sup>876</sup> Some researchers indicate that Togbi Kundo Hossu Bowelle and his army was defeated heavily by the French in a war. Kundo (Behazin) was kidnapped by the French while signing a peace treaty after the defeat. He supposedly lived out the remainder of his life in exile in Martinique, an island in the Eastern Caribbean Sea and also in Algeria where he is believed to have died in 1894 and his remains were returned to Abomey. See <http://blackhistorypages.net/pages/behazin.php> (accessed: 02/19/2009);

Europeans' 'adoration' for Kundo led to his invitation abroad after several negotiations. On board the ship, on the high sea, Kundo was said to have requested that the ship return to Anlo so he could get the pipe that he had forgotten. The sailors thought that since they had gotten the "notorious king" onboard, and there was no way that he could escape, that there was no point listening to his demands. Not even several entreaties from Kundo could change their minds. Kundo, who was fully dressed in his state regalia, slipped his foot out of the traditional sandals he was wearing and mystically stopped the ship from moving by stepping on the floor of the ship with his bare foot. Kundo said to his kidnappers, '*Atsiligeli, nye ya nye me to ha yi ge o, nye ya nye me go ha yi ge o, dordorklele,*' literally meaning, '*Atsiligeli,*'<sup>877</sup> I would not go to sea, I would not go ashore (unless you let us go back home [Dahome] for my pipe, we shall not proceed on the sea). The source indicates that the sailors had to sail back to Dahomey for Kundo to pick up his pipe and then returned to the ship to continue with the journey.<sup>878</sup>

Another version was summarized by David Locke as follows:

Thus Kundo was captured, put inside a wine barrel and shipped to Europe. One version of this story says that Kundo had left his pipe in Africa and asked that the ship returned for it. When the Germans refused, Kundo used his 'juju' to becalm the ship until his request was granted. At length he reached Germany where he was poisoned. When Kundo's mother learned of her son's capture, she could not believe it. She was so convinced that her son could never be defeated that she asked people to bet on it.<sup>879</sup>

The Fon and Ewe of West Africa are believed to be one of the indigenous African people who were most resistant to Western domination and colonialism and one of the last to be defeated by Europeans and their African allies.<sup>880</sup> Despite the perceived death of Kundo, some of his subjects still believed he was too strong and powerful to be kidnapped and killed, as hopeful rumors developed about Torgbui Kundo reappearing. Kundo was and still is an inspiration to all Ewe of West Africa and they continue to perform musical activities that constantly remind them

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<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/58661/Behanzin> (accessed: 02/19/2009), Boahen et la (1987), Pakenham (1991), and Harris (1998)

<sup>877</sup> *Atsiligeli* is an appellation for the elephant and the shark.

<sup>878</sup> As narrated by Kobla Molisi and Kodzo Agbalekpor both maternal uncles of the author and Kofitse Dekpe Gbolonyo, paternal uncle of the author on August 3, 1999 at Dzodze, Ghana. This narrative is common among all Ewes.

<sup>879</sup> Locke (1978: 101-102). This version is the same as one I was told by Kila Fiebor and Opeano in separate interviews at Anlo Afiadenyigba, Ghana (see appendix E)

<sup>880</sup> See Gorlin (2000: 35)

of this great king and warrior. The following are examples of three such songs. The first song comments on the said kidnapping of Kundo.

**Song 89: *Kundo Yi Yevuwode***

*Atsiagbeko* (Text in Ewe: Anlo dialect)

//:Kundo yi Yevuwode

Megbo o he

Dada be mina mitso gbe de dzi

Kundo yi Yevuwode

Megbo o he

Mitso gbe de dzi://

//:O! Miafe Awafiaga

Do de (ga tsi) aho(ava) me!

Miyina aho(ava) wo ge://

Miyi aho, miyi aho, miyi aho

Mide so, mide so, mide so

Kundo yi Yevuwode

Megbo o he

Mitso gbe de dzi<sup>881</sup>

**Literal translation**

Kundo has gone to the Whiteman's land

And never returned

Mother says let us bet on it

Kundo has gone to the Whiteman's land

And never returned

Let us bet on it

Oh! Our Great War King

Is perished in battle (is captured in war)!

We are going to fight (going to war)

Let's go to war, let's go to war, let's go to war!

Let's fight, let's fight, let's fight!

Kundo has gone to the White man's land

And never returned

Let us bet on it

Whether he went to the whiteman's country by will or was kidnapped is the subject of this debate. This song shows that his subjects at the time, including the composer of the song, disagree on the events leading up to Kundo's departure abroad. "Whether or not he went there by will, we need to take action. For us, it is our leader and warrior that has been captured and we cannot just let go. We must go to war, we must fight the enemy," says the composer.

Kundo is also known for his symbols, which include *zi* (smoking pipe), *atiligeli/atsiglinyi* (elephant), *azi* (egg), and a captive hanging from a flagpole;<sup>882</sup> all of which are rebuses of his names and spiritual power. The next song describes the encounter between Torgbi Kundo (as a captive) and the Europeans (as captors) as more of a tug-of-war (*dodoklele*) between an elephant (*atiglinyi*) and a whale shark (*boso*), the two biggest living creatures on land and in the sea in Ewe conception. The song underpins some of Kundo's symbolic features as mentioned above.

<sup>881</sup> See also Locke (1978)

<sup>882</sup> The flagpole is a reference to a boastful and rebellious Anago ([a Yoruba sub-ethnic group] who was a practitioner of harmful magic from Ketou, whom the king hanged from a flagpole as punishment for his pride).

**Song 90: Atsiligeli****Tordziha (Text in Ewe)**

*Atsiligeli, nya nye me to ha yi ge o*  
*Nya nye me go ha yi ge o, dodoklele!*  
*Egoe mila yia?*  
*Alo 'toe milayia?*  
*Atsiligeli, nya nye me tor ha yi geo*  
*Nya nye me go ha yi geo, dodoklele*

**Literal translation**

*Atsiligeli* I will not go (further) to sea  
 I will not go to shore, deadlock (tug-of-war)!  
 Do we go (back) to shore?  
 Or do we go further into the sea?  
*Atsiligeli*, I will not go (further) to the sea  
 I will not go to shore, deadlock (tug-of-war)!

In the song, Kundo represents an elephant and his captors the whale shark. While Kundo demands that the ship returns to shore his captors refuse and insist that they continue the journey. The traditional musician documents this historic event by drawing this parallel that would facilitate retention.

The next song below underscores bravery acts of Dahomean army under Kundo's leadership. It also underscores Kundo's mysterious spiritual powers.

**Song 91: Kundovio Tso Ameta****Atrikipui (Text in Ewe: Anlo dialect)**

*Kundovio tsoa 'meta loo*  
*Tu medi o*  
*'Ho neva!*  
*Kundoawoe tso 'meta dee*  
*Tu medio*  
*'Hor neva!*  
*Miele tsinoko keke Dahume*  
*Fifia, 'hor neva*  
*Miele ahanoko keke Dahume*  
*Fifia 'hor neva*  
*Kundoawoe tso ameta de tu medio*  
*'Hor neva*  
*Wole Sodeto*  
*Kundowo gbona*  
*Wole 'vamega*  
*Kundowo gbona*

**Literal translation**

Kundo's children (army) have beheaded/killed  
 No gun sounds (without a gunshot)  
 Let there be war!  
 Kundos army have beheaded/killed  
 No gunshot (without gunfire)  
 Let there be war!  
 We went drinking water in Dahumey  
 Right now, let there be war!  
 We went drinking spirit/wine in Dahumey  
 Right away, let there be war  
 The Kundos have killed without gunfire  
 Let there be war!  
 If Sodeto is captured  
 Kundo's army would come (attack)  
 If the war commander is captured  
 Kundo's forces would attack

The composer brags about his/her power and dares the enemy to respond. "We, the army under the command of our great warrior Kundo, have attacked and killed (beheaded and defeated the enemy) but the victim's party never responded. We are ready for any response anytime. Whether

at a party or a drinking spree in Dahomey (in good times and in bad times), when there is an instant attack, we shall respond immediately, if our commander is captured we would fight on” the composer/singers declare.

The belief that Togbui Kundo was a great warrior and a charismatic leader is deeply enshrined in the above and many other songs. The aim of this section is not to debate whether or not Kundo was captured, kidnapped, sent abroad, and killed or died of natural causes. Rather, it is to show how musicians comment on, record, and disseminate historical narratives about Kundo and how their own imaginations about the man are reflected in such texts.

### **6.3.2 Togbi De Na Atitso Hosu Abofrakuma I**

*“Adzigo! So de gbe, mieyi ge; Abofrakuma to zi Adzigo, miva minya aho ado da”*  
(Adzigo! War god commands, we will go; Abofrakuma has stormed Adzigo, come let’s push war away)

Abofrakuma I is popularly known as one of Anlo Ewe’s illustrious sons. He was born as a “child” of Togbi Nyigbla (War God Nyigbla) at the Nyigbla shrine in Anloga in 1800 to Efia, his father. Born as De Na Atitso Hosu Efia, Abofrakuma became one of Anlo Ewe’s fearless leaders who continued to defend the motherland until his death in battle. From his birth it was believed that he would grow to become a great leader and warrior. According to Mamattah and some of my discussants, Abofrakuma’s natal name De Na Atitso Hosu or Atitsogbi is an abbreviation of a philosophical statement: *“Atitsoe alo atitsue wonye metso na mi si avanye ho”* (it is a mighty tree that I have given you that will grow up and tower highest and become the eagle in the annals of

chivalry).<sup>883</sup> C. M. K. Mamattah gives a brief account of Abofrakuma's illustrious deeds in Anlo Ewe history:

In his youth Abofrakuma was first an Anlo warrior. Later, he distinguished himself in a battle against the Adas... Togbi ADAKU of Asadame who was on the same battlefield with him was highly impressed at the gallantry of Abofrakuma in killing the chief of Ada and chopping off his head. Togbi Adaku presented to Abofrakuma on the field of battle a sword as a sign of promotion in the ranks and Abofrakuma became war captain and successfully led the Anlo to several battles, wars and expeditions.<sup>884</sup>

According to my discussants Abofrakuma was head of the delegation sent by the Anlo *Awomefia* to the Asante to sign a friendship treaty when the Asante heard of the bravery of Abofrakuma after the battle of Dodowa (also known as the battle of Akatamanso) in 1826. The Asante invited the Anlo to a friendship meeting in Kumasi. After that meeting, the Anlo became allies of the Asantes.<sup>885</sup> De Na Atitso Hosu had the nickname "Abofrakuma" given to him by an Asante war leader who was impressed by Abofrakuma's sagacity, tact, and diplomacy.<sup>886</sup> In addition, "the Ashanti presented Abofrakuma with a sword and a wife named TAWIA. Tawia came to Anlo and begat two sons (twins) for Abofrakuma, ATSU and ETSE ABOFRAKUMA."<sup>887</sup> De Na Atitso Hosu was installed as Togbi Hosu Abofrakuma, *dufia* (paramount chief) of Kedzi as well as the *dusimevalogomefia* (right wing or Woe divisional war

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<sup>883</sup> Personal communication with Agbotadua Kumassah (see appendix E). See also Mamattah (1976: 337), and Wilks (1970, 1975, 1993, 1996)

<sup>884</sup> Mamattah (1976: 337)

<sup>885</sup> Personal communication with Agbotadua Kumassah and interview with Mr. C. K. Kudjordjie (see appendix E for details). See also Mamattah (1976) and Wilks (1970, 1975, 1993, 1996)

<sup>886</sup> Mamattah (1976: 330-331) and Wilks (1970, 1975, 1993, 1996)

<sup>887</sup> Mamattah (1976: 338), Wilks (1970, 1975, 1993, 1996)

commander).<sup>888</sup> Thereafter, he led the Anlo Ewe in fighting many wars including *Agoe-Adzigova* (Agoe-Adzigo also called Genyi Wars: 1860-63 and 1865-1866).<sup>889</sup>

Abofrakuma died in the Agoe-Adzigo war where he led his army<sup>890</sup> to fight the Agoe and their Dahomean allies. In that war, he was betrayed by a woman and was killed on the battlefield together with his brave son Atsu while Etse was captured but spared execution. As narratives report, “Etse was permitted to marry in Agoe-Adzigo so as to rear up children who would be as brave and as daring in war as their great-grandfather Abofrakuma I.”<sup>891</sup> Abofrakuma’s name is widely known not only among Anlo Ewe but also among the Asantes and other societies in West Africa, especially in Togo and Benin (Dahomey), where he died on the battlefield and was buried. His graveyard at Agoe-Adzigo<sup>892</sup> has become a shrine. Today, many of the historical narratives of the feats of Abofrakuma can be heard and seen in artistic practices. Below are a few songs and battle cries that reiterate the greatness of Abofrakuma.

**Song 92: So Ho**

***Kpegisu*** (Text in Ewe: Anlo dialect)

*So ho!*

*Miawoe nye so ye dena*

*’Hodzogbe miawoe la du ga*

*Abofrakuma nto no agbe nadu ga?*

*Abofrakuma nto no agbe*

*Wo ya nadu ga ha?*

*So ho!*

*Miawoe nye so ye dena*

*Hodzogbe miawoe la du ga!*

**Literal Translation**

Thunder’s war (spiritual war)!

We are the thunder that strikes

On the day of war, we shall be victorious!

Abofrakuma himself alive for you to win?

Abofrakuma himself to be alive

And you would emerge as winner?

Thunder’s (spiritual war)!

We are the thunder that strikes

On the day of war, we shall be victorious!

Warriors associate themselves with anything fearful and naturally powerful. They want to bear a name that will psychologically give them courage and in turn frighten their enemy. The

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<sup>888</sup> See Mamattah (1976: 234). In a letter dated 15<sup>th</sup> March, 1934, signed by the Awomfia Togbi Sri II and the then State Clerk N. C. Kwawukume published in Mamattah (1976: 355-358) it is stated that the Agudza war was fought around 1782 and 1784.

<sup>889</sup> See Mamattah (1976)

<sup>890</sup> Included in the army were Aborkauma’s twin sons Etse and Atsu Hosu and his half brother Adzika Axolu.

<sup>891</sup> Mamattah (1976: 332)

<sup>892</sup> See Mamattah (1978: 335)

recitation, or even mentioning of these names boosts their egos and, at the same time, instilled fear into their enemy. Abofrakuma and his warriors likened their power to that of thunder. Even the sound of thunder is enough to leave a fighter trembling. “Our strength is like that of the spirit of God of Thunder, *So*. We will ever win, more so when Abofrakuma our great leader is alive and leading us,” the composer/singer reiterates.

As a commander, Abofrakuma was good at his organizational skills and strategies. The *atripkui* war song below is a commentary on Abofrakuma’s message to Zonyra Boni, the then left wing or Lashibi divisional commander and the *dufia* (paramount chief) of Anloga.<sup>893</sup> The former was informing the latter of the need to fight the Agoe-Adzigo war against the Fon of Dahomey. The Agoe-Adzigo war was one of the earliest civil wars the Ewe were involved in against their kin, the Fon.

**Song 93: *Bofrakuma do ame de Boni***

*Atripkui* (Text in Ewe: Anlo dialect)

*Bofrakuma do ame de Boni [Zonyra]*

*Be neva*

*Aho va Adzigo*

*Neva yewoayi loo*

*Novi tsi Ava ha?*

*Mewo de oa?*

*Awa va Adzigo*

*Va miyi*

*Dahume-Fowo fe Agboa*

*Magbae madzo*

**Literal translation**

Abofrakuma sent a message to Boni [Zonyra]

That he should come

That war has come to Adzigo (Adzigo under attack)

He should come so they would go (fight)

Siblings/comrades perishing in war

Can’t we do anything (to help)?

War has come to Adzigo (Adzigo under attack)

Come let’s go

The gates/blockade of Fon’s of Dahomey

I will break it and leave (fight the Fon’s)

The message is clear and obvious. Abofrakuma got the message that his kin in Agoe-Adzigo were under attack by the Fon of Dahomey. He related the same message to other Anlo Ewe war commanders and asked that they go to help their Adzigo kin. The musicians not only tell us the main message but also describe the severity and urgency of the action to be taken. “Our siblings

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<sup>893</sup> Togbi Zonyra Boni was then the *Mialogomefia* (Left Wing or Lashibi Divisional Commander) and the *Dufia* (Paramount Chief) of Anloga.

(*novi*) and allies are being killed. The last thing we should do is not to do anything. No matter how formidable the Fon allies army is, our army is strong and prepared to break their front and defeat them,” the song entreats Boni and other Anlo warriors to go to war.

The song below goes further to comment on what followed the announcement and Abofrakuma’s call to fight the Agoe-Adzigo war against the Fon.

**Song 94: *Adzigo, So Degbe***

**Kpegisu** (Text in Ewe: Anlo dialect)

*Adzigo, Adzigo So de gbe*  
*Mieyi ge (miawo nua)*  
*Anlowo be*  
 “*Adzigo, Adzigo so de gbe*  
*Mieyi ge (miawo nua)*”  
*Anlowo (amewo) tso tu*  
*Tso tu yia (mieyi na) ’va wo ge*  
*Anlowo (amewo) tso yi*  
*Tso yi yia (mieyi na) ’va wo ge*  
*Avawo nutsu ya me sia ku o de*  
*(Ne) So de gbe*  
*Mieyi ge (miawo nua)*  
*Anlowo be*  
 “*Adzigo, Adzigo so de gbe*  
*Mieyi ge (miawo nua)*”

**Literal Translation**

Adzigo Adzigo Thunder (war god) commands  
 We will go (we will go to war and fight)  
 The Anlos say  
 “Adzigo, Adzigo Thunder (war god) commands  
 We will go (we will go to war and fight)”  
 The Anlos (the people) take gun/prepare  
 Take gun and going (we are going) to war  
 The Anlos (the people) take sword/prepares  
 Take sword and going (we are going) to war  
 A fighterman (warrior) does not fear death  
 (If) Thunder (war god) commands  
 We will go (we will go to war and fight)  
 The Anlos say  
 “Adzigo, Adzigo So (war god) commands  
 We will go (we will go to war and fight)”

In this song, the musician proclaims that the god of war (So) and the commander have declared that the community is going to war in Adzigo against the Fon. The musician, possibly a member of the army, encourages, prods, and incites warriors to be courageous to fight—“A warrior does not fear death.” A battle cry used in military musical sessions records Abofrakuma’s deeds in the Agoe-Adzigo war as follows:

**Song 95: *Abofrakuma to zi Adzigo***

**Kpegisu** (Text in Ewe: Anlo dialect)

//:*Abofrakuma to zi Adzigo*  
*Miva minya aho ado da*  
*Ho ke ha?*  
*Ho basa*  
*De misu ye miewo*

**Literal translation**

Abofrakuma has stormed Adzigo  
 Come let’s push war away (fight the enemy)  
 What kind of war (enemy) is it?  
 A very dangerous war (enemy)  
 We are capable that is why we’ll fight it

*De miesu ye mieva://*  
*Anamusa, de mieva*

We are ready hence we have come  
Anamusa we have come

The fact that the Anlo army under the command of Abofrakuma was contemptuous is discernible in the above and many other songs. The composer clearly captures the pride and military powers of Abofrakuma and his army. “We are a formidable side under Abofrakuma. What kind of war or enemy that we could not fight. We are ready to storm Adzigo and fight dangerous armies under powerful commanders Anamusa<sup>894</sup>,” the song proclaims.

Below is an Atrikpui war song, which also comments on one of the clashes between the Ewe and their Fon-Dahomean kin in one of their civil war encounters. Although the Ewe and the Fon of Dahomey are close kin, they were involved in different war encounters against each other at different points in history. Nevertheless, they keep their kinship affinities and have collaborated in other wars against their common enemies. It is therefore interesting to hear Fon and Dahomean names in many Ewe war songs. In some cases the Ewe portrayed the Fon and Dahomeans as enemies and in many others as allies, spiritual advisors, military strategist and collaborators. Below is one of the songs that portray the Fon, Anago, and other Dahomeans as Ewe foes:

**Song 96: *Aklie Do Goka Me***

*Atrikpui* (Text in Ewe: Anlo dialect)<sup>895</sup>

*Aklie do goka me*

*Tue di Anago*

*Dahume 'klasuwoe do goka me*

*Mieyina Dahume 'xoluawo kpo ge da*

*Aklie do goka me*

*Fogbonuviwo*

**Literal translation**

The warrior in battle dress, locked in combat

Gunshots reverberate in Anago

Dahomey warriors in battle dress locked in combat

We are going to meet the warriors of Dahomey

The warrior in battle dress, locked in combat

Let the children of Fon (the Fon army)

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<sup>894</sup> According to my discussant Amega Setsoafia Seshie, Anamusa is an “unidentified” Fon-Dahomean Allies war leader.

<sup>895</sup> *Axolu* as used in this song (*'xoluawo*) means ‘warriors,’ ‘army commanders,’ or ‘the king’s army.’ The Anago’s are a Yoruba sub-ethnicity that are related to the Fon in Dahomey and for that matter the Ewe historically. Like the Fon, they were involved foes and allies of the Ewe at different times in history.

<i>Nezo do mi yia</i>	Take the lead/begin the war; we would advance
<i>Hoe ('ye, woe) dze ale</i>	Come what may
<i>Mieyina Dahume 'xoluawo kpo ge da</i>	We are going to meet the warriors of Dahomey

It is not very clear whether or not the above song relates to the Agoe-Adzigo war or whether it alludes to another Ewe-Fon war that was led by Abofrakume. The song, however, underscores the clashes between the Ewe and their Fon-Dahomean kindred. From the few songs above, there is no doubt De Na Atitso Hosu Abofrakuma was a great leader in Anlo. From the perspective of the musicians who wrote these songs, whether as his (Abofrakuma's) contemporaries or based on historical narrative, Abofrakuma was and still is an Ewe hero and a prominent historical figure.

### 6.3.3 Avadada Adzika Axolu Gagli

In many cultures and societies, as great leaders relinquish power and presence, other great ones emerge. One of the illustrious leaders and warriors that were as heroic as Kundo and Abofrakuma was Adzika Axolu Gagli I. He was also known as Axolu Gagli, Axoluga Taga, and Axolu Kpoto 'Demo.'<sup>896</sup> Adzika Axolu Gagli I was one of the younger half brothers of the legendary Abofrakuma. He reigned as *Anlo Avadada* (field marshal/commander) from 1841-1883.<sup>897</sup> In his litany of Field Marshals of the Agave clan of Anlo, Mamattah states that "Axolu was a hero of several wars: Agoeva, Adidomeva [of] 1866, Agotime Afegame or Wedomeva [of] 1869-1871... He saw active service at Agotime, Ho, Kpando, Peki, and Agu. He presented a

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<sup>896</sup> It should be noted that "Axolu" is also used in Ewe as a politico-military title, which may mean a field mashall, a general, captain, a king, or chief. According to C. Kudjordjie other Ewe military ranks include *Zewuze, Gbete, Alosi, Akosu/Avakosu, and Axolu-gbete*

<sup>897</sup> See Mamattah (1976: 330-367)

friendship sword to the Asantes. He signed the 1874 Treaty of Dzelukofe.”<sup>898</sup> Besides his bravery and spirituality, Axolu was witty and was highly respected for his ability to settle disputes among his people. It is said that sometimes, while on the battlefield, he was sought after and called back home to resolve desperate situations. However, not all his subjects liked him, probably due to his strict rules. One of the songs to honor him is as follows:

**Song 97: Axolu Menye Amevo O**

<i>Atrikpui/Akpoka</i> (Text in Ewe: Anlo dialect)	<b>Literal Translation</b>
<i>Axolu meny'a 'mevo o hee</i>	Axolu is never a bad person
<i>O! Be miyo Axolu neva</i>	Oh! Call Axolu to come
<i>Axolu menye amevo deke o</i>	Axolu is never one bad person
<i>Aza so gbe vo</i>	The day has come
<i>Miyo Axolu neva</i>	Call Axolu to come

Every hero has some adversaries. No matter the extent of love, respect and adoration his subjects and admirers have for him, there are usually some elements of the society that may disagree with him. They may criticize him and more often than not highlight his weaknesses. Such was Axolu’s case. Though, for his military, spiritual, and leadership roles, many hailed him, his adversaries did not let go of his flaws. “We may brand him bad but he is never a bad man. You see, now we need to call for his assistance even though he is at war defending the land. We have no choice despite the criticisms leveled against him,” the composer explains.

**6.3.4 Glagovi Tete Tenge Gligui Dzokoto**

*“Fia Tenge tso amevu tso nya woe miedu ku nyo wu ahomeku nyo wu”*  
(King Tenge took human blood to prepare spiritual concoctions we used death is better, death in war is better)

Another legendary Ewe leader and warrior who emerged after Kundo, Abofrakuma, Axolu and many others was Glagovi Tete Tenge Gligui-Dzokoto. Tenge was born as Lotsu Agbemeasenu

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<sup>898</sup> Mamattah (1976: 231)

Gligui-Dzokoto. Later as a result of his bravery and spiritual power, he was given different names including Tenge/Tete (black scorpion also called *aho yibo*), Agbomashiku (the ram who is not scared of death), and Glagovi.<sup>899</sup> Tenge, one of the twenty-one siblings succeeded his father Togbi Dzokoto I who died in 1869 at Anyako. He was installed Togbi Tenge Gligui-Dzokoto II at *Yokele* battlefield near Kpalime in Togo in 1873 as the *Miavalogomefia* (left wing or Lashibi divisional commander) and *Dufia* (paramount chief) of Anyako.<sup>900</sup> The three-year gap between the death of Dzokoto I and Tenge Gligui-Dzokoto II was as a result of the successor's absence from home. Mamattah writes:

Chief Dzokoto I on the grounds of ill-health and old age, and during the absence of his son Tenge Dzokoto from home on the battle-field at Agoe Adzigo, delegated his powers of leadership of the Anlo Military Lashibi Division to Nyaxo Tameklo I, who replaced him...Dzokoto I later died at home in the very year of the Agotimeva [Agotime war].<sup>901</sup>

Tenge Glagovi Tete Gligui-Dzokoto II was such a brave leader and warrior who had and attained many military feats and honors to his credit. In Mamattah's words "Tenge's name ranks second to that of Abofrakuma among the chivalrous in Anlo Military history."<sup>902</sup> Tenge, who was noted for his spiritual powers and war victories, fought against injustices both within Anlo state and against its external enemies. The song below relates to some of his mysterious spiritual battlefield deeds and feats.<sup>903</sup>

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<sup>899</sup> These later name that became popular were *ahononko*, *nutsunko*, or *kalenko* (drinking, manly/bravery, and warrior names). See Avorgbedor (1994, 2001a), Anyidoho (1982, 1983, 1997), and Agbedor (2005)

<sup>900</sup> See Mamattah (1976: 234, 418-438). Note also that Anlo Ewe rulers that are also military commanders were not installed at home but rather at a battleground (see chapter 5). Research also indicates that Tenge's installation was during the Deputy Commissioner Captain Goldworthy's Volta expedition in 1873. See Matthew, Adam. 1999. *Africa through Western Eyes: Manuscript Records of Traders, Travelers, Soldiers, Missionaries, and Diplomats in Africa Parts 1-2*. Marlborough: Publications, [Notes: Part 1 and Part 2 are from the Royal Commonwealth Society Library now housed at Cambridge University.]

<sup>901</sup> Mamattah (1976: 426)

<sup>902</sup> Ibid

<sup>903</sup> See Mamattah (1976), Locke (1978, 1992), and Dor (2000)

**Song 98: *Ku Nyo Wu****Atrikpui/Akpoka* (Text in Ewe: Anlo dialect)**Literal Translation***Fia Tenge tso amevu*

King Tenge took blood

*Tso nya woe miedu*

In preparing spiritual concoctions we used

*Ku nyo wu ahomeku nyo wu*

Death is better, death in war is better

*Ku nyo wu ahomeku nyo wu*

Death is better, war death is better

*Fia Tenge tso amevu*

King Tenge took blood

*Tso nya woe miedu*

In preparing spiritual concoctions we used

*Ku nyo wu ahomeku nyo wu*

Death is better, a battle death is better

As mentioned earlier, despite the uncertainties of war, casualties and loss of life, warriors constantly show that it is heroic to perish in war. “Death is ok, but to die in war is heroic,” they often indicate, as in the song above. A warrior wants others to know about the wonderful and great feats he has achieved while on the battlefield. The composer alludes to one of the mysterious spiritual battlefield achievements of Tenge Dzokoto. Tenge was believed to have fed his army with a “spiritual meal” that sustained and helped them to conquer their enemies. In the song’s text blood serves as a metaphor for the spiritual power involved in the sustenance and victory of the warriors. According to my discussant, by the expression “*Fia Tenge tso amevu tso nya woe miedu*” (King Tenge used blood to prepare spiritual meal we ate), the musician is metaphorically referencing Tenge’s use of spiritual power and military knowledge in leading his army.

The next two songs comment on the common occurrence of enemy attacks on Tenge and his people. In both songs, Tenge Glagovi Tete Dzokoto is portrayed as the one solely responsible for anything that affects the Anlo.

**Song 99: *Aho Le Tenge****Atsiagbeko* (Text in Ewe: Anlo dialect)**Literal translation***Aho le Tenge*

Tenge is besieged

*Be aho le Tenge*

Truly, Tenge is besieged

*Oo, aho le Tenge*

Oh, Tenge is besieged

“An attack on Anlo is an attack on Tenge and vice versa,” the composer portrays.

Invoking Tenge’s name in relation to an enemy attack is a powerful way to galvanize support for the Anlo to go to war. The last thing an army would want to ignore is an attack on their commander. Hence a message indicating that Tenge is besieged was sure to invoke all the necessary sentiment to fight. The song below goes further to place the onus on Tenge: “*Glagovi Tete woa ’gba nye ya, Sohotu la de miawoe*” (Glagovi Tete this is your responsibility, the spiritual gun of the war god would save us). “Our victory or defeat is in your hands. We, however, believe that under your leadership the spiritual gun of our war god would save us.”

**Song 100: *Glagovi Tete woa ’gba nye ya***

<b><i>Atsiagbeko Vulolo</i></b> (Text in Ewe: Anlo dialect)	<b>Literal translation</b>
//:Glagovi Tete woa ’gba nye ya	Glagovi Tete this is your responsibility
Sohotu la de miawoe://	War god’s (thunder) spiritual gun would save us
//:Woa ’gba nye ya	This is your responsibility
Sohotu la de miawo ee://	War god’s (thunder) spiritual gun would save us
Glagovi Tete woa ’gba nye ya	Glagovi Tete this is your responsibility
Sohotu la de miawoe	Thunder’s war gun would save us

The *vulolo* song below comments on the use of war drums to announce imminence of war and the need to prepare for it.

**Song 101: *Atsiadogbe***

<b><i>Atsiagbeko-Vulolo</i></b> (Text in Ewe: Anlo dialect)	<b>Literal translation</b>
//:Atsia dogbe loo (hee)	This is the day of the show ( <i>Atsia</i> is “speaking”)
Mekawoe nye hunowo?	Who are the priests (the spiritual leaders)?
Miya yo wo (da)://	Go and call them (summon them)
//:Dzokotovua digo	Dzokoto’s music has been outdoor (sounding)
Tode me ha	On whichever ground (under any circumstance)
Dzokotovua digo	Dzokoto’s music has been outdoor (sounding)
Mile woge://	We shall do it (we are ready to act/perform it)
//:Atsia dogbe loo	This is the day of the show ( <i>Atsia</i> is “speaking”)
Mekawoe nye hunowo?	Who are the priests (the spiritual leaders)?
Miya yo wo da://	Go and call them (summon them)

*Atsia* music and dance has begun, this is the day to show our styles, strength, and power.

The song says Dzokoto’s drums are sounding; a clear signal of Dzokoto’s popularity and power.

The composer calls for spiritual preparation by the priest and warriors; a task that they believed Tenge Dzokoto was very good at. His army's belief and trust in the potency and efficacy of his spiritual concoctions and mystical powers at war is so entrenched that his name is almost synonymous with power, spirituality, and greatness. The song also calls for all members of the music group to come together: "time has come for us to show our work, style, power, and superiority to all." Also, by referring to *Atsia* music and dance as "*Dzokotovu*" (Dzokoto's music and dance), the composer ascribes qualities of great power, popularity, and style to the music and its performers.<sup>904</sup>

The expression of Tenge Dzokoto's greatness is not limited to politico-military musical genres. The song below is from a social musical genre and underscores Tenge's greatness. It simply recognizes Tenge Dzokoto as one of the great men that lived on earth. The song speaks for all Anlo Ewe. It indicates that all Anlo appreciate Tenge's rule and recognize him as one of their great leaders.

**Song 102: *Dzokoto Va Anyigba Dzi***

*Agbadza/Akpoka* (Text in Ewe: Anlo dialect)

**Literal Translation**

*'Megativeawo va anyigba dzi*

Great men came to live on earth

*Dzokoto va anyigba dzi*

Dzokoto came to live on earth

*'Megativeawo va nyigba dzi*

Great men lived on the earth

*Dzokoto va anyigba dzi*

Dzokoto lived on the earth

*Anlowo be Dzokoto va nyigbadzi*

Anlos say Dzokoto lived on the earth

Dzokoto died at home in his hometown, Anyako on Sunday, June 18, 1911 after 38 years of reign and military leadership. Like Kundo, Abofrakuma, Axolu, and many other Ewe heroic warriors, Tenge Gligui Dzokoto's politico-military achievements are great sources and good examples of all Ewe today to emulate.

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<sup>904</sup> See also Gorlin (2000)

## 6.4 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This chapter highlights specific indigenous information within Ewe military culture focusing on military institutions, personalities, codes, warfare propaganda, and historic wars. It illuminates the relevance of indigenous military knowledge, history, and importance of songs and their deeper meanings in defense, security, and stability in traditional Ewe society. Musical practice in general and songs in particular serve as media through which coded and uncoded military messages are disseminated. Songs insinuate, educate, direct, petition, prepare the community's emotional state of mind and psychologically boosts warriors morale in times of war. Musical activities are vital parts of Ewe pre-war and post-war rituals.

The chapter concludes that among the Ewe, women are not usually combatants. However, certain categories of women take part in the selection and disqualification of combatants. Mothers, for example have the right and the judgment to determine whether or not a man is qualified and for that matter fit to go to war or be a warrior. In the past politico-military leaders and commanders were chosen and often installed on the battlefield. As mothers take part in the selection process of combatants, it is prudent to suggest that they indirectly take part in the selection of Ewe military commanders, since future commanders are chosen from a pool of combatants on the battlefield. Also the highest Ewe military title, like other politico-religious and musical titles, is a feminine title—*avadada* (lit. war mother meaning commander-in-chief)—an indication of indigenous Ewe's conception of, respect for, and importance attached to feminine power, even in a male dominated profession. It also reflects the Ewe ontology and conception of life and power as emanating first and foremost from female (see chapter 3).

