

# **The Rise and Fall of Dansuomu**

A thesis submitted by

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## Abstract

Dansuomu, a traditional item of repertoire among the Akan of Ghana, has an interesting relationship to the Ashanti Region during the years surrounding Ghanaian Independence. Through the political actions of Kwame Nkrumah, first Prime Minister and President of Ghana, and the innovative reactions of the Ashanti people, Dansuomu flourished with great popularity from the 1950s to the 1970s until it mysteriously faded from common practice. *The Rise and Fall of Dansuomu* is an ethnomusicological work that focuses on the political and developmental history of Dansuomu as it experienced rapid development towards frequent use in the communal events of Ashanti society, including weddings, funerals, and annual festivals. Employing research from academic resources, fieldwork in Kumasi, Ghana during the summer of 2016, and the practice of Dansuomu at Tufts University and Kumasi's Center for National Culture, the material of this project serves to add a humble narrative of historical significance to the limited body of knowledge available on Dansuomu.

## Acknowledgements

The completion of this research project, taking the sum total of one and a half years, would not have been possible without the aid of some very important and generous people. Firstly, I am forever grateful to my advisor, Professor David Locke, whose knowledge and experience in Ghanaian music has proved to be an unending and admirable resource. Through his direction and assistance, I have been given many opportunities of learning that I could not have imagined before entering the Master's program at Tufts University. I also extend a warm thank you to Professor Attah Poku, Tufts' Ghanaian artist in residence, whose teaching of dance drumming has been exciting and motivating. If it weren't for Prof Poku's guidance and kindness in Ghana, as well, the information available to me would never have reached the level that it did, and the project as a whole would be much more limited. Further, I'd like to thank the members of the Center for National Culture's performance group, who welcomed me in friendship and openly answered my questions, as well as collectively aided in my learning of/about Dansuomu. Likewise, I appreciate the performance and interviews given by members of the Twedie ensemble, as well as the information given to me by Nana Safo, former artistic director for the Cultural Center. I'd like to thank Professors Jeffrey Summit and Kwasi Ampene, whose wisdom and teaching moments I will carry far

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## **Introduction: Methods and Motivations**

### **Why Dansuomu?**

When I arrived at Tufts University in fall of 2015, I was fresh out of an undergraduate program in which I had studied and written a thesis about Voodoo and ritual in New Orleans, Louisiana.<sup>1</sup> Much of the music I was hearing and learning about had been brought to the city from Haiti, and thus I spent time trying to get acquainted with the ever-flowing polyrhythmic percussion and singing that had accompanied many of the events I attended. The majority of that research came from a place of observation and literature in academia; therefore, I was excited to introduce a stronger element of bimusicality<sup>2</sup> to my scholastic pursuits while at Tufts through the Kiniwe! African Drum and Dance Ensemble lead by Professor Attah Poku, as well as in the classroom with my advisor, Professor David Locke. Taking classes with both of them throughout my semesters at Tufts provided an invaluable physical and mental introduction to various styles of remarkable Ghanaian traditional music. Under the leadership and tutelage of Prof. Poku, a lifelong percussionist at Manhyia Palace for the Ashanti royal family as well one of the top

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<sup>1</sup> Barnes-Duke, Harriet. 2015. *Voodoo Fire: The Multifaceted Nature of Voodoo in New Orleans*. New College of Florida Library, Sarasota, FL.

<sup>2</sup> For more on bimusicality see: Hood, Mantle. 1966. *The Quest for Norms in Ethnomusicology*. Washington: Pan American Union. Print.

members of the Amamresso Agofomma at Kumasi's Center for National Culture, I learned the basics of performance, i.e., drum parts, songs, dance and dress, for several traditional items of repertoire from the Ashanti Region among others. Prof. Locke, also experienced in learning and researching African music for decades whose accumulated knowledge and keen development of analysis has been an endless resource, provided for a mental exploration through Ewe and Dagomba traditions with emphasis on hearing and playing the music as well as interpretive analysis and notation style. Surrounded by these two experts of Ghanaian music, I began to become more familiar with the music and dance and certainly became more aware of the vibrancy, grace, power, and beauty within it.

Dansuomu was my first performative introduction to Ghanaian music, and consequently has become one of my favorites. Through this piece<sup>3</sup> I engaged with the cyclic rhythms of percussion, sweeping songs, and storytelling dances of traditional Ghanaian music. I spent many hard hours over the course of two years to learn and perform Dansuomu in different settings, including the end-of-semester Kiniwe concerts, Tufts' Akan Festival which celebrated the music and traditions of the Akan of

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<sup>3</sup> There is some concern about what to label the traditional items of repertoire such as Dansuomu. While options such as 'genre' have been suggested to me, I have chosen 'piece' for the sake of ease of reading, and I will continue to use it for the duration of the thesis. I recognize this is not a solution, only a temporary placement until the time when a term is agreed on or deemed appropriate.

Ghana, the retirement celebration of Abraham Adzenyah at Wesleyan University, and community events such as town meetings and educational gatherings. No doubt I am still a fledgling of the craft, but my love for the piece has only grown since the beginning. Therefore, when Prof. Locke suggested I travel to the Ashanti Region to do fieldwork for Dansuomu, I could hardly take time to think before jumping at the chance. From that moment I began to collect resources about Ashanti music, economy, history, and societal structures while also making travel and accommodation plans. I was fortunate in that Prof. Poku was also in the region during my stay, and all introductions, travel, and inquiry were made very smooth for me as first-time visitor of Ghana. Upon realizing that Dansuomu was nearly a deceased practice in Kumasi and having found no reference to it in academic literature, I knew this project was going to be an interesting one.