In fighting their numerous wars, the Ewe were led by great kings and military leaders. Ewe composer-poets cast the names and deeds of these illustrious leaders in their songs and

proverbs as lasting portraits. In commenting on and documenting military events, musicians not only describe their experiences, memories, and/or imaginations of battle scenes but also invoke the ancestral spirits of these prominent personalities that led their people. Their metaphoric descriptions and allusions to battle scenes and warriors give us some sense of the nature of the various combats and contribute to our efforts to identify and situate some of the Ewe military events in time and space. My investigations indicate that most of the musicians might have taken part in or witnessed the events they described in the songs, in which case the songs were created as events happened or soon after. Others may have based their compositions on oral historical narratives of militarism and political activities, in which case the songs were composed after the events have happened. It is also possible composers were influenced by their creative imaginations. If so then, could the imagination of composers distort the truth? Although it is possible that composers' imaginations might have influenced or distorted the truth in one way or the other, there is little doubt that imagination plays a small role, if any at all, in the creation of the songs. This is because some features and characteristics of the politico-military culture may still be seen in such activities and occasions including festivals, installation of kings, chiefs, and other political leaders, and also during funeral celebrations of prominent Ewe personalities. Also, the names of individuals and the wars they served in are not proclaimed only in musical practices. They are also immortalized in sculpture, poetry, proverbs, personal names, names of shrines, and other landmarks.

In today's peaceful atmosphere, the mostly military institutions evolved into institutions of humane and hospitable society. The Ewe traditional state evolved gradually into a peaceful coexistence with its neighbors. The institutional functions of the war songs, drums, and dances also were modified. For example the name *atamga* (lit. great oath) meaning "secret oath" was

changed to *agbeko*, which means, “life is clear” or “live is safe” and was dedicated to the pursuit of peace through a spirited remembrance of the horrors of warfare. The military units became political units and the basis of the present Ewe community system. Military commanders became political heads or chiefs of the communities they led during migration and battles within a centralized state system headed by a king, *Awoamefia/Fiaga*. It should be noted that the warlike past is not only documented in the music and dance traditions, but also in the institution of chieftaincy as relics of the heroic past, or in the regalia of chiefs as symbols of their royal rights or prerogatives. Other sources include poetry, clothing, sculpture, and religion from which much more information about Ewe indigenous military knowledge and values may be found.

War dances, songs and other musical instruments and implements are still in use, but in quite different contexts. Since there are no more ethnic and other wars between the Anlo Ewe and their neighbors, musical activities associated with these military institutions are now performed only during special occasions. These include occasions such as festivals, funerals, tragic events, or enthronement or dethronement of kings, chiefs, queen mothers, old warriors, elders, prominent stateswomen and men. Songs and other musical practices associated with militarism not only serve military purpose but also continue to be some of the reliable sources of historical, political, and socio-cultural information. Since military musical practices live on long after warfare, so does the information they contain. Hence, musical activities are believed to be reliable means of documentation that live for posterity.

In conclusion, musicians used their musical skills and resources to aid memory by documenting events of the time or as a later commentary on the past. Their products and practices now serve as historical documents and sources of reference for information on Ewe military sub-culture. So long as the songs live, so long as generation after generations sing them

and pass them on, the information they contain is passed on and the present and future is informed by our past. Although ethnic and other such conflicts as described in the songs are no longer prevalent, there are other challenges that we face as a people today that we could effectively use knowledge and values from our past in solving and making sure our future is without such conflicts.

## 7.0 SOCIO-CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE AND VALUES

*“Ati deka mewoa/mezua ave o”*  
(One tree does not make/became a forest)

Having discussed the political, historical, and military knowledge, the pervasive role of religion and spirituality in Ewe society, and having exhibited how song texts support, retell, and carry on these various knowledge systems in previous chapters, I now look at Ewe social life with emphasis on humanistic and moral values. Humans have an inherent tendency towards socialization, making the occurrence of socio-cultural life a natural one. Social relationships are essential for every human person and no one individual can be self-sufficient. In view of these limitations in individual capabilities, Ewe society places emphasis on social life as a constant reminder to the individual and the society of the need to help one another and to function as a community. In addition to the proverb quoted above, the following Ewe maxims sum it up:

*Emia ye kloa dusi, eye dusi ha kloa emia*  
(The left arm washes the right arm and the right arm also washes the left arm)

*Abo deka melea todzo o*  
(One hand does not hold the buffalo by the horn)

The maxims, often used as song texts, remind us that an individual inevitably requires relationships and cooperation with others in order to achieve many of his/her pursuits. In turn, society needs individuals to come together to form a community. This underscores the need to appreciate communal values such as cooperation, brotherhood/sisterhood, and friendship. There

is no doubt that in Ewe communities, music is one of the primary means by which socialization and its value in almost all dimensions is articulated, transmitted and preserved. This chapter is devoted to the above values in Ewe society. It focuses on humanistic and moral values, and using musical resources as evidence, discusses their basic conceptual frameworks by which they are articulated, expressed, and transmitted.

## **7.1 HUMANISTIC VALUES**

By humanity, I am referring to all human beings collectively; the human race; humankind. It also includes the quality or condition of being human; human nature; the quality of being humane; kindness; and benevolence. Throughout the history of the Ewe and especially now in modern times, humanistic values espouse cooperation and peaceful living among all people at all levels, cultures, and ideologies. Universal fundamental humanistic values promote cultural and religious diversity, individual creativity, and communal ethos. Conversely, humanity discourages and sometimes totally rejects the validity of declarations by individuals or groups asserting and claiming spiritual and moral superiority or politico-religious autonomy over others. The theme of humanity or humanistic values is not only deeply rooted in Ewe culture but also very important in understanding Ewe moral values. Some issues raised and discussed in previous chapters allude to the important Ewe concept of humanism. The reader may recall that: (1) the powers, attributes, and concern of the supernatural forces are focused on the protection and wellbeing of living humans on earth whether in peace or in war and (2) traditional rituals and prayers pay attention to the protection of life, bless fertility, encourage giving birth to many children, but denounce the taking of life, even that of the enemy. This section identifies further some of the

indigenous humanistic values of the Ewe and discusses the sources of knowledge and philosophy upon which these values are based. Most specifically, this section focuses on humanity, greetings, tragedy (death), and the concept of brotherhood.

### 7.1.1 Humanity

Indigenous Ewe's humanistic values embrace common moral decencies including freedom, justice, truthfulness, and compassion, and reflect the typical standards that human beings discover and develop through living together. These values draw upon reason and, through different media including the arts, express concern for justice, fairness, and for the physical and mental well being of all members of a community. In indigenous Ewe society, the people's institutions, art, philosophical thoughts, and practices are full of expressions that underscore the importance of the human beings and concern for human welfare.

For example, the Ewe concept of humanity and the value that is indigenously attached to it may have educed from their ontological concept that *Bomeno/Mawu* (Creator God/Supreme Being) creates human beings (see Chapter 3). They believe and recognize human value as being intrinsically linked with recognition of the existence of Mawu as well as the unity of all people, irrespective of biological composition, relationship, or cultural affiliation. The concept that all people/persons, even strangers, are human (are of one human body/race) and must be treated humanely is expressed in the following Ewe proverbs and song texts:

**Song 103: *Amezro Ha Ame Vie***

*Avihe* (Text in Ewe: Ewedome dialect)  
*Amezro ha ame fe vie wonye*  
*Menye atsikogbe wowo tsoe o*

**Literal Translation**

A stranger is also a human offspring  
he/she did not explode out of the trunk of a tree

And the proverb:

*Amedzro la, dzogbetae, mesena miena o*  
(A stranger is like an oasis, it soon dries up)

*Afo menya dume degbe o*  
(lit., the feet do not know the day of traveling to a foreign town)

Both the song and the proverbs underscore one humanistic value—people are human beings irrespective of their physical, ideological, biological, spiritual, and cultural differences—and should be treated as human. *Amedzro* (lit., human stranger: *Ame* = human being/person; *dzro* = strange/foreign) meaning a stranger or foreigner is a concept the Ewe use to identify a person who has come from a different town, village, or community/social group to visit, sometimes without prior notice or agreement. *Amedzro* (*amedzrowo*, plural) may also mean visitor, in which case it is used to identify a well-known person who is visiting, and is regarded as a member of the extended family or relative (*fometo*), a friend (*xo/xolo/velia*), or an acquaintance (*amenyanye*). *Amedzrowo* may come to lodge with their hosts as “absolute strangers” or on the recommendation of someone else who may know the hosts. Their stay could last for a day, a week, or longer. Customarily, *amedzrowo* are often given the best hospitality the host can offer. They are well looked after and fed with scrumptious and often sumptuous meals. The meaning of *amedzro* may also be extended to refer to anyone who travels to another country with the intent of going back to his/her home country. Irrespective of how long the individual lives in that foreign country or of the property he/she acquires there, he/she is still considered an *amedzro*. Although an *amedzro* is not considered to be a permanent member of the community/family that they live in, he/she is always treated humanely and in many cases with special care and attention. The host often tries to treat him/her well so as not to suggest that because they are an *amedzro* they are inhuman.

The song text and proverb above underscore important moral lessons regarding the treatment of strangers—and for that matter, human beings. The following are the deeper meanings underlying the concept of *amedzro*. First, every person was born by human beings; no human being came out of a tree trunk. Hence all humans are equal and must be treated humanely, even when one is perceived as a stranger. Secondly, since strangers/visitors have a short stay or are often on transit, they must and are often well treated, which in turn neglects the permanent members of the host group/family. However, in view of their short or transitory state, the joy that we get from their visit/stay is short-lived. So, the proverb/song texts remind the host not to forget and neglect others because the stranger/visitor will soon leave but the family stays forever. Thirdly, because humans are mobile beings, the Ewe believe that every human being would at one point in time become an *amedzro*. That belief is expressed in the proverb *afo menya dume degbe o* (lit. the feet do not know the day of traveling to a foreign town). In that case, the Ewe tries to treat an *amedzro* with all the respect and care it can afford with the view that one day they too will become an *amedzro*. The *akpese/boboobo* song further exhibits the above belief:

**Song 104: *Afo Menya Dume Degbe O***

**Akpese** (Text in Ewe: Ewedome dialect)

*Afoe, afoe, afoe*

*Afo menya*

*Dume degbe o, afoe*

*Ne 'kpo 'medzro/novi*

*Naloe ko, afoe*

**Literal Translation**

The leg, the leg, the leg

The leg does not know

The day it would travel to a foreign land, the leg

When you see a stranger/sibling

Just love him/her, the leg

The fourth meaning of *amedzro* is connected with Ewe ontology and concept of ancestorship. It is believed that the spirits of ancestors sometimes visit the earth as *amedzro* in the form of living beings. As discussed in chapter 3, the last thing Ewe want is to incur the displeasure of the spirit of their ancestors. Since an *amedzro* is often a total stranger, it is

possible that an *amedzro* could also be the spirit of the host's ancestor. This uncertainty makes clear as well as propels the need for a host to treat every *amedzro* as humanly as one would treat his/her own family. The benefits—blessings, protection, guidance, etc—that one would bring upon oneself by welcoming an ancestor disguised as an *amedzro* is as important as the hope for receiving great hospitality and human treatment when traveling as an *amedzro*. To the Ewe humanism therefore transcends all boundaries and differences including those between the living and the dead.

The Ewe concept of giving fundamental value to humanity underscores the global understanding of humanity. Scientific research reveals that human life originated in one cultural setting, spread to other locations, and from this different cultures evolved and humanity became the multicultural society in which we live today.<sup>905</sup> We are more or less *noviwo* (siblings)<sup>906</sup> from the same family stalk. Racial and other physical differences including hair, eye color and physique can be seen as the kinds of variations one finds in any family where no two offspring are exactly the same. That notwithstanding, research<sup>907</sup> has shown that human beings are so close biologically that blood from an individual of one race can be transfused to save life of a person from a different race. Based on this global theory of human relationship, although this may sound wishful but we try to embrace humanistic family values that supersede boundaries, of nation, race, religion, ethnic origin, sexual differences, and preferences among others. The Ewe

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<sup>905</sup> See for example Büchner, Ludwig. 1894. *Man in the Past, Present, and Future: A Popular Account of the Results of Recent Scientific Research Regarding the Origin, Position, and Prospects of Mankind*. New York: P. Eckler; Stringer, Chris and Robin McKie. 1997. *African Exodus: The Origins of Modern Humanity*. New York: Henry Holt; Palmer, Douglas. 2007. *The Origins of Man*. London: New Holland Publishers. See also <http://www.molwick.com/en/evolution/092-human-origin.html> (accessed: 12/07/2007)

<sup>906</sup> See section 7.1.4 below for detailed discussion on *novi* concept.

<sup>907</sup> See Büchner (1894), Stringer and McKie (1997), and Palmer (2007)

concept of *amedzro* and *novi*<sup>908</sup> therefore underscore this global theory of humanity and human relationship.

Today, we know that the implication that, by belonging to one group of people, nation, race, or by embracing a faith system with its particular beliefs, rules, and regulations, individuals often find a means for separating themselves from global familial values. The humanistic family ethic, while tolerating and understanding differences in customs, beliefs, and social agendas, embraces an inclusiveness that seeks to rise above religious and political animosities and emphasize what unites human beings rather than that which separates them.

Beside *amedzro* as discussed above and *novi*,<sup>909</sup> the comprehension of human values and profound appreciation for humanity is reflected in other Ewe communal social structures including *hlo* (the clan), *fome* (the extended family: *fo* = womb; *me* = inside; meaning all persons coming from or tracing their birth to the same womb), *xo/xolo/velia* (friend), as well as other complex networks of biological and social relationships.<sup>910</sup> Below are a number of songs, proverbs, personal names and maxims that underscore not only the overriding importance of human fellowship for the well-being of the individual human being and the community but also for their underlying philosophy. The following Ewe personal names reiterate the importance of life and humanity:

*Agbenyega*  
(lit. Life is the greatest/richest or Life is money)

*Agbeyehia* or *Agbeehia*  
(lit. Life is the most or greatest need/valuable)

*Amewuga*  
(lit. Human Being is worth more than riches/money)

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<sup>908</sup> Ibid

<sup>909</sup> Ibid.

<sup>910</sup> See Dzobo (1997, 2006) and Gyekye (1996, 1997). See also chapter 1 for further discussion on *hlo*, *fome*, etc.

*Amewusika*  
(lit. Human Being is worth more than gold)

These Ewe personal names underscore the fundamental human value and importance of life. In a deeper sense *Agbenyega* (*agbe* = life, *nye* = is, and *ga* = big/greatest/richest/money) means life is the most important and most valuable thing that an individual possesses. Similarly, *Agbeyehia/Agbehia* (*agbe* = life, *ye* = what is, and *hia* = needed) emphasizes the overriding necessity of life in human existence. A human being is highly valued or has a high premium because it has life. Without life, humanity is not only valueless but also cannot exist. Furthering this idea, *Amewuga* (*ame* = human being, *wu* = worth more than/more valuable/supersedes, *ga* = riches, money, greatness, or bigness) and *Amewusika* (*ame* = human being, *wu* = worth more than/more valuable, and *sika* = gold) reflect the Ewe concept of riches and human value. To the Ewe, richness or money is not only measured in terms of material possession but also, and more importantly, in humanistic values and in life itself. For example, traditionally, the more children one gives birth to the richer one is perceived. Being able to not only produce but also more importantly sustain and nurture in life a number of human beings is, in fact, the greatest form of riches/money in Ewe conception. *Amewuga* and *Amewusika*, philosophically therefore, mean a human being is worth more than any form of material riches or possession including money, gold, clothing, shelter, and so on (See the song below). For their philosophical underpinnings therefore, the Ewe may name their children *Agbenyega*, *Agbeehia*, *Amewuga*, *Amewusika*, *Amenyo* (Human being is good), *Amedzro* (Human stranger), *Agbenyo* (Life is good)<sup>911</sup> among other names, serving as a reminder, to themselves and humanity, of the overriding importance and value of life. Kwame Gyekye indicates that human fellowship is probably the fundamental

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<sup>911</sup> It should be pointed out that these names (*Agbenyega*, *Agbeyehia/Agbehia*, *Amewuga*, and *Amewusika*) may be written or called in short forms as *Enyega*, *Ehia*, *Ewuga*, and *Ewusika*, where “E” is a pronoun (3<sup>rd</sup> person singular) that represents “*Agbe*” and “*Ame*” variously.

principle for all kinds of help an individual may want or need.<sup>912</sup> Only human beings can constitute this fellowship, and it cannot be replaced by any kind of material possession. This idea is reiterated in the following *agbadza* song, which comments on the philosophical meaning of the name *Amewuga*.

**Song 105: *Ame Wu Ga***

*Agbadza* (Text in Ewe: Anlo dialect)

//:Amewuga lo (3x)://

*Meyo ga la*

*Ga meto o*

*Meyo gbeto*

*Gbeto to nam de*

*Amewuga lo ho yo*

**Literal Translation**

Human being is more than riches

I call money/riches

Money/riches did not respond

I call human being

Human being responded to me

Human being is really worth more than riches

In indigenous Ewe conception, money cannot provide all human needs and is not of absolute value. Only the human being is of absolute value for, in times of need, the richest materialistic individual called for money but money did not come. However, when he/she called a human being there was a response. In times of real distress, money, gold, cars, mansions, and other material possessions will not respond to cries for help; only a human being will. Those symbols of riches need to be used by a person to serve the needs of the human being, i.e., without human beings riches are useless. This makes the human being worth more than riches hence needs to be given ultimate value and consideration.<sup>913</sup>

Although Ewe culture emphasizes the value and appreciation of human beings, there is no doubt that people naturally undermine those values and take humanity for granted. The following Ewe maxims, proverbs, and songs provide the basis for this feeling. First, the maxims:

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<sup>912</sup> See Gyekye (1996)

<sup>913</sup> See Dzobo (1997, 2006), Gyekye (1996, 1997)

*Ne akpokplo kua hafi wonya efe didime*  
(Lit. It is when the frog/toad dies that its actual length is known)

*No ame gbo medzea ame nu o*  
(Lit. One never fully appreciates what is near him/her)

*Ave no to gbo medzea to nu o*  
(Lit. The buffalo never fully appreciates the forest that it lives close in/close by)

The three examples above allude to the same human phenomenon—appreciation, dissatisfaction, undervaluation, and discontent with what is at hand. The three sayings, although expressed in different manners, metaphorically allude to the same human attitude of not fully recognizing and appreciating the value of humanity and all that it possesses: they establish and emphasize one and the same philosophical thought and concept. To the Ewe, to appreciate humanity means you should recognize the other person as a fellow individual whose worth as a human being is equal to yours and with whom you undoubtedly share basic human values, ideas, and sentiments. The song below exhibits this need for appreciation and the effects of when it is lacking.

**Song 106: Noamegbo Medzea Ame Nu O**

**Zigi** (Text in Ewe: Ewedome dialect)

*Agbenono nye nusese*  
*Xexeame nono nye nusese nuto*  
*Enye amedewovie zu lea?*  
*Ne wotsinam magbe hafi*  
*Egbe ya nyemedze mianu o*  
*Noamegbo, medzea 'me nu o*  
*(Spoken: Egbe ke gbe ye Akpokplo ku de*  
*Hafi wonyaa wo didime)*  
*Medzo lo, meya da lo*  
*Xexeame agamagbale ye*  
*De wotrona yesiayi*  
*(Spoken: Ne Mawu lo ko de*  
*Nye tsie mavazua 'me, gbe deka*  
*Ame 'de wo vi menyo*  
*Nye tsea 'me koe ya dzim*  
*Migabu be*  
*Atsikogbe mewo tsoe o*  
*Hafi va dzo de mia dome o*

**Literal Translation**

Life (living) is a difficult thing  
Living on earth is really a difficult thing  
I, someone's child has become like this?  
Had I been told I would have refuted it  
Today I am worthless before you  
A person does not appreciate what s/he has  
The day that the frog/toad dies  
Before its actual body length is known  
I am gone/going, there I go  
Earth (Life) is a chameleon skin  
It changes always  
If God permits  
I will also become a human being one day  
I am someone's child (offspring)  
I too was born by a human being  
You [plural] should not think that  
I exploded out of a tree trunk (I am not human)  
And came to live (exist) among you

*Ya miano wonyea 'la*  
*Abe tsoevi menyo ene*  
*Noamegbo ya medzea 'me nu o*  
*Gbedeka ko mava dzo*  
*Noamegbo medzea 'me nu yo yo (hu hu)*

So that you would be maltreating/dehumanizing me  
 As though I am an orphan  
 A person does not appreciate what s/he has  
 One day, I would be leaving (would be gone)  
 Human being does not appreciate the worth  
 and value of a fellow human being

**Song 107: Wonye Alea**

*Adevu/Akpi* (Text in Ewe: Ewedome dialect)

**Literal Translation**

//*Wonye 'lea, wonye la*  
*Ne miano wonye la za (wonye la)//*  
*Menye atsikogbe mewo tso*  
*Amede wovi menye*  
*Hafi va dzo*  
*Miwo 'menugbe na nye tse dzro*  
*Ame adeke menya tso me o*  
*Mitasi wonye la dzro*

Treat me like this, Treat me like that  
 So you continue to treat me in this way (that way)  
 I did not explode out of a tree trunk  
 I am someone's child (offspring)  
 And came to life (existence)  
 Treat me as a human being at the very least  
 Nobody knows tomorrow/future is unpredictable  
 Stop treating me like this/dehumanizing me

The two songs above demonstrate the Ewe sensitivity to inhumane treatment. The composer Nanevi Maweta, drawing on traditional Ewe *zigi* and *adevu/akpi* tunes, proverbs, and maxims comments on an abhorred but common human phenomenon. In a personal communication Nanevi reiterates that, “Life is difficult and challenging because humans made it so.” He rhetorically questions, “why should one be inhumanly treated by fellow human beings as though one is not their kind, but rather a piece of wood?” Using himself as an example, the composer implied that he has done so much for others but today, the same people he has helped do not even recognize him as a human being, let alone appreciate his worth. “Well, I believe that soon when I leave them, they will certainly realize the human value in me. It is sad though, that humans have made life so difficult and so inhuman” he adds.<sup>914</sup> To fail to appreciate and acknowledge a favor, contribution, or help is in effect to overlook or undervalue one of the humanistic ties that bind us. In a deeper sense, the songs and proverbs reiterate three basic humanistic facts: to fully enjoy humanity means one should appreciate his/her values as a human

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<sup>914</sup> Personal communication with Nanevi Maweta (see appendix E)

being; one should exhibit these values by extending that appreciation and recognition through various means including compassion, generosity, and hospitality; and that the individual and society must be open to the interests and welfare of others, offer help where necessary, and to confront it as a humanistic and moral obligation.<sup>915</sup>

One may question the rationale behind some of the dehumanizing narratives that are associated with Ewe and other African cultures. For example, despite the appreciation and importance attached to the value of humanity, inhumane traditions such as domestic slavery and human sacrifice did exist in some quarters of the Ewe and other African cultures decades ago. Domestic slaves were mostly people who were captured in war. Although they were often not killed, they worked as slaves for kings and war commanders for many years. Although domestic slaves were in no way treated as those involved in the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, it still cast doubt on the Ewe and African humanistic values and consciousness (see chapter 1, section 1:10).

Human sacrifice is alleged to have occurred in the event of the death of a great king, when it was believed that an innocent individual is sacrificed so that his spirit would accompany and serve the spirit of the departed king in eternity. This ancient practice was based on what Kwame Gyekye calls “false metaphysics,” that is, the belief that a deceased king continues to *live as king* in the ancestral spiritual world (see chapter 3).<sup>916</sup> In view of this belief, the spirit of the deceased king needed his retinue of servants in the afterlife just as he had in life, hence the “need” for the sacrifice of an innocent soul. This neither makes any rational or moral sense, nor is it consistent with Ewe ontology. From the humanistic point of view, those who are killed to “accompany” and “serve” the king have every right to live their life to its fullest. Ontologically, how could the spirit of the king still continue to be a king with his own retinue of servants at a

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<sup>915</sup> See Dzobo (2006), Agawu (2007), and Gyekye (1997)

<sup>916</sup> See also Gyekye (1996, 1997)

place believed to be the abode of Bomeno/Mawu/Se (the Creator God) Himself? This can be argued to contradict the Ewe concept of the afterlife. There is no doubt that the practice of human sacrifice and domestic slavery in Africa's past constitute a moral blemish on Ewe and African humanity and cast some doubt on the Ewe and African appreciation and respect for human life and dignity. That notwithstanding, there is also much evidence that the Ewe cherish and uphold humanity. The fact that these evil practices, especially that of human sacrifice, were carried out in secret and undertaken in a clandestine manner, is an indication that those who committed it knew that it was not just an inhumane but also criminal and evil act, which would not only be rejected but also condemned by the larger community/society.<sup>917</sup> Just as in all human cultures, the good and the evil are conterminous. It behooves humanity to uphold and promote only that which is worthwhile.

### **7.1.2 *Gbadoname*: The Humanistic Value of Greeting**

Greetings, an expression of friendly and respectful regard, are a cultural universal. All societies have at least one form of greeting; however, conception, manner, and form of greeting differ from culture to culture. In Ewe and other African societies, greeting people is an important means to enhancing human relations and in making people feel good about themselves. One of the clearest manifestations of humanism and communal ethos among indigenous Africans (including the Ewe) is the network of greetings that are performed in the course of daily life. According to my discussants, including Prof. Komla Dzobo, in traditional Ewe society, greeting is considered a way of acknowledging the other person as a fellow human being. Therefore, for

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<sup>917</sup> See Gyekye (1997)

the Ewe, greeting is obligatory, not optional. Furthermore, a person may feel deeply hurt if you pass him/her by without greeting him/her. The failure to greet someone by either refusing to initiate a greeting or declining to respond to another's initiation may be regarded as a failure on your part to recognize that he/she shares your humanity and may also signal a rupture in the social network. The understanding is that if a person appreciates the fact that all human beings are created in the same divine image, he/she would deem it a privilege to greet his/her fellows. Greeting another person is, therefore, not only an act of loving-kindness but also an act of respect to which the other person is entitled. As Prof. Dzobo puts it in an interview, "...we not only have an obligation to greet each person in a cheerful and pleasant manner; we also have the obligation to try to initiate a greeting to every human being."<sup>918</sup>

Around the world and in the history of humanity there are different attitudes to who initiates a greeting. In some societies, there are those whose cultural norm or petty conceit may not permit them to recognize anyone unless they are recognized first. Some cultures have a hierarchy based on age, sex, status etc. that may influence or determine who initiates a greeting or a conversation; that is, for example, you don't speak to your elders until spoken to. In other cultures and contexts, a child is expected to greet but may not be the first to ask an elder, for instance, "how are you?" Yet in other cultures people believe (as a cultural or individual conception) that it is their way of establishing and maintaining their 'dignity' and 'superiority' over others, i.e., by letting others recognize them first. In some other contexts, people may hesitate from a sense of insecurity, towards being the first to extend a warm greeting to those they meet. They are afraid to give or extend a token but genuine friendship and receive only an icy stare in return. They will therefore insist on waiting until the person they meet takes the

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<sup>918</sup> Komla Dzobo (Interview: June 18, 2007, Ho, Ghana)

socio-humanistic ‘emotional risk,’ while they ‘play it safe.’ From an indigenous Ewe perspective such behavior is wrong. An Ewe will initiate or respond according to socio-cultural positions (as described below) at the time of meeting. A sense of conceit or importance, or an illusion of security is not sought out at the expense of humanistic and socio-cultural values.

In fact security concerns in Ewe culture recommend the opposite: that one initiate greeting with a stranger, or even someone with whom they sense danger, feel insecure, or are not sure whether or not the individual is human or a spirit (entity). Giving a friendly greeting with a warm smile, and inquiring after another’s welfare relieves potential tension and helps one to determine whether or not the other is a friendly or hostile/unfriendly spirit. For, it is proverbially said:

*Gbe ye nado hafi nanya fuwoto*

(Lit. It is through expression/initiation of greetings that you get to know your enemy)

By initiating greetings, friendship and open heartedness are extended and, most importantly, mutual humanistic values that bind human beings are recognized and acknowledged. By doing so, the receiver, whether human being or a spiritual entity disguised in human form, has been humanely ‘forced’ to open up his/her intentions. If the person fails to return the same greeting, then feelings of insecurity are confirmed by his/her refusal to respond. For, in Ewe indigenous concept, it is only those who are in enmity (*le fu me* or *le ke me*), harbor ill feelings against another, or embody evil spirit that may not exchange friendly greetings. Greeting (as in the *Agoo!...Ame...concept*)<sup>919</sup> therefore is a way to identify and differentiate between humans (friends, enemies) and good or evil spiritual embodiments/entities. If one intentionally or forgetfully fails to greet or respond to greetings, an Ewe may often ask:

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<sup>919</sup> See chapter 3 section 3.2.3.2 for further discussion of *Agoo...! Ame...* and related concepts

*Eke me mielea?*  
(Are we in enmity?)

Similarly, if one forgets to greet or respond to greetings for genuine reasons and later realizes it, one may say:

*Menye fu/ke me ye miele o; eku nenlo wo be.*  
(We are not in enmity; death should forget/overlook you).

Through this one recognizes and apologizes for their breach of fundamental and vital socio-cultural and humanistic acts. As act of consolation, appeasement, or pacification, this saying states, “I am sorry for not greeting you, but know that it was not out of enmity. I wish that death forgets you so you live longer as a compensation for my disregards and the pain that my inability to greet may have caused you,” according to Afefi Agbalekpor-Gbolonyo.<sup>920</sup> It is especially important to greet a stranger or someone with whom you’ve had negative relations”; as by greeting such a person pleasantly, you initiate and establish open communication, and there is potential for breaking down barriers of misunderstanding and bitterness. Also, a friendly greeting to someone who is feeling dejected can serve as a form of charity and humanitarianism, which would help to revive the person’s soul. Finding human contact through such a warm greeting can inspire someone to rediscover his/her own human feeling.

The facial expression used while greeting is another important component to the way in which one greets another person. It is also socio-culturally expected that greetings be done in a specific facial, bodily, and kinesthetic manner. For example, some greeters may use the expression “...is not the expression on my face my own personal business?” In the Ewe context of greetings, facial expressions can be categorized as objects of the public domain as while they are a result of an inner feeling belonging to the individual’s private feelings, they also affect the

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<sup>920</sup> In a personal communication with my Afefi Agbalekpor Gbolonyo, popularly known as “Sonkake” (see appendix E)

mood of those around the individual. Therefore the expression on an individual's face is as much the public and community's business as it is the individual's business.

In view of the public nature of our facial expressions, the faces we wear when we exchange greetings give the receiver information on how we regard them as well as our notion and feeling about humanity. In a normal social context, therefore, regardless of our mood, we have a responsibility to greet everyone with the "appropriate" facial expression that is contextually acceptable. For example, one should give greetings with a cheerful and pleasant countenance in happy social context and a mournful, sympathetic, and sober countenance in funeral or tragic context. In the Ewe's conception, such act is not just a social act but also a moral and humanistic obligation that underscores our sense of and value for humanism.

Greetings are exchanged at all times of day and under various circumstances. Greeting texts, accordingly, possess fixed as well as variable portions to what is said. Traditional African societies are rarely as rushed as societies found in the West. Among the Ewe, it is a sign of great respect for the guest, traveler, youth, or person under less exhaustion to initiate the greeting with the local host, elder, or the person under more exhaustion. Usually, the 'local person(s)' wait politely for a greeting, and then give their own reply. No matter how urgent the situation is one is always expected to express some form of greeting before enquiries are made. Typical traditional Ewe greeting is extensive and may be considered long by other standards. In an exchange of greetings, greeters may wish to know about the state of each party's health 'living well/strongly' (*fo sesie/lamese*) and whether the counterpart and his/her family 'slept well/peacefully' (*do nyuia*) and have 'risen with life' (*fo de agbea*). Within the greeting they may acknowledge and express appreciation for the 'work' or 'favors' they, or their relatives, received from the greeting

respondent, or his/her people, in the recent past. If one forgets to mention and express such gratitude, one may well be reminded of it later either by the respondent or others.

The importance of greetings among the Ewe (as in many African cultures) and its role as an act of recognition and appreciation of an individual as a human being cannot be overemphasized. If seen from other cultural point of view (including modern Western culture), it may be an overestimation if not a nuisance. Seen in a larger sense as one of the most common and fundamental forms of humanity, the Ewe may use greetings as a tool to assess one's sense of humanistic values, extent of belonging to humanism, and level of acceptance of others as one's kind. Kofi Agawu states that:

Greetings ... reinforce this larger sense of belonging. If I meet you later in the day, after greeting you in the morning, I will greet you again by noting that you have been 'sitting' (engaged at some task) all this while; and then, depending on how much time we have, I may inquire into the details of this 'sitting' or move on with a conventional affirmation of your being at work. There are similarly casual (second or third) greetings that acknowledge people returning from the farm, or from the river, or from work.<sup>921</sup>

The recognition of the individual by the human social act of greeting is a moral obligation. Greeting, in Ewe conception, therefore, is first and foremost a humanistic value and not just a social act.

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<sup>921</sup> Agawu, Kofi. 2007. "The Communal Ethos in African performance: Ritual, Narrative and Music among the Northern Ewe." *Transcultural Music Review* (11) <http://www.sibetrans.com/trans/trans11/art08.htm> (accessed: 12/10/2008)

### 7.1.3 *Kufafa: Mourning the Dead*

*Fa na ame ye wofana na*  
(One who sympathize with others is often sympathized with)

*Kugbenovie wowona; 'megbeto nutie 'ya wowone do*  
(Brotherhood-in-death/tragedy that they express; towards human beings that it is shown)

Humanistic values are more profoundly expressed among humans when tragedy strikes. As mentioned in earlier chapters, death, though seen as a gateway to a more permanent state of being, is nevertheless tragic (see chapter 3). The great value placed on human beings is best demonstrated by the response to the death of a member of the community. Death of an individual is regarded as an attack on humanity, although it is understood, in Ewe conception, as a consequence of life. A single death affects not just the specific group or clan to which the deceased belonged but the entire village or community. It therefore calls for the expression and display of all human feelings and expressions including sympathy, condolence, hope, and encouragement. Knowing that others share in your grief is a great assurance of being accepted and recognized as a human being. The Ewe therefore use every opportunity and means to share in others' grief. For instance, after normal greetings at funeral settings, the bereaved family member would ask the visiting party:

Question: *Miawo ya dzodzoa me (gbo) ko miele; Miawo de afo ka dzie miele?*

(As for us, we are in fire/hot conditions; What about you, what step/leg are you on?)

Answer: *Afo ma dzi ko miawo ha miele; Miafe dzodzoa va do miagbo; mieva be miado afo na mi*

(We are also on the same leg/step; It is your hot conditions that has reached us; Hence we have decided to trace your steps/legs [come to mourn with you])

In addition, a simple question like “are you well with mourning?” or an expression like, “you have suffered a tragedy!” would also show the depth of grief shared by the visiting party. These are some of the ways Ewe express sympathy, share in others' grief, and most importantly, express humanism at another level. Such expressions as part of greetings, “immediately

acknowledge the period of grieving; it acknowledges that things are not cool, that we are sitting inside a fire,”<sup>922</sup> and that as humans we can only imagine the extent of grief the bereaved family is going through.

Furthermore, during death, all normal economic and other everyday activity is stopped, usually at great cost, to permit everyone to express their sympathy and mourn the transition or departure of human life from among the living. Although interruption of economic activities affects economic returns, the premium put on human life outweighs that put on economic productivity. As Gyekye indicates, it is because “the economic values of the African people are not measured in terms of economic production and the maximum use of one’s time. For them, it is the human being that counts.”<sup>923</sup>

Writing on greetings and its role in the expression and sharing of grief among Northern Ewe, Kofi Agawu comments on the situation where an individual who was absent from home is expected, upon return, to acknowledge and express in greetings his sympathy and sense of humanism:

If I have been away ... for some time—if, for example, I live and work elsewhere, and only visit my hometown occasionally— I am obliged to incorporate the question [“are you well with mourning,”] in the first greetings I exchange with others. The thought is that because some members of our community may have passed away while I was gone, and because the task of taking them and hiding them (burying them) has been undertaken by those who remained in the village on behalf of all of us, the work done ought to be acknowledged. And if I know you to be specifically bereaved, I will be sure to include that question. To overlook it would be to demonstrate particular insensitivity to your circumstances; it would also be to downplay our mutual membership of a community that mourns openly, extensively and together.<sup>924</sup>

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<sup>922</sup> Agawu (2007)

<sup>923</sup> Gyekye (1996: 25-26)

<sup>924</sup> Agawu (2007)

In addition, to overlook it is to ignore a basic humanistic value. That is, recognizing and acknowledging (1) the deceased person as human kind that has passed away; (2) the bereaved family members as human beings who are saddened by the lost; and (3) your own self as a mortal being, equally saddened by the loss, and will someday be deceased. By simply showing one's sympathy and expressing condolence, one has acknowledged and expressed in a very profound and deep ways one's own sense and value of humanism.

#### **7.1.4 *Novi* (“Sibling”): The Ewe Concept of Brother/Sisterhood**

*Amenoviwoe nye awu...Letesa: Amenovi menye ame fe futo o*  
(One's siblings are shirts...*Letesa: One's sibling is not one's enemy*)

Brother/Sisterhood, the belief that all people should act with warmth and equality toward one another, regardless of differences in race, creed, nationality, serves as yet another humanistic value that indigenous Ewe society upholds. The Ewe concept of human brother/sisterhood is absolutely derived from the African belief that all human beings are children of one and the same Supreme Being (for the Ewe, *Mawu/Se*) and therefore belong to one universal human family. Even though the Ewe, like many other African societies, traditionally live in small local communities and are divided into clans and lineages with composite and broad-spectrum matrix of relationships, they conceptualize humanity to include all human beings even beyond their narrow geographic or spatial confines. The idea here is that our common brother/sisterhood (*novinyenye*) is intrinsically linked to our common humanity (*amenyenye*) that all human beings belong to one species/seed (*ameku deka*, see chapter 2).

A practical manifestation of the African humanistic and brother/sisterhood concept may be seen in such socio-moral virtues as hospitality, generosity, and concern for others who are

beyond one's own people. The prevalence of this humanistic phenomenon, especially reflected in hospitality towards guests, in indigenous African societies and cultures has attracted the attention of many scholars and travelers in and to Africa over the centuries. The sense of humanism that characterizes social relations among individuals in African societies is, according to Kwesi Dickson, a "characteristic of African life to which attention has been drawn again and again by both African and non-African writers on Africa. Indeed, to many this characteristic defines Africanness."<sup>925</sup> Dugald Campbell, a British anthropologist who lived in central Africa in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries wrote: "Hospitality is one of the most sacred and ancient customs of Bantuland, and is found everywhere. A native will give his best house and his evening meal to a guest, without the slightest thought that he is doing anything extraordinary."<sup>926</sup> In the mid-twentieth century Julius Kambarage Nyerere, the first president of Tanzania (formerly Tanganyika) writing on African Socialism observed: "One of the achievements of our [African] society was the universal hospitality on which they [i.e., the members of the community] could rely."<sup>927</sup> Kwame Gyekye, writing on African socio-moral virtues including hospitality, generosity, and concern for others, states that: "...These communitarian features, which have been the subject of much relationship involving the cultures of Africa, are held not only as outstanding but also as the defining characteristics of African cultures."<sup>928</sup>

According to Gyekye, the sense of community "that is said to characterize social relations among individuals in African societies is a direct consequence of the communitarian social

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<sup>925</sup> Dickson, Kwesi. 1977. *Aspects of Religion and Life in Africa*. Accra, Ghana: Ghana Academy of Arts and Sciences, page 4.

<sup>926</sup> Campbell, Dugald. 1922. *In the Heart of Bantuland: A Record of Twenty-Nine Years in Central Africa among the Bantu Peoples*. London: Seely Service and Co., page 45.

<sup>927</sup> Nyerere (1968: 5)

<sup>928</sup> Gyekye (1997: 36-37)

arrangement.”<sup>929</sup> Among the Ewe, this conception of humanity is explicitly expressed or alluded to in various forms including kinship terms and references, e.g., *novi* (sibling—brother or sister). Morphologically, *novi* is made up of two root words, *no* = mother and *vi* = child. Etymologically, *novi* is a term derived from the descriptive expression, *nonye fe vi* (my mother’s child/offspring).<sup>930</sup> That is, *no* = mother, *nye* = my, *fe* = possessive article, and *vi* = child/offspring. Generally, *novi*, meaning sibling, includes full biological brothers and sisters, as well as half brothers and sisters. Within the philosophical conceptual framework of the understanding of human relationships in Ewe society, the word “sibling” (*novi*) also encompasses family relationships beyond that among the children of one man and/or woman. It includes all levels or categories of cousins and other relatives, male or female, linked by blood ties. That is to say, first, second, or third cousins are all “siblings” (*novinyewo*) in Ewe conception. Furthermore, people use the term *novi* almost limitlessly, to describe their relationship with others. Outside the extended family, lineage, clan, community, or local geographic confines, an individual may refer to someone as his/her sibling (*novi*) just because they both come from the same village, town, or ethnic group. Therefore, one’s friends may as well be regarded or labeled “sibling” (*novi*) in Ewe society. It should be noted though that Ewe have other affinity and kinship terminologies that differentiate between the various categories and levels of relations including *tovi/fofovi* (lit. father’s child, meaning half brother/sister), *xolo/xo/velia* (friend), *enyo* (brother/sister-in-law). However, *novi* may be used contextually in place of *tovi/fofovi* (half brother/sister), *xolo/xo/velia* (friend), or *enyo* (brother/sister-in-law).

Kwame Gyekye confirms that:

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<sup>929</sup> Ibid.

<sup>930</sup> Other terms or word for sibling include *danyevi*, *nanenyevi*, *nonyevi* all literally meaning “my mother’s child” or sibling. *The Anlo Ewe commonly uses danyevi* while *nanenyevi* is predominant among the Tonu (Tongu) Ewe and *nonyevi* may be heard among Ewe in the middle belt of Togo.

A phenomenon about African relationships typical of all African societies is that when two strangers meet, however far way from home, and discover that they come from the same village or town, one of the first things they do is to sort out how they might be related to one another. They may find that they are closely related by blood or only distantly related or they may not be at all related by blood. But whatever relationship they discover between them, they would regard one another as a brother. This means that the African people regard everybody as related to everybody else, though the terms to express the different relationships are extremely imprecise. The reason for the lack of precise terms is most probably because, however two people are or seem to be related, what really matters is that they are both human beings. That is all.<sup>931</sup>

The Ewe concept of sibling (*novi*), derived from the general African view of humanity, is to recognize all human beings as related—as brothers and sisters—in one way or the other; for, humanity they say, has no boundary. The following Afa song underscores the Ewe concept of brotherhood as enshrined in *novi* (sibling). The song metaphorically reiterates the important role human beings can play in the welfare of humanity.

**Song 108: *Ame Noviwoe Nye Awu, Letesa***

**Afa** (Text in Ewe: Anlo dialect)

//:Ame noviwoe nye awu lo, letesa lo

Ame noviwoe nye awu, letesa://

//:Ame ade yo novinyewo nam a! letesa://

//:Ame noviwoe nye awu lo, letesa lo

Ame noviwoe nye awu, letesa lo://

**Literal Translation**

One's siblings are (like) shirts, letesa

One's siblings are (like) shirts, letesa

Someone calls my siblings for me (to help)!

One's siblings are (like) shirts, letesa

One's siblings are (like) shirts, letesa

Brotherhood is the philosophical principle on which *letesa*, one of *Afa* (Yoruba, *Ifa*) divination oracles, is based.<sup>932</sup> In the song above, the composer alludes to *letesa*'s philosophy; using a shirt/cloth as a metaphor for humanity.<sup>933</sup> On the surface level, one may be tempted to limit the interpretation of this metaphor to only biological siblings. Contrary, from the foregone analysis of the concept of *novi*, what *letesa* espouses embraces all humankind. Humanity, like

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<sup>931</sup> Gyekye (1996: 27)

<sup>932</sup> See Fiagbedzi (1977), Locke (1978), Avorgbedor (2001b), Agbodeka (1996), and James Burns <http://www.cepafrica.org> (Accessed: 12/26/08)

<sup>933</sup> There is a similar song in Yoruba where the same concept of brotherhood and humanity is likened to clothing for example “*Enia lasoo mi...* (people are my clothing...). See Euba (1990: 245) for the full song and detailed information. It should also be noted that *Afa* is the Ewe version of Yoruba *Ifa*

cloth that is worn to cover and protect the body from external harm, is to shelter and protect the individual from life's adverse conditions. The composer, therefore, reiterates *letesa*'s advocacy: "Siblings, and for that matter, human beings, are shirts we wear. A human being can only call on another human being for help and protection in times of need and adversity. I am in need, I am in distress; please call humans to save their kind, as *letesa* teaches." On the surface, the song may be interpreted to mean differentiations between blood brother/sisterhood as against other relatives. Sometimes, from the literal meaning of *novi* (mother's child), this may be pointing out the subtle, somehow discriminatory, differences between biological half brothers and sisters, especially in polygamous families. However, in a deeper sense, *novi* and *letesa* concepts expound the intricacies of humanistic values. The idea here is: our common brother/sisterhood is intrinsically linked to our common humanity; all human beings belong to one species; and that it takes human beings with a great sense of humanistic values to save and protect their kind. The deeper signification assigned to the concept *novi* (sibling) in Ewe culture is purposed to uplift people from the purely biologically determined blood-relation level onto the social and human stage; the level where the essence of humanity is held as transcending the contingencies of biological relation, race, or ethnicity.

An Ewe maxim emphasizes that *amenovi menye ame fe futo o* (lit. One's sibling is not one's enemy). The message here is that under no circumstances should humanity be tempered with inhuman enmity. Hence in what may be seen as the most irreconcilable enmity, when humanistic values are upheld, peace and reconciliation would prevail. Again, the song below reiterates the importance of brotherhood and humanism.

**Song 109: Agobaya Wonye**

*Kpegisu* (Text in Ewe: Anlo dialect)

'Gobaya wo nye

Matsoe matso ta

**Literal Translation**

They are fan palm fronds (leaves)

I will take to cover my head (use as shelter)

<i>Yi yome de (za)</i>	Into eternity (in life and in death)
<i>Danyevi doko ha</i>	[Even] My poor sibling
<i>Neno anyi nam de</i>	Should stay (be there) for me
<i>'Gobaya wo nye</i>	They are fan palm fronds (leaves) <sup>934</sup>
<i>Ne nu va ke (ne medo nui)</i>	On the day of (when I remember)
<i>Dzivowo dza gbe he</i>	Bad rains/thunderstorms (adversity/disaster)
<i>Matsoe matso ta</i>	I will take to cover my head (use as shelter)
<i>Yi yome</i>	Into eternity (in life and in death)
<i>Ameawo melom o</i>	The people [some] do not like me
<i>Toga-todiviwo melom o</i>	The paternal cousins do not like me
<i>Amewo melom o</i>	The people [some] do not like me
<i>Noga-nodiviwo melom o de</i>	The maternal cousins do not like me

The song emphasizes that family, brotherhood, and humanity is a person's shelter in life and in death. Human beings provide the best and lasting protection to their fellow human beings. From a biological perspective, the song advises that, unlike friends, who may cut relationships at will, one's siblings will always be involved in one's life. One can never forget, disregard, ignore and/or change his or her biological ties with his/her siblings irrespective of their status and conditions. Using the broader conception of *novi*, the song speaks to human brother/sisterhood in general. Metaphorically, humanity is likened to *agoti* (fan palm), a tree that symbolizes power, endurance, shelter, and protection in Ewe culture (see chapter 5 section 2.1.3). Thus, sister/brotherliness is analogized to this powerful image of *agoti*.<sup>935</sup> Like *agobaya* (fan palm fronds), human beings are protective emblems to fellow humans. Irrespective of their conditions and predicaments, human beings are supposed to be humane to their kind.

The basic message of the next song is that a generous-spirited member of a group will be protected by friends and never suffer. That is to say, if people live by humanistic principles and values, humanity will be there for them. As a good example, the composer praises the generous,

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<sup>934</sup> *Agobaya* (fan palm fronds) is the frond of *agoti* (*borassus aethiopum* with leaves that are palmately rather than pinnately). *Agoti* is a very tall palm whose frond is used for many things including shelter, fan, and umbrella. Also, remember that *danyevi* is another name for *novi* (sibling), as discussed earlier (see footnote on page 403).

<sup>935</sup> See Locke (1992: 65-66)

community-spirited individual and recommends membership in mutual aid societies. Using imagery of a hawk (which is not a typical ‘social’ bird), the composer of the following *kpegisu* and *akpoka* songs conveys these messages:<sup>936</sup>

**Song 110: *Xenohame Menye***

***Kpegisu*** (Text in Ewe: Anlo dialect)

*Xenohame menyeya*  
*Ye wobe nye mekuna*  
*Do wo ku o he*  
*Papayisue gblom be*  
*Gbosusua nu nyuia dee*  
*Nake gblom be*  
*Nye deka koe danye dzia*  
*Nye deka koe*  
*Nye duawo novi*  
*Be naneke ya me wom o*  
*Xenohame menyeya he*  
*Ye wobe nye mekuna*  
*Do wo ku o he*

**Literal Translation**

If I were a social bird (a social person)  
 And they say I never die  
 A disease death (from sickness)  
 It is the hawk that is saying that  
 To be many is a good thing (it is great to be many)  
*Nake* is saying that  
 I am the only child of my mother (have no siblings)  
 I am the only one  
 That is a sibling of the townfolk  
 But nothing happens to me  
 If I were a social bird (a social person)  
 And they say I never die  
 A disease death (from sickness)

**Song 111: *Gbomasumasua Nusese Wonye***

***Akpoka*** (Text in Ewe: Anlo dialect)

“*Gbomasumasua nusese wonye*”  
*Xevi ade gbloe va yi na*  
*Papayisue gbloe bena*  
 “*Yedada medzi yewo sugbo o*  
*Gbomasumasua kue wonye*”  
*Xevi ade gbloe va yie*

**Literal Translation**

“Not being many is a difficult thing”  
 Says a bird, as it flies by  
 It the hawk that says  
 “Their mother did not born them in great numbers  
 Not being many is death (deadly)”  
 A bird says as it flies by

In both of the songs above, membership in a social or communal society and/or belonging to a bigger group of people is likened to being a bird in a flock. The songs indicate that, like birds in a flock, an individual gains advantages from his/her big group as there are more people to care for each other. Individualism or leading a solitary life is a challenge and not a good idea

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<sup>936</sup> *Nake* could probably be the name of the composer of the song. It may also refer to someone the composer have dedicated the song to may be as result of his/her real life circumstances. As mentioned in earlier chapters songs can be used (and are often used) to comment on every issues about anybody, everything, within appropriate contexts. See Fiagbedzi (1977), Avorgbedor (2001) Locke (1978, 1992) Agawu (1995), and Younge (1991)

Both songs use the same proverb: the first song regards relations in a larger group from a positive perspective (emphasized the advantage): *Papayisue gblom be “gbosusua nu nyuia dee”* (It is the hawk that is saying, “to be many is a good thing”). The second song uses it from a negative perspective: *Papayisue gbloe bena “yedada medzi yewo sugbo o; gbomasumasua kue wonye”* (The hawk said, “their mother did not born them many; not being many is death/deadly”). The composer(s), personifying the solitary hawk, comment on the advantages of a more social way of living. “I am an only child; I have no biological siblings. However, due to my social ways of living and cooperative behavior all the townspeople—humanity—have become like siblings to me. I will not die out of curable diseases or preventable mishaps because in times of such adversities, people (humankind) would be there for me,” the song reiterates. The composer of the second song simply laments about the difficulty of living a lonesome life and sort of blames his/her mother for not giving him/her siblings.<sup>937</sup> Using twins as an example, the *avihe* (dirge) below reinforces the above comments and the need to uphold brother/sisterhood.

**Song 112: *Ve Nono Dzrom***

*Avihe* (Text in Ewe: Ewedome dialect)

*Ve nono dzrom lo*

*Nonye medzi o*

*Ne meke de*

*Venuwofe*

*Ve nono dzrom lo*

*Nonye medzi o*

**Literal Translation**

Being a twin (in pairs/ collaboration) is my wish

[But] My mother did not begat it (twins)

(My mother did not born me as a twin)

When I get to (whenever I visit/witness)

Twinship ceremonies (people collaborating)

Being a twin (in pairs/collaboration) is my wish

[But] My mother did not begat it (twins)

The individual wishes that he/she was born a twin in which case he/she could go through life knowing there would always be a natural partner and someone to collaborate with. Unfortunately, the subject’s mother did not bear any twins. In many African societies including the Ewe, twins have a special place in society. From birth, they are taken through different

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<sup>937</sup> See Locke (1992)

ceremonies, rituals, and rites. They are given special names and roles to play in society. They are seen as having more spiritual power than the ordinary citizen. Parents of twins also have some special socio-cultural roles they play in society. As such, some people often wish they were born twins or that they give birth to twins. Beside their special roles and place in society, it is the collaborative and cooperative spirits of twins that are the cause for admiration. The brother/sisterhood spirit of twins is a fundamental humanistic principle. Twins see themselves as the same people, hence the failure or success of one often is taken as the failure or success of the other. Hence their strong sense of collaboration which is what the composer alludes to in the above song, saying “*ne meke de venuwofe, ve nono dzrom lo*” (whenever I see twins collaboration, I always wish I was born a twin). That is to say, “when I go out to other groups and see how they work together and support each other, I wish my group, family, or community does the same. Unfortunately, ‘my mother’ i.e., the community, does not encourage, provide for or recognizes that humanistic value.” The composer only used this twinship collaborative spirit, i.e., the connecting spirit that comes from being twins, as a metaphor to underscore the basic humanistic value of collaboration. The spirit of collaboration is not only peculiar to twins. It is a fundamental human characteristic.

Romantic and perfect as the above discussion and those of earlier scholars may sound, it should be noted that there are many inhuman acts and behavioral patterns that have been and are still being perpetuated in African cultures including Ewe society. In all human societies, although all kinds of humanistic and socio-cultural ideals, virtues, and values are prescribed, preached, and promoted, it is nearly impossible, in my opinion, to have an absolutely ‘perfect’ society. Ewe culture and society is of course not a perfect one. There are acts that set and keep social commentators, educators, and law enforcers on their toes. Social idealism, though easily

conceivable, is not always practical. The following songs comment on some of the most common acts that seem to negate the human values discussed earlier.

**Song 113: *Gbome Pee Kie Wo Nam Lea***

**Zigi** (Text in Ewe. Ewedome dialect)

*Gbo me pee kie wo nam la? (3x)*

*Eto gome tse wo nam le yaa*

*Eno gome tse wo nam le yaa*

*Novi gome tse wo nam le yaa*

**Literal Translation**

Is this how humanity (town) has treated me?

My paternal lineage too has abandoned me

My maternal lineage too has neglected me

My siblings have also deserted me

In the ideal situation, the community as well as the family must always be there for the individual just as the individual is expected to be there for the community or the family—brotherliness is reciprocal. Practically, however, it is not always so. In the above song, the individual was disappointed by the neglect he/she suffers from all entities that should have treated him/her better. Blood relation is no guarantee or protection against social neglect, isolation, and even inhuman treatment.

The song below is about negative aspects of social life including greediness.

**Song 114: *Miekua No Lo***

**Agbadza** (Text in Ewe: Anlo dialect)

*Miekua no lo*

*Devi ye nye due*

*Fonyemeawo de, 'be*

*Mikpo kukuawo nam da lo*

*Gbagbeawo ha kpom ee*

*Fonyemeawo de*

*Awo num alea*

*Be nkunye adze tsiewo dzi*

**Literal Translation**

You are so ungenerous (stingy/greedy)

A native is the one who builds the town

My family/relatives, I say,

Take a look at the dead (ancestors) for me

The living ones are also seeing it

My family/relatives

Could do this to me (hurt me so deeply)

That I remember the ancestors

This song is a bitter complaint against the acts that flout human and family values that, according to the composer, the ancestors have prescribed and lived by. Greediness and ungenerosity towards humanity, especially family relatives, is frowned upon and often condemned in no uncertain terms. These are human values the composer imbibed and upholds. However, he/she has found people in the community including extended family members to be

greedy and not ready to contribute to his/her welfare. They fail to recognize that in being generous and helpful to others the community benefits and develops and they in turn benefit as well. He/she laments: “Do not force me to invoke and speak ill about the ancestors and thereby go against custom, for it is bad etiquette. Remember the values our forebears upheld. Our family has no record of selfishness, greed, and ungenerosity as you can see. Can we do the same for those living to emulate? I am just appalled at the stinginess of you my own family relatives. Remember that it takes the cooperation and generosity of individual citizens to develop a community.”

**Song 115: *To Le Asiwu Mele***

**Zigi** (Text in Ewe: Ewedome dialect)

*To le asiwo de*

*Mele nyonyo o*

*No le asiwo de*

*Mele nyonyo o*

*To le asiwo de*

*Mele nyonyo o*

*Woava zu be*

*Deke deke mele asiwo (nawo) o*

**Literal Translation**

You have a father (paternal relatives)

Things (it) are not going well

You have a mother (maternal relatives)

Things (it) are not going well

You have a father (paternal relatives)

Things (it) are not going well

Let alone (what if it becomes that)

You have none at all?

If everyone were to desert an individual, naturally that person would hope to have their parents beside them no matter what the circumstances—at least according to what family values prescribe. This, however, does not always hold true. In reality, under certain circumstances, one may find even their parents deserting them either by choice or by circumstances beyond the parent’s control. The above song comments on how difficult it could be for an individual not to have his/her parents beside him/her. “Even when you have a father and a mother it is still not a rosy journey; things may not be all great; how much more challenging could life be if you do not have any of them around?” This is a situation where the individual cannot get basic human support from his/her social/communal group and relations. Although a simple song, its deeper meaning is an indirect indictment on a society’s humanistic values system. That is to say, our

society is so lacking human values that without one's parents—or closest relatives—an individual has no human support.

**Song 116: *Woe Le Mawoe Le***

**Zigi** (Text in Ewe: Ewedome dialect)

*Woe le mawoe le lo*

*Yo, yo, yo!*

*Woe le mawoe le lo*

*Amedeka mewoe o*

**Literal Translation**

Do it this way let me do it that way

Yes, yes, yes!

Do it this way let me do it that way

One person does not do it all alone

**Song 117: *Akloloe***

**Adevu** (Text in Ewe: Ewedome dialect)

*Akloloe*<sup>938</sup>

*Xoa 'tiwo d'agbe*

*Atia 'deke me mexo*

*Akloloe*

*De agbe o*

**Literal Translation**

The wild/itching creeping plant

Receives trees to life (protects other trees)

No tree receives

The wild/itching creeping plant

To life (protects the creeping plant)

Cooperation is a fundamental humanistic value. It is expressed in many proverbs and maxims including the following:

*Woe ale, mawoe ale; ame deka mewone o*

(Do it this way, let me do it that way; one person does not do it alone)

As in the song above; and

*Dusie kloa mia eye mia ha kloa dusi*

(It is the right hand that washes the left hand and the left hand also washes the right hand).

However, the song “*Akloloe...*” usually sang in a declamatory rhythm and recitative style seems to expose a common human experience; that is, our favors are not always returned. The metaphor used here is that of *aklolo*, a creeping plant, which grows to protect other plants, but remains unprotected. It reiterates the fact that there are situations whereby certain members of the society devote to serving and protecting others yet get no protection themselves, not even

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<sup>938</sup> Note that *aklolo*, with the same spelling and pronunciation may mean hernia. However, in this song it refers to a creeping plant coils around other plants, mostly trees. Because of its itchiness, it prevents people from cutting trees around which it creeps.

from the most serious adversity—death. As a natural phenomenon, the *aklolo* creeping plant (also called *leklele*, *dza*, or *dzadza*) ‘protects’ all other plants from human ‘attack’ by creeping around or near them. By their severe ‘poisonous itching nature’ people are reluctant to cut trees or grass near an *aklolo* plant. Hence, such trees that have *aklolo* creeping round are rarely cut down. Unfortunately, however, no plant ‘protects’ *aklolo* from humans. The analogy here is that humanity and society does not just fail human beings but sometimes it fails the very people that work hard to save its life. As Kofi Agawu notes, “words like these are designed to fit individual experience; they are offered here in capsule form as a subject for philosophical exploration.”<sup>939</sup>

The welfare of the individual is a social or communal responsibility in many African societies. As we already know, parenting is not limited to biological parents or relatives. All adults, and for that matter humanity, share in the responsibility of a child’s upbringing. That notwithstanding the community is always aware that every individual is associated not only with his/her parents but also a specific family. Hence one cannot claim parenthood of a child on the bases of ‘discovery’ of an orphan as expressed in the *gbolo* song below.

**Song 118: *Amede Dzi Vi***

***Gbolo*** (Text in Ewe: Wedome dialect)

*Amede dzi vi*

*Ku le egbo*

*Megabu (su) be de yi foe o*

**Literal Translation**

Someone had a child

But died leaving the child

Do not think you have found him/her (child)

In a recording/interview session, Afetor Dake explained that the fact that the child is an orphan does not mean he/she is ‘lost’ and parentless. You cannot claim to have found him/her. The child may have lost the biological parents but the extended family, the community, and by extension humanity is watching over him/her. Commenting on this song in his book *African Rhythm: Northern Ewe Perspective*, Kofi Agawu indicates, “this is a warning against facile

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<sup>939</sup> Agawu (1995: 139)

discoveries and a celebration of motherhood. The fact that a mother has died does not mean that you have ‘found’ the child left behind.”<sup>940</sup> This, as he rightly points out invokes “the stigma attached to barren women, thematized in many African texts...”<sup>941</sup>

## 7.2 MORAL VALUES AND VIRTUES

This session focuses on morality. It concludes the discussion on socio-cultural values in general and humanism in particular. The session first discusses the various definitions of morality and moral values from general as well as specific African perspectives.

Morality is derived from the Latin word *moralitaser* (from root word *mos*, plural *mores*) meaning manner, character, proper behavior.<sup>942</sup> Morality speaks of a system of behavior in regards to standards of right or wrong action. The word carries the concepts of: (1) moral standards, with regard to behavior; (2) moral responsibility, referring to our conscience; and (3) a moral identity, or one who is capable of right or wrong action. Commonly used synonyms include ethics, principles, virtue, and goodness.<sup>943</sup> In its general usage, morality has three principal meanings. First, in its descriptive usage, morality means a code of conduct created, defined, held, and understood by a society, an individual, or groups of individuals to be authoritative in issues of right and wrong. Secondly, in its normative and universal sense, morality refers to an ideal code of conduct, one which would be espoused in preference to

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<sup>940</sup> Agawu (1995: 139)

<sup>941</sup> Ibid

<sup>942</sup> See Latin Dictionary and Grammar Aid: <http://archives.nd.edu/latgramm.htm> (Accessed: 06/12/08), Devlin (1974), Magesa (1997), Adams (2002), Helm (1981), Kretzmann (1999), and Gyekye (1995, 1997)

<sup>943</sup> See Devlin (1974), Magesa (1997), Gyekye (1996). See also Wiredu (1991, 1996), Gbadegesin (1991), Wiredu and Gyekye (1992), Magesa (1997), Adams (2002), Helm (1981), Kretzmann (1999)

alternatives by all rational people, under specified conditions. Thirdly, morality is synonymous with ethics, the systematic philosophical study of the moral domain.<sup>944</sup> Morals are created and defined by society, philosophy, religion, or individual conscience. Morality describes the principles that govern our behavior.<sup>945</sup>

Generally, morality is often thought of as belonging to a particular religious point of view. However, by definition, we see that this is not the case, for everyone adheres to a moral code or doctrine of some sort. In relationship to our behavior, morality is important for three reasons: (1) to ensure fair play and harmony between humans (both individuals and societies); (2) to help make humans ‘good’ beings so as to ensure ‘good’ societies; and (3) to help humans keep ‘good’ relationship with the Supreme Being or power that created us. Based on these points, it is obvious that our beliefs are essential to our moral values and behavior but human morality is not entirely based on religious beliefs. While most people may agree with the first two points, it is point three that may be contested (see section 7.2.1 on below).

In many scholarly works on African philosophy,<sup>946</sup> morality is seen as a set of social rules and norms provided as a guide for conduct in society. The rules and norms are formulated out of and affixed to the people’s beliefs about right and wrong conduct and good and bad character. It also partly determines and defines the people’s customs, values and traditions, their heritage or ways of life and conduct in a given community. Hence moral values may vary from community to community and from time to time. Among people who share a common heritage or have similar cultures or religious beliefs, some of these values cut across sections of the

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<sup>944</sup> See Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/morality-definition/> (Accessed: 06/12/08), Devlin (1974), Magesa (1997), Adams (2002), Helm (1981), Kretzmann (1999), and Gyekye (1995, 1997)

<sup>945</sup> See Devlin (1974), Magesa (1997), Gyekye (1996)

<sup>946</sup> Gyekye (1996). See also Wiredu (1991, 1996), Gbadegesin (1991), Wiredu and Gyekye (1992)

various communities. Within traditional African societies, there are similarities in a shared sense of morality that is based on the key concept of humaneness (Ewe: *amedodudu*).<sup>947</sup> Morality is intrinsically social, since it is a by-product or consequence of the relations between individuals. According to Gyekye “if there were no such a thing as human society, there would be no such a thing as morality.”<sup>948</sup>

Moral values are things held to be right or wrong; desirable or undesirable. They are patterns of conduct that are considered most worthwhile and thus cherished by society. They are not only principles of behavior but also goals of social and individual action. The set of moral values is acquired, through example, teaching, and imprinting from parents and society.<sup>949</sup> Moral values, along with traditional laws, behavior patterns, and belief systems, are the defining features of a culture. As a necessary factor in the functioning of any society, morality is essential to every human culture, even though features of moral codes or values of one culture may differ from those of another culture. Moral values are enforced by example, parenting, conscience, disapproval, shunning and only in some instances by law. In Ewe society, like that of others, moral values are seen as the standards of good (*nyui*) and evil (*vo*), which govern an individual’s behavior and choices as well as that of the community. The morality of an individual may find influence in the individual’s society and government also incorporating religious and/or self-influence. When moral values derive from society and government they, from necessity, change as the laws and morals of the society change. An example of the impact of changing moral values in Ewe society may be seen in the case of marriage (polygamy and monogamy).

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<sup>947</sup> See Devlin, Patrick. 1974. *The Enforcement of Morals*. London: Oxford University Press, and Magesa, Laurenti. 1997. *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life*. New York: Orbis Books

<sup>948</sup> Gyekye (1996: 55)

<sup>949</sup> I am not aware of any scientific research indicating that morality is ‘innate’ in humans; that is, morality being genetically determined in us

Traditionally polygyny, but not polyandry, is an accepted and even encouraged practice. It permits Ewe men who are financially, physically, emotionally, and morally capable to marry as many women as they are *able to look after* (feed, cloth, house, satisfy, and protect them and their children). In this regard, the tradition is biased against women in that it does not permit polyandry even if the woman is capable. However, the value of polygyny is rapidly waning and its moral base is quickly changing due to Christian doctrines and Western influences and values that bluntly prohibit plural marriage (see pages below).

Ewe believe that moral values also stem or evolve from within an individual's own self as often exhibited in the behavior of children. For example, if a child is told not to touch or play with an object, he/she knows enough to make sure no one is looking before they violate that rule. That awareness by itself signals the child's knowledge of violation of a moral code. It is needless to teach this behavior for it is instinctive. Nevertheless, once any disciplinary action is taken to 'correct' the individual's behavior, he/she now acquires the capacity or knowledge to differentiate the right behavior from the wrong. Based on the child's own previous knowledge, he/she can make or take right or correct decisions, choices, and actions. As individuals, our choices in life may be between 'positive' and 'negative,' that is, kind or cruel, acceptable or forbidden, and selfish or generous. All being equal, an individual may, under any circumstance, choose to be cruel, selfish, or do what is forbidden. However, if the individual possesses strong moral values he/she will be filled with guilt if those values are ignored.