### **Methods of Study**

As is customary with ethnomusicology, my research accumulated information through both reviewing relevant literature and conducting fieldwork that included practiced bimusicality. In the university setting, I took five iterations of Tuft's Kiniwe Ensemble with Prof. Poku and have spent one year as a new member of the Agbekor Drum and Dance Society founded by Prof. Locke and with Prof. Poku as its current artistic

director. Although Dansuomu has not been the exclusive focus of these groups, the practice with various forms of dance and different styles of music in Ghana has helped me develop my ear and musical abilities. Also at and through Tufts, I worked with the academic material that allowed me to know where to begin in terms of discussing Dansuomu and how to express the relevance of my research findings. Because I came into my Master's program with only having heard Ghanaian Highlife and knowing vague themes of the country's history, I waded through piles of books about Ghana, especially within the field of ethnomusicology with additions of anthropological, political, and historical texts. While countless of these texts added general impressions to my knowledge of Ghana, a particular few proved to be the most beneficial. For politico-historical information, I relied primarily on *The History of Ghana* by Roger Gocking, as well as Ama Biney's *The Political and Social Thought of Kwame Nkrumah* and *Building the Ghanaian Nation State; Kwame Nkrumah's Symbolic Nationalism* by Fuller Harcourt. Raymond Williams' *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* gave me a good set of terminology with which to discuss Dansuomu's societal functions, while Eric Hobsbawm's *Invention of Traditions* provided a concept of tradition that was applicable to the piece's development in the Ashanti Region during Independence. I would have been remiss not to draw from the great works of J.H. Kwabena Nketia, especially *African Music in Ghana*, as well as Kwasi

*Ampene's Female Song Tradition and the Akan of Ghana: the Creative Process in Nnwonkoro.*

These literary resources, while highly valuable, were only secondary to my experience in the field. In addition to my work with Dansuomu in the United States, I was fortunate enough to spend a month abroad in Kumasi, Ghana during the summer of 2016 for further study. While my time there wasn't long, my experiences were invaluable. Through the introduction of Prof. Poku, I worked with the Center for National Culture's premiere performance group, the Amamresso Agofomma. With the performers, I had song and dance lessons, the opportunity to practice daily with the group, and the pleasure of performing with them frequently during my visit. The group also allowed me to record and participate in two commissioned performances of Dansuomu. I also met, interviewed and recorded members of the Twedie Dansuomu ensemble, who are one of the only remaining ensembles in Kumasi today who perform Dansuomu, although very infrequently. My primary sources for historical and aesthetic information about Dansuomu were Nana Safo, former artistic director for the Cultural Center, and Akuah Twereboa, leader of the Twedie ensemble. Sister Abena, the 'mother figure' of the Amamresso Agofomma, was my main teacher and a wonderful singer and dancer, while Prof. Poku gave me lessons in the percussion parts and techniques associated with Dansuomu. I was not only learning from

friendly company, but made many friends and benefited from the openness of many people whom I have come to greatly respect. I was able to interview elders and youths alike about their relationships to Dansuomu as well as the other items of traditional repertoire, and learned much about the piece that I would never have understood without stepping foot in Ghana.

### **What is Dansuomu?**

The Dansuomu that I was originally taught, as well as the versions that I encountered in Kumasi, is a sweet combination of leader and group vocals, a set of percussion instruments playing cyclic poly- and cross-rhythms, and a male/female dance that tells a story of playful courtship or a freestyle dance of a similar nature. The unique thing about Dansuomu is that the piece features as the leading instrument a large calabash--dried, halved, and then placed with the concave curve facing down into a large basin of water to be struck with a rubber-ended stick. This is how the piece received its name; *da* meaning 'under' and *nsuo* meaning 'water.' The sounds produced are simultaneously warm and booming, and each strike can create a range of pitches if the player raises or submerges the gourd into the water. The calabash is accompanied by a hand drum and several idiophones, as well as several pairs of bamboo clappers.<sup>4</sup> In the

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<sup>4</sup> More details on the ensemble in Chapter 3.

performance of the piece, the women primarily dance and sing while playing rattle or clappers, while the men play the majority of the instruments and dance.

What I knew of Dansuomu before interviewing group leaders and historians in Ghana, was that the piece was very popular at funerals, weddings, and festivals up to the 1980s, but that it was strangely nowhere to be found in current day. In my endeavor to flesh out what had happened to the piece that I had loved performing and that I was told used to be quite popular, the resources of both knowledgeable and kind individuals and socio-political literature on Ghana lead me to understand that the answer could be found in the timing of Dansuomu's popularity in the Ashanti Region and Ghana's political history.

### **When is Dansuomu?**

Establishing the historical timing is very important to this, and every, ethnomusicological inquiry. Because Dansuomu often is classified as a "traditional" art form, it is at risk of being portrayed as something that has been maintained in exact fashion from the beginning of its existence. As with any tradition, this stagnancy of practice is not possible. The historical dynamism of Dansuomu is particularly striking, as it arose in a new iteration of performance culture in the Ashanti Region as recently as the early 1950s. While the Ashanti Dansuomu that I came to know

incorporates both music and dance, as well as men and women, I learned while in Ghana that the piece was adapted from an older Akan form of women's recreational music. Therefore, below I briefly lay out some relevant historical background information so that the reader is aware of Ashanti action throughout the history of Ghana and at which moment in time the version of Dansuomu that I have studied was growing and becoming favored. This is merely a very brief sketch.