As mentioned, religion is yet another source of African moral values. As in other world religions, most indigenous African religions have built-in sets of codes by which its believers must live. Individuals who subscribe to a particular religion often adhere to that religion's moral and/or behavioral code. In African societies (even within Ewe society) it is intriguing to note

that the codes may widely vary from one institution to another. For instance, in moral codes of marriage, those whose religion permit and/or encourage polygamy have no guilt engaging in plural marriage. On the other hand, adherents to other religions that prohibit polygamy feel they must remain monogamous or harbor a great sense of guilt if they do otherwise.<sup>950</sup> The following songs reiterate the fact that indigenously, polygyny is morally accepted among the Ewe. The songs comment on the rivalry found in a polygamous family as well as some challenges inherent in polygamy, especially those pertaining to co-wives and the challenges a polygamous man faces.

**Song 119: Wodeka Wodea?**

**Bobo** (Text in Ewe: Anlo dialect)

*Ewui! Wodeka*  
*Wode ha?*  
*Wode mi, de mi*  
*Sugbo fuun*  
*Nutsua to gie*  
*Neyo be Tavi*  
*Nutsua to gie*  
*Neyo be Fofu*  
*Wodeka*  
*Wode he*  
*Ewui! Wodeka*  
*Wode ha?*  
*Bobo yeye ade ga to*  
*Yetsusi mekpo avo*  
*Woata ayi*  
*Bobo ya gbo o*  
*'Sro fe avo*  
*Woma de eve*

**Literal Translation**

What! Is it only you  
That is married to him (are you the only wife)?  
We were married, [our husband] married us  
In great numbers (we're many married to him)  
[When] the man [our husband] passed here  
You called him Tavi (my dear)  
[When] the man [our husband] passed there  
You called him Fofu (my husband)  
Is it only you (are you the only one)  
That is married to him (in this marriage)?  
What! Is it only you  
That is married (are you the only wife) to him?  
A new Bobo dance-drumming has been established  
My husband's wife (co-wife) has no [fitting] cloth  
That she could dress in and go to participate in  
This [new] Bobo dance music  
It is [our] husband's [male] cloth that  
She divided into two

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<sup>950</sup> It should be noted that while most (if not all) indigenous African religions permit polygyny (the practice or condition of having more than one wife at one time), polyandry (the state or practice of having more than one husband or male mate at one time) is not known. Also some foreign religions that have either been forced on Africans (including Christianity and Islam) or adopted by them (including Buddhism, Hinduism, etc) and have long become some of the widely practiced religions do not permit or encourage polygamy. Islam, however, does.

This song speaks from the perspective of a woman in a polygamous marriage who finds her co-wife clinging too much to their husband and portraying herself as the only wife. The complainant, sensing that her co-wife may be trying to attract too much of their husband's love and attention to herself, begins to complain and even mock her rival. She alleges that her rival depends too much on their husband to the extent that she had to use their husband's (male) cloth to be able to participate in social activities—an allegation that is a very negative remark in Ewe and African polygamous homes.

The song below speaks to the polygamous man who believes in marrying multiple wives, married as many as four wives until he realized he could not satisfy and/or cater to all of them. His excuse and complaint that some of the wives are no longer good for him prompts one of his wives to call for a divorce.

**Song 120: *Deka Nede***

***Bobo*** (Text in Ewe: Anlo dialect)

*Deka nede*

*Be deka menyo o*

*Be eve ha nede*

*Be Eve ha menyo o*

*To ha nede*

*Be to ha menyo*

*Be 'ne ha nede*

*Be 'ne ha menyo*

*Nekpla 'si eta*

*Be de menyo nam o*

*Ke na madzo ko*

*Nade bu makpo da*

*Ee, nebe nye menyo naye oa?*

*Nya medzo*

*Nade bu makpoda*

**Literal Translation**

One that you married (you married one wife)

But soon said one [wife] is not enough/satisfactory

Then the second one you married

You said two [wives] are not enough/satisfactory

Then you married a third one

Then you said three [wives] are not enough

Then you went and married a fourth one [wife]

Then you soon said four is not enough

Now you put your hands on your head (lamenting)

That some of them [wives] are not good for you

Now, let me go leave the marriage/divorce

So you may marry another [better] one for me to see

Really, you say I am not good for you?

I am going [leaving the marriages]/divorce

Marry another/different [wife] so I would see

The song above questions the moral justification of one man marrying many women only for him to decide at will that some of his wives are no longer good for him. The song also

underscores the moral right of the wives to decide whether or not to stay in a polygamous home.

The two songs below, though they concentrate on co-wife rivalry, confirm the above issues:

**Song 121: Nyemele Agbe No Ge O**

**Bobo** (Text in Ewe: Anlo dialect)

*Helehele/“Mebia gbangban”*

*Wode de*

*Nyemele agbe no ge o*

*Tsunyesi fe*

*Helehelea/hayahaya*

*Wode de*

*Nyemele agbe no ge o*

*Le nya ya me o*

*Za do memlo anyi de xo me*

*Tsunyesi le dzadza dom na ye lo*

**Literal Translation**

This lighter-skin/“I have fair complexion”

That [he] has now married

I am not going to be alive (I may not have peace)

This my husband’s wife’s (co-wife’s)

Lighter-skin/extreme show-off lady

That [he] has now married

I am not going to be alive (I may not have peace)

In this plural marriage/rivalry case/scenario

At night when I am asleep in my room

My husband’s wife (co-wife) keeps troubling me

**Song 122: Tsunyesi, Naxo Gbogbo**

**Bobo/Ganyaglo** (Text in Ewe: Anexo/Anlo dialects) **Literal Translation**

//: (Tsunyesi) Naxo gbogbo

*Meli kafi neva*

*Dziwo nedze me he://*

*Ewui! Wolavli Kple ma?*

*Srodedea sefenue wonye*

*Mede asi*

*Le sro/ahia*

*Fe nya ya me kenken*

*Nenyo ne ameade ko*

*Amea ne di*

//: (Tsunyesi) Naxo gbogbo

*Meli kafi neva*

*Dziwo nedze me he://*

My husband’s wife/rival Get breath (Be patient)

I was here before you came

Let your heart settle (Take heart/relax)

What! You wish to contest [him] with me?

Marriage is a thing of destiny/fate

I remove my hands (not getting involved)

From this marriage (in this rivalry)

Issue completely (issues at all)

If it is good for someone (if someone like it [him])

The person should marry it [him]

My husband’s wife/rival Get breath (Be patient)

I was here before you came

Let your heart settle (Take heart/relax)

In both songs, the composer centers him/herself within a polygamous home. The songs comment on peculiar rivalry and petty quarrels that are a hallmark of polygamous homes. Both songs set two scenarios between the first or older wife and the second/newer wife. Usually the newer (often younger) woman portrays herself as the better woman/wife, more loved by their husband, and tries to lord it over her co-wives. In the first song, the composer/singer comments on the behavior of a newly married co-wife who seems to be using her “beauty” as a winning

factor over her rivals. In the second song the composer sings from the perspective of an earlier/older wife. “Just be patient, for marriage is more than just pride. You cannot take my position as the first/earlier/older wife from me. I have experience much more than you do. As such I am not going to meddle in such kinds of fruitless rivalry, for at the end it would not be worth it. If you really like your man (our husband), just stay in the marriage peacefully and be patient with yourself.”

The next song is a mockery and an advice to men who are potential polygamists and/or are “possessed” with plural marriage without necessarily considering its challenges.

**Song 123: *Esro Yeye Ade Wodena***

**Bobo/Ganyaglo** (Text in Ewe: Anexo/Anlo dialects) **Literal Translation**

<i>Esro[Ahia] yeye de[me] wodena</i>	A new/additional woman/fiancée that one marries
<i>Ne menya dede oa</i>	If you do not know how to go about it/marry her
<i>'Lagba wo do</i>	It would break you up/ruin your life
<i>Ledi, ledi/kaka lekpo</i>	You wished, and so longed for it, now you have it
<i>Ne/de le nyae</i>	If you knew/had you known
<i>Nano srowo xoxoa gbo</i>	You would have stayed with only your old wife
<i>Afiawo gbafiawo ke</i>	It served you right and again served you well
<i>Ne de le nya</i>	If you knew
<i>Srowo xoxoa nyo wu</i>	Your old/first wife was enough/better
<i>(Afoku: spoken)</i>	(Incident/misfortune/unfortunate situation)

Like the earlier ones, this song admonishes men about multiple marriages. “It is great to have many wives and it is pleasant to always have a “new” wife/fiancée. However, in some cases new wives do not turn out to be the best. They may sometimes be so troublesome that they may ruin your life and family.” The composer mocks an unidentified man who falls a victim of troublesome new wife/wives. “It serves you right; had you know, you would have kept to only your first/old wife. It is unfortunate though, but it is the reality; plural marriage has its troubles and disadvantages.”

Although Ewe society allows plural marriage, it does so only with the conviction and understanding that the man is well resourceful and materially, morally, emotionally, and socio-culturally capable of maintaining and fairly catering for the family. A man who cannot adequately provide for the welfare of his multiple wives, their children, and extended family members is often mocked. While polygamy is indigenously a symbol of prestige, status, riches, and respect, it can also be a source of embarrassment if the man is not able to live up to the expectation of both his family and the larger society. In such cases where it becomes obvious that a man cannot adequately provide for his large family, the culture prescribes and supports divorce and/or intervenes to stop any efforts by the man to marry additional wife, even if the potential woman accepts his proposal. This points to the fact that even though Ewe indigenous culture permits and, in some cases, encourages polygyny, Ewe moral code of marriage has prescribed checks and balances. It does however fail in its inequality and discriminatory prescriptions and biases against women. It is necessary and would be interesting for further research from the musician's perspective to be conducted into the reasons and arguments for and against polygyny within indigenous versus modern Ewe, Ghanaian, and African societies.

### **7.2.1 Morality and Worldview (“Religion”)**

According to some African philosophers including Kwesi Wiredu, Kwame Gyekye, and Segun Gbadegesin there is some conception, and a great deal of temptation to which a number of scholars have succumbed in writing, that African “moral values of good and bad or right and wrong derive from the command of some supernatural being or beings, and that their moral

beliefs and principles can be justified only by reference to religious beliefs and doctrines.”<sup>951</sup> According to Kwame Gyekye, this conception that African moral value is purely derived from religion is “greatly mistaken.” Among most eloquent articulators of this view are Bolaji Idowu and M. Akin Makinde. In his book, *Odumare: God in Yoruba Belief*, Idowu rejects any indication that African morality derives from African societies’ need for self-preservation or that morality is “the product of commonsense.”<sup>952</sup> He asserts “Our [Africans’] own view is that morality is basically the fruit of religion and that, to begin with, it was dependent upon it. Man’s concept of deity has everything to do with what is taken to be the norm of morality.”<sup>953</sup> More specifically, he continued, “The sense of right and wrong, by the decree of God, has always been part of human nature.”<sup>954</sup> Turning to the Yoruba, he declares: “with the Yoruba, morality is the fruit of religion.”<sup>955</sup> Idowu’s standpoint is supported by M. Akin Makinde in his book *African Philosophy, Culture, and Traditional Medicine*.<sup>956</sup>

Kwesi Wiredu and other scholars<sup>957</sup> who oppose this view indicate that indigenous African religions are not revealed religions. Kwesi Wiredu maintains that African traditional religions’ receiving direct revelation from God is unheard of. There are no prophets of God in African traditional religion and, in particular, none with any pretence to moral revelation.<sup>958</sup> Because of this, Africans do not have access to the ‘commandments of God’ to use as the basis of their moral system.<sup>959</sup> Earlier on J. B. Danquah, writing on the Akans, has declared with great

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<sup>951</sup> Gyekye (1996: 56-57). See also Wiredu (1991, 1996), Gbadegesin (1991), Wiredu and Gyekye (1992)

<sup>952</sup> Idowu (1962: 144)

<sup>953</sup> Ibid, 145

<sup>954</sup> Ibid

<sup>955</sup> Ibid

<sup>956</sup> See Makinde (1988)

<sup>957</sup> See See Danquah (1952), Wiredu (1991, 1996), Gbadegesin (1991), Wiredu and Gyekye (1992), Gyekye (1995, 1996, 1997)

<sup>958</sup> See Wiredu (1991)

<sup>959</sup> See Gyekye (1996), Wiredu (199), and Wiredu and Gyekye (1992)

emphasis that, “We [Akan] have never had a Christ or a Buddha or a Mohammed. Never in the history of the Akan people, so far as we know, have we had what is known as a revealed religion, a revelation to, or by, a prophet, of duty to a Supreme Master or Lord.”<sup>960</sup> In reference to the Yoruba, Segun Gbadegesin also maintains that they “are very pragmatic in their approach to morality, and although religion may serve them as a motivating force, it is not the ultimate appeal in moral matters.”<sup>961</sup> From these and other arguments advanced by these scholars, it is obvious that, naturally, Africans south of the Sahara generally do not seek the rationale of morality in the decrees of God but in the exigencies of social existence.<sup>962</sup> Hence the possible answer an Ewe moral thinker is likely to give to a question Socrates asked, in Plato’s dialogue *Euthyphro*,<sup>963</sup> whether the gods love the pious because it is pious, or whether it is pious because it is loved by the gods. Applied towards our argument, would the God/gods love the pious/good/moral because it is pious/good/moral and hate evil/bad/immoral because it is evil/bad/immoral. To the Ewe and many African indigenous moral thinkers, if something is good because God approves of it, how would they (the people) identify that good thing since they practice non-revealed religion(s)?

Secondly, according to my discussants, because the Ewe may also subject their divinities to moral assessment and deem some of their actions as immoral, unethical, and inhumane, it

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<sup>960</sup> Danquah (1952: 3) also quoted in Gyekye (1995: 135)

<sup>961</sup> Gbadegesin (1991: 82)

<sup>962</sup> See Danquah (1952), Wiredu (1991, 1996), Gbadegesin (1991), Wiredu and Gyekye (1992), Gyekye (1995, 1997)

<sup>963</sup> In monotheistic diction, this may be transformed into: “Is what is moral commanded by God because it is moral, or is it moral because it is commanded by God?” Indications are that the dilemma has continued to present challenges for theists since Plato presented it and it is still an object of theological and philosophical debate. See Adams, Robert Merrihew. 2002. *Finite and Infinite Goods: A Framework for Ethics*. New York: Oxford University Press, Gyekye (1995), Aertsen, Jan. 2004. *Medieval Philosophy and the Transcendentals: The Case of Thomas Aquinas*. New York: Brill, Frame, John M. 2007. *Euthyphro, Hume, and the Biblical God*. [http://www.frame-poythress.org/frame\\_articles/1993Euthyphro.htm](http://www.frame-poythress.org/frame_articles/1993Euthyphro.htm) (Accessed: 01/04/2009), Paul Helm, Paul, ed. 1981. *Divine Commands and Morality*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, Kretzmann, Norman. 1999. “Abraham, Isaac, and Euthyphro: God and the basis of morality.” In *Philosophy of Religion: The Big Questions*, edited by Eleonore Stump & Michael J. Murray. Oxford: Blackwell

stands to reason that entities and actions are not necessarily good because supernatural approves of them since the supernatural's own judgments and actions may be called to question and subjected to human moral standards and scrutiny.<sup>964</sup> For example, in the event of a divinity failing to fulfill its obligation and/or promise to a devotee, that divinity could be censured and even abandoned by the devotee(s). Such an action on the part of the divinity may imply a moral disappointment and deceit and may lead to the loss of the divinity's moral/power to command as well as the obedience of its devotees. Subjecting lesser gods to moral and ethical standards is common across indigenous African societies and religions. K. A. Bussia, notes that: "The gods are treated with respect if they deliver the goods and with contempt if they fail...Attitudes [to the gods] depend upon their success, and vary from healthy respect to sneering contempt."<sup>965</sup>

Ewe communal values create the foundation of the essentially social and humanistic basis of their moral values. Such moral values, enjoined within a moral system pursue general human well-being. Thus, in Ewe morality, there is a continuous preoccupation with human welfare, and what is morally good is that which brings about human well-being. Therefore, an action, a habit, or a pattern of behavior is considered good only if human and social well-being is promoted. Any list of moral values equated with the good in Ewe society will include kindness, compassion, generosity, hospitality, faithfulness, truthfulness, concern for others, and the action that brings peace, justice, dignity, respect, and happiness. They are conducive to cooperative and harmonious living, having been fashioned out of the experiences of the people in living together in and as a society.

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<sup>964</sup> In separate interviews with Prof. Datey-Kumordzie, Prof. Komla Dzobo, Midawo Azafokpe, Setsoafi Yibo (see appendix E). See also Dzobo and Amegashie-Viglo (2004), Gyekye (1995, 1996)

<sup>965</sup> Busia, A. K. 1954. "The Ashanti of the Gold Coast." In *African Worlds: Studies in the Cosmological Ideas and the Social Values of African Peoples*, edited by Daryll Forde. Oxford: Oxford University Press, page 205. Also quoted in Gyekye (1995: 137)

In view of the above, any behavior that is contrary to the cherished and upheld moral values is not only frowned upon but also criticized, condemned, and punished through various ways and means including musical practice. It is an undeniable fact in Ewe culture that sometimes it is dicey to talk about and criticize certain immoral acts in public and by ordinary speech, especially if it involves certain categories of people in society, for example kings. However, the arts, especially musical practices, often enjoy immunity to barriers of censorship regarding expression and open condemnation of immoral acts.<sup>966</sup> Song texts are directly, indirectly, and/or metaphorically implored and explored to express public and individual concerns against any immoral act by anyone, including the king. Here are some songs that talk about various immoral acts, in this case, stealing/burglary and murder.

**Song 124: *Ame Nutu Mewoa Do Eve O***

**Zigi** (Text in Ewe: Ewedome dialect)

//: *Yawo Kowua*

*Ame nutsu*

*Mewoa do eve o://*

//: *De asi le fi nu*

*Nale dowowo me://*

//: *Mele nuo wo*

*'Zo pe mele atsia do de nu gbe*

**Literal Translation**

Yawo Kowua,

A human male (a man)

Does not work two jobs

Leave stealing alone (stop stealing)

And hold on to working the real job

I am doing the thing

I am now going to do it stylishly/decorate it

In Ewe conception, there are two kinds of jobs that men may work: a good job and a bad job. One is permitted, encouraged, and positively rewarded and the other prohibited, discouraged, and severely punished. There are different good jobs or works that Ewe men are supposed to be engaged in. Stealing, however, is not a job, let alone a good one. Hence, when Yawo Kowua, the thief, is suspected of engaging in pilfering, the musician indirectly reminds him and the society that stealing is not a job, even if some members of the society including Yawo think so. The composer, speaking for the community, advises: “Yawo Kowua, we know

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<sup>966</sup> See Adjaye (2004) for detailed discussion and further insight.

you are engaged in ‘two jobs.’ In reality, a man does not work ‘two jobs;’ one of your ‘jobs’ cannot be permitted. We advise that you quit one ‘job’ (stealing) and hold on to working the real and acceptable job. I am voicing society’s objections now, but if you do not stop your immoral acts, then I would extend my criticism in a more aggressive (stylish) way.” It is the hope of traditional African musicians and largely musicians all over the world that music serves as a strong means of protest and education. Kofi Agawu notes that “correcting anti-social behavior through song may not be the most efficient social policy, but it does have the direct effect of humiliating the victim.”<sup>967</sup> Below is another musician’s protest against stealing and murder.

**Song 125: *Fiafitowo Amebada Yae Wo Nye***

***Adzogbo*** (Text in Ewe: Anlo Ewe)

*'Yae wo nye lo, 'yae wo nye*  
*Fiafito amebada 'yae wo nye*  
*Ne wofi fi ha,*  
*Wo mulona gbede o*  
*Ne wowu ame ha*  
*Wo mulona gbede o*  
*Xoxoa meloa,*  
*Ya devi ya va loa?*  
*Wo kata 'medeka wonye*  
*Ge metua xo*  
*Na adaba o*  
*[A]daba li xoxo [hafi]*  
*[Hafi] ge va do*  
*Fiafito ya ku tsi agba ngo*

*Bo bo bo boe! Ku tsi agba ngo he*

*Devi ya ha ku tsi agba ngo*

*Bo bo bo boe! Ku tsi agba ngo he*

**Literal Translation**

That is what they are truly, that is what they are  
 Thieves/burglars are very bad/dangerous people  
 Even when they steal,  
 They never agree/accept (they deny/lie about) it  
 Even when they commit murder  
 They never agree/accept (they deny/lie about) it  
 Adult did not agree/accept it (did not tell the truth)  
 Would the child/young agree/accept (tell the truth)?  
 They are all the same people  
 The beard does not tell historical narratives (advice)  
 To the eyelid/lash  
 Eyelid/lash was there long (came with man)  
 [Before] the beard arrived (grew later)  
 The thief died and was left on the mat (he/she died  
 disgracefully/uselessly)  
 Awful, awful, awful, awful! Died disgracefully  
 This child also died and was left on the mat (this  
 child also died disgracefully/uselessly)  
 Awful, awful, awful, awful! Died disgracefully

In all societies, stealing/burglary is frowned upon, condemned, and outlawed. In the above song the indigenous musician openly comments on this immoral act, its associated characters, and its ultimate consequences. The song points out some of the characteristics of a

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<sup>967</sup> Agawu (1995: 135)

thief/burglar and murderer. According to the composer: (1) thieves are generally bad and dangerous people; (2) they are liars who never speak the truth; (3) all kinds of thieves and murderers have similar characters; and (4) that such immoral trait has a top-down transfer relationship. That is, such traits may be passed on from older people to younger ones and that it is improbable a child would teach an adult such immoral acts. And finally, that there are several punishments for the people who commit those crimes. However, the song implies, those punishments including the ultimate consequence—miserable and disgraceful death—do not discriminate between an adult and a child. As typical of Ewe and African indigenous forms of communication, the composer infuses a proverb into the song and uses it to explain the fact that evil acts are passed on from older generations to younger ones just as historical narratives.

The proverb “*Ge metua xo na adaba o*” (the beard does not/cannot narrate historical events to the eyelid) as used in the song is embedded with deeper information than first perceived. It is important for the reader to understand that *xo* (often translated as historical narrative or advice) in Ewe, means much more than its literal translation. Etymologically, *xo* connotes old entity, history, advice, philosophy, wisdom, knowledge, experience, and sagacity. There are different kinds of *xo* including *xo xaxlawo* (secrete/hidden/private/protected narratives/advice) and *xo gbadzawo* (public/open narratives/advice).<sup>968</sup> Much of the historical narratives, philosophical thoughts, and other kinds of knowledge and advice are disseminated through the process of *xotutu* (lit. passing on/telling of *xo*). It takes an experienced, wise, morally upright, often older person to effectively transmit *xo*. Since *xo* transmission largely depends on real experience and/or sound historical, philosophical, moral and linguistic grounding as well as knowledge of other cultural features, it is uncommon to have a child as

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<sup>968</sup> Other kinds of *xo* include *duxo* (State narrative), *hloxo* (clan narrative), *fomexo* (family narrative), etc.

*xotula* (lit. *xo* transmitter) or to transmit *xo* to an adult. The composer, using natural phenomena of eyelid/lash and beard, expresses in the deepest way, that adults corrupt children by their immoral acts. “It is impossible for the beard to tell the eyelid/lash what happened many years ago since the eyelid/lash was part of the individual at birth, and experienced everything that the individual went through long before the beard grows later in life.” The beard (child) therefore rarely could, if at all, influence the eyelid/lash (adult). It is rather the eyelid/lash (adult) that is likely to, and often, influence the beard (child). All morally corrupted individuals are the same, the composer emphasizes. A child thief/murderer is the same as an adult thief/murderer. Children must know that they face the same punishments and bear the same consequences as the adults that indulge in such acts. Again, the song below reiterates similar points.

**Song 126: *Miafe Dumegawo***

*Adzogbo* (Text in Ewe: Anlo dialect)

*Miafe dumegawo*

*Mede kakla na mi loo*

*Dzoduametowo le mia me*

*Mayo wo nko ne miase*

*Miga gbe o lo*

*Miayo wo, miagbe na wo*

*'Mekudolawo*

*Le mia me*

*Mayo wo nko ne miase*

*Miga gbe o lo*

*Miayo wo, miagbe na wo*

*Tutu gba nye Kofoti*

*Evelia nko nye Tanti*

*Torlia nko nye Mami*

*Miga gbe o lo*

*Miayo wo, miagbe na wo*

**Literal Translation**

Elders of our town (leaders/statesmen/rulers)

I ask for your attention (ask permission from you)

Evil people are living among (evil doers among) us

Let me mentioned their names to your hearing (I will identify them for you)

Do not deny my allegation (do not doubt my claim)

Call them and stop them (advice them to desist)

Those who would cause death/who would kill

Are living among us

Let me mention their names to your hearing (I will identify them for you)

Do not deny my allegation (do not doubt my claim)

Call them and stop them (advice them to desist)

The first [person] is Kofoti (one is Kofoti)

he second [person's] name is Tanti

The third [person's] name is Mami

Do not deny my allegation (do not doubt my claim)

Call them and stop them (advice them to desist)

The message contained in this song is clear and straightforward. The composer is exposing individuals whose acts and behavior are questionable. The composer prays that the community listens to his allegation and not doubt his/her claim. He insists they investigate,

summon the individuals identified, punish them, and stop them from their evil deeds. Relying on their “immunity” (from legal action) Ewe musicians enjoy by virtue of their “profession” the medium of expression they use. The composer actually and publicly identifies the individuals by name in his song (report) to lend credence to his claim.<sup>969</sup> Although the names may not necessarily be the real names of the alleged evil individuals, musicians often use terms, labels, and descriptive expressions that make it very easy for the public to identify the real/actual person portrayed in the song. The song also underscores the trust in and the power of elders in Ewe communities. It indicates that by the power invested in them as elders, their advice, counsel, and admonitions go a long way to deter many from committing crimes.

Gossip is yet another social behavior that, though frowned upon, is pervasive in Ewe culture as in all cultures. Here a singer acknowledges the immorality of gossip and its potential of leading those engaged in it into trouble and further states that gossip may be socially addictive or infectious. The rumormonger, according to the song, is an immoral person that leads an innocent person into trouble.

**Song 127: *Enyatonamela***

*Azigi* (Ewe-Ewedome dialect)

//:*Enyatonamela*

*Ame hede nyame lae://(3x)*

//:*Wotoe nam de*

*De magbe de to za (nu a)?:// (3x)*

//:*Enyatonamela*

*Ame hede nyame lae://*

**Literal Translation**

The rumormonger (gossipmonger)

Is the one that leads/puts you into trouble

Since you told me/now that you told me

Will I refuse to say something/pass it on?

The rumormonger (gossipmonger)

Is the one that leads/puts you into trouble

The maxim “*Enyatonamela ame he de nyamelae*” (the gossipmonger/rumormonger is the one who leads you into trouble) says it all. “Those who gossip about others are bad people; they would find trouble for you,” says the composer/singer. “Now that you told me, do you expect me not to tell others...?” Of course, there would be no rumor if there is no rumormonger and

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<sup>969</sup> This research could not confirm any evidence of such license ever been tested or challenged in a court of law.

because gossiping can be addictive, it is easy to ‘recruit’ new rumormongers. Having stated the consequences of gossiping, the composer/singer admits that himself/herself will not hesitate to continue spreading the rumor.

The next song talks about the temptations of using one’s status or social position as an excuse to indulge in immoral acts.

**Song 128: *Mile Afo Ne Agede***

*Afa-Dzisa* (Text in Ewe: Anlo dialect)

*Milea ‘fo ne lo, tonyeawo*

*Milea ‘fo ne agedea*

*Vu to fovu*

*Memoa adzido gbede*

*Tonyeawo mile be ne agedea*

**Literal Translation**

Hold its leg (pacify him/her), my kinsmen

Hold the leg of *agede*.<sup>970</sup>

A drum owner who drums

Does not make love to *adzido*,<sup>971</sup>

My kinsmen take care of *agede*

The song admonishes those who use their social status or office as a privilege or license to defy tradition. To make his/her point, the composer uses a proverb “*Vuto fo vu memoa adzido o*” (a drum owner does not make love to the drum). The proverb means a musician may own the instrument(s) or may be the leader of the musical group, but he/she may not have the right to do anything he/she pleases. This indirectly cautions the master drummer (and by extension, all leaders) and all who are promiscuous of the fact that there are limitations to the powers of leaders. The gods, ancestors, and the society seriously frown upon such acts. Promiscuity is not only immoral but also an affront to the divinities that must be pacified. It admonishes all Ewe to hold on to tradition, be steadfast and never lose their guard. “We must take care of traditional belief, religion and customs first and always, so that the gods will forever be there for us,” the song reiterates.

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<sup>970</sup> A traditional belief system

<sup>971</sup> *Adzido* sometimes called *Adido* is the baobab tree.

### 7.3 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The subject of this chapter is Ewe socio-cultural knowledge and philosophical thoughts focusing on selected humanistic and moral values. Humanistic values, it is pointed out, espouse cooperation and peaceful living among all people at all levels, cultures, and ideologies. Ewe humanistic values embrace common moral decencies as outlined above. The Ewe (and for that matter African) concept of humanity and the value that is indigenously attached to it is educed from their ontological concept that Mawu creates all human beings. Despite the entrenched religiosity of Ewe and Africans in general, it is argued that their moral values did not emanate from religion, even though religion undoubtedly plays some roles in the domain of moral practice. Ewe moral values, like that of other Africans, are founded essentially on their experiences of living together. Africans including Ewe therefore do not seek the rationale of morality in the decrees of God but in the exigencies of social existence.

It is also pointed out that the global humanistic family ethic, while tolerating and understanding differences in customs, beliefs, and social agendas, embraces an inclusiveness that seeks to rise above religious and political animosities and tensions and emphasize what unites human beings rather than that which separates them. The Ewe concept of *amedzro* and *novi* underscores this global theory of humanity and human relationship. The deeper and wider signification assigned to the concept *novi* in Ewe culture is purposed, indeed, to uplift people from the purely biologically determined blood-relation level onto the social and human stage; the level where the essence of humanity is held as transcending the contingencies of biological relation, race, or ethnicity. At the core of this familial ethic is support for the universal declarations of human rights that embrace all human beings.

The chapter also touches on greeting, polygamy and promiscuity. Since morality is seen as a set of social rules and norms provided as a guide for conduct in society, then it is prudent in my opinion, to conclude that greeting in Ewe society, seen in a larger scope as a tool to assess an individual's sense of humanism, is in itself a humanistic and moral obligation and not just a social act. In indigenous Ewe culture polygyny is morally accepted but polyandry is unheard of—which serves as a cultural bias and discrimination against women. Although Ewe society allows plural marriage (polygyny, specifically), it does so only with the conviction and understanding that the man is well resourceful and materially, morally, emotionally, and socio-culturally capable of maintaining and fairly catering for his family. Promiscuity is not only immoral but also an affront to the divinities that must be pacified by the promiscuous individual.

In conclusion, there is no doubt that the practice of human sacrifice and domestic slavery in Africa's past constitutes a moral blemish in its history and casts some doubt on the Ewe and African appreciation and respect for human life and dignity. However, the fact that these evil practices, especially that of human sacrifice, were carried out in secret and undertaken in a clandestine manner, is an indication that those who committed it knew that it was not just an inhuman but also criminal and evil act, which would not only be rejected but also condemned by some members of the community/society.<sup>972</sup>

By focusing on and discussing the above selected humanistic and moral values, I am neither indicating that Ewe moral values are limited to the above nor am I suggesting that Ewe musicians comment only on the above selected values. As seen from the previous chapters, Ewe songs and proverbs are filled with expressions of the importance of the human being and concern

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<sup>972</sup> In a personal communication Professor Akin Euba argues that by their belief in life in eternity (including the belief that a deceased king needs a servant in the other life), some members of the larger community believe that human sacrifice is done for the good of the community. They therefore accept that the "criminals" are acting on behalf of the community (Personal communication with Prof Akin Euba: 02/15/09; Pittsburgh, USA).

for human welfare and morality. It takes the artistic works, creative ingenuity, and deliberate quest for and interest in preservation of knowledge and values for the musician to be able to document all the above and many other Ewe indigenous knowledge and values. Ewe musicians serve not only as entertainers but also as social visionaries, commentators, and “journalists,” whose products and practices prescribe and remind us of our humanism and help keep the society in moral check. It is important that we understand these musical products in their deepest sense so we can utilize them in educating the present and future generations.

## 8.0 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

*“Hadzimatso la dewo gbana axatse”*  
(An endless song often leads to the breakage of the rattle)

In the previous seven chapters, I have attempted to identify, analyze, and discuss some bodies of knowledge and values that are indigenous to the Ewe and that have contributed meaningfully to the substance and sustenance of Ewe society and culture. In this concluding chapter, I concentrate on the place and relevance of indigenous knowledge and cultural values in modern Ewe, Ghanaian, and African societies. I reiterate the need and possibility of harmonizing indigenous knowledge with modern scientific and global cultural concepts and values that are pervasive in Ewe, Ghanaian, and African societies today.

The chapter is in two parts. The first part presents a cursory summary of the first seven chapters of the dissertation, noting the main indigenous knowledge systems and values on which each chapter focuses and the role of the musician in these systems and values. Part two of the chapter discusses the relevance, possibilities, processes, and benefits of harmonizing tradition with modern scientific knowledge. It raises some possible and potential challenges of such harmonization attempts and offers suggestions as to how to limit and overcome those challenges. It also looks at the implications of the research, its import, and implications to conventional/non-traditional and traditional scholars, researchers, and educators in Ewe and African music and culture in particular and ethnomusicology in general.

## 8.1 PART I: SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS

Chapter 1 introduces the musicological exploration into the Ewe indigenous knowledge system by delineating the background of the study, including statement of research, literature review, theoretical framework, methodology, and significance of the study. This opening chapter proceeds with an ethnographic overview of the Ewe, outlining their geographical, historical, religious, and socio-cultural backgrounds. Thereafter, the study focuses on specific concepts and draws conclusions based on the discussions and analysis.

Chapter 2 reveals the deeper meanings embedded in common Ewe musico-linguistic terminologies and concepts. I assert that Ewe traditional philosophico-linguistic concepts establish clear analogies between artistic creativity and procreation. The Ewe concept of *no* (mother), which is the source of life as well as artistic, politico-military, and spiritual titles, underlines the procreative concept of musical production. Against this background, and in a process refined by countless generations, Ewe musicians (including *azagunowo* and *hesinowo*) are not just artistic procreators, but also nothing less than sages and oracles. These social visionaries and their idealistic images are utilized constantly in reevaluating and redefining society's most critical assumptions and values. In a typical course of dance-drumming activities through which real life situations are reenacted and dramatized, the entire society helps these "procreators" and scholars to define the desirable attributes of communal life, and then actively mold its citizens to conform to these ideas of ethics and behavior.

Language, I reiterate, is a vehicle of concepts, an embodiment of philosophical points of views, and a factor that influences philosophical thought. In other words, the thoughts of a sage are, to some extent, determined by the structure and other characteristics of his/her language. It is therefore crucial to critically examine the linguistic and philosophical paradigms of the Ewe

language when considering the music and indigenous knowledge of the Ewe. Text, I conclude, extends beyond song lyrics and includes all Ewe music and dance productions based on or relating to any verbalized and/or un verbalized texts. Consequently, the rhythmic patterns, called *vugbewo*, are musico-linguistic texts and must be interpreted as such. In addition, I establish that there are at least three levels of meaning and cultural acts to any Ewe musico-linguistic text—literal, proverbial/deeper, and philosophical—all of which are relevant and must be included in the interpretation of any Ewe indigenous knowledge and philosophical thought.

Chapter 3 looks at issues of cosmology, ontology, and epistemology. On Ewe metaphysics, I conclude that indigenous Ewe ontology prescribes four classes of being, all of which have religious and/or spiritual characteristics and powers: the super-natural and immortal beings, the ancestral spirits, the mortal or animate beings, and the inanimate beings. Further analysis of Ewe ontology reveals the concept of a trinity in different metaphysical entities. First, the Supreme Being is three in one; “*Etoe Nye Agbe*” (Three is Life) and “*Menoa Eto Dzi Gli Na O*” (It Never Fails If It Is On Three), as the Ewe variously express it. The trinity of God includes: *Mawu Sodza/Miano-zodzi*, the female principle and the source of life; *Mawu Sogbla/Sogble*, the male principle, characterized by power; and *Mawu Segbolisa/Se/Mawu-Lisa*, the principle of law, the unity of life, and determiner of the destiny of human beings. Secondly, we discover the Ewe belief in the three-pronged conception of existence and life cycle: *amedzofe/bome* (human origin/pre-earthly life), *kodzogbe* (mortal life/life on earth), and *tsiefe* (eternity/post earthly-life). Third is the tripartite conception of the person; i.e., the human being consisting of *luvo* (soul/the personality-soul), *gbogbo* (spirit-breath/the life in the person), and *nutila* (body/the physical material of the entity).

Also related to the above is the concept of life-death dialectics; both life and death are given together as the fundamental terms of human existence, and in Ewe conception, *agbe* (life) precedes *ku* (death), and life is always at the mercy and expense of death. This is because death is a natural consequence of life. As such, when we mention or pray for life, death is implicated. All the ontological issues, nevertheless, revolve around the person (soul, spirit, and body). The immaterial part of a person, the soul and spirit, survive after death. The body, the material part, goes back into the womb of Mother Earth, from whom it came. The spirit, which is a breath of Mawu/Se in a human being, joins Him/Her. The soul either continues to live an everlasting life in the ancestral world or reincarnates. It is important to note that this indigenous Ewe metaphysical concept of the trinity of God, of existence, and of the composition of human being is not in any way connected to, influenced by, or functioned according to the Christian concept of the Holy Trinity. Ewe believe in the soul, spirit, and body—hence in the triality of the nature of existence—which leads directly to their belief in an ancestral world inhabited by departed souls. The logical relationship between the belief in the soul, destiny, and the ancestral world, as well as the belief in the complementary nature of life and death, is one of dependence, strengthening the belief system of the Ewe. Based on my analysis, I therefore conclude that the concept of “heaven-hell” and “sin” as prescribed, propagated, and preached by Western/Christian religions are not indigenous to the Ewe. The “heaven-hell” and “sin” concepts which currently predominate among Ewe is a Christian (Western) religious ideology/belief that has been pumped into the ontological consciousness of Ewe since the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century.

My study also debunked false assertions that the Ewe concept of God is a borrowed concept. Using Ewe musico-literary works and references, I show that not only do Ewe know

and believe in one supreme God, but they have been communicating with Him through divinities long before the advent of European contacts and later Christian missions in Eweland. I assert that *Tsifodi/nudededo*, the dramatic Ewe indigenous process of communication with the supernatural, is not only a spiritual act, but also, and most importantly, a socio-cultural and moral obligation. On epistemology, I indicate, knowledge involves knowing and expressing something in the hand, in the heart, as well as in the head. Knowledge is greater than knowing some facts and procedures, hence its forms of transmission transcend books, written sources, and lectures. Knowledge is lived, preserved, and transmitted, among other methods, through musical art.

Chapter 4 traces the routes and events of migration of the Ewe from Ketu to their present homes. From the historical discussion, I conclude that, although the forebears of the Ewe may not have developed the art of writing as in Western cultures, they have documented historical events and other daily activities in other forms and by other means. Musicians, as illustrated in the chapter's discussions, were some of the agents of documentation and their products were the means by which they achieved their goals. The songs remind all Ewe of the historic events. The musical traditions of the Ewe, which form an integral part of their general cultural heritage, are, and should be considered and treated as, a repository of their historical events. Due to their functionality, citizens need not consciously memorize these songs to be able to tell their stories. As the music is performed and the songs are sung, the story is told as well, and generations are informed and educated.

In Chapter 5, I chart the profile of Ewe traditional political culture and elucidate its indigenous knowledge system and what I regard as its embedded democratic tenets, both institutionally and conceptually. In this regard, I point out that kingmakers traditionally choose an Ewe king/chief from a pool of eligible candidates. By the mandate of the people's political

will and power, kingmakers exercise their judiciousness and wisdom in their election. This process, in my opinion, is one of the indigenous democratic principles. It has also been established from the chapter's discussion that in the process of choosing a ruler, it is incumbent on the electors to consider the wishes of the people to whom the elected person would be presented, who have to accept him as their ruler, and whom he would rule. Consequently, I conclude that insofar as the citizens have a say in the suitability of the individual chosen to rule them, it can be said that the traditional Ewe political system provides for the people to participate in choosing their rulers, even if the action is taken by some few people, namely, the kingmakers. This, in my view, is a sign and act of participatory democracy.

An Ewe king/chief is both the politico-military and religious head. The stool (throne) he occupies, which is the symbol of his political power, is an ancestral stool. This partly accounts for the spiritual/sacred aspect of the throne and the source of the great dignity, respect, and veneration the king/chief is accorded. The taboos relating to his conduct and manners are all meant to remind him, his subjects, and others of the secrecy and sanctity of the position he occupies.

In Ewe society, consensus formation operates at all political levels. Although the king holds the central position, his power is severely limited and he cannot embark on any action without the consent of the people. The orally established oath of office pronounced at the swearing-in ceremony serves as the constitutional "document" and establishes the contract—injunction—between the king and his subjects during the installation process. According to the injunctions, the king/chief respects the wishes of the people and rules in accordance with their will. The people have the moral right to remove a bad ruler or have him removed by those who elected him. The will of the people is, therefore, politically effective. The method of arriving at

decisions, reflecting respect for the individual, is that of consultation and consensus, freedom of expression, and openness of deliberation at public meetings and assemblies. These practices are important elements of the democratic principles. Irrespective of social status, every citizen participates freely and openly in politics in one way or another and contributes to consensus formation. Musicians often use the medium of songs to propagate and urge citizens to play active roles in politics. Certainly, consensus is one of the outstanding features of the decision-making process in the traditional Ewe political practice. The values of equality, reciprocity, respect for others, and mutual recognition are implemented through consensus formation. The principle of popular government, though not that of popular sovereignty, is firmly established in the Ewe, and, for that matter, African tradition.

I conclude that song text and proverbs shed light on the fact that a chief is never imposed on an Ewe community, a fact of which contemporary African politicians, the self-imposed military rulers and other aspiring political candidates of Africa today must take note. In addition, the structured, established, and acknowledged methods of choosing the king/chief guarantee that questions of political legitimacy rarely arise in the traditional Ewe political practice—another lesson for modern Africa politicians to emulate.

With a clearer understanding of the indigenous political knowledge system in Chapter 5, I follow up in Chapter 6 with a look at a related knowledge body—the military culture. Here I focus on military institutions, personalities, codes, warfare propaganda, and historic wars. My discussion illuminates the relevance of indigenous military knowledge and history, and the importance of music in defense, security, and stability in traditional Ewe society. My discussion reveals that songs, drum patterns, and other instrumental and kinesthetic productions serve as media through which coded and uncoded military messages are disseminated. Songs insinuate,

educate, direct, petition, prepare the community's emotional state of mind and psychologically boost warriors' morale in times of war. Musicians are therefore vital, if not indispensable, organs of military force and structure and their products are essential tools in any Ewe military operation and dispensation.

Although women are not usually combatants, they take part in the selection of combatants. Mothers have the right and the judgment to determine whether or not a man is qualified and fit to go to war. By their status they indirectly take part in the selection of commanders, since future commanders are chosen from a pool of combatants on the battlefield. The highest Ewe military title—*avadada* (lit., war mother meaning commander-in-chief)—like other religious and musical titles, is a feminine title, an indication of indigenous Ewe's conception of, respect for, and importance attached to feminine power, even in a male-dominated profession. It also reflects the Ewe ontology and conception of life and power as emanating from the female. By their acts, Ewe composer-poets cast the names and deeds of their illustrious politico-military leaders in their songs and proverbs as lasting portraits for posterity.

The subject of Chapter 7 is Ewe socio-cultural knowledge, focusing on humanistic and moral values. Humanistic values, it is pointed out, espouse cooperation and peaceful living among all people at all levels, cultures, and ideologies. In its conclusion, I argue that, despite the entrenched religiosity of Ewe and Africans in general, their moral values did not emanate from religion, even though religion undoubtedly plays some role in the domain of moral practice. Their moral values are essentially established from their experiences of communal life. Ewe therefore, do not seek the rationale of morality in the decrees of God, but in the exigencies of social existence. This is because traditional Ewe religions are not received and/or revealed religions. It is also pointed out that the global humanistic family ethic, while tolerating and

understanding differences in customs, beliefs, and social agendas, embraces an inclusiveness that seeks to rise above religious and political animosities and tensions and emphasize what unites human beings, rather than that which separates them. The Ewe concept of *amedzro* and *novi* underscore this global theory of humanity and human relationships. The deeper and wider significance assigned to the concept *novi* (sibling) in Ewe culture is purposed, indeed, to deter people from the purely biologically determined blood-relation level to the wider social and human stage—the level where the essence of humanity is held as transcending the contingencies of biological relation, race, or ethnicity. At the core of this familial ethic is an implicit support for the universal declarations of human rights that protect all human beings.

Since morality is seen as a set of social rules and norms provided as a guide for conduct in society, then it is prudent, in my opinion, to conclude that greeting in Ewe society, seen in a larger scope as a tool to assess the individual's sense of humanism, is, in itself, first and foremost a humanistic and moral obligation and not just a social act. In indigenous Ewe culture, polygyny is morally accepted but polyandry is unheard of and may not be accepted—a cultural bias and discrimination against women. The practice of human sacrifice and domestic slavery in Africa's past constitutes a moral blemish and casts some doubt on the Ewe and African appreciation and respect for human life and dignity. However, the fact that these evil practices, especially that of human sacrifice, was carried out in secret and undertaken in a clandestine manner, with all those involved sworn to secrecy, is an indication that those who committed it knew only too well that it was not just an inhuman but also criminal and evil act, which would not only be rejected but also condemned outright by the larger community/society. One may also argue that these acts are somehow and sometimes condoned and connived by some members of the larger community on the bases of their believe in the continuation of life in eternity: in which case a diseased king may

need a servant in eternity. Hence they believe that human sacrifice is done for the good of the community and that the “criminals” are acting on behalf of the community.

In the middle of all these indigenous knowledge expositions is the musician—the traditional/local artistic scholar<sup>973</sup>—and his/her multiple intellectual and artistic skills. The traditional Ewe musico-cultural scholar, armed with his/her products, serves as one of the regular, reliable, and accessible personnel and media through which information, policies, and knowledge are disseminated. It takes the artistic works, creative ingenuity, and deliberate quest for and interest in preservation and dissemination of knowledge and values for the musician to be able to document all of the previously mentioned and many other types of Ewe indigenous knowledge and values. Within this traditionally non-literate society, musicians and their products serve as the repository of much of Ewe indigenous processes, principles, and publicity and/or agitprop machinery. Truly, we cannot lose sight of the fact that musicians by nature sometimes base their compositions on their creative imaginations, thereby not always “documenting” what happens but rather creating models from their “fantasies.” They also use their creative and imaginative skills to set standards by which the society may strive to live.

Nevertheless, much of what they produce—either by documenting and/or commenting on reality or by mere imagination—contributes tremendously to understanding the indigenous knowledge system and values of an oral society. This is because even the wildest fantasies of a composer are undoubtedly based on or informed by his/her experiences in real life; for, every imagination/fantasy has some amount of reality. Indigenous musicological contributions to unraveling, documenting, and transmitting the indigenous knowledge systems of oral societies are therefore as relevant as the volumes of literary works to a literate society. However, it is only

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<sup>973</sup> See Euba (2008)

when we take a closer look at the indigenous musical products and practices from indigenous theoretical perspectives, frameworks, and holistic indigenous methodological approaches that we may be able to discover the quantity, quality, and depth of information they contain.<sup>974</sup> Armed with deep insight and creative skills, as artists and educators, composers present the society's visions to the community through their use of musico-linguistic texts and artistry and thereby keep society informed, remind us of our humanity, aid our memory, and help keep society in moral check.

The survival of any type of music is dependent upon the extent to which the music is able to satisfy the values the people seek in it. The values, which may be aesthetic or structural, social, historical or religious, may operate individually or in a simultaneous complexity. In other words, the factors that shape and maintain the music, the text and all other things associated with it may be found in the music itself, in the artist, or in the context of performance, as well as in the rationale behind the composition and performance of such musical works. Besides that, the poetic creativity that goes into the composition of these songs plays an important role in their maintenance and continuous transmission. It is clear that one of the main features that identify and help preservation and transmission of Ewe songs is its poetic integration with musical structures into a unified artistic expression. Another is the fact that these pieces are usually short and focus on one theme. There is the need for their brevity, for "they must, of necessity, be short if they are to become the functional possession of the populace."<sup>975</sup> According to Kofi Anyidoho, the composers of these songs probably were aware of the fact that, for such songs to survive for posterity, they must be short, simple and catchy, so that the general populace, the

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<sup>974</sup> See Euba (2008)

<sup>975</sup> Anyidoho (1997: 139)

bearers of tradition, would not have to spend long hours trying to rehearse and commit them to memory.<sup>976</sup>

As varied as the songs may be, the process of natural selection eliminates songs with weak and undesirable messages, or songs that are unappealing or disagreeable to the people.<sup>977</sup> Those with desirable messages and/or enticing artistic characters gain widespread popularity and are sung as long as they are contextually appropriate and their messages remain relevant, even after many generations. For every song that captured the “popular imagination and interest” of the people and therefore survived many centuries, there were countless others that did not live beyond their initial performances. The various musical works and activities that survived their initial censorship as well as European and other foreign influences did so because of the positive values the people saw in them. They were kept alive because, beside their musical benefits, the society used them largely as a repository of their indigenous knowledge and as processes of educating. The song texts are imbibed at varied times in life, depending on the genre and textual composition, and become scripts and references that are recalled and quoted (both in song and speech) later in life. A closer look at these songs may provide vital insights into various aspects of the poetic imagination of the composers. Regardless of who composed them, “the short song rapidly becomes the common possession of the community”<sup>978</sup> and has ever remained so. The argument here is that there must be something uniquely intriguing about such songs to have appealed to, and still continue to arrest, the attention of so many people over time and space.

The songs discussed in this thesis are just a sample of many such songs that are found in diverse musical performances, not only in Anlo communities, but among all Ewe of West Africa.

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<sup>976</sup> Ibid

<sup>977</sup> See Fiagbedzi (1977), Anyidoho (1997) and Dor (2001)

<sup>978</sup> Anyidoho (1996: 139)

As a natural phenomenon, changes and variations occur as a piece of music travels in time and space. As Nketia states: “In drawing any evidence from traditional songs we must take into account historical processes of change. Whatever its origin may have been, it has not remained unchanged in content.”<sup>979</sup> The songs discussed above and many others that remind us of the history of Anlo Ewe are not exceptions. However, one noticeable characteristic of these songs is that musical text, actions, dances, drum patterns and the narratives that surround them everywhere they are performed relate to the historical facts enumerated in the works. Though there may be degrees of changes, variations and differences in the melodies, form and structure, as well as occasions of performance and their functions, the songs remind the people of their history. The fact remains that fundamental characteristics of Ewe music are exceptionally tenacious (especially the religious and court genres) for several centuries despite some changes. Their effect on the people is so strong that they inject their values and help maintain them in all aspects of their lives and through many generations.

In order for music to have usefulness for the Ewe, it must have presence. Not only must people be familiar with it, they must know the music and associate with it, for it is through music-making that the Ewe partly handles forces of great potency, shapes them according to his will, and increases or decreases the power of the life force.<sup>980</sup> So, though some of these songs talk about history and metaphysical issues, they have presence, for they are always linked with present issues, events, and contexts. So long as the songs live, so long as generation after generation sing them and pass them on, the information they contain is passed on and our present

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<sup>979</sup> See .Nketia (1964)

<sup>980</sup> See Turkson (1989: 79)

and future are informed by our past.<sup>981</sup> It is also obvious that the survival of Ewe indigenous music is directly linked with the survival and continuous practice of Ewe culture. For when Ewe lose their language, they will lose much (if not all) of their culture since the greater part of their cultural heritage, including their philosophical thoughts, is embedded in and expressed through their language and music.

## **8.2 PART II: IMPLICATION AND APPLICATION OF STUDY**

### **8.2.1 Indigenous Knowledge (IK) in Modern Society**

This section involves the implications of the study and its application in modern Ewe, Ghanaian, and African societies. The discussion in this section is centered on harmonizing tradition with modernity. It looks at the relevance, processes, challenges, and possibilities. Any attempt to “harmonize” indigenous knowledge and values with modern (largely Western) scientific knowledge has to face practical and theoretical challenges, methodologies, and approaches and has to follow specific steps so as to ensure a holistic and meaningful integration. In my view, the process needs to include: (1) identification of what constitutes indigenous knowledge and values; (2) the types of knowledge and values the community (in this case, the Ewe) has and holds on to; (3) sources of these values; (4) the real meaning and importance of the various knowledge bodies and values; and (5) their relevance in today’s world. In the past seven chapters I have followed steps 1 through 4 and delineated, through discussions, analysis, and expositions of some bodies

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<sup>981</sup> See Awoonor (1974, 1975), Dzobo (1975, 1997, 2004, 2006), Anyidoho (1982, 1983, 1997), Gyekye (1995, 1996), Korem and Abissath (2004), and Goolin (2000)

of Ewe indigenous knowledge and values, their sources and deeper meanings and values. In this section, I focus on step 5 where I discuss the need, process, and relevance of indigenous knowledge in modern society.

### **8.2.1.1 Indigenous Knowledge vs. Modern Scientific Knowledge**

Bodies or systems of knowledge categorized under Indigenous Knowledge System (IKS) or any of its related terminologies<sup>982</sup> are characterized and often differentiated from Modern Scientific Knowledge (MSK). The characteristics of and differences between these two systems include the following:<sup>983</sup>

(1) Local vs. Global/Universal: Indigenous knowledge (IK) is based on, rooted in, and often applicable to a particular community. It is a set of experiences generated by people living in the communities. Modern scientific knowledge (MSK) is the knowledge generated in modern scientific institutions and industrial firms. It often carries a “universal truth,” that is, it yields the same results no matter where it is applied;

(2) “Tacit” vs. “Explicit”: IK is embedded in the everyday activities of the people who generate and use it, hence it is considered to be difficult to capture and codify. On the other hand, MSK is explicitly expressed and usually taken through rigorous procedures of creation—observation, experimentation, validation, and explicit documentation;

(3) Preservation/Transmission (Oral vs. Written): IK is orally preserved and transmitted. It is often preserved through continuous practice and usage and rarely in written form. It is transferred through observation, imitation, demonstration, and participation. In contrast, MSK is often preserved and transmitted in written form, electronically, through academic schooling

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<sup>982</sup> See Chapter 3 for further details.

<sup>983</sup> See Sefa Dei (2000, 2004a), Abdi and Cleghorn (2005), and Abdi (2006)

systems and other institutional means. In MSK, the knowledge is carefully documented and stored as it is being produced. It is transmitted by formal educational media;

(4) Experiential vs. Theoretical: Unlike MSK, IK is considered experiential rather than theoretical knowledge; i.e., it derived from experience and trial and error and tested only through time in what some call the “social laboratory of survival of local communities.” MSK is based on scientific research, derived from hypotheses and scientific methods. MSK relies on studies made in laboratories with scientific or mathematical models, methodologies and approaches;

(5) Socio-Spiritual vs. Non-Spiritual: IK is full of and influenced by social and spiritual values of the people. Nature is revered as mother or provider of all things. In some communities, the people’s spiritual values and belief may not be separated from much of their indigenous knowledge bodies, making it difficult for objective conclusions to be drawn. In contrast, MSK separates attitudes, beliefs, and/or cultural dimensions from the knowledge creation process. Objectivity is the approach and the hallmark of MSK. Nature is to be conquered, mastered, improved, and scientifically controlled; and

(6) Holistic vs. Compartmentalized Approach: Since IK is embedded in many spheres of the people’s life activities, it is often understood and used as a holistic entity. Humankind is considered part of the nature. Natural tendency toward equilibrium is the central theme of IK. Contrarily, the compartmental approach is preferred in MSK. This system of knowledge breaks down matter for study into its smallest components in order to reach into the deeper and hidden facts of what is being studied.

### **8.2.1.2 Harmonizing IK and MSK Systems**

It is clear that these two systems of knowledge differ in many ways. IKS and MSK represent different knowledge systems because of their respective backgrounds, values, principles, skills,

organizing procedures, and usage. But the fact remains that both systems have been proven to be very useful to the people that created, use, and believe in them. It is therefore important that we harmonize the best and most useful aspects of both, to the benefit of humankind in this modern world. The real challenge is to search for an appropriate balance between indigenous and modern scientific knowledge, skills, and teaching methods, and to find mutual recognition and respect to work together in a complementary manner toward enhancing the well-being of mankind and sustainable development. Through this, both systems would be enriched with more global vision, paying attention to philosophical, psychological, religious, social, and cultural dimensions of the systems, which used to be considered as outside scientific rationale.

Lack of recognition and use of IK comes from two perspectives. First, although indigenous knowledge systems represent an enormous wealth, they are not well mobilized. In view of this, modern development strategies usually ignore, underestimate, and in some instances undermine other knowledge systems of developing countries, which are often labeled non-scientific and non-universal, and instead base everything on MSK. Beside the rejection or sidelining of IK on the basis of its lack of scientific proof, there is also another side that unfortunately stems from the very people that hold the knowledge as their indigenous product. This has to do with the colonial and early Christian missionary<sup>984</sup> mentality that is still very much alive in many, if not all African societies once colonized by European governments. Among some Ewe there is still a widely held view that anything associated with indigenous culture, language, and hereditary values is “satanic, heathen, pagan,” and thus “backward, uncivilized, and primitive” as reflected by the vast number of urban Africans who feel

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<sup>984</sup> Sadly, there are still some Christian “missionary” groups that continue to perpetrate these unfortunate acts in disguise and, in many cases, in exchange for what they call humanitarian and developmental projects to alleviate “poverty,” “hunger,” “illiteracy,” etc.

“embarrassed” to associate themselves with their own cultural background. The majority of African youth still subscribe to the “Western technological lifestyle,” and, on a smaller scale, to the “urban African dream,” mostly on the basis of “superiority,” with the aim of living a “better modern” life. Truly, the growing trend towards urbanization is encouraging many African youth to abandon their indigenous knowledge and values, in the belief that new, better, and more “civilized” knowledge and opportunities abound in the West and African urban centers. It is time for Ewe, and Africans for that matter, to recognize this deeply rooted mentality as the product of colonialism, underdevelopment, and of specific policies in human history, and to acknowledge the limitations it imposes on Africa’s development, as well as its devastating effects on the natural environment and on the valuable indigenous knowledge system.

Notwithstanding the prevailing practice to value MSK and technology for development, coupled with attitudes of inferiority complex and rejection of indigenous ideas, the pluralism of IKS and cultures is increasingly being recognized and gradually prevailing. It is worth noting that in recent years a number of studies into IKS led to more information regarding its usefulness in modern times, and has therefore increased awareness, growing interest, and appreciation, even among scientists and development practitioners worldwide, for IKS.<sup>985</sup> For example, in 1999 in Budapest, Hungary, *UNESCO-ICSU World Conference on Science* deliberations reiterate the urgent need to integrate indigenous knowledge into the modern scientific knowledge system, especially in the field of scientific education and research. Since then a few countries have incorporated IKS into their mainstream society through formal, semi-formal, and non-formal education systems. For example, IK is gradually becoming an essential component of basic and higher education curricula in some countries, including Ghana, Nigeria, Uganda, South Africa,

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<sup>985</sup> See report: *UNESCO-ICSU World Conference on Science*, Budapest, 1999

India, and Thailand, where they are called by different names and terminologies.<sup>986</sup> There are also centers and institutions that are set up to manage and research IKS of various African communities and localities.<sup>987</sup>

Also in March, 2000, in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia at the *2nd Knowledge for Development Conference (GKII)*, organized by UNDP, the World Bank, and other organizations, the final resolution includes an advocacy and complete endorsement of the IKS program. The plan expressly recommends the identification, collation, study, development, and dissemination of indigenous knowledge bodies in various forms, including literary and performing arts. This is a result of the increased awareness of the importance of indigenous knowledge for economic and social development of local people as well as efforts to move toward a “glocal” (global-local) knowledge-base system. As it is becoming obvious that development is no longer the exclusive domain of modern science and technology, there are more calls for developing strategies to consider and incorporate indigenous knowledge bodies into development policies.<sup>988</sup> This is important not only because IKS is obviously relevant to the local community in which the

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<sup>986</sup> It should be noted that in Thailand, the term Local Wisdom (LW) is more popularly used than Indigenous Knowledge (IK) or Traditional Knowledge (TK). Also, since 2002, the National Science and Technology Development Agency (NSTD) in Thailand has set up a program to study the process and apparatus of using modern scientific technology to influence indigenous knowledge in health, food, and handicraft.

<sup>987</sup> 1. Ghana: (a) HARCIK Ghana Resource Centre for Indigenous Knowledge, School of Agriculture, University of Cape Coast, Cape Coast, Ghana; (b) CECIK Centre for Cosmovisions and Indigenous Knowledge (Ghana) Dr. David Millar, Director c/o T.A.A.P., P.O. Box 42, Tamale, Northern Region. 2. Nigeria: (a) NIRCIC Nigerian Centre for Indigenous Knowledge (Nigeria), Institute for Agricultural Research, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria; (b) African Resource Centre for Indigenous Knowledge, Nigerian Institute of Social and Economic Research, Ibadan, Nigeria; (c) YORCIK Yoruba Resource Centre for Indigenous Knowledge, Centre for Urban and Regional Planning, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria. 3. Ethiopia: APIK Association for the Promotion of Indigenous Knowledge, Addis Ababa University, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. 4. Burkina Faso: BURCIK Centre Burkinabè de Recherche sur les Pratiques et Savoirs Paysans, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. 5. Sierra Leone: CIKFAB Centre for Indigenous Knowledge, Fourah Bay College, Department of Sociology, University of Sierra Leone, Freetown, Sierra Leone. See also <http://www.kivu.com/wbbook/preface.html> (accessed: 01/16/2009)

<sup>988</sup> Liebenstein, G.W. “Interfacing Global and Indigenous Knowledge: Towards an Indigenous Knowledge Information System.” Paper presented at the Sixth UNESCO-ACEID International Conference on Education, Bangkok, Thailand, December 12-15, 2000.

bearers of such knowledge live and produce, but also because it is a key element of the “social capital of the poor”<sup>989</sup> that provides self-reliance and self-sustenance of the rural community.

In recent years, development programs have been started in local communities across Eswatini and in Ghana. Many such programs, instituted mainly by companies that rely on foreign funding, failed partly because they were based entirely on “imported and foreign” ideologies, values, and knowledge systems. These companies and organizations often did not take into account ecological, cultural, political, and religious knowledge and value systems of the people. In order for development programs to be patronized and sustained within the limited facilities of the rural communities, they have to meet the needs, and fit with the contexts and values of the people. If we are able to identify, understand, sift, and modify good and useful elements of the indigenous knowledge and values and integrate them into the development programs, it will make the programs relevant to the local people, provide good foundation for success and sustainability, and ensure development.

In various documents and conferences on indigenous knowledge and sustainable development programs, the World Bank, UNDP, and other organizations reiterate the need to recognize, support, and fund research into IKS and its integration into mainstream education. They emphasize that all agents (government, religious institutions/organization, CBO, NGO, donors, local leaders, private sector initiatives) need to *research* into indigenous knowledge system; *study* and *identify* useful elements within it; *recognize*, *value*, and *appreciate* it on its own terms; and incorporate it into their programs and projects. Before incorporating it in their approaches, they need to *understand* it and critically *validate* it against the usefulness for their intended objective. For the highest level, World Bank sees IK as part of the global knowledge. In

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<sup>989</sup> Gorjestani N. “Indigenous Knowledge for Development: Opportunities and Challenges.” Paper presented at UNCTAD Conference on Traditional Knowledge, Geneva, 1 November, 2000.

this context, it has a value relevant in itself because it can be preserved, transferred, adopted, and adapted elsewhere.<sup>990</sup>

Research has shown that indigenous knowledge contributes to modern scientific knowledge in many ways and fields, especially in the areas of health and medicine, creative and literary arts, and in agriculture and natural resource management. While MSK benefits from IKS, it takes on a vital role in adapting and modifying IKS for the modern world in many ways and across cultures. While it is easier and less controversial to adapt IKS of the creative and literary arts of a people, for example, in the case of traditional medicine and health, scientific validation is important prior to sharing practices beyond the original context and location to provide assurance and safety including effectiveness. In such recognition, according to Yuwanuch Tinnaluck, MSK and IKS should be viewed as two separate but related systems of knowledge that can supplement, rather than compete with each other; that is, “work together co-intelligently.”<sup>991</sup>

### **8.2.1.3 Educational Processes, Implications, and Suggestions**

Having outlined and discussed the characteristic differences between IKS and MSK, having underscored the relevance of the indigenous knowledge system in the realm of modern scientific knowledge, and having shown the benefits and the values there are for the two systems to not only co-exist but most importantly work together co-intelligently, I discuss in this section a

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<sup>990</sup> See Warren D.M. “Using Indigenous Knowledge in Agricultural Development.” World Bank Discussion Paper 127, Washington, 1991; World Bank. “Indigenous Knowledge for Development, A framework for Action.” Paper prepared by the World Bank in November 1998 describing the important contribution that indigenous practices can make in development; Guus von Liebenstein. “Indigenous Knowledge: Towards Indigenous Knowledge Information System.” Bangkok, 2000; and Information Technologies in Educational Innovation for Development: Interfacing Global and Indigenous Knowledge. Sixth UNESCO-ACEID International Conference on Education, Bangkok, 2000

<sup>991</sup> Yuwanuch Tinnaluck. “Modern Science And Native Knowledge: Collaborative Process That Opens New Perspective For Pgst.” Quark, Any: 2004 Núm.: 32

possible process that may be adopted and its possible educational and developmental implications.

The goal of sustainable development in Africa calls for a re-acknowledgement of the power and contemporary relevance of indigenous knowledge systems and values, and their systematic integration into formal, semi-formal, and non-formal educational systems. As researchers, scholars, educators, and policy planners, we need to develop educational models based on our research works and studies, in collaboration with traditional scholars who are, undoubtedly, the authorities on the various indigenous knowledge systems. The models must be inclusive of young and old, local and foreign, traditional and modern, and link rural Africa and the industrialized world; these could serve as catalysts for other grassroots organizations to develop educational strategies appropriate to their own circumstances. But as we embark on developing such models, we must also intensify our educational campaign to “conscientize” the youth on the issues of the cultural inferiority complex and the unrealistic dream of a perfect modern urban life. The growing trend towards urbanization is encouraging thousands to abandon their indigenous knowledge or show ambivalence towards it, in the belief that new knowledge and new opportunities are to be found only in cities and by adopting Western cultural practices and lifestyles hook, line and sinker. This is often done without considering the long-term ramifications of totally abandoning their cultural heritage. Yet the realities of mass unemployment, the high costs of urban life, higher (Western) education, and the increasing AIDS pandemic bear witness to the fact that those dreams do not always translate into positive realities. In fact many of the youth who throng the cities end up homeless, jobless, and frustrated. This leads to a vicious circle of poverty and unsustainable livelihood because many of them have

neither the traditional skills that sustained their ancestors nor the specialized and expensive skills required for employment in a modern city.

It should be pointed out that one of the greatest threats to the economic and political stability of African societies, including Ghana and for that matter the Ewe, is the gradual erosion of indigenous knowledge and the accompanying destruction of “cultural capital” including human cultural wealth (such as songs, proverbs, folklore, language, philosophy, and social co-operation as I discussed in this dissertation) and natural wealth (such as minerals, plants, water resources, clean air, animals, insects, and soils, as other studies have shown).<sup>992</sup> According to some researchers, this robs people of their ability to respond to social and environmental change, both by removing the resource base, and by attacking the foundations of human identity.<sup>993</sup>

Our main focus should be to create an environment and atmosphere where children would have the opportunity to experience both knowledge systems and worlds as they grow. We must adopt a system of teaching and learning that can combine the essentials of both “worlds”—the traditional and the modern. What we have had and still predominates is the system where African children are either kept in their home environments, thereby missing out on the modern scientific aspects of education, or somehow “forced” into full-time formal schooling, thereby missing out on the indigenous aspects. The latter often furthers the neo-colonial mentality by building aspirations of urban life and encouraging young people to believe that they have no future in rural communities. The former deprives individuals of and access to the changing and

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<sup>992</sup> Mundy P.A. and J. L. Compton. “Indigenous Communication and Indigenous Knowledge.” In *The Cultural Dimension of Indigenous Knowledge Systems*, edited by D. M. Warren, L. J. Slikkerveer and D. Brokensha. Londres, Intermediate Technology Publications, 1995: 120-123; D.M. Warren, *Using Indigenous Knowledge in Agricultural Development*, World Bank Discussion Paper 127, Washington, 1991; Koopman, Bevan Raymond *Software Tools for Indigenous Knowledge Management*. B.A. Thesis, University of Queensland, 2002. <http://eprint.uq.edu.au/archive/00000093/>; International Federation of Library Associations, IFLA Statement on Indigenous and Traditional Knowledge, IFLA Newsletter, No. 42, June 2003.