In the pre-colonial 1600s of Ghana's history, the states belonging to the Akan<sup>5</sup> were largely dominated by both the people of Denkyira and Ashanti. According to Roger Gocking, the 1670s saw a gathering together of chiefs under the military leader, Osei Tutu, whose goal was to establish control over the trading city of current-day Kumasi. The successful capture of power over Kumasi brought the leaders of the various Akan groups into closer contact and Osei Tutu wished to effect a political unification by means of divine intervention. Therefore, together with his spiritual advisor, Okomfo Anokye, Osei Tutu manifested the Golden Stool of the Ashanti. With this magical stool came a charter of governance, which set up Ashanti royals and the king known as the Asantehene, as the cultural leaders of the Ashanti Region (Gocking 2005, 22). The Portuguese had arrived and settled in Ghana two centuries before this in 1471. They established ports on the 'Gold Coast,' which became means of exporting

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<sup>5</sup> The grouping of Akan people in Ghana incorporates several smaller ethnic groups

cash crops and enslaved people from fortifications such as El Mina in Cape Coast. From that time forward, power in the country shifted from the center towards polities in the coastal areas, with whom the Ashanti fought for dominance. In the early 1800s, the British had gained control over the relatively Europeanized coastal areas, but battled with Ashantis for access to lucrative resources such as gold, ivory and enslaved people. They struggled for power from the 1820s to the 1870s, when the British military finally entered and burned Kumasi, resulting in the colonizing of the Ashanti kingdom.

During colonial rule, the Ashanti pride suffered a great offense when in 1896 the Asantehene, or Ashanti King, was captured along with some of his divisional chiefs and sent out of the country. This occurred as a rebuttal to the actions of the Ashanti's, who had refused to accept British advisors (2005, 45). In the early 1900s, newly appointed Governor Sir Frederic Hodgson demanded that the Golden Stool be handed over to the British to circumvent any attempt by the Ashantis to replace their exiled leader. According to Gocking, "[t]o the Asante the Golden Stool was more than a throne. It was seen as a symbol of Asante nationhood containing all of their *sunsum*, or souls, and consequently this demand was seen as a great insult. Under the leadership of the Queen Mother, Yaa Asantewaa, the Asante besieged the British in their fort in Kumasi, and several months of hard fighting followed before the revolt was put down" (2005, 47). Nana

Yaa was expatriated along with a host of other Ashantis, except for those that were kept on Cape Coast for the time of their capture. Yaa Asantewaa, forever depicted carrying a rifle for her courage and leadership in battle, is a powerful female figure in Ashanti history, whose importance as a cultural heroine has surely influenced the prowess of women in musical creation and performances such as Dansuomu. It wasn't until 1924 that the Prempeh I, the exiled King, was allowed back into the heart of Ashanti land with his familiars. During this time, mission churches and colonial administrators worked to educate Ghanaians in a European fashion and supported the economic boom of the early 1900s due to increased production of goods and trade.

Coming out of involvement in World War II and affected by cocoa prices from the Great Depression, the British and the citizens of the Gold Coast Colony instituted a series of reforms. A growing wave of nationalists began to push to have inherent jurisdiction to which the British government responded by creating a new constitution in 1944. During this time, political parties were formed with the purpose of having dialogues aimed at achieving independence from Britain. In 1947, the United Gold Coast Convention was established with Kwame Nkrumah serving as the secretary for the organization. From this position, Nkrumah formed his own party, the Convention People's Party and eventually became the Prime Minister of Ghana. Further upon independence in 1957, he became

the first President of Ghana. Nkrumah's actions during the period when he was vying for power, especially with Asanti opponents, facilitated the conditions for Dansuomu to become a staple of Ashanti performance practice. Circumstances of modern history took the piece from what was a recreational music style to a nationally recognized form that was used for Ashanti community events and cultural festivals.

### **Chapter Layout**

The following chapters contain deeper information with respect to the Ashanti development of Dansuomu in the 1950s, the significance of its lifespan, and the musical qualities that make the piece so sweet. To the best of my ability and with limited experience with Ghanaian music in practice, I hope to contribute to an understanding of the piece's political relevance and its why it rapidly rose to popularity before slowly fading into disuse. Having established a brief historical background in this introduction, I further discuss Dansuomu in a historical light in Chapter One: Passing of Hands. This chapter follows the chronological development of Dansuomu in the Ashanti Region as it relates to the political action of Kwame Nkrumah and the social changes that occurred in Ghana starting in the early 1950s. This chapter lays out the relationship between Dansuomu and its relation to another piece, Adowa, which it replaced for a time during the push for Ghanaian Independence. In

Chapter Two: Make It Sweet, I attempt to piece together a vision of Dansuomu as it fits, or rather fit, into Ashanti society. This includes a discussion of Nnwonkoro, a performance practice that developed from late-night recreational music to an official ensemble frequently used in funeral celebrations, in a parallel fashion to Dansuomu. The final Chapter Three: Sing Higher!, highlights features of the music of the piece as they relate to Ashanti aesthetics.

The thesis as a whole, although I could not have known this at the onset of the project, has come to serve not as an in-depth musical or cultural analysis of Dansuomu, but rather as a means of showing a setting in which politics, history, and music combine to form a deep relationship in the Ashanti Region.

## Chapter 1: Passing of Hands

### Political Upheaval and Social Change

Dansuomu is, or more accurately was, part of a larger Ashanti repertoire performed to honor the Asantehene (or court royals) and entertain communal figures during cultural events such as weddings, funerals, and festivals. While Dansuomu may be categorized as traditional with respect to its societal position, it is important to note that its earliest appearances were in the 1950s. Its relative recency does not disqualify the piece from status as "traditional," but rather allows an opportunity to look deeper into the circumstances of its creation within a recent historic timeframe. Its recent creation also allows for first-hand accounts from people who were part of the peak of Dansuomu's relevance to Ashanti culture and performance.