<sup>993</sup> See Gemma Burford et al. “Education, Indigenous Knowledge and Globalisation.” *Science in Africa*, Science Magazine for Africa, March 2003.

ever competitive technological world, leaving them behind. As we build new schools, develop new curricula, and fund modern technological programs, we must promote work towards harmonization and integration of both systems. We must promote IKS and values in youth education programs (schools, youth movements, etc). We must make conscious efforts to balance our curricular items to reflect their roots in African indigenous knowledge, challenges, and possibilities and not just create a carbon copy of the Western school system and cultural ideologies. We need to reconsider Western paradigms in the light of Africa's indigenous knowledge systems and values and take a fresh look at Western customs and cosmo-vision vis-à-vis that of the African local people

Pedagogical approaches and techniques should include active participation in indigenous practices that are relevant and would lead to acquisition of knowledge bodies identified. One of the approaches is to recognize, value, and involve the various traditional scholars—those who know, practice, use, and are the authorities of the various indigenous knowledge systems—in their societies.<sup>994</sup> Students should be given an individual workbook of questions relating to various local themes including history, culture, politics, environment, health, food, philosophy, arts, etc, and should be required to fill in answers by interviewing both pre-identified and unidentified traditional scholars, authorities, parents, grandparents, or other community elders. Students should periodically be encouraged and enabled to go to their respective traditional cultural settings and environments to undertake these research works, since the focus here is to encourage learning within the home environment—from the “source.”

In addition, schools should periodically invite traditional scholars, authorities, artists, etc. to their classrooms to interact, teach, share, and direct school programs on indigenous

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<sup>994</sup> Euba (2008)

knowledge. For example, opportunities should be created for the students to see the health benefit of a respectful collaboration between a traditional healer (from the local community) and a Western-style trained doctor (from the university medical school). Such a move would not only acknowledge the importance of the traditional scholars' role in the modern school system, but also encourage the youth to see the bearers of indigenous knowledge as intellectuals whose contribution to their education and future life is as important as the modern (Western) scientific ones they get from their teachers. This move would also help to close the generation gaps that so often result from formal education. Rather than despising older relatives for their "illiteracy," "backwardness," or "primitivity," their deep and valuable knowledge is tapped for development and acknowledged. It would also encourage the youth to recognize these elders as holders of valuable knowledge, and to acknowledge their contributions.

It is also important to encourage students to share their personal experiences and views relating to the themes from their cultural, linguistic, and individual perspective. This I believe would enhance cross-cultural understanding and appreciation since most African classrooms are melting pots of children from different linguistic, ethnic, cultural, and economic backgrounds. Again, it is important that both teachers and local facilitators are involved here to encourage every student to make a contribution, thus helping to build self-esteem and to ensure that new information is placed in a familiar context. Since everyone may be an "expert," ideas must be exchanged in an environment of open-mindedness and willingness to listen, with an emphasis on what the different individuals in ethnic, religious, and national groups may learn from one another.<sup>995</sup>

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<sup>995</sup> Sterling, S. 2001. *Sustainable Education: Re-visioning Learning and Change*. Devon, UK: Green Books/The Schumacher Society, p 38

There is also the need to integrate theory and practice at all levels. For example, as part of the requirement at different levels and stages, students should be helped to complete different practical tasks that are based on their research and theoretical works. Their tasks may include medicinal plant identification, cultivation, and processing; construction of a material object relevant to his/her ethnic group, e.g., architectural design or sculpture; performance of a traditional song, poetry, dance and/or drum piece(s); and collection and documentation of ethnic cuisine, preparation and preservation of local dishes, etc. Students should be encouraged to study and be able to explain the philosophy, history, cultural significance, and any other theoretical or deeper meaning that their project may hold within the community. These projects must be supervised by both teachers and local elders, and must meet the satisfaction of local scholars and elders as well as school authorities. These tasks would help to raise the awareness of the importance of praxis-based learning, while conserving some of those elements of culture that cannot be readily captured in written documents.

In the domain of war, peace, and conflict resolution, students should be encouraged to have open discussions based on historical and modern conflict situations. Using available research works that illuminate the philosophical, political, and moral underpinnings of various cultural issues (as discussed in this dissertation), students may have fruitful discussions that may: enhance local capacities for peacemaking; promote alternative justice systems for reconciliation and consensus building; enhance the role of women in traditional approaches to peacemaking; integrate traditional African approaches into national and international mechanisms for conflict resolution; and develop training and research on African approaches to conflict resolution and reconciliation. Such programs may also help students to understand and appreciate the fact that the culture and traditions that form an integral part of indigenous knowledge provide codes of

conduct addressing all aspects of the community—moral, health, economic, social, environmental, recreational, and psychological. They would understand that when all these are in place, they keep the society in its equilibrium.

In addition to the above, the programs must be formulated in a way that encourages critical thinking at levels and stages appropriate to the material students will learn from IKS, MSK, and their integration. Students should be encouraged to think critically, discuss, critique, and evaluate issues of social change, positive and negative aspects of traditional culture, modernization, and the integration processes. This includes consideration of the role of the traditional scholars, non-traditional or conventional scholar, local and international institutions such as schools, religious bodies, local community organizations, NGOs, CBOs, governmental bodies, the United Nations, World Bank, International Monetary Fund, and World Trade Organization.

Finally, institutions must encourage the publication of ad hoc manuals where students may be helped and encouraged to publish their research works locally. This move would not only ensure that indigenous knowledge bodies are not extinct after current traditional scholars are gone, but will also serve as records of students' progress, references, and resources for future use. This may also encourage the students to discover that what is indigenous and in the oral tradition can also be documented in a literary form. In addition to their roles in researching, teaching, and supervision, traditional scholars and community elders may be involved in the assessment process where appropriate and applicable. Their views and impressions may be considered in awarding students the necessary certificates of merit; graduating students may be interviewed by at least one elder of their ethnic group, who must be satisfied with their indigenous knowledge and understanding.

### 8.3 CONCLUSION

*“Nya sugbo meyona abaka/kusi o”*  
(Too much of information does not fill a basket)

This study reveals that Ewe indigenous knowledge and cultural values are embedded in musical practice in general and song texts in particular. It reiterates the various important roles of musicians in Ewe society. There is the need for further research in this direction. From a musicological perspectives using multidisciplinary approach, Ewe indigenous knowledge and values need to be exhaustively and critically researched, analyzed, and organized in a sophisticated manner. Those ideas that seem to be unclear and unfocused, but nonetheless worthwhile, must be explored, refined, and given a modern translation. The enormity of the threat posed by the break-up of indigenous communities has not yet been fully realized by many of those now in power, although it has always been obvious to community elders. Many mistakenly believe that the reason that rural African societies have not evolved in the same way as the “civilized” West is a lack of knowledge. This study however shows that there is much knowledge embedded in various aspects of traditional African life, which, when explored, could be used together with modern science to improve the lot of Africa.

The study shows the need to rebuild in Ewe the sense of self-esteem, confidence in, understanding, and appreciation of indigenous practices. This does not mean a return to the destructive ethnic conflicts and discriminations, grounded in insecurity and fear, which have haunted so many countries in Africa. Rather, in order to cope with modern technological advances, live on good terms with our own past, our neighbors—local and international, human and non-human—with whom we share this planet, we must first rediscover an awareness of who we are. We must not forget that as we aim and strive for modernity, we belong simultaneously to

an ethnic group, to a nation, and to the world. By drawing on our very indigenous knowledge bodies and using them together with what the modern world has to offer, we would be in a position to realize the full benefits of concepts couched in many currently fashionable phrases such as “sustainable development,” “conflict resolution,” “good governance,” “poverty alleviation,” and “environmental stewardship,” all of which could be translated as fostering a sense of peace with our cultural identity and ourselves. The goal of “sustainable development” in Africa calls for a re-acknowledgement of the power and contemporary relevance of indigenous knowledge, and its systematic integration into formal and semi-formal education.

The political landscape of Africa would surely improve if only our modern politicians would take some time to listen to and digest the indigenous knowledge and values embedded in some of their traditional artistic products one at a time. As suggested elsewhere by earlier scholars,<sup>996</sup> where we need to focus in our quest for modern democracy and political stability is to find and tap indigenous ways and means, including musical practice, to revitalize the autochthonous democratic elements, incorporate them into our modern political institutions and constitution, and harmonize them with those inherited from foreign cultures. With a huge dose of prudence, common sense, imagination, creative spirit, and a sense of history, we would be able to utilize indigenous political knowledge and viable democratic forms in modern political settings. It is important that we integrate these indigenous knowledge systems, holistic methodological approaches, and techniques into our modern educational policies, curricula, and processes so as to insure that younger generations and others that will follow may see,

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<sup>996</sup> See World Bank. *Findings*. Special Issue, African Regional Studies Program. Washington, D.C., September 1993, p. 1.; Oyugi, W. O and A. Gitonga, eds. 1987. *Democratic Theory and Practice in Africa*. Nairobi, Kenya: Heinemann, and Gyekye (1996, 1997)

understand, appreciate, and be guided by these values in their quest for modern nation-state political power.

My study suggests steps and processes that may be further developed through collaboration between traditional scholars and conventional policy makers, curriculum planners, researchers and educators; between young and old, and between rural Africa and the industrialized world. In this dissertation, I have dealt with “familiar” historical, religious, anthropological, philosophical, educational, linguistic issues and problems in which there is obvious necessity for examining musicological evidence. But I have no doubt that musicological studies guided by an awareness of these issues of the Ewe, and for that matter Africans, can contribute to the study of their cultural knowledge by providing evidence. As musicologists, we have a duty to possess a sound cultural knowledge of the music we study and the people who make it, not forgetting the research into how the various aspects of these musical genres we study contribute to or affect social order, the general education of children, and how it shapes the future of the society in which such music is performed.<sup>997</sup> It is my hope that this study will serve as a moderate contribution to previous studies in related disciplines, mark the beginning of a new direction, stimulate debates, and give rise to similar research in other African societies and artistic traditions.

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<sup>997</sup> See Nketia (1964) and Euba (2008)

## APPENDIX A: MUSICAL ANALYSIS

### A.1 MUSICAL FEATURES AND ANALYSIS

This appendix concentrates on the musical features of the song texts cited in the dissertation. As I stated earlier, my study focus on song texts. Since musical analysis is not the focus of my research, I only briefly look at the musical genres and/or styles from which I selected the songs and their musical features

#### A.1.1 Genres/Styles

Ewe musical/dance genres and styles include but not limited to the following: *adabatram*, *adekpetsi/adekpedzi*, *adevu*, *adzida*, *adzoha/adzohe*, *adzohu/adzogbo*, *adzro*, *agbadza/ageshe/agbobli*, *agbangbi*, *agbeko/atsiagbeko/atamga*, *agblehawo*, *agblovu*, *agbo*, *agbosu/agbosuvu*, *ageivu*, *afa/afavu*, *afei*, *afli*, *agoha*, *alaga/alagavu*, *akaye/avihe*, *akpalu*, *akpese/boboobo*, *akpi*, *akpoka*, *ameshivu/amesivu*, *asafo*, *asiko*, *atompani*, *atrikpui*, *atsia*, *atsigo*, *atsikevu*, *atsigali/tigare*, *atsibлага/atibлага*, *babashiko/babasiko*, *bobo*, *blekete*, *dekonyanu*, *duasika*, *dum*, *egbanegba*, *gabada*, *gadzo*, *gahu/agahu*, *gakpa*, *gazo*, *gbelehawo*, *gbeto-nido*, *gbolo*, *glihawo/glimedehawo*, *gota*, *halo*, *kalevu*, *kinka*, *kokuvu/koku*, *kpegisu*, *laklevu*, *leafelegbe*, *nyayito*, *sonfo*, *todzihawo*, *totoeme*, *tuidzi/tudzi*, *vuga*, *vukpo*, *woleke*, *yeve/yevevu*

(*akpedada, husago, sogbadze/sogba, avlevu, adavu, afovú/afotoe, and sovu*) *zagada, zibo, zigi,*  
and *zizihawo,*

The songs discussed in this study are drawn from one or more of the above genres and styles. Below is a table showing the sub-ethnic distribution and distinctions of the above musical genres/styles.

## DISTRIBUTION OF MUSICAL GENRES AND STYLES

SUB-ETHNICITY	Southern Ewe (Southern Volta Region)	Northern Ewe (Central Volta Region)
GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION (Districts and Capitals)	North Tongu Adidome South Tongu, Sogakope Akatsi, Akatsi Ketu North, Dzodze Ketu (South), Denu Keta, Keta	Ho Municipal, Ho Hohoe, Hohoe Kpando, Kpando South Dayi, Kpeve Adaklu-Anyigbe, Kpetoe
MUSICAL GENRES AND STYLES <b>1. Social and Recreational</b>	<i>adekpetsi/adekpedzi, adzida, adzro, agbadza/ageshe/agbobli, agoha, aketeni, akpalu, akpoka, atsia/atsa, atsigo, atsibлага/atibлага, babashiko/babasiko, bobo, dekonyanu, duasika, gahu/agahu, gakpa, gbotohawo, glihawo/glimedehawo, gota, gumbe, halo, ekatsotso, kenyo, kinka, leafelegbe, nyayito, nyagbedi, siga, woleke, zizihawo,</i>	<i>Agbangbi, adzoha/adzohe, agblehawo, akaye/avihe, akpese/boboobo/dedeleme, amezo, asiko, antiada/atiaza, atsadeva, dzolevu, eghanegba, gabada, gbelehawo/gbotohawo, gbolo, glihawo/glimedehawo, gumbe, konkoma, pamprovu, pasamaka, siti, totoeme, tuidzi/tudzi, zigi</i>
<b>2. Politico Military and Spiritual</b>	<i>adekpetsi/adekpedzi, adzohu/adzogbo, agbeko/atziagbeko/atamga, agblovu, akpoka, ameshivu/amesivu, ametsovu, asafo, atompani, atrikpui, dodovee/dodovi, gadzo, gakpa, gazo, govu, kalevu, kpegisu, laklevu, sokla, vuga,</i>	<i>adabatram, adevu, agbo, agblovu, afei, afli, akpi, amesivu, ametsovu, asafo, atompani, brikpini, dum, gbeto-nido, govu, kalevu, laklevu, sonfo, vuga, vukpo, zibo,</i>
<b>3. Religious</b>	<i>agbosu/agbosuvu, afa/afavu, ageivu, alaga/alagavu, atsikevu, atsigali/tigare, blekete/brekete, detevu, kokuvu/koku, yeve/yevevu (akpedada, husago, sogbadze/sogba, avlevu, adavu, afovu/afotoe, and sovu) zagada</i>	<i>adabatram, atsigali/tigare, blekete, dum, dzovu, gbeto-nido, trovu</i>
<b>4. Occupational</b>	<i>agbleha, adevu, todzihawo,</i>	<i>adevu, agblehawo,</i>

## A.2 DESCRIPTION OF SELECTED MUSICAL GENRES/STYLES

### A.2.1 Socio-Recreational

**Agbadza:** *Agbadza* is one of the oldest Southern Ewe social musical traditions. It is also the most popular and regularly performed style by the Southern Ewe of Ghana, Togo, Benin. *Agbadza* is derived from *Atrikpui*, an older war dance. There are many variations of *agbadza* including *agbobli*, *akpoka*, *kini*, *agba*, and its newest version *ageshie/age*. The main distinguishing feature among these varieties is tempo. Irrespective of variety, *agbadza* performance has five sections or movements. These include *banyinyi*, a short introductory piece that is performed as a prayer to the gods and the ancestors; *vutsotso*, the main dance section; *adzo*, a slower and less-vigorous dance section (often in this section, only the master drum, Sogo accompanied by *gankogui* and *axatse* are used); *hatsatsa*, a selection of reflective songs sung often with bells and rattle accompaniment; and *vutsotso* is repeated. *Agbadza* is performed by all both sexes and all ages. It has become the most popular style perform during funerals among the all Southern Ewe.

**Adzoha/Agbangbi/Adzohe:** *Adzoha* (*adzo* = insinuation; *ha* = song) refers to songs of insinuation usually performed by Northern Ewe women. Originally, individual women in the society sang *adzoha* to express their feelings of disapproval and opposition to many social issues affecting them and actions against them. *Agbangbi* on the other hand refers to a love/courtship music and dance type performed by women of Northern Eweland. In *agbangbi*, dancers display their dexterity and flexibility at the waist with vigorous shaking of the buttocks all aimed at enticing the opposite sex—men. Related to *Adzoha* and *agbangbi* is *adzohe*. A term often used to refer to the songs used in *agbangbi* and other love and insinuation performances.

**Gahu:** *Gahu* is a Southern Ewe social musical tradition. Originally, *gahu* is associated with marriage and wedding rites of the Yoruba of Nigeria. Presently, the Ewe of Ghana, Togo and Benin perform the dance on most social occasions. Although this historic origin can be seen today in the rich Yoruba costume worn by many performing groups, the Ewe have significantly transformed this stylized dance by introducing some typical southern Ewe dance movements, songs, and drum motives. Themes of *gahu* songs relate to historical, philosophical, and topical issues.

**Egbanegba:** *Egbanegba* (*e* = it; *gba* = breaks; *ne* = it; *gba* = breaks) literally means if it breaks let it break. *Egbanegba* is a traditional recreational music and dance of the Northern Ewe often performed by the youth. *Gabada* is a faster form of *egbanegba*.

**Boboobo:** *Boboobo* is the most popular social music and dance of the Northern Ewe of Ghana and Togo. This music and dance, also known as *agbeyeye* (new life), or *akpese* (music of joy or music of freedom), emerged from Kpando, a town in the Volta Region of Ghana during the independence struggle between 1947 and 1957. Some researches ascribe the origin of *boboobo* to the late Francis Cudjoe Nuatro popularly called F.C. who is believed to have derived *boboobo* from an older circular dance called *konkoma*.<sup>998</sup> Although this music was initially confined to a few towns and villages in central and northern Eweland, it has now spread to all Ewe speaking territories in Ghana, Togo and Benin. *Boboobo* songs texts may be sacred or secular.

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<sup>998</sup> See Younge (1991)

### A.2.2 Religious

*Afavu*: *Afa* is a god of divination among the Ewe of West Africa.<sup>999</sup> This religious institution, which extensively uses music and other art forms, has been described by some scholars as perhaps having one of the most complex and highly specialized forms of verbal arts among Ewe.<sup>1000</sup> *Afavu* (*Afa* music and dance), usually serve as the basic or introductory movement of many other Anlo Ewe musical performances (be they religious or secular). It is used to “seek permission,” and to invoke guidance and blessings for the performance. It is also used as a warm-up or preparatory dance for other related genres and, as such, its songs and dances are the most commonly sung and performed. It is, therefore, the most popular religious music among the Southern Ewe. There are two principal sections in the worship of *Afa*. These are *Afa Anago* and *Afa Dzisa*. These names are also often used to refer to their musical accompaniments that explicitly differ in tempo and sometimes songs. *Afa Anago* is the slower and *Afa Dzisa* the faster one. Despite the fact that *Afa* music is sometimes performed informally (especially when used as an introduction to other performances), it is a vital tool for priests and priestesses<sup>1001</sup> of *Afa* who spend a lifetime in pursuit of wisdom and spiritual growth. There is a great deal to learn, so it is no surprise that *Afa* songs play important roles in the learning process. In fact, Nukunya’s analogy may be useful at this point. In his article on *Afa* “Divination in Anlo. A Preliminary Report,” he states “It has been suggested...that the amount of energy, time and

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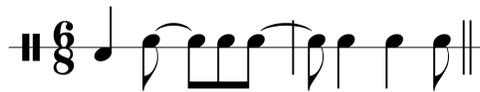
<sup>999</sup> See Chapter 3, and also Anyidoho (1997)

<sup>1000</sup> Ibid (1997: 144-150)

<sup>1001</sup> In discussing *Afa* and *Yeve* during my interview with Bokoga Togbui Kumedzro (an *Afa* high priest and a paternal uncle of the author), he used *boko* and *afashie* “priest and priestess” to refer to any member (devotee) of the congregation, not just the leaders. His explanation to this when I questioned it was that, even though there are *Tobokogawo* and *Amegashigawo* “high priest and priestesses,” all initiates of the religion have equal access to the divine agents and have the right to perform the same rites and rituals. “Because we are all ordained we are all priests and priestesses. The hierarchy is determined by other factors, for instance it is not everyone that is *Toboko* or *Amegashie* (a diviner),” he reiterates. Personal interview at Dzodze-Fiagbedu, Ghana on the 24<sup>th</sup> of April, 2003.

knowledge that goes to qualify a person as diviner may be equivalent to if not greater than what one requires for a Ph.D.”<sup>1002</sup> In addition to the spiritual values, the moral values of the people and their historic events are deeply grounded in the highly metaphorical *Afa* songs, which help a great deal in the training of *Afa* priests and high priests. The songs of *Afa* teach, among other things, the meaning of each *edu* (plural *eduwo*), the symbol configurations to which various divination verses are attached, and what must be done when that pattern is cast. *Afa* songs also guide and instruct devotees towards success in their religious pursuits. In fact, like so many other things among Ewe and Africans in general, the spiritual, historical and philosophical lessons are largely learned through songs. In *Afa*, songs are like instructional manuals for the religious. It is emphasized that the theory of knowledge and intellectual history that *Afa* tradition establishes is as exhilarating and reliable a field and resource as that found in any culture.<sup>1003</sup>

There is usually one basic timeline (bell pattern) for *Afa* music.



Tempo is one major feature that differentiates between different *Afa* movements. Here is an example of *Afa* song.

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<sup>1002</sup> Nukunya (1969: 9-26). See also Anyidoho (1997: 144-146), and Abimbola (1976: 18-20)

<sup>1003</sup> See Ibid.





Bellow is an example of *Yeye* (*husago*) song, “*Gbea Wodo.*”

**Gbea Wodo** Tr. jskg

**A Call** **Resp.**

Gbea wo - do lo - o      gbea wo - do, gbea 'Dza-fia do gbea me - nye gbe - vo.

**5 A1 Call** **Resp** **B All (chorus)**

Gbea wo - do lo - o      gbea wo - do, gbea 'Dza-fia do gbea me - nye gbe - vo.      Xo - xo nue wo -

**10** **B1**

gbi - na ka ye - yea - wo do,      gbea wo - do gbea me - nye gbe vo.      Xo - xoa nue wo -

**14** **A**

gbi - na ka ye - yea - wo do      gbea wo - do gbea me - nye gbe - vo.      Gbea wo - do lo - o

**18**

gbea wo - do gbea 'Dza-fia do gbea me - nye gbe - vo.

**Figure 8-2: “Gbea Wodo”**

**Yeye** (Text in Anlo Ewe dialect)

//:Gbea wodo lo o gbea wodo  
 Gbe ya Adzafia doa  
 Gbea menye gbevo o://  
 //:Xoxoa nue wogbuina ka yeyewo do  
 Gbea wodo  
 Gbea menye gbevo://  
 Gbea wodo lo o gbea wodo  
 Gbe ya Adzafia do,  
 Gbea menye gbevo o

**Literal translation**

The language he used (what he said)  
 The language (what) Adzafia used (said)  
 The statement is not a bad one (critique)  
 It is by the old that the new ropes are made.  
 The language he used (what he said)  
 The statement is not a bad one (critique)  
 The language he used (what he said)  
 The language (what) Adzafia used (said)  
 The statement is not a bad one (critique)

### A.2.3 Politico-Military

This section describes Ewe politico-military music and dance types including *adzogbo/adzohu*, *adabatram*, *govu*, *zeglenyi*, *zagada*, *fiavu*, *dodovi*, *adevu*, *gadzo*, *atrikpui*, *akpoka*, *gadzo*, and *kpegisu*. Research has indicated that most of these styles originated from Dahomey (now the Republic of Benin) and Notsie in Togo. Fiagbedzi puts the dates of origin of some of these musical types and other *Amegaxoxovuwo* to be between 1650-1886.<sup>1008</sup>

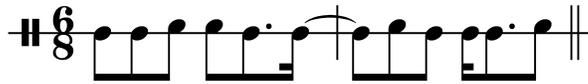
***Adzogbo/Adzohu:*** *Adzogbo/adzohu* is a warrior-spiritual music and dance that originated from the ancient kingdom of Dahomey, the ancestral home of the Ewe and Fon-speaking people of West Africa. *Adzogbo* first began as *dzohu* (spiritual music and dance) in which male dancers often display their *dzoka/bo* (magical/spiritual power and expertise). Besides its songs, it is one of the most complex of Ewe dances.<sup>1009</sup> Though originally a military-spiritual music and dance genre, *adzogbo* evolved into, and has remained, a socio-recreational dance since the pacification of West Africa in the late nineteenth century. *Adzogbo* has three main movements or sections, including *ago*, *atsia*, and *kadodo*. *Ago* is the processional part that brings dancers into the performance ground. It is a rite of consecration composed of several ritualistic dance and song episodes, during which the divinity of *adzogbo* is said to first manifest its presence. *Kadodo* is a less formal movement primarily for entertainment and fellowship. In *kadodo*, the performers form a communal circle to dance in a side-to-side motion and sing historic songs of pride and accomplishment. *Atsia* is the series of episodes in which battlefield maneuvers are enacted and the dancers display their virtuosity and agility. Here the performers reenact the historic use of

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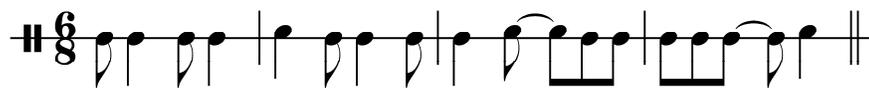
<sup>1008</sup> See Nissio Fiagbedzi (1977)

<sup>1009</sup> See chapter 4 and also Locke and Agbeli (1980)

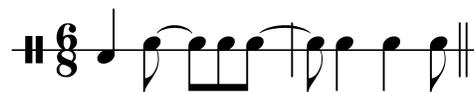
*adzogbo* as a medium for divining battle strategies. Generally, songs of *ago* are sacred, spiritual, and ritualistic. Its basic bell pattern is:



*Kadodo* songs on the other hand are more informal but focus highly on historic issues and also try to build the morale and confidence of besieged citizens in times of war or disaster. Its basic bell pattern is:



*Atsia* songs serve basically as text for drum patterns. Their text is first recited and then sung before being played by *azagunoga*, the master drummer and danced by the *atsiadola*, the style dancer. Its basic bell pattern is:



Here is an example of *atsia* song in *adzogbo*, “De Nu Do”

# De Nu Do

Tr. jskg

Call Resp. Call All

'Mea-de yi ve - du yo ge, woa - de nu do. 'Mea-de yi ve - du yo ge, woa -

5  
de nu do . E - nu - gbe - yi - la me-gbea 'go ma - do - . 'Mea-de yi ve - du yo ge, woa -

9  
de nu do. 'Mea - de

Figure 8-3: “De Nu Do”

**Adzohu-Atsia** (Text in Ewe: Anlo dialect)

//:Mea de yi vedu yo ge

Woade nu do.://

Enugbe yi la

Megbe ago mado o

Mea de yi vedu yo ge

Woade nu do

## Literal Translation

Someone who goes calling on the gods  
Should put his/her mouth on to the ground  
(Show humility and reverence).

A person who goes on a divine mission  
Never refuses to knock (to seek permission)  
Someone who goes calling on the gods  
Should put his/her mouth on to the ground  
(Show humility and reverence).

**Adabatram:** *Adabatram* (*adaba* = insanity; *tram/tra* = gone astray) refers to one of the most important and revered of all the war drums and genres found in Eweland. The term also refers to the music and dance type in which the drum features as the lead instrument (which is only sporadically played during ritual performances). The drum, considered as a war god, is always decorated with skulls and limbs of war captives and covered with calico. Usually rituals are performed before the drum is used, and in the past, it is believed that only human sacrifice

was made to the god before the drum was played. It is only executioners and powerful warriors, who are believed to have fortified themselves spiritually against any power including the spirits of the war captives executed, perform *Adabatram*. Presently, *adabatram* performance and rituals require no human killings and/or parts and it is strictly contextual. *Adabatram* is predominantly a Northern Ewe musical tradition. It is well established and performed mostly by the people of Ho, Peki, and Wusuta during war and on the death of a political leader (king/chief) or great warrior. It is also played during funeral celebrations of important traditional personalities including chief hunters, and priests.<sup>1010</sup>

Related to *adabatram* is ***Dum***, a type of drum associated with one of the Northern Ewe major gods (dzebunkokomasatsi) of the people of Ho in Asorgli traditional area. *Dum* is believed to be the mouthpiece of the god, and played on such occasions as war anniversaries, funeral of kings and chiefs and during the final rituals of tragic/bad deaths.<sup>1011</sup>

***Govu***: *Govu* (*go* = gourd; *vu* =drum) refers to both an instrument and a music/dance genre that is similar in function and structure to *adabatram* and *dum*. The term also refers to the double-headed gourd drum that serves as the lead drum in the *govu* ensemble. Like *Adabatram* and *dum*, *govu* is regarded as a sacred drum, hence never used out of ritual and spiritual context. Among the Northern Ewe *govu* is performed as a ceremonial music for valiant and heroes. In the south, especially among the people of Kliko traditional area *govu* is performed as ritual music only once in a year.

Similar to *govu* is ***Zeglenyi***: A sacred drum of the people of Gbi Dzigbe traditional area. It is performed only one night in a year and never brought out in the open during the day. *Zeglenyi* is believed to be the spiritual embodiment of warriors that perish at war.

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<sup>1010</sup> Amoaku (1975) and Agawu (1995)

<sup>1011</sup> Amoaku (1975) and Agawu (1995)

**Zagada:** *Zagada* is a Northern Ewe music and dance performed in the past to commemorate war veterans who returned home with war victims and captives. Presently, *zagada* is performed exclusively for parents of twins to dance to, as part of the twin-rite among the Asogli people of central Eweland.

**Fiavu:** *Fiavu* (*fia* = king/chief; *vu* = drum) literally means king/chief's music and dance. It is an important drum ensemble at the king/chief's court in Northern Eweland. *Fiavu* ensemble is constituted by men who are regarded as the king's/chief's personal bodyguards. Membership of *fiavu* ensemble is hereditary. Members are drawn from various royal and musical families in the community.

**Dodovi/Dodovee:** *Dodovi* is a musical type of the people of southern Eweland. In the past *dodovi* is performed on the battlefield as a signal for any missing person to trace the group on hearing the music.

**Gadzo:** *Gadzo's* origin is traced to Notsie. It is performed after war so that the warriors could display and re-enact battle scenes for those at home. *Gadzo* is now performed by professional and amateur groups for entertainment during festivals, political activities including installation of kings and chiefs, funerals of state personalities, and prominent elders.

**Atrikpui/Akpoka/Gazo:** *Atrikpui*, which is also called *kalevu*, "music for the brave" or *nutsuvu*, "music for men," was associated with warriors of old. The name *atrikpu* is derived from the warriors' historical statement "*negbe deko miakuatri; negbe deko miaku kpuide*" which means "at worst, we can only die instantly or die shortly." *Atrikpui*, therefore, refers to the instant death associated with war. *Atrikpui*, regarded as one of the oldest Ewe war dances, was performed before and during war, but sometimes was also performed after war in olden days to mourn defeat or celebrate victory. *Atrikpui* was later transformed and renamed *agbomasikui* (lit.

ram that does not fear death) and later developed into *agbadza*, which is a funeral/social dance. It should be noted that the original form of *atrikpui* is still performed on special and serious occasions. There were and are still specific songs for every occasion relating to the mood, period, and event. *Akpoka* and *gazo* are both some of the Southern Ewe's oldest musical genres. They are both war music and dance genres that derived from *atrikpui*. While *akpoka* started as a social and recreational music and dance and its performance was open to everybody, *gazo* started as a war-dance drama performed after war to enable warriors to reenact battlefield scenes. Like *atrikpui* and *gadzo*, *akpoka* and *gazo* are all now performed by professional and amateur groups for entertainment during festivals, political activities including installation of kings and chiefs, funerals of state personalities, and prominent elders. Musical characteristics and songs of these styles are not much different from each other and form other Southern Ewe war genres mentioned in this study. The basic differences can be seen in dance movements, drum patterns and tempo of some sections and styles. Below is an example of an *atrikpui* song. This song could be used in *akpoka*, *gadzo* and other war genres<sup>1012</sup>

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<sup>1012</sup> Younge (1991)



attained on the battle field; hence, the word *atsia*, ‘style’ or ‘display’ was added to the root *agbeko* to give us the term “*atsiagbeko*” as we have it today. Although it is difficult reconciling these two narratives about its origin, one can argue both cases. Since the majority of Ewe warriors in the olden days were not only noted hunters, but also war leaders and commanders, the ‘monkey origin’ is a possibility. Secondly, the many dance movements that explicitly depict war scenes, military tactics, and maneuvers and numerous song texts attest to its being a warriors’ dance. The two narratives agree on one fact: that *atsiagbeko* is a warriors’ dance. Almost all the war genres discussed here use the same bell pattern as timeline. This notwithstanding, there are clear differences between them. These differences are mainly in the dance movements, drum patterns, songs, instrumentation, costume and tempo.<sup>1013</sup>

***Kpegisu:*** *Kpegisu* is a war dance that was instituted in honor of brave women. Unlike *adzogbo*, *gadzo*, *atamga* (which later became *atsiagbekor*), and *atrikpui*, which were musical traditions brought from Notsie, *kpegisu* evolved after Anlo had been established. It was one of the musical genres that were established as a result of war and its consequences. Having lost her only son in one of the ferocious wars Anlo fought, Yakagbe<sup>1014</sup> was so devastated that she vowed revenge. In her lamentation song, she commented on how inadequately prepared Anlo was for that battle in which her son was killed. “Our sons have set *agobodzo*,<sup>1015</sup> in which there is no charcoal (or much fuel) to keep it burning.” In her determination to retaliate, she defied tradition and forcefully joined the team of men who strengthened the Anlo forces at the battlefield. Yakagbe was said to have fought shoulder to shoulder with her male counterparts in that battle (in which Anlo become victorious) as well as in subsequent ones. Her gallantry,

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<sup>1013</sup> See Fiagbedzi (1977), Lock and Agbeli (1980), and Younge (1989, 1992)

<sup>1014</sup> One of the brave Anlo women in whose honor *kpegisu* was instituted.

<sup>1015</sup> “*Agobo*” means “corn husk” and “*dzo*” means “fire”. Hence *agobodzo* refers to fire made with corn husk.

military feats and bravery brought about major changes in gender roles and perceptions in Anlo. *Kpegisu* was, therefore, established in honor of all brave women who have distinguished themselves and whose deeds have benefited the state in various ways. Hence, from its inception, women have assumed some major musical roles (especially in drumming), not only in *kpegisu* performance, but also in other genres in Anlo, especially in Klikor, the home town of Yakagbe. Since the actions of Yakagbe, the roles of Ewe women have been redefined, and women's activities in various institutions (such as drumming, military and politics) have never been the same.<sup>1016</sup> Although men perform *kpegisu* and continue to dominate other dance-drumming genres, Yakagbe has shown that, given the chance and equal opportunity, women could do as well as, if not better than, men in previously male-dominated fields in Anlo. *Kpegisu* songs and other musical characteristics are not much different from other war genres mentioned above. The basic differences can be seen in dance movements, drum patterns and tempo of some sections and styles.

#### **A.2.4 Occupational**

***Adevu:*** *Adevu* (*ade* = hunt; *vu* = drum) is a traditional Ewe music and dance associated with hunters and their hunting expeditions. It is performed as a reenactment of the processes and activities pertaining to hunting. Performers are usually men most of whom are actual hunters. The performers mime serious hunting skills associated with hunting expeditions. The dance is performed also in honor of any hunter who has successfully killed a wild or big animal. In recent times it is performed mostly during festival and at the funeral of notable hunters. *Adevu* is

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<sup>1016</sup> See Locke (1992) and Dor (2001: 79-80)

commonly performed among the Northern Ewe. Although the Southern Ewe have a variant of *adevu*, it is not frequently performed.

### **A.3 TONAL SYSTEM, MELODIC AND HARMONIC ORGANIZATION**

The musical characteristics of all the songs analyzed in this thesis epitomize the general features of Ewe songs. In this section, I briefly discuss form and variation, melodic organization, scale and tonal system, harmonic structure and common rhythmic patterns of the songs and their usual instrumental accompaniment

#### **A.3.1 Form and Variation**

Most Ewe songs are in simple binary (AB) and ternary (ABA) forms. The variations of these forms have been used differently in songs discussed in the dissertation. These variations include AA<sub>1</sub>BB<sub>1</sub>A, AB(ba)A, and ABaBaA<sub>1</sub>. Usually, the *heno/hesino* “cantor/lead singer” starts a song with an intriguing and usually metaphoric and/or proverbial statement (A) which, though puzzling and/or incomplete grabs the listeners’ attention. This first statement may be repeated, but rarely in an exact form or with a clear variation, (A<sub>1</sub>) usually by the chorus. It is followed by a second statement (B), which is usually longer in length and/or more elaborate and seeks to clarify the meaning of the first statement in some cases and, in others, adds another dimension to what the first statement implies. This second phrase may also be repeated verbatim, but usually is done with significant variation (B<sub>1</sub>), or it may incorporate portions of the first statement (ba). Finally, there is often a reiteration of the first statement, sung by the entire group. This may take



Gbea menye gbevo o://  
 //:Xoxoa nue wogbuina ka yeyeawo do.  
 Gbea wodo  
 Gbea menye gbevo://  
 Gbea wodo lo o gbea wodo;  
 Gbe ya Adzafia doa,  
 Gbea menye gbevo o

The statement is not a bad one (critique)  
 It is by the old that the new ropes are made.  
 The language he used (what he said)  
 The statement is not a bad one (critique)  
 The language he used (what he said)  
 The language (what) Adzafia used (said)  
 The statement is not a bad one (critique)

## Emode?

Tr. jskg

Call Resp. Call

Fi - ka dzie mia - to - gbio to yia 'de - gbe, e - mo de ? Fi - ka dzie

6 mia - to - gbio to yia 'de - gbe, e - mo de ? 'Me - kae du za nu he gbea

11 'va ma - yi A - yi - sa - woe be mo la me - nyo. 'Me - kae be 'mo la me - nyo 'Me - kae du

17 za nu he - gbea 'va ma - yi, e - mo de ?

Figure 8-6: “Emode”

**Atrikpui** (Text in Ewe: Anlo dialect)

//:Fika dzie Nyaho (Togbiwo) to  
 Yi adzogbe; emo de?://  
 'Mekae dua 'va/So nu

Tso/he gbea 'va mayi?  
 Gbayiza/Ayisa woe be 'mo lae menyoo

### Literal translation

Where did our warriors/forefathers pass  
 To war; where is the way (the techniques)?  
 Who has partaken of war/So's meal  
 (The spiritual concoction)  
 But refuses to go to war?  
 The cowards say the way is not good (safe)

*'Mekae be mo le menyo o?*  
*'Mekae du va/za nu*  
*Tso/he gbea 'va mayi?*  
*Emo lae nye yi!*

Who says the way is not good (not safe)?  
Who has taken the war/night meal  
But refused to go to battlefield?  
This is the way (to fight is the way)

In the excerpts above, the underlined words and phrases are the places where variations usually occur. In the first example, “Gbea Wodo,” the variation shown is musical (melodic, harmonic and cadential). The second example shows possible textual variations. The word “*miatogbuiwo*,” “our grandfathers” may be replaced by “*miamamawo*,” “our grandmothers”, “*kaleawo*,” “warriors,” etc. These variations are the possible differences that one may hear in the same song sung in different communities within Anlo and also in other Ewe communities. Other common features of these songs are call and response, (solo/cantor and chorus), refrain, and mixed sectional forms. Call and response is a predominant feature. Virtually every song employs some sort of call and response which usually occurs between *hesino/heno*, the cantor (lead singer) and *haxewo/vuviawo*, the chorus (participants/musical community). It should be noted that this phenomenon is not just unique to singing (songs), but is also common in drumming and sometimes in dancing as well. During performances, a song leader, lead dancer or master drummer will make a call or a gesture, and the musical community is expected to respond immediately with a chorus, dance movement or supporting drum pattern. These repetitive interactions and complementary characteristics or phenomena are reflections of communal spirit (or communality), one of the sociocultural elements embedded in Ewe traditional culture. They also replicate the way in which most traditional African communities were built and maintained, and explain vital aspects of African societies and why they work. Community cooperation and success, individual, leadership and group responsibilities are reinforced through the singing of songs and performance of many musical traditions. Through the lifelong musical training among

Ewes, effective leaders, and attentive and cooperative followers emerge to fill the roles that tradition and society have prescribed for them.

### **A.3.2 Scale and Tonal System**

It is commonly known (especially to researchers focusing on Anlo Ewe music) that pentatonicism is the major tonal system used by Anlo traditional composers.<sup>1017</sup> Hemitonic and anhemitonic forms of pentatonic and hexatonic scales are the predominant tonal materials used in Anlo songs. The following are examples of hemitonic and anhemitonic pentatonic scales.

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<sup>1017</sup> See Jones (1959), Nayo (1964), Fiagbedzi (1977), Younge (1989), Locke (1992), Dor (2001)

(a) Anhemitonic Pentatonic Scale

1. Anhemitonic Pentatonic Scale

<sup>3</sup> (a)

<sup>4</sup> (b)

2. Hemitonic Pentatonic Scale

<sup>5</sup> (a)

<sup>6</sup> (b)

<sup>7</sup> (c)

**Figure 8-7: Pentatonic Scales**

Ewe (especially, Anlo) melodies may not always maintain the same tone as the tonal center in a piece, although there is usually a central tone to which other tones in the mode of the song gravitate. It is usual for a melody to begin and/or end on any degree of the scale in the process of melodic progression. “*Kundovio*” is an example.

# Kundovio

Tr. jskg

Figure 8-8: “Kundovio”

**Atrikpui** (Text in Ewe: Anlo dialect)

*Kundovio tsoa 'meta loo*

*Tu medi o*

*'Ho neva!*

*Kundoawoe tso 'meta dee*

*Tu medio*

*'Hor neva!*

*Miele tsinoko keke Dahume*

*Fifia, 'hor neva*

*Miele ahanoko keke Dahume*

*Fifia 'hor neva*

*Kundoawoe tso ameta de tu medio*

*'Hor neva*

## Literal translation

Kundo's children (army) have beheaded/killed

No gun sounds (without a gunshot)

Let there be war!

The Kundo's army have beheaded/killed

No gunshot (without gunfire)

Let there be war!

We went drinking water in Dahumey

Right now, let there be war!

We went drinking spirit/wine in Dahumey

Right away, let there be war

The Kundos' have killed without gunfire

Let there be war!

### A.3.3 Melodic Organization

Unlike scale and modal uniqueness, there is no common melodic shape or progression in Ewe songs. There are usually combinations of different melodic shapes, such as pendulum seconds and thirds, repeated melodic tones, gap-filled melodic structures,<sup>1018</sup> scale fragments and stepwise movements, skipped tones and neighbor tones, ascending and descending scalar phrase structures, and melodic movements. This combination notwithstanding, some melodic shapes are more common than others. This may be due to the fact that melodic progression of most of the songs is conditioned and/or influenced by the phonemic tone or contour of the texts used. Ewe is a tonal language and as such exerts tremendous influence on melodic movement of vocal music, drum language, and other instrumental pieces. The tonal and melodic progressions of most of the songs try to depict the three main tone bands or contour lines (low, medium and high) that are usually recognized and used in spoken Ewe language.<sup>1019</sup> However, this is not to say that all Ewe traditional melodies strictly follow the tonal inflections of the spoken language. There are some traditional songs that explicitly violate this general phenomenon of melodic tone-language contour agreement. As is typical of Ewe melodic movements, the songs in this thesis predominantly use movements of seconds and thirds. While fourths and fifths are quite frequently used, sixths, sevenths, and octaves are rare.

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<sup>1018</sup> A gap-filled melodic structure is a progression in which a wide intervallic gap created as a result of a leap is immediately filled with stepwise motion of inner tones the leap skipped.

<sup>1019</sup> See Fiagbedzi (1977), Agawu (1990), and Dor (2001)

### A.3.4 Harmonic Organization

Ewe traditional harmony, which is the result of performance roles, arises out of melodic processes, hence depends largely, and is closely linked with the scales and modal systems on which the melody is based.<sup>1020</sup> In other words, harmonic procedures in Ewe traditional vocal music reciprocally influence melodic organization.<sup>1021</sup> In Ewe musical practice, it is uncommon to have an exact repetition of a musical phrase, be it melodic, harmonic, or even textual.<sup>1022</sup> There is usually some form of modification either in the melodic progression, harmonic structure, or in the text. The different modifications and transformations that occur contribute to the general harmonic structure of the piece. Parallelism is one of the prominent features of part-singing in Anlo Ewe vocal music. Other polyphonic devices employed include overlapping, part crossing polarity, and coupling. Common harmonic intervals of Anlo vocal music and as such of most of the songs in this work include fourths, fifths, and octaves, usually in parallel motion. Among these, the fourth is the most important and most commonly used interval besides the octave. The harmonic fourth usually occurs at sporadic points of the piece and at the cadences. The fifth, an inversion of the fourth, is yet another important and frequently heard harmonic interval which usually occurs at points of voice separation. Thirds and sixths may be heard sporadically between fourths and fifths. Intervals of seconds and sevenths are seldom used.<sup>1023</sup>

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<sup>1020</sup> See Fiagbedzi (1977, 1997), Younge (1989, 1992), and Dor (2001)

<sup>1021</sup> Blacking also observed a similar phenomenon in the compositional process of Venda songs where he indicated that harmonic progressions are determinants of melodic creation and design during the compositional process. See Blacking, (1967: 109-167, 177-179)

<sup>1022</sup> See Fiagbedzi, (1977: 249-262), Avorgbedor (1981), Anyidoho (1983: 300-309)

<sup>1023</sup> See Dor (2001: 226-245)

### A.3.5 Rhythmic Structure

Rhythmically, Ewe songs are not as complex as the instrumental pieces. Both strict and “relaxed”<sup>1024</sup> rhythms are employed. The songs discussed in this work could rhythmically be organized in two main groups. The first group comprises those that are accompanied by drum and other percussive instruments and have strict metric movements based on time circles (timelines) that are usually maintained by *gankogui* (double bell), *atoke* (slit/boat/banana bell), and/or *axatse/akaye* (rattle). The second group of songs may be described as those with loosely metered rhythmic movement or relaxed metric progression. Though drums do not usually accompany the latter, it is not strictly *a cappella* and not always unaccompanied. The songs may be accompanied with *gankogui*, *axatse/akaye* (rattle), and other smaller percussive instruments. Any percussive accompaniment to this category of songs may not strictly or necessarily follow the rhythmic pattern, meter, or tempo of the songs. The basic timecircles used to accompany most of the songs are discussed under the various genres and ensembles in appendix A.2.1

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<sup>1024</sup> For lack of appropriate terminology, I prefer to use ‘relaxed’ rhythm to “free” rhythm. This is because I do not think what is usually termed “free rhythm” is or can really be free. To a very large extent, the “free” rhythmic songs or pieces have definite durational, time span, framework, and tempo within which they are rendered.

## APPENDIX B: SONG TRANSCRIPTIONS

### SELECTED MUSICAL TRANSCRIPTIONS

Song 2 *Agbadza: Avakuku Medea Do Gbo O*

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#### Avakuku Medea Do Gbo O

*Arr. JS Kofi Gbolonyo(jskg)  
Univ. of Pittsburgh, 2008)*

Call Response Call

A - vaku-ku \_\_\_medea do gb'o \_\_\_ hee? \_\_\_ A - vaku-ku \_\_\_medea do gb'o \_\_\_

<sup>8</sup> Response All (Chorus)

hee! \_\_\_ Me-ga nya-me ko-loa man o, me-ga tu-gu ko-loa nam o'a 'li-me ke-dio!

**Agbadza** (Text in Ewe: Anlo dialect)  
*Avakuku mede'a do gbo o, hee?(2x)*  
*Meganyame kolo'a nam o*  
*Megatugu kolo'a nam o*  
*Alime kedi wo*

**Literal Translation**  
 A dead penis does not go near a vagina, ok?  
 Do not pester (disturb) the vagina for me  
 Do not torment (bother) the vagina for me  
 Your skinny waist

## Mawue Na

Arr. J. S. Kofi Gbolonyo  
Univ. of Pittsburgh, March, 2009

Ma-wue na! Ma-wue na, ne nye me-de sro Ma-wue na; ne nye me - dzi vio Mawue na

6 ne nye me kpo gao Ma-wue na A - de - ta - gba - tsu - tsue do lo be \_\_\_ "a-me-nu-ve -

11 la me-doa yo-me kpl'a meo ma-se'o d'a fia nye - me - le yo - me yi ge \_\_\_ o \_\_\_ Ma-wue na!

17 Ma-wue na, ne nye me-de sro Ma-wue na; ne nye me - dzi vio Ma-wue na ne nye me kpo

22 gao Ma-wue na A - de - ta - gba - tsu - tsue do lo be \_\_\_ "a-me-nu-ve - la me-doa yo-me kpl'a

27 meo ma-se'o d'a fia nye - me - le yo - me yi ge \_\_\_ o \_\_\_

**Agbadza** (Text in Ewe: Anlo dialect)

Mawue na, Mawue na  
Ne nye me de sro o ha  
Mawue na  
Ne nye me dzi vi ha o  
Mawue na  
Ne nye me kpo ga ha o  
Mawue na  
Adetagbatsutsue do lo be  
"Amenuvela medoa yome  
Kple ame o  
Masewo de afi ya  
Nye mele yome yi ge o"

**Literal Translation**

It was destined by God (caused by God)  
Even if I do not marry  
It was destined by God (caused by God)  
Even if I do not have a child  
It was destined by God (caused by God)  
Even if I am not rich  
It was destined by God (caused by God)  
It is the tsetse-fly that proverbially said  
"One's helper does not go to eternity  
with one's body (dead body)  
Let me leave you here (I can only take you this far)  
I am not going into eternity (with you)"

### Bokono Daxo

Arr. J.S. Kofi Gbolonyo  
 Univ. of Pittsburgh  
 March, 2009

Spoken (measure 1-3)

A - loo ya! A gua\_ 'to! Bo-ko - no da - xo ne - doa

6  
 'de-gbe nu na nyo; Gbee dzea 'bla A-wu-no da-xo ne-doa 'de-gbe nu na nyo; Gbee dzea

12  
 'bla a - ye - ee, gbee dzea 'bla a - ye - ee, gbee dzea 'bla; A-wu - no

17  
 da - xo ne - doa 'de - gbe nu na nyo; Gbee dzea 'bla! \_\_\_\_\_

1. | 2.

**Afa** (Text in Ewe: Anlo dialect)  
*Aloo ya! Gbee nye towo* (spoken 3x)  
*Bokono daxo nedo adegbe*  
*Nu na nyo*  
*Gbee dzeabla*  
*Awuno doaxo nedo adegbe*  
*Nu na nyo*  
*Gbee dzeabla aye* (2x)  
*Gbee dzeabla*  
*Awuno doaxo nedo adegbe*  
*Nu na nyo*  
*Gbee dzeabla aye*

**Literal Translation**  
*Aloo ya*, voice/prayer is yours  
 The Great High Priest/Diviner should offer a prayer  
 So there would be success (all things will be good)  
 It is prayer that makes or brings success  
 The Great High Priest/Diviner should offer a prayer  
 So there would be success  
 It is prayer that makes or brings success  
 It is prayer that makes or brings success  
 The Great High Priest/Diviner should offer a prayer  
 So there would be success  
 It is prayer that makes or brings success

### Bokono Menyi Ba

*Arr. J.S. Kofi Gbolonyo  
Univ. of Pittsburgh  
March, 2009*

Cantor Chorus

Bo-ko-no me-nyi ba-(ee); ba-tse-le-lea 'Wu-no me-nyi

5 Cantor Chorus

ba. Bo-ko-no me-nyi ba (ee); ba-tse-le-lea 'Wu-no me-nyi ba. 'Wu-no

10 Cantor

me-nyi ba (ee) ba-tse-le-lea 'Wu-no me-nyi ba. Bo-ko-no ba.

*Afa* (Text in Ewe: Anlo dialect)

*Bokono menyɩ ba ee*

*Batsɛlele Awuno menyɩ ba*

*Awuno menyɩ ba ee*

#### Literal Translation

High Priest I venerate you

Batsɛlele High Priest I worship you<sup>1025</sup>

High Priest I revere you

<sup>1025</sup> Bokono and Awuno are synonyms. They are religious titles usually used by Afa high priests and diviners.

## De Nu Do

Tr. jskg

Call Resp. Call All

'Mea-de yi ve-du yo ge, woa - de nu do. 'Mea-de yi ve-du yo ge, woa -

5  
de nu do . E - nu - gbe - yi - la me-gbea 'go ma - do - . 'Mea-de yi ve-du yo ge, woa -

9  
de nu do. 'Mea - de

**Adzohu-Atsia** (Text in Ewe: Anlo dialect)

//:Mea de yi vedu yo ge  
Woade nu do.://

Enugbe yi la  
Megbe ago mado o  
Mea de yi vedu yo ge  
Woade nu do

**Literal Translation**

Someone who goes calling on the gods  
Should put his/her mouth on to the ground  
(Show humility and reverence).  
A person who goes on a divine mission  
Never refuses to knock (to seek permission)  
Someone who goes calling on the gods  
Should put his/her mouth on to the ground  
(Show humility and reverence).

### Hafi Nayi Fiafeme

*Arr. J.S. Kofi Gbolonyo  
Univ. of Pittsburgh  
March 9, 2009*

The musical score is written in 2/4 time with a key signature of two flats (Bb and Eb). It consists of two staves. The first staff is labeled 'Cantor' and 'Chorus'. The lyrics are: 'Ha - fi na-yi fia-fe - me la \_\_\_\_\_ A - goo! \_\_\_\_\_ Ha goo! \_\_\_\_\_ A -'. The second staff starts at measure 10 and continues with the lyrics: 'goo na mi; me - doa \_\_\_\_\_ goo na mi; Fia-fe-me-to - wo a - goo! \_\_\_\_\_ A goo!'. Both staves include first and second endings for the chorus section.

**Boboobo** (Text in Ewe: Ewedome dialect)  
*Hafi nayi fia feme la*  
*Agoo!*  
*Agoo na mi*  
*Medo agoo nami*  
*Fiafemetowo agoo*

**Literal Translation**  
 Before you enter the abode of the King,  
 Knock! (Seek permission)  
 Permission from you  
 I am seeking permission from you  
 Members of the palace your permission

### Agoo! Agoo Eee!! Agoo!!!

Arr. J.S. Kofi Gbolonyo  
Univ. of Pittsburgh  
March 9, 2009

The musical score is written on a single treble clef staff in 2/4 time. It consists of three lines of music. The first line contains the lyrics: "A - goo! A - goo ee!! A - goo!!! Mia-ta - me, mia-no ke - sie; do-". The second line starts at measure 6 and contains: "vo-pe-te-pe-te-pe-te; To-gbi, To-gbia-wo! \_\_\_\_\_ Mie-yo mi loo! \_\_\_\_\_ Ku-se, ku-se;". The third line starts at measure 10 and contains: "a-gbe ye loo, a - yee! Mie - kla-mi loo! \_\_\_\_\_ ku - se, ku-se; da-gbe ye loo, a - yee!". The score includes various musical notations such as eighth notes, quarter notes, and rests, with some notes having accents or slurs.

**Zigi** (Text in Ewe: Ewedome dialect)

Agoo, agoo ee! Agoo!  
Miatame miano kesie  
Vovlowo petepete (fetefete)  
Togbetogbeawo  
Miekla mi loo  
Kusie, kusie  
Agbe/dagbe ye loo, ayee  
Mieyo mi loo,  
Kusie, kusie  
Agbe/dagbe ye loo, ayee

**Literal Translation**

Knock! (Asking for permission)  
Our heads, our great mothers, peace  
All you spirits (all you in the spirit realm)  
All you Great Ancestors  
We have sort your permission (call on you)  
Peace, peace  
It is for life/goodness intentions, oh yes!  
We have called upon you (asking of you)  
Peace, peace  
It is for life/goodness intentions, oh yes!

### Nonome Vovo

*Arr. J.S. Kofi Gbolonyo  
Univ. of Pittsburgh  
March 9, 2009*

No-no-me vo-vo yae Ma-wu wo-mi. A-le-si me-le yae —  
 7 — nyo na mu loo! Nye ma-tso to-nye a tso do-li to wo Ne Ma-wu  
 Ne nya wu-  
 14 lo ko la a-nyo na nye ha. A-nyo na nye loo! A-nyo na  
 20 m ha la ke dzi ko ma - do E - dzi ko ma do. 2. E - dzi ko  
 nye ha! Ne Ma-wu lo ko la a-nyo na nye ha! A-nyo na nye ha!  
 ma do Ne nya wu - m ha la e dzi ko ma - do! E-dzi ko ma - do!

**Akpese** (Text in Ewe: Ewedome dialect)

*Nonome vovo*  
*Yae Mawu womi*  
*Alesi mele*

#### Literal Translation

It is with different personality traits  
That God has made us  
How I am (my character)

### Kakla Nye Nusese

Arr. J.S. Kofi Gbolonyo  
Univ. of Pittsburgh  
March 9, 2009

The musical score is written in treble clef with a 2/4 time signature. It consists of three staves of music. The first staff begins with a quarter rest followed by a series of eighth and quarter notes. The second staff starts at measure 8 and continues the melodic line. The third staff starts at measure 17 and concludes the piece with a double bar line.

**Boboobo** (Text in Ewe: Ewedome dialect)  
*Kakla nye nu sese*  
*Meyi loo, nye ma ga gbo o*

**Literal Translation**  
It is difficult to say goodbye  
I am gone and I am will not return

**Agbolete**

*J.S. Kofi Gbolonyo  
Univ. of Pittsburgh  
Jan. 24, 2009*

Call Response Call

'Gbo-le-te b'a 'me vo ye nue; ma - yitsie-wode dee - madoa me me loo — 'Gbo-le-te b'a

6  
'me vo ye nue; ma - yi tsie wo de dee - ma - doa 'me me loo — 'Gbo-le - te b'a

***Afa*** (Text in Anlo Ewe dialect)

*//:Gbolete be ame vo ye nu*

*Mayi tsiewode*

*Mado ame me loo://*

**Literal Translation**

Gbolete says he has lost all his people

I would go to eternity

So I can be among people

# Gbea Wodo

Tr. jskg



A Call Resp.  
Gbea wo - do lo - o gbea wo - do, gbea 'Dza-fia do gbea me - nye gbe - vo.

5 A1 Call Resp B All (chorus)  
Gbea wo - do lo - o gbea wo - do, gbea 'Dza-fia do gbea me - nye gbe - vo. Xo - xo nue wo -

10 B1  
gbi - na ka ye - yea - wo do, gbea wo - do gbea me - nye gbe vo. Xo - xoa nue wo -

14 A  
gbi - na ka ye - yea - wo do gbea wo - do gbea me - nye gbe - vo. Gbea wo - do lo - o

18  
gbea wo - do gbea 'Dza-fia do gbea me - nye gbe - vo.

**Yeve** (Text in Anlo Ewe dialect)

//:Gbea wodo lo o gbea wodo  
 Gbe ya Adzafia doa  
 Gbea menye gbevo o://  
 //:Xoxoa nue wogbuina ka yeyawo do  
 Gbea wodo  
 Gbea menye gbevo://  
 Gbea wodo lo o gbea wodo  
 Gbe ya Adzafia doa  
 Gbea menye gbevo o

**Literal translation**

The language he used (what he said)  
 The language (what) Adzafia used (said)  
 The statement is not a bad one (critique)  
 It is by the old that the new ropes are made.  
 The language he used (what he said)  
 The statement is not a bad one (critique)  
 The language he used (what he said)  
 The language (what) Adzafia used (said)  
 The statement is not a bad one (critique)

## Mivua Gboa Mayi

Tr. jskg

Call Resp. Call

Mi-vua 'gboa ma - yia, ka-lea-woe - ! Da - hu-me 'kla-sua-woe, mi-vua 'gboa ma -

6 Resp.

yi. Ka - lea - woe, mi - vua 'gboa ma - yi, Da - hu - me.

***Akpoka*** (Text in Anlo Ewe dialect)

*Mivu agboa mayia*  
*Kaleawoe!*  
*Dahume aklasuawoe*  
*Mivu agboa mayi*  
*Kaleawoe*  
*Mivu agboa mayi*  
*Dahume*

**Literal translation**

Open the gates for me to go (to leave)  
 The brave warriors!  
 The Dahomey (vultures) mysterious fighters  
 Open the gates for me to go (to leave)  
 The brave warriors!  
 Open the gates for me to go (to leave) to  
 Dahomey (an ancestral home)

## Klilinu

Tr. jskg

Kli - li - nue mie - ke do vo, a - da - tsia ge - . Mia - to nu - tsu - vio, kli - li - nue mie - ke do

6  
Resp.  
vo a - da - tsia ge, dzi - me - le fo na - gbu - gbo.

***Atrikpui*** (Text in Anlo Ewe dialect)

*Klilinue mieke do vo*

*Adatsia ge*

*Miatio nutsuvio*

*Klilinue miedo do vo*

*Adatsia ge, (ne)*

*Dzi mele fo (wo)*

*Nagbugbo*

**Literal Translation**

We have now reached Klilinu (the wharf)

Tear is fallen

My brethren (brother-men/ brave men)

the wharf have we reached

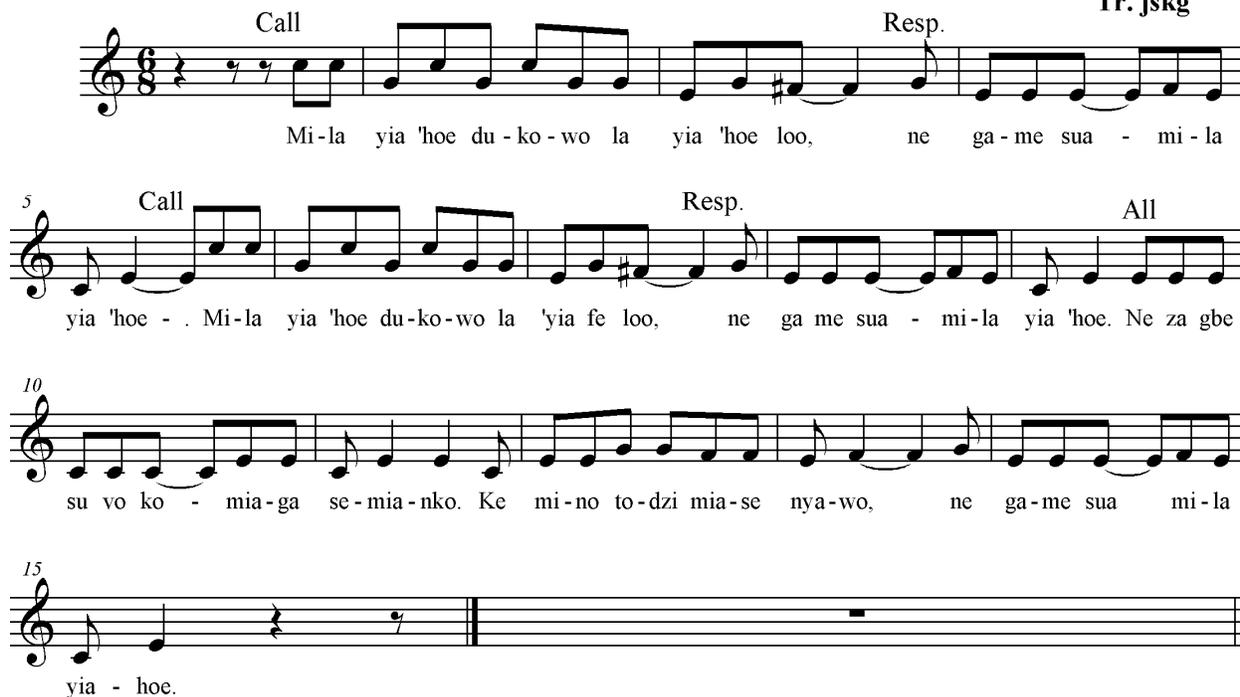
Tear is fallen,

for if you are not strong at heart (cannot endure),

Then better retreat

# Mila Yi Aho

Tr. jskg



Call Resp.

Mi-la yia 'hoe du - ko - wo la yia 'hoe loo, ne ga - me sua - mi - la

5 Call Resp. All

yia 'hoe - . Mi-la yia 'hoe du-ko-wo la 'yia fe loo, ne ga me sua - mi-la yia 'hoe. Ne za gbe

10

su vo ko - mia-ga se-mia-nko. Ke mi-no to-dzi mia-se nya-wo, ne ga-me sua mi-la

15

yia - hoe.

**Akpoka** (Text in Anlo Ewe dialect)

*Mila yi aho/afe*  
*Dukowo la yi afe/ahoe loo*  
*Ne game sua mila yi afe/ahoe*  
*Ne aza gbe su vo koa*  
*Miagase mia nko*  
*Ke mino to dzi miase nyawo*  
*Ne game sua mila yi afe/ahoe*

**Literal translation**

We shall go home  
 The state shall go home  
 When time is due, we shall go home  
 When the day of reckoning is come  
 You would hear from us  
 So be on your guard and listen to the messages  
 When time is due we shall go home

## Atamga

Tr. jskg

(A) - tam-ga-y'a de mie-gbloe - dzro, e - go koe mie-do - a-si ma-do

5 glae loo! 'Tam - ga - y'a de mie-gbloe dzro, dza-dza - li-dza ka-ka 'si ma-do

9 glae hee. 'Tam - ga y'a

**Atrikpui** (Text in Anlo Ewe dialect)

*Atamga ya de mie gbloe dzro*

*Ego koe miedo*

*Asi mado glae loo.*

*Atamgayia de mie gbloe be*

*Dzadzalidza kaka*

*Asi mado glae hee*

**Literal translation**

The great oath we have sworn (in vain)

We have just clashed (on the battlefield)

We cannot stand and stare (aloof)

The great oath we have sworn that

So long as the enemy persists

We shall not stand aloof (we would fight)

## Emode?

Tr. jskg

Call Resp. Call

Fi-ka dzie mia-to-gbio to yia 'de-gbe, e - mo de ? Fi-ka dzie

6 mia - to - gbio to yia 'de-gbe, e - mo de ? 'Me-kae du za nu he gbea

11 'va ma - yi A - yi - sa - woe be mo la me - nyo. 'Me-kae be 'mo la me - nyo 'Me-kae du

17 za nu he - gbea 'va ma - yi, e - mo de ?

**Atrikpui** (Text in Ewe: Anlo dialect)

*//:Fika dzie Nyaho (Togbiwo) to*

*Yi adzogbe; emo de?://*

*'Mekae dua 'va/So nu*

*Tso/he gbea 'va mayi?*

*Gbayiza/Ayisa woe be 'mo lae menyoo*

*'Mekae be mo le menyoo?*

*'Mekae du va/za nu*

*Tso/he gbea 'va mayi?*

*Emo lae nye yi!*

### Literal translation

Where did our warriors/forefathers pass  
 To war; where is the way (the techniques)?  
 Who has partaken of war/So's meal  
 (The spiritual concoction)  
 But refuses to go to war?  
 The cowards say the way is not good (safe)  
 Who says the way is not good (not safe)?  
 Who has taken the war/night meal  
 But refused to go to battlefield?  
 This is the way (to fight is the way)

# Moxenu

Tr. jskg

**A Call**      **Resp.**

Mo - xe-nue bla - gba-dza      to ka me loa le ye do ee. E - mo - xe-nue bla

6      1      **Call B**

'gba-dza      gbe ka dzie kua wum le.      le.      Mi doa-'me de du - me - gao

11      **Resp.**      **B1 Call**

gbo - neo - tso tu kple kpe - neo      wu lo nam lo - .      Mi

16      **Resp.**

doa 'me de 'za gua-wo      gbo - neo      foa 'va - yi - vuo - neo - si'a 'va nam

21      **A All**

loo.      E - mo-xe-nue bla 'gba-dza - to ka-me lo'a le ye do ee, E - mo-xe-nue bla

27

gba - dza - - - gbe ka dzie kua 'wum le.