As I began the research the historic narrative of Dansuomu initially appeared to me as a mysterious phenomenon of rapid popularity and gentle decline rather than the story of one component of a larger traditional repertoire that was established<sup>6</sup> centuries before. Undoubtedly this air of mystery was due, in part from ethnomusicology's general lack of awareness of Dansuomu and lack of knowledge about the particulars of its decline. Adding to that point is the strange fact that this piece was beloved

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<sup>6</sup> Keeping in mind the fluidity of traditions and natural tendencies to change and adapt through time.

and performed frequently from the 1950s to the 1970s, yet was unknown to any Ghanaian, or Ashanti, outside of a performance troupe that I spoke with in Kumasi in 2016. Its brief existence as a staple of Ashanti cultural repertoire is not as curious as it seemed at first, however, as I was told through interviews with those who took part in the height of Dansuomu's popularity. According to them<sup>7</sup>, the political and social environment surrounding the piece's history reveal a shape of the conditions that directly influenced Dansuomu's rise and fall. Ghana was undergoing a political upheaval, i.e., independence from British colonial rule, just before Dansuomu took form. Much of the reason for its formation relied on the actions and social thought of Kwame Nkrumah and his influence as Prime Minister and first President of the 'new' nation of Ghana. Incorporating Afro- and Eurocentric perspectives of the political thought of Kwame Nkrumah, as well as personal interviews and vignettes, this chapter seeks to examine the politico-cultural environment that brought Dansuomu to life for Ashanti people.

### **Nkrumah's Hand**

As history will attest, public perceptions of significant political figures tend to shift as time moves forward. The sentiments, both

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<sup>7</sup> Primarily Nana Safo, former director and historian for Kumasi's Center for National Culture, as well as elder members of the Twedie Troupe who still perform Dansuomu today.

nationally and internationally, surrounding Kwame Nkrumah's influences on Ghanaian political structure, as well as cultural and economic values during the time of independence and his presidency, are complicated and multifaceted. While he is often praised for his unwavering pursuit of promoting the 'African' as a sophisticated and valuable member of modern society, he is also scrutinized for his tendency toward authoritarian rule<sup>8</sup>. It is not my intention, however, to argue for or against his political ethics, but rather to connect his practices to the trajectory of Dansuomu as it rose to popularity and slowly faded from Ashanti repertoire. In order to trace as clear a relationship as possible, I outline the actions and political thought of Nkrumah that are relevant to Dansuomu's history subsequently. The narrative at hand is one of connecting Nkrumah's nationalist-driven actions with tensions among the Ashanti, which led to violence and political opposition that would provide the catalyst for Dansuomu's creation.

### West African Nationalism

According to Ama Biney in *The Political and Social Thought of Kwame Nkrumah*,<sup>9</sup> Nkrumah was born to an Akan family of little means; however, his mother pushed for her son to receive a decent education. He

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<sup>8</sup> Fuller, Harcourt. 2014. *Building the Ghanaian Nation-State: Kwame Nkrumah's Symbolic Nationalism*. Palgrave Macmillan, New York, New York.

<sup>9</sup> Biney, Ama. 2011. *The Political and Social Thought of Kwame Nkrumah*. Palgrave Macmillan, New York City, New York.

began attending the Government Training College at the age of 17 and mentoring under Dr. James Kwegyir Aggrey, who was perhaps the first strong provoker of Nkrumah's nationalist ideals. Following Dr. Aggrey's untimely passing, Nkrumah decided to further his studies in the U.S. at Lincoln University, pursuing a degree in Philosophy and Pan-Africanism. While receiving his university education, Nkrumah became enthralled and greatly influenced by the politico-philosophical works of Karl Marx, Vladimir Lenin, and Marcus Garvey. Biney claims that Nkrumah's experience of racism in the States, as well as his intellectual adoration of socialist thought, drove him to become a serious follower of Garvey's Black Nationalist movement, and further, motivated him to become the President of the newly formed Association of African Students. In the early 1940s, while pursuing a Master's degree in Philosophy at the University of Pennsylvania, Nkrumah published "The History and Philosophy of Imperialism," and "Mind and Thought in Primitive Society: A Study in Ethno-Philosophy with Special Reference to the Akan Peoples of the Gold Coast, West Africa" (Biney 2011, p.22-25).

Following a decade in the United States, Nkrumah departed to London with the intention to study law. His aspirations quickly shifted back to leadership and politics, however. Upon landing in England Nkrumah aligned himself with Joe Appiah and George Padmore, an important Ghanaian politician-lawyer and an influential Pan-Africanist, respectively.

Through his connections with these men, and other die-hard individuals organized around ideals of African freedom from colonialism, Nkrumah accepted a position as the President of WASU, the West African Students Union, in 1945. Two years later, he published a monograph titled *Towards Colonial Freedom*. Concurrently, Nkrumah became the secretary for WANS, the West African National Secretariat, as well as participated in the 5th Pan-African Conference held in Manchester, during which time he was scrutinized by fellow members of the conference for being too communist in his political approach to freeing West Africa from Great Britain (2011, p.30). While Nkrumah was forced to publicly step back from his deep socialist beliefs for the sake of keeping good ties with the United States and Great Britain, his personal politics were given outlet through his devotion to Pan-Africanism.

### Pan-Africanism

In D. Zizwe Poe's 2003 publication, *Kwame Nkrumah's Contribution to Pan-Africanism; An Afrocentric Analysis*, Pan-Africanism is defined as "a set of ideas and actions that seek to establish an optimal zone for macro-African agency...Some authors have also described it as an ideology. In this book, it is made synonymous with the African Personality, African Genius, and African Community as described by Nkrumah" (2003, p11). The concept of African Personality that was developed in the late

1800s, i.e., the delineation of African and non-African, was the foundation for Nkrumah's idea of the Collective African Personality. In his promotion of the African as similar within the continent and dissimilar to people of other continents, Nkrumah transcended racist notions choosing to base his ideas on sociocultural influences and hegemonic power structures<sup>10</sup> (2003, p10). Nkrumah sought refuge from the disadvantages of colonialism through freedom from Britain's political power over West Africa, and in order to accomplish this goal, he projected "a call to the West African masses...to mobilize through nonviolent methods in a national liberation movement for the establishment of national independence and economic freedom" (Biney 2011, p34).

What's more, he wanted to promote Africa globally as a modern, independent, and unified continent. Symbolically, Nkrumah's Pan-Africanism is visible in Ghana today, through printed stamps and currency that exhibit important people and events of Africa as an imagined united nation<sup>11</sup>. Yet he presented himself as a figure who also put stock in maintaining cultural traditions. Nkrumah walked a fine line of negotiating what was necessary to promote unity within West Africa and what he saw as being uniquely important to various ethnic groups throughout the

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<sup>10</sup> Nkrumah replaced racist notions of difference with those informed by social climate and the specific kinds of hegemonic oppression present in West Africa, for example slavery, colonialism, and the economic disadvantages that came as consequences to oppression.

<sup>11</sup> Fuller, Harcourt. 2014. *Building the Ghanaian Nation-State: Kwame Nkrumah's Symbolic Nationalism*. Palgrave Macmillan, New York, New York.

region. Despite his seeming hesitations to deny or overlook cultural differences in Ghana upon his return to the country, it is clear through his political actions that Nkrumah fought vigorously for Ghanaian independence via a quickly developing authoritarian governance strategy. For example, shortly after his election to presidency, he enforced laws such as granting police the right to jail individuals for up to five years without trial and claiming all disrespectful acts against the president as criminal offenses<sup>12</sup>. This uncompromising political attitude may have been necessary to break the final barriers between Great Britain and the newly independent nation-state of Ghana, but it also caused Nkrumah to butt heads with people in the Ashanti region over economic, cultural, and political control.

#### Ashanti Political Opposition

The history of the Ashanti region<sup>13</sup> has a certain political and territorial complexity that lends itself to the development of simultaneous Ashanti pride in war, performance of cultural aesthetics, and resources, as well as envelopment of other Ghanaian ethnic groups. The economic value of gold dust and cash crops emanating from the region, not to mention the development of the slave trade, brought the Gold Coast to the

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<sup>12</sup><http://www.dw.com/en/ghanas-kwame-nkrumah-visionary-authoritarian-ruler-and-national-hero/a-19070359>

<sup>13</sup> Refer to the Introduction

attention of colonials, who both fought against and coordinated with the Ashanti people frequently. The Ashanti polity was both part of the overall anti-colonial effort by the leaders of the Gold Coast Colony as well as its own interest group. As Ghana approached independence in the 1940s and 1950s, the Ashanti people sought political liberation, economic gain through regional control of resources, and freedom of cultural expression. Some Ashanti's wanted power within the newly created nation of Ghana. Nkrumah saw Ashanti interests as a threat to his pan-ethnic vision of the post-independent Ghana because he wanted to spread the wealth of the Ashanti region throughout Ghana, raising up the poor of less endowed areas. While Nkrumah was extremely instrumental in carrying out the independence so desired by Ghanaians, his politics also threatened the realization of Ashanti control over Ashanti resources.

Upon Nkrumah's return to Ghana in 1947, he accepted a position within the United Gold Coast Convention, which consisted largely of Ghanaian elites. Nkrumah realized that his alignment with the UGCC was based in political motivation that counteracted his socialist beliefs, and quickly branched off from the party to form what would become the UGCC's direct political opponent. The Convention People's Party, formed in 1955, was made up of Ghanaian members unassociated with the chiefs and royals of the country, organized toward the betterment of the nation as a whole through allocations and divisions of goods and economic

success to all. For example, “Nkrumah and his government viewed cocoa revenue as national property to be fairly redistributed in the economic improvement of the entire country via central control” (Biney 2011, p.51) This ‘betterment for the many through the wealth of the few’ was problematic to the Ashanti people because most of the resources that would be relied on by all of Ghana would extend outward from the Ashanti Region. In order to counteract Nkrumah’s growing movement toward nationalist independence, the National Liberation Movement took shape among concerned Ashantis. Biney describes the opposition of the NLM to the CPP party succinctly:

The tumultuous years of 1954 through 1957 saw a violent political confrontation between the National Liberation Movement (NLM), which was formed on September, 1954, and the Convention People’s Party (CPP) government. The causes that gave rise to this movement were rooted in a complex emergence of material and regional interests in the country. The loss of Asante’s historic hegemony over a country it once ruled, in addition to the fact that a large proportion of the country’s major exports (gold, timber, and cocoa) originated in the Asante region fueled Asante grievances. (2011, p.65)

Nearing the moment that would inaugurate Ghana’s first Prime Minister under British rule, tensions came to a head between the NLM and

the CPP, resulting in violent confrontations and attacks. In Kumasi, 1955, Nkrumah and close members of his party barely escaped an explosion directed at his mother's home. The culprits behind the assault were not caught or discovered, but it was believed by Nkrumah to have been NLM sympathizers. Despite his devotion to a democratic election process, the opposition he faced from Ashanti groups and the threats to his life and that of his family surely colored his personal grievances, which perhaps pushed him harder to fight for his place as head of political decision making in Ghana. The violence Nkrumah physically and metaphorically endured during his presidency continued in this fashion, as at least six reported attempts of assassination were made on his life and honorary statues of him were under constant threat of being turned to rubble. Many of the actual and planned attacks were spearheaded by Ashanti individuals (Fuller 2014, p.150).

### The Catalyst

It was during the three years leading up to Nkrumah's presidency in 1960 that Dansuomu was shaped into an Ashanti tradition from a larger Akan tradition. Ironically, Nkrumah provided the impetus for its conception. According to Nana Safo, previous director of the Center for National Culture in Kumasi, in an interview conducted on July 27, 2016, Nkrumah's popularity suffered the most in the Ashanti region for reasons stated

above, as well as his lack of entertainment appeal. The National Liberation Movement platform, on the other hand, employed beloved cultural repertoires to attract attention to their party. Nana Safo claimed that the opposing party specifically “used Adowa drumming and dancing to attract a lot of people; even those with their walking sticks get up and dance.” Having lived near this period as a child, as well as having been a historian for the Cultural Center, Nana Safo stated as fact<sup>14</sup> that Nkrumah saw the appeal of Adowa to large crowds as a serious threat to his presidential campaign. Using his power as Prime Minister in the late 1950s, Nkrumah officially banned the public performance of Adowa, momentarily quieting his opposition. Despite his brief success, he perhaps did not count on Ashanti resistance and ingenuity.

### **Adowa in Exile**

Before and after its stint in exile, Adowa was an important staple of Ashanti traditional repertoire. It is often performed at communal events, such as funerals and festivals. The combination of dance, drum, and song forms what might be termed devotional toward the chiefs and important people of Ashanti. In *A Handbook on Asante Culture*, which I picked up from Kumasi’s Center for National Culture bookstore, Osei Kwadwo describes Adowa as a “dance [that] is played everywhere in the Asante

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<sup>14</sup> I have not been able to find any historical text that substantiates this fact; however, I have found no reason to question the truth of the statement.

kingdom. Every town or village can organise the dance. Approval is not sought from anybody to organise Adowa dance. It is National Property” (2002, p.110). Although not an explicit criticism of Nkrumah’s actions, Mr. Kwadwo is perhaps concluding his brief mention of Adowa with a statement backed sentiments commonly found among the Ashanti people; Adowa is an inalienable heritage, something that cannot be taken away from the people who carried their knowledge into present time.

The importance of Adowa as a symbol of Akan culture before independence is not acutely clear to me, having gathered no ethnographic data in the moments leading up to Adowa’s banishment in the 1950s. Having heard from elders of the communities I primarily learned from while in Kumasi, I think it fair to say that the sentiments toward the dance in current day may reflect sentiments of the past. I include an Adowa vignette from my summer in Kumasi, during which time presidential campaigning for the 2017 election had begun. The event, I believe, demonstrates Adowa’s significance in representing Ghana’s national culture, as well as its current-day relationship to politics.

#### Zongo Community Gargayiya Festival

During the summer of 2016, I attended an annual festival held in Kumasi’s Jubilee Park, a spacious outdoor stone arena open to sky and

sun. The Gargayiya Festival<sup>15</sup> honors various cultural aspects of the Zongo community of Ghana. Zongo is both a neighborhood in Kumasi as well as the overarching name of a community in Ghana with bases in familial ties to the Northern Region as well as Islamic religious beliefs.<sup>16</sup> The festival begins with a parade of chiefs that stems from the outskirts of the surrounding neighborhood and coalesces into one mass of colorfully adorned troupes and attendees packed around the barrier of the park. A raised stage is centrally located, the platform present for performances to be seen by the community members who were organized under tents of various groups and their leaders. The performances follow and continue for hours with brief pauses for announcements. It is difficult to give the festival a range of hours, as it surely varies each year; yet, it is safe to say that darkness had begun to encroach as the events of the day disseminated, and night nipped at our heels when we finally walked home.

At this particular festival, (former) President John Dramani Mahama attended and declared it an official addition to Ghana's yearly calendar of national events. In reaction to this announcement, the uproarious crowd, which was perhaps extra-large and extra excited due to Mahama's attendance, waved flags and shouted praise in his honor. This

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<sup>15</sup> For more information about the festival, visit: <http://citifmonline.com/2016/07/24/prez-mahama-attends-zongo-community-festival-in-kumasi-photos/>

<sup>16</sup> For general info about the Zongo Community: <http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/Zongo-the-eleventh-region-281461>

reaction surprised me, because most of the Ashanti community I had talked politics with were not planning to vote for Mahama in the upcoming election. The former President is from the Northern region and his actions of the day implied that he had a stronger connection to the Zongo Community than any others in the Central region, perhaps due to their affiliation with the North. He not only formalized the festival, he also donated two fresh busses to a local school.

It was Sunday, July 24th, and the Center for National Culture's performance group was hired to do a couple of different dances over the course of the afternoon. I tagged along to observe and try to be useful. The Amamresso Agofoma carries a reputation as one of the premiere performance groups in Ghana, and consequently is proficient in dances<sup>17</sup> and repertoires from all parts of the country. Having not attended a festival in Ghana before, I expected that all of the dances would be associated with the Northern region. As far as I could tell all of the pieces fell in line with my expectations; and then I was approached by one of the Amamresso performers and told I would dance Adowa with my female teacher...for the President. I didn't have much time to ask questions, as I was immediately whisked on stage to dance. The performance is a blur; I had never learned Adowa, thus was focused intently on Sister Abena for cues and movements. As she deftly responded in time to calls from the

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<sup>17</sup> The term 'dance' here is not meant to imply a separation from the singing and drumming of each piece, but rather the aspect that I was mainly engaged in that day.

*atumpan*, grasping imagined wealth from the air and presenting it to President Mahama, I tripped along behind her in a mimicry of her movements, attempting to appease the crowd if not with accuracy, then at least with entertainment. A few chiefs walked onto the stage, throwing handfuls of two dollar cedis in our direction<sup>18</sup> and smiling broadly. The crowd roared with approval as we darted off the stage again--no doubt partially caused by the amusement of watching an *obroni*<sup>19</sup> attempt Ghanaian traditional dance. More significantly, as I came to find out shortly after, because Adowa is a beloved Ghanaian cultural staple.

A few snapshots of the Zongo Community Festival:



Taken by author; July 24th, 2016

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<sup>18</sup> It is tradition to press money to the foreheads of performers who are pleasing the audience or the royals who are being honored by the performance.

<sup>19</sup> Twi: white person

My first clues about the social significance of Adowa began when I started making friends with several young girls hanging around the Cultural Center who were learning it for the first time. Some days (after I had danced Adowa in public several times, unfortunately) I accompanied them in their lessons. They all seemed to enjoy the dance and were glad to be learning. Similarly, many other young girls living on the same block as my guest house had learned some Adowa movements in afterschool programs. During the Gargayiya Festival, a handful of them tagged along with their friends. I was curious to hear their opinions about the performances of the day, as I myself had been awed by the virtuosity and liveliness of each different group. When I asked the girls, who came from Zongo, Fante, Hausa, Akan, and other backgrounds, what their favorite dance of the day was, the answer was unanimous and hands down: Adowa! I inquired further, in an attempt to discover why Adowa sparkled to my young companions. They seemed to shyly agree that it was the grace of movement, as they all broke out into the movements.

A second, and hard to miss, insight on the current political importance of Adowa came from the speech given by Mahama just before the final dances of the festival. The density of people packed into the park in addition to the hocketed booming of Mahama's voice through multiple speakers made the exact words difficult for me to follow sonically. What I

did pick up on, and what seemed to be the main point of the speech, centered on a goal for non-violence during the upcoming December election. Recall that Nkrumah pushed for nonviolence in political action throughout West Africa during the shift to independence without great success. In this case, Mahama was running for a second term --which the majority of voters in Ghana ultimately denied him-- and it's reasonable to think that his presence at the Gargayiya festival was a strategic appeal to voters as well as a call for peace in the coming months of potential political overturn.

The speech began with greetings, thank-yous, and announcements. Following this, Mahama broke into the kind of political talk that brings waves of shouting and cheers, in which the attending Zongo community eagerly participated. My focus and energy were declining at this point in the day, but I perked up at Mahama's mention of the Cultural Center's troupe. Amidst a brief recognition of all the groups that performed for him, Mahama specifically showered praise on Adowa and his own appreciation of the dance. The crowd erupted again. Many of the Amamresso Agofoma brushed off the compliment, subtly demonstrating their opposition to Mahama's presidency, but the crowd at large seemed to reflect his affinity. I was surprised, having witnessed pieces from earlier that day in which dozens of dancers were moving with amazing synchronicity or throwing themselves high into the air while

holding and playing large gung-gongs. I do not know with any culturally informed depth why an Ashanti dance would carry such weight at a Zongo event, apart from finding the piece very pleasing myself, but it appeared that Adowa had taken the day.

Perhaps using Adowa's power to invoke communal excitement, Mahama chose this moment to transition the mood of the speech. The intonation and dynamics of his words became much more somber. In this movement, an adagio compared to the excitement beforehand, Mahama transitioned into discussing the reality that his presidency could be nearing an end. With presidential optimism toward a triumph in the polls, Mahama showed no hesitation in promoting himself. Yet he also spent a large portion of his talking time reiterating to the public the importance of accepting the democratically affirmed winner regardless of the outcome. At the time, I didn't think much of Mahama's transition from Adowa to the election. Reflection, however, has allowed me to wonder if it was an implicit recognition of Adowa's history, or a public action to demonstrate his concern for the unity of Ghana.

### **A Substitute Brand**

With retrospective criticism, Biney reports that "In order to preserve national unity, which was fundamental to Nkrumah's vision of society, Nkrumah resorted to political repression of the opposition. This is one of

the principal contradictions in his political practice and political thought” (2011, p.173). Assuming that Nkrumah outlawed Adowa as a strategic move to undermine the opposing party, his actions may have been perceived by Ashanti as being similar to British colonials abusing cultural norms in order to control those under their influence.<sup>20</sup> Just as they had no intention of losing culture and resources to hegemonic powers during colonialist rule, the Ashanti people almost immediately came into a solution. This is not to say that every Ashanti culture-bearer converged to replace Adowa; but rather, that new ways were found to fill the space left by Nkrumah’s disappearing act.

Trusting Nana Safo’s words on the matter, Dansuomu developed and became known --although I am unsure to what degree-- in as few as three years after Adowa was made inaccessible. When I told Nana Safo that I had heard nothing that shed light on Dansuomu’s decline in popularity in the 70s, he began by referring to the piece as a “substitute brand.” To explain, he turned the question on me: “Let’s say Star beer was in shortage, and there was a substitute to Star, wouldn’t you go to that brand?” Sure, I would. I had, actually, tried an alternative beer the day before at a bar that didn’t carry Star, and found it to be just as cold and refreshing in the summer heat. Nana Safo’s use of the metaphor didn’t come across with negative connotation, no implication that Dansuomu

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<sup>20</sup> This is not to say that Nkrumah is comparable to a colonialist, but rather to express the relationship between events in Ashanti history.

was less valuable or pleasing than Adowa. Rather, his words sounded very matter-of-fact: Adowa was not available during a stint of time, Dansuomu took its place.

### **Lifespan and Demise**

Momentarily moving beyond what I've been told of Dansuomu's early stages,<sup>21</sup> it is interesting to note the temporal relationship between Dansuomu's and Nkrumah's rise and fall. Dansuomu came to fruition as a direct action against Nkrumah's attempt to slip the rug out from under the National Liberation Movement. From its impetus, the piece only gained in energy and popularity as new elements were added and the Ashanti community spread the fire around, so to speak. According to some of the elder members of performance groups I interviewed, the 1960s and 70s housed the height of popularity for Dansuomu, during which time it could be performed by a troupe multiple times a week at the events for which Adowa would have been appropriate. While Nkrumah worked tirelessly to develop the unified Ghana, and Africa, that he pictured through a heavy lens of Pan-Africanism, Dansuomu matured and became beloved in Ashanti. If the reaction to Dansuomu from the attendees of Tufts' 2016 Akan Festival, which included Ghanaian royals and important figures, is anything to base the piece's previous popularity on, then the rampant

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<sup>21</sup> Which will be discussed in the following chapter.

cheers during that performance would imply that it was quite adored in its time. And yet, following two decades of stardom, Dansuomu has almost disappeared from Ashanti, and Ghanaian, active cultural repertoire.

Here, Nkrumah comes back into play. His concurrent years of limelight in Ghana were surely more tumultuous than Dansoumu's. Violence and aggression towards his person, as mentioned, continued for the remainder of his presidency. Of course, Nkrumah was not one to deflate in opposition. His mission seemed to propel him forward with a fierce passion. After climbing from Prime Minister in '52 to Ghanaian Independence in '57 and Presidency in 1960, Nkrumah further implanted himself as the ultimate ruler of Ghana by instating the CPP as the permanent national party and himself as president for life in 1964. This unchecked rule only lasted for a mere two years before the National Liberation Council staged a military coup in 1966. Nkrumah was effectively banished, i.e., fled to protect his life before tensions rose to a head. I have not found evidence of the exact moment that Adowa was allowed freely back into public use, but at this point it certainly would have been no longer outlawed. Consequently, as Nkrumah spent the remaining six years of his life in exile, Dansuomu began a slow fade into the background. Star beer had just been reintroduced to the people, and the substitute brand fell to the favor of its predecessor.

## **Chapter 2: Make it Sweet**

### **Growing in Layers**

Initially, my perception of Dansuomu likely fell in line with a layperson's ideas of what scholars usually label as "African traditional music." However, while discussing the piece with Ghanaians in English, the term 'cultural dance' was used most frequently. I err on the side of caution in unquestioningly referring to this piece as traditional without including some caveats, for example, the lineages of tradition are never static; and the people, technologies, and environments sustaining them are ever-changing. On the other hand, it is beneficial to view Dansuomu as traditional, in the sense that the social function, instrumentation, musical qualities, and dance movements were all born out of long-standing practices of the Ashanti as well as other groups inhabiting Ghana. Besides wishing to avoid delivering a sense of stagnancy in Ashanti music-making, there are other complications when using the term 'traditional', including the problem of how to discuss the function of the piece in Ashanti society while factoring in its recent development and temporary use. I wish to explore the piece's traditionality not only for the sake of fleshing out terminology, but also in hopes of recognizing the significance of Dansuomu's creation and development to the Ashanti social setting. In the following chapter, therefore, I employ anthropological

and ethnomusicological notions of 'African music' and 'tradition', accompanied by experiences and conversations conducted in Ghana, toward the goal of puzzling together a more holistic view of Dansuomu as an aspect of society.

### **New, Old, and of the People**

Before submerging ourselves in theoretical perspectives of 'tradition,' let us first clarify several terms that relate to Dansuomu as an aspect of human agency and creativity. Raymond Williams' *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, published in 1976, delivers a solid etymology and contemporary<sup>22</sup> use of several terms in the English language that are appropriate for our discussion. The first of which, pertaining to the Ashanti community, and more broadly the Akan community as a social organization with various traits and practices, is 'culture.' Williams' definition gives a general sense of its uses:

**Culture:** 'one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language...(i)...a general process of intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic development, (ii)...a particular way of life, whether of a people, a period, a group, or humanity in general, (iii)...the works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activity...**culture** is music, literature, painting, and sculpture, theater and film (1976, 87-92).

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<sup>22</sup> i.e. 1950s-70s.

'Culture', then, is useful to us in two ways, the first being that culture is 'a particular way of life' and the second being that 'culture is music.' Later, these two seemingly separate notions of culture will overlap considerably, but let us first expound on culture as music. Williams describes culture, in iteration (i), as a process during which certain organizing features are developed, with the implication that said features are integral to the culture at hand. One of these developments, 'aesthetic,' is often associated with studies of African music, art, and performance as a quality indicative of and specific to society.

Williams defines 'aesthetic,' with respect to art, as: "**Aesthetic:** a key formation in a group of meaning which at once emphasized and isolated SUBJECTIVE (q.v.) sense-activity as the basis of art and beauty as distinct, for example, from *social* or *cultural* interpretations. It is an element of the divided