**Atrikpui** (Text in Ewe: Anlo dialect)  
*Moxenu/Maxenu bla agbadza*  
*To ka mee loa le yedo ee*

*Moxenu bla agbadza*  
*Gbe ka dzie kua wum le*  
*Mido ame de dumegawo gbo*

**Literal translation**  
 Moxenu has put on his war implements (to fight)  
 In which river would the crocodile attack me  
 (Where is the next possible battlefield?)  
 Moxenu has put on his war implements  
 Where would death kill me?  
 Send people to the rulers/elders of the land  
 (Petition the king and his council of elders)

*Newoa tso tu kple kpe  
Ne woawu lo nam loo  
Mido ame de 'zagugawo gbo*

*Newoa fo awayivuo*

*Newoa si awa nam loo  
Moxenue bla agbadza  
To ka mee loa le yedo ee  
Moxenue bla agbadza  
Gbe ka dzie kua wum le*

So they'll take arms and ammunition (prepare)  
So they'll kill the crocodile (defeat the enemy)  
Send people to the master drummers  
(Petition the master musicians)  
So they'll sound the war drums  
(Announce war and summon the warriors)  
So they'll defeat the war for me (defeat the enemy)  
Moxenu has put on his war implements  
In which river would the crocodile attack me  
Moxenu has put on his war implements  
Where would death kill me?

Song 73 Atrikpui: Klala Me Mado

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### Kakla Nye Nusese

*Arr. J.S. Kofi Gbolonyo  
Univ. of Pittsburgh  
March 9, 2009*

**Atrikpui** (Text in Anlo Ewe dialect)

*Klala mee mado  
Adzo tso nutsvio  
Klala mee mado  
Klala mee mado lo ho  
Adzo tso nutsvio  
Klala mee mado*

#### Literal Translation

I shall sleep in calico  
Sons of men are under attack  
I shall sleep in calico  
Sons of men are under attack  
I shall sleep in calico  
Sons of men are under attack

# Mi Ya Wu

Tr. jskg

Mi-ya wu ha - ku-mi - ye, to - me - lo wui - li de-gbo he - . Mi-ya

wu ha ku-mi ye, e-lo wui-li de-gbo he. O mi-ya he. To-me-lo ma-no yia-go

e - ge - li ma-no woe zo - . To-me-lo ma-no yia-go e - ge - li ma-no woe - zo

. Mi-ya wu ha - ku-mi ye e - lo - wui - li - , de-gbo he.

**Adzogbo** (Text in Fon language)

'Miya wu ha kumi ye  
 To melo wuili degbo he  
 Miya wu ha kumi ye  
 Elo wuili degbo he  
 Tomelo mano yiago  
 Egeli mano hoeso  
 Miya wu ha kumi ye  
 Elo wuili degbo he

**Literal Translation**

Oh, come and see a miracle  
 A crocodile has attacked a hippopotamus  
 Oh, come and see a miracle  
 Crocodile has attacked a hippopotamus  
 A crocodile cannot live on land  
 A cow cannot live in water  
 Oh, come and see a miracle  
 A crocodile has attacked a hippopotamus

## Kundo Yi Yevuwo De

Tr. jskg

Kun - do yi ye - vuo - de me - gbo he, da - da be mi - na mia - tso gbe de dzi. Kun - do yi  
 ye - vuo - de me - gbo he, mi - tso gbe de dzi. Kun - do yi dzi. Oo - ! Mia - fea  
 'va - fia - ga - ga tsia 'va me - , mie - yi - na 'va wo - ge. Oo! - Mia - fea 'va fia - ga - ga - tsi  
 'va me - , mie - yi - na va wo - ge - . Mi yia 'ho, mi - yia 'ho, mi - yia 'ho. Mi -  
 de so, mi - de so, mi - de so Kun - do yi ye - vuo - de me - gbo he , mi - tso gbe de dzi.

**Atsigbeko** (Text in Ewe: Anlo dialect)

//:Kundo yi Yevuwode  
 Megbo o he  
 Dada be mina mitso gbe de dzi  
 Kundo yi Yevuwode  
 Megbo o he  
 Mitso gbe de dzi://  
 //:O! Miafe Awafiaga  
 Do de (ga tsi) aho(ava) me!  
 Mieiyna aho(ava) wo ge://  
 Miyi aho, miyi aho, miyi aho

**Literal translation**

Kundo has gone to the Whiteman's land  
 And never returned  
 Mother says let us bet on it  
 Kundo has gone to the Whiteman's land  
 And never returned  
 Let us bet on it  
 Oh! Our Great War King  
 Is perished in battle (is captured in war!)  
 We are going to fight (going to war)  
 Let's go to war, let's go to war, let's go to war!

Mide so, mide so, mide so  
 Kundo yi Yevuwode  
 Megbo o he  
 Mitso gbe de dzi

Let's fight, let's fight, let's fight!  
 Kundo has gone to the White man's land  
 And never returned  
 Let us bet on it

Song 91 Atrikpui: Kundovio

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## Kundovio

Tr. jskg

**Atrikpui** (Text in Ewe: Anlo dialect)

*Kundovio tsoa 'meta loo*  
*Tu medi o*  
*'Ho neva!*  
*Kundoawoe tso 'meta dee*  
*Tu medio*  
*'Hor neva!*  
*Miele tsinoko keke Dahume*  
*Fifia, 'hor neva*

### Literal translation

Kundo's children (army) have beheaded/killed  
 No gun sounds (without a gunshot)  
 Let there be war!  
 The Kundo's army have beheaded/killed  
 No gunshot (without gunfire)  
 Let there be war!  
 We went drinking water in Dahumey  
 Right now, let there be war!

Miele ahanoko keke Dahume  
 Fifia 'hor neva  
 Kundoawoe tso ameta de tu medio  
 'Hor neva

We went drinking spirit/wine in Dahumey  
 Right away, let there be war  
 The Kundos' have killed without gunfire  
 Let there be war!

Song 97 Atrikpui/Akpoka: Axolu Menye Ame Vo O

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## Axolu Menye Ame Vo O

Tr. jskg

Call Resp. Call

'Xo-lu me-nyea 'me vo hee. Oo! mi-yo 'Xo-lu ne - va. 'Xo-lu me-nyea

6 Resp. Fine

'me vo de-keo. A - za sua 'gbe vö. mi - yo 'Xo-lu ne - va. 'Xo-lu me-nyea

**Atrikpui** (Text in Ewe: Anlo dialect)  
 Axolu menya mevo o hee  
 O! Be miyo Axolu neva  
 Axolu menye amevo deke o  
 Aza so gbe vo  
 Miyo Axolu neva

**Literal Translation**  
 Axolu is never a bad person  
 Oh! Call Axolu to come  
 Axolu is never one bad person  
 The day has come  
 Call Axolu to come

## APPENDIX C: LIST OF SONG TITLES

### LIST OF MUSIC TEXT

(BY TITLE OF SONG, DRUM, VERBAL TEXTS)

<b>Title of Text</b>	<b>Genre</b>	<b>Chapter/Page</b>
Vugbe 1: <i>Mieva Do Za</i>	Boboobo	2/149
Vugbe 2: <i>Generator/Televisi</i>	Ageshie and Boboobo	2/150
Vugbe 3: <i>Ege Metua Xo Na Adaba O</i>	Ageshie	2/151
Song 1: <i>Nusi Dzo Egbea</i>	Adzro	2/153
Vugbe 4: <i>Kolo Do Sopota</i>	Ageshie	2/154
Song 2: <i>Avakuku Medea Do Gbo O</i>	Agbadza	2/155
Song 3: <i>Dumenyo Meso Afe O</i>	Kinka	2/170
Song 4: <i>Mawue Na</i>	Adzoha	3/216
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Song 5: <i>Bokono Daxo</i>	Afa	3/222
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Song 7: <i>Ametowo Adegbe</i>	Afa	3/223
Song 8: <i>De Nu Do</i>	Adzohu-Atsia	3/224

Song 9: <i>Medo Ago Na Mi</i>	Akpalu/Agoha	3/226
Song 10: <i>Mede Ago De Miadzi</i>	Ageshie	3/226
Song 11: <i>Hafi Nayi Fia Feme</i>	Boboobo	3/227
Song 12: <i>Agoo</i>	Zigi	3/227
Song 13: <i>Mewoge Ne Miakpo</i>	Babasiko	3/227
Song 14: <i>Nya Medo Agoo</i>	Babasiko	3/228
Song 15: <i>Mitoe Ne Togbiawo</i>	Bobo	3/228
Song 16: <i>Mete Se Wogbe</i>	Afa-Dzisa	3/235
Song 17: <i>Mawu Wo Mi</i>	Akpese	3/237
Song 18: <i>Nonome Vovo</i>	Akpese	3/238
Song 19: <i>See Do Ame Da</i>	Boboobo	3/238
Song 20: <i>Alesi Senye Wom</i>	Akpese	3/240
Song 21: <i>Xexemenyawo</i>	Akpalu/Agoha	3/241
Song 22: <i>Esenye Lo</i>	Afa	3/242
Song 23: <i>'Gbeme Nuawo Ken Li</i>	Kpegisu	3/242
Song 24: <i>Senye Melo O</i>	Afa	3/245
Song 25: <i>Kuvi</i>	Akpalu	3/251
Song 26: <i>Yome Safi</i>	Boboobo	3/251
Song 27: <i>Kakla</i>	Boboobo	3/251
Song 28: <i>Agbefu Wo Ye</i>	Akpalu	3/254
Song 29: <i>Amenye Wogbo</i>	Avihe	3/257
Song 30: <i>Agbolete</i>	Afa	3/257
Song 31: <i>Gbeyigbe Meku La</i>	Kpegisu	3/257

Song 32: <i>Adzino Kugbe</i>	Boboobo	3/259
Song 33: <i>Nyino Di La</i>	Avihe	3/260
Song 34: <i>Nuka Tutue Meva Wo</i>	Ageshie	3/261
Song 35: <i>Woawo Blemanuawo</i>	Akpalu	4/276
Song 36: <i>Wo Nutoe Wo Nua</i>	Yeve	4/284
Song 37: <i>Gbea Wodo</i>	Yeve	4/284
Song 38: <i>Miato Gawo De</i>	Yeve	4/285
Song 39: <i>Kaxoxoa Nue</i>	Akpoka	4/286
Song 40: <i>Wofia 'Da</i>	Atrikpui	4/286
Song 41: <i>Mivu Agboa Mayi</i>	Akpoka	4/287
Song 42: <i>Agbome Miele</i>	Atrikpui	4/287
Song 43: <i>Agokoli Be Mile Kpo Gba Ge</i>	Atrikpui	4/287
Song 44: <i>Togbi Agokoli Fe Nutasese</i>	Boboobo	4/288
Song 45: <i>Kom Da De Gbe Adewo Dzi</i>	Koku	4/290
Song 46: <i>Atsom Do Gbexo Mi Yia</i>	Adzohu Kadodo	4/291
Song 47: <i>Klilinue Mieke Do Vo</i>	Atrikpui	4/292
Song 48: <i>Mila Yi Ahoe</i>	Akpoka	4/293
Song 49: <i>Amee Doa Fia</i>	Adzoha/Fiaha	5/312
Song 50: <i>Ame Ye Koa Fia</i>	W. Blege (composer)	5/312
Song 51: <i>Togbia Do Do Mi</i>	Adzoha/Fiaha	5/316
Song 52: <i>Togbia Vivim</i>	Adzoha/Fiaha	5/321
Song 53: <i>Futowo Fe Nya Gbogblo</i>	Zigi	5/325
Song 54: <i>Nya Le Mumu Fe Dome</i>	Zigi	5/326

Song 55: <i>Nyemano Nu Ava Na Sim O</i>	Gadzo	5/332
Song 56: <i>Aho Dzo Miyo Bo</i>	Yeve-Adavu	5/334
Song 57: <i>Badagao Za Do</i>	Atsiagbeko	5/335
Song 58: <i>Tsie Lafo Miawoa?</i>	Atsiagbeko	5/336
Song 59: <i>Fowo Lable Miawoa?</i>	Atsiagbeko	5/337
Song 60: <i>To Ya Woe</i>	Agbeko-Hatsiatsia	5/340
Song 61: <i>Atamga</i>	Atamga/Atrikpui	6/349
Song 62: <i>Etu Akpo Bete Akpo</i>	Gadzo	6/350
Song 63: <i>Dzo Ble Ame</i>	Adabatram	6/352
Song 64: <i>Yewo Si Dexle</i>	Adabatram	6/352
Song 65: <i>Dzogbeku Menye Nkpe O</i>	Gadzo	6/354
Song 66: <i>Mumuna</i>	Atsiagbeko	6/356
Song 67: <i>Emo De?</i>	Atrikpui	6/358
Song 68: <i>Akonta Bo Wui Ga</i>	Atsiagbeko	6/358
Song 69: <i>Du Xoa Gba</i>	Atsiagbeko	6/359
Song 70: <i>Dzengo Do Tome</i>	Atsiagbeko	6/360
Song 71: <i>Moxenu/Maxenu Bla Agbadza</i>	Atrikpui	6/362
Song 72: <i>Mebe Mayi</i>	Atrikpui	6/365
Song 73: <i>Klala Me Mado</i>	Atrikpui	6/366
Song 74: <i>Nesim Nlobe</i>	Gadzo	6/369
Song 75: <i>Avu Mato Dzo</i>	Atsiagbeko	6/369
Song 76: <i>Ahogbo Lado Kitsigbo</i>	Atsiagbeko	6/370
Song 77: <i>Tu Nedi</i>	Atsiagbeko	6/371

Song 78: <i>Adzonu Made Gbe Za</i>	Atsiagbeko	6/371
Song 79: <i>Vo De Mi Nu</i>	Atsiagbeko	6/372
Song 80: <i>Du De Masi Du De</i>	Atsiagbeko	6/372
Song 81: <i>Nakefoto Mefoa Adzido O</i>	Atsiagbeko	6/372
Song 82: <i>Dzi Hoe Xa Yewo</i>	Atsiagbeko	6/376
Song 83: <i>Fika Eloviawo Yi?</i>	Akpoka	6/378
Song 84: <i>Amu Medea Dze O</i>	Kpegisu	6/380
Song 85: <i>Gbemagbe Nye Gbemagbe</i>	Kpegisu	6/381
Song 86: <i>Yofega Wo Nya</i>	Kpegisu	6/382
Song 87: <i>Yevutua Do Mada</i>	Atsiagbeko	6/383
Song 88: <i>(O) Miya Wu</i>	Adzogbo	6/384
Song 89: <i>Kundo Yi Yevuwode</i>	Atsiagbeko	6/390
Song 90: <i>Atsiligeli</i>	Tordziha	6/391
Song 91: <i>Kundovio [Tso Ameta]</i>	Atrikpui	6/392
Song 92: <i>So Ho</i>	Kpegisu	6/394
Song 93: <i>Bofrakuma do ame de Boni</i>	Atrikpui	6/395
Song 94: <i>Adzigo, So Degbe</i>	Kpegisu	6/396
Song 95: <i>Abofrakuma to zi Adzigo</i>	Kpegisu	6/396
Song 96: <i>Aklie Do Goka Me</i>	Atrikpui	6/397
Song 97: <i>Axolu Menye Amevo O</i>	Atrikpui/Akpoka	6/399
Song 98: <i>Ku Nyo Wu</i>	Atrikpui/Akpoka	6/401
Song 99: <i>Aho Le Tenge</i>	Atsiagbeko	6/401
Song 100: <i>Glagovi Tete woa 'gba nye ya</i>	Atsiagbeko-Vulolo	6/402

Song 101: <i>Atsia do gbe</i>	Atsiagbeko-Vulolo	6/402
Song 102: <i>Dzokoto Va Anyigba Dzi</i>	Agbadza/Akpoka	6/403
Song 103: <i>Amezro Ha Ame Vie</i>	Avihe	7/410
Song 104: <i>Afo Menya Dume Degbe O</i>	Akpese	7/412
Song 105: <i>Ame Wu Ga</i>	Agbadza	7/416
Song 106: <i>Noamegbo Medzea Ame Nu O</i>	Zigi	7/417
Song 107: <i>Wonye Alea</i>	Adevu/Akpi	7/418
Song 108: <i>Ame Noviwoe Nye Awu, Letesa</i>	Afa	7/431
Song 109: <i>Agobaya Wonye</i>	Kpegisu	7/432
Song 110: <i>Xenohame Menye</i>	Kpegisu	7/434
Song 111: <i>Gbomasumasua Nusese Wonye</i>	Akpoka	7/434
Song 112: <i>Ve Nono Dzrom</i>	Avihe	7/435
Song 113: <i>Gbome Pee Kie Wo Nam Lea</i>	Zigi	7/437
Song 114: <i>Miekua No Lo</i>	Agbadza	7/437
Song 115: <i>To Le Asiwo Mele</i>	Zigi	7/438
Song 116: <i>Woe Le Mawoe Le</i>	Zigi	7/439
Song 117: <i>Akloloe</i>	Adevu	7/439
Song 118: <i>Amede Dzi Vi</i>	Gbolo	7/440
Song 119: <i>Wodeka Wodea?</i>	Bobo	7/445
Song 120: <i>Deka Nede</i>	Bobo	7/446
Song 121: <i>Nyemele Agbe No Ge O</i>	Bobo	7/447
Song 122: <i>Tsunyesi, Naxo Gbogbo</i>	Bobo/Ganyaglo	7/447
Song 123: <i>Esro Yeye Ade Wodena</i>	Bobo/Ganyaglo	7/448

Song 124: <i>Ame Nutu Mewoa Do Eve O</i>	Zigi	7/453
Song 125: <i>Fiafitowo Amebada Wo Nye</i>	Adzogbo	7/454
Song 126: <i>Miafe Dumegawo</i>	Adzogbo	7/456
Song 127: <i>Enyatonamela</i>	Azigi	7/457
Song 128: <i>Mile Afo Ne Agede</i>	Afa-Dzisa	7/458

## APPENDIX D: LIST OF FIELD RECORDINGS/ENSEMBLES

NAME	GENRE/STYLE	PLACE
1. Atsibladekame Habobo	Akpalu/Atsigo/Agoha	Dzodze-Gbota Ade
2. Didokuiwo Habobo	Bobo/Adzro/Ageshie	Dzodze-Fiagbedu
3. Dzigbodi Habobo	Bobo/Afa/Akpoka	Dzodze-Apeyeme
4. Dzogbefime	Yeve/Alaga	Dzogbefime-Dzodze
5. Dzogbefime	Agbosu	Dzogbefime-Dzodze
6. Mawuli Kpli Mi	Adzogbo/Kpegisu/Gota Aflao	Aflao
7. Afiadenyigba Gadzo	Afa/Gadzo/Duasika/	Anlo-Afiadenyigba
8. Afiadenyigba Babashiko	Babashiko	Anlo-Afiadenyigba
9. Ghana-Nyive Akpalu	Akpalu/Agoha	Ghana-Nyive
10. Togo-Nyive Avihe	Avihe/Gbolo/Zigi	Togo-Nyive
11. Adidogome-Lome Koba	Atsia/Atrikpui/Adzogbo	Adidome
12. Dokplala Koku	Kokuvu/Atsikevu/Dzovu	Dokplala
13. Agbozume Koku	Kokuvu	Agbozume-Netime
14. Dzodze-Fiagbedu Brekete	Brekete/Atsikevu	Dzodze
15. Ho-Adabatram	Adabatram	Ho
16. Miwoeneny Habobo	Boboobo	Taviefe-Deme
17. Dunenyo Habobo	Boboobo	Ho-Dome
18. Aflao Brekete	Brekete/Atigeli	Aflao
19. Dzogadze Atsiagbeko	Atsiagbeko	Dzogadze

20. Adaklu-	Adevu/Akpi/	Adaklu-
21. Alavanyo Adevu	Adevu/Akpi/	Alavanyo Wudidi
22. Ziavi Zigi	Zigi/Gbolo/Egbanegba	Ziavi
23. Takla Zigi	Zigi/Gbolo/Avihe	Takla-
24. Dokplala Novinyo	Agbadza/Gota/Kpegisu	Dokplala
25. Dzodze-Afetefe	Akpoka/Gazo/Atrikpui	Dzodze
26. Ave-Xevi	Kpegisu/Gota	Ave-Xevi
27. Tsublu Gorovedu	Goveduha/Brekete/	Dzodze
28. Vudoba Anyigbavedu	Brekete/Anygbaveduha	Vudoba
29. Akpateme Bangrivedu	Bangri/Brekete	Akpateme



1026

**Figure 8-9: Dzodze Didokuiwo Habobo songs recording session**

<sup>1026</sup> Photos by Prosper Agbesi Gbolonyo during one of the field recoding sessions with henowo (lead singers) of Dzodze Didokuiwo Habobo (Dzodze, 6/21/07)



1027

**Figure 8-10: Nyive Akpaluha and Akaye/Avihe Lead Singers**

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<sup>1027</sup> Top: Ghana Nyive Akpalu Habobo members. Bottom: Togo Nyive Akaye/Avihe Lead singers. Photo by N. C. Kofi Hadzi and Komi David Tefe (Ghana and Togo Nyive, 6/16/07)



1028

**Figure 8-11: Anlo Afiadenyigba Gazo and Babashiko Henowo**

<sup>1028</sup> Photos by Prosper Agbesi Gbolonyo during one of the field recoding sessions with Anlo-Afiadenyigba groups. Top: Babasiko Group lead singers. Bottom: Gadzo Group lead singers (Anlo-Afiadenyigba, 6/11/07)



1029

**Figure 8-12: Lead Singers of Tublu Gorovedu Shrine at Dzodze**

<sup>1029</sup> Photos by Prosper Agbesi Gbolonyo and Pascal Kudzo Ahiadzo showing lead singers of Dzodze-Fiagbedu Tublu Gorovedu shrine during religious song recordings (Dzodze, 6/13/07)

## APPENDIX E: LIST OF INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED

### LIST OF INTERVIEWS AND PERSONAL COMMUNICATIONS

NAME	PLACE	DATE
1. S. Datey-Kumodzie	Accra, Ghana	6/7/07
2. S. Datey-Kumodzie	Accra/Pittsburgh (Phone)	1/16/08
3. S. Datey-Kumodzie	Accra/Pittsburgh (Phone)	8/17/08
4. S. Datey-Kumodzie	Accra/Pittsburgh (Phone)	2/12/09
5. Midawo Ashito Asafo	Dzogbefeme, Ghana	8/2/05
6. Midawo Ashito Asafo	Dzogbefeme, Ghana	6/12/07
7. Midawo Ashito Asafo	Dzogbefeme/Pittsburgh (Phone)	8/19/08
8. Midawo Ashito Asafo	Dzogbefeme/Pittsburgh (Phone)	1/12/09
9. Midawo Ashito Asafo	Dzogbefeme/Pittsburgh (Phone)	2/10/09
10. Masa Miheso	Dzodze, Ghana	5/07/07
11. Agbotadua Kumassah	Anlo-Afiadenyigba, Ghana	6/25/05
12. Agbotadua Kumassah	Anlo-Afiadenyigba, Ghana	3/18/03
13. Agbotadua Kumassah	Anlo-Afiadenyigba, Ghana	7/05/05
14. Bokoga Kodzo Kumedzro	Dzodze, Ghana	6/21/07

15. Bokoga Kodzo Kumedzro	Dzodze, Ghana	7/10/05
16. Bokoga Kodzo Kumedzro	Dzodze, Ghana	7/13/05
17. Bokoga Kodzo Kumedzro	Dzodze, Ghana	6/18/03
18. Bokoga Kodzo Kumedzro	Dzodze, Ghana	4/24/03
19. Togbe Kotoko III	Ghana-Nyive, Ghana	6/16/07
20. Kosonde Ameto Gbolonyo	Dzodze, Ghana	4/24/03
21. Kosonde Ameto Gbolonyo	Dzodze, Ghana	5/25/05
22. Kosonde Ameto Gbolonyo	Dzodze, Ghana	5/07/07
23. Kosonde Ameto Gbolonyo	Dzodze, Ghana	6/21/07
24. Kosonde Ameto Gbolonyo	Dzodze/Pittsburgh (Phone)	2/10/09
25. Koku Agbesi	Peki-Ayensu, Ghana	5/15/07
26. Akogo Koku Asafo	Dzogbefime, Ghana	6/12/07
27. Huno K. Afedo	Vudoba, Ghana	6/22/07
28. Fati A. Afedo	Vudoba, Ghana	6/22/07
29. Kodzo Tagbolo	Dzodze/Pittsburgh (Phone)	8/20/08
30. Kodzo Tagbolo	Dzodze, Ghana	5/07/07
31. Kodzo Tagbolo	Dzodze, Ghana	6/21/05
32. Tsiamiga S. Agbedoza	Peki, Ghana	5/14-15/07
33. Huno Sofahu Alaga	Akpateme, Ghana	5/20/07
34. Asomo Seku	Dzodze, Ghana	5/4/07
35. Asomo Seku	Dzodze, Ghana	5/25/07
36. Amega Setsofia	Aflao, Ghana	5/20/07
37. Killa S. Fiebor	Anlo-Afiadenyigba/Pittsburgh (Phone)	2/9/09

38. Killa S. Fiebor	Anlo-Afiadenyigba, Ghana	6/11/07
39. Killa S. Fiebor	Anlo-Afiadenyigba, Ghana	7/7/05
40. Killa S. Fiebor	Anlo-Afiadenyigba, Ghana	3/21/03
41. Dodzi Fianyo	Dzodze, Ghana	6/21/07
42. Koku Mawunyo Alowodor	Dzodze, Ghana	6/21/07
43. Alufa (Boko) Bolu Tublu	Dzodze, Ghana	6/21/07
44. Alufa (Boko) Bolu Tublu	Dzodze, Ghana	6/13/07
45. Openo Gabianoo	Anlo-Afiadenyigba/Pittsburgh (Phone)	2/9/09
46. Openo Gabianoo	Anlo-Afiadenyigba, Ghana	6/11/07
47. Openo Gabianoo	Anlo-Afiadenyigba, Ghana	7/7/05
48. Openo Gabianoo	Anlo-Afiadenyigba, Ghana	3/21/03
49. Komla Ahiayibo Palala	Dzodze, Ghana	6/21/07
50. Kwami Senyo	Ho, Ghana	6/19/07
51. Kwami Dzokoto	Accra, Ghana	6/15/07
52. C. Kwame Kudjordjie	Ho, Ghana	6/18/07
53. C. Kwame Kudjordjie	Ho/Pittsburgh (Phone)	8/18/08
54. Komla N. Dzobo	Ho, Ghana	6/18/07
55. Komla N. Dzobo	Ho/Accra (Phone)	6/21/07
56. "Togbui" Konu B.S. Lamadeku	Accra, Ghana	6/15/07
57. "Togbui" Konu B.S. Lamadeku	Accra/Pittsburgh (Phone)	8/19/08
58. "Togbui" Konu B.S. Lamadeku	Accra/Pittsburgh (Phone)	12/15/08
59. "Togbui" Konu B.S. Lamadeku	Accra/Pittsburgh (Phone)	2/08/09
60. Yibo Seshie	Aflao, Ghana	05/20/07

61. Kofi Nyadi	Aflao, Ghana	05/20/07
62. Agbomashie Seshie	Aflao, Ghana	05/19-20/07
63. Agbomashie Seshie	Aflao, Ghana	03/22/03
64. Agbomashie Seshie	Aflao/Pittsburgh (Phone)	12/15/08
65. Kodzo Ashiabi	Dokplala, Togo	7/8/05
66. Kodzo Ashiabi	Dokplala, Togo	5/18/07
67. Kodzo Ashiabi	Dzodze, Ghana	6/14/07
68. Minawo Akosonshie Agbalekpor	Dzodze, Ghana	2/12/02
69. Minawo Akosonshie Agbalekpor	Dzodze, Ghana	6/10/03
70. Minawo Akosonshie Agbalekpor	Dzodze, Ghana	6/20/05
71. Minawo Akosonshie Agbalekpor	Dzodze, Ghana	5/5/07
72. Minawo Akosonshie Agbalekpor	Dzodze/Pittsburgh (Phone)	7/06/08
73. Nissio Fiagbedzi	Accra, Ghana	7/03/05
74. Togbi Dey	Dzodze, Ghana	5/6/07
75. Kodzo Buku Agbalekpor	Dzodze, Ghana	7/01/05
76. Agbodzinshie Kamassah	Dzogbefime, Ghana	6/12/07
77. Kofitse Dekpe	Dzodze, Ghana	8/3/99
78. Kofitse Dekpe	Dzodze, Ghana	2/21/01
79. Kofitse Dekpe	Dzodze, Ghana	7/23/05
80. Kofitse Dekpe	Dzodze, Ghana	6/14/07
81. Nanevi Maweta	Ho, Ghana	6/18/07
82. Afebi Agbalekpor-Gbolonyo "Sonkake"	Dzodze, Ghana	6/21/07
83. Afebi Agbalekpor-Gbolonyo "Sonkake"	Dzodze, Ghana (Phone)	12/07/05

84. Afefi Agbalekpor-Gbolonyo “Sonkake” Dzodze, Ghana		3/22/03
85. Afefi Agbalekpor-Gbolonyo “Sonkake” Dzodze/Pittsburgh (Phone)		1/24/09
86. Abla Danyo	Ghana-Nyive, Ghana	6/16/07
87. Davi Amanu Atafi	Togo-Nyive, Togo	6/16/07
88. Kosi Edudzi Tefe	Togo-Nyive, Togo	6/16/07



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**Figure 8-13: Prof. S. Datey-Kumodzie**

<sup>1030</sup> Professor Datey-Kumordzie explaining a philosophical concept during one of the interviews. Photo by the author (Accra, 6/7/07)



1031

**Figure 8-14: Rt. Rev Prof N. Komla Dzobo and Kofi Gbolonyo**

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<sup>1031</sup> The author poses with Prof Dzobo after an interview. Photo by Divine Kwasi Gbagbo (Ho, 6/18/07)



1032

**Figure 8-15: Kodzo Ashiabi and Kofitse Dekpe**

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<sup>1032</sup> Kodzo Ashiabi (left) and Kofitse Dekpe (right), both clan and traditional religious elders in Dokplala, Togo and Dzodze/Weta, Ghana(respectively), pose for this picture at the funeral of Akosonshie Agbalekpor (in *Tsiefe*: RIP) in Dzodze. Photo by Agbesi Prosper Gbolonyo (Dzodze, 9/16/07)

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## Websites (Online Resources)

- African Missions Resource Center:* <http://africamissions.org>
- Alokli West African Dance:* <http://www.alokli.com/index.html>
- Anlo-Ewe Ethnography:* <http://www.dancedrummer.com/anlo.html>
- Atideka:* <http://www.atidekate.com/Volta/Ewe.html>
- Azaguno:* <http://www.azaguno.com/pages/zelma.html>
- Blackhud Research Center:* <http://www.hypertextile.net/blakhud/index.htm>
- Cepafrika:* <http://www.cepafrika.org>
- Community Empowerment Project:* <http://www.cepafrika.org>
- Council of Ewe Associations of North America:* <http://www.ceanaonline.org>
- Dancedrummer.com:* <http://www.dancedrummer.com>
- Dzodze:* <http://www.dzodze.com>
- Ghanaian Association of South Florida:* <http://www.ghanafloida.org>
- Ho-Asorgli:* <http://www.music.sdsu.edu/african/index.html>
- Ho-Asorgli:* <http://www.hoasogli.com>
- Indigenous Studies African Anthropology:*  
[http://www.archaeolink.com/indigenous\\_anthropology\\_africa\\_i.htm](http://www.archaeolink.com/indigenous_anthropology_africa_i.htm)
- Institute for Music and Development:* <http://www.imdghana.org>
- Introduction to Anlo-Ewe Culture and History:*  
<http://www.cnmat.berkeley.edu/~ladzekpo/index.html>
- The Anlo-Ewe Music of West Africa:* <http://music.calarts.edu/~aladzekp/alfred.html>
- The African Guide:* <http://www.africaguide.com/culture>
- The Ewe Culture: Bridging Cultures:* <http://www.bridgingdevelopment.org/culture.html>
- Wikipedia The Free Encyclopedia:* [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ewe\\_music](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ewe_music)
- Zadonu:* <http://www.zadonu.com>

**Discography (Sound Recordings) and Videography/Filmography (DVD, Video, and Film Recordings)**

*Drum Gahu: Good-time Dance Music from the Ewe People of Ghana and Togo.* Arranged by Godwin Agbeli, and produced by David Locke, WCM 9494. Tempe, AZ: White Cliffs Media Co., 1994. CD

*Ewe Drumming From Ghana: The Soup Which Is Sweet Draws the Chairs in Closer.* Recorded by James Burns. Published by Topic Records under World and Traditional Section of the British Library Sound Archive, 2005. CD

*Ewe Music of Ghana.* Recorded by S. K. Ladzekpo. New York, NY: Asch Records, 1969. LP

*Ewe Notsie Migration: Hogbetsotso.* Recorded by C.K Kudjordjie (“Papavi Hogbedeto”). Ho, Ghana: Rizo Linos Records, 2005

*Ghana: Rhythms of the People: Traditional Music and Dance of the Ewe, Dagbamba, Fante, and Ga People.* Recorded and produced by Paschal Yao Younge. Published under Music of the Earth Series by Multicultural Media. MCM 2000, 3018, ISBN: 002930132. 2000. CD.

*Kpegisu: A War Drum of the Ewe; Featuring Godwin Agbeli with Victoria Wombie & David Locke;* produced and directed by David Locke. Tempe, AZ: White Cliffs Media Co. Distributed by Talman Co. 1990. Videocassette.

*Music and Dance of Ghana, West Africa.* Presented by Agbekor Drum and Dance Society. Cambridge, MA: Conitnental Cablevision. 1989. Videocassette.

*Rhythms of the People: Traditional Music and Dance of the Ewe, Dagbamba, Fante, and Ga People.* Recorded by Paschal Yao Younge. Barre, VT: Multicultural Media. 2000. CD.

*Songs of war and death from the Slave Coast: Abutia Kloe, Ewe, Ghana.* Recording organized by Michael Verdon and Larry Christopherson. New York: Ethnic Folkways Records. 1982. LP

*Traditional Drumming and Dances of Ghana.* Recorded by John Tanson. New York: Folkways. 1976. LP

*Togo: Music from West Africa.* Cambridge, MA: Rounder. 1992. CD

*Yeve: Ritual Music and Dance of A Secret Society.* Recorded and Produced by Paschal Yao Younge. MSFS Volume One, published by Prizm Media Group, 2002. CD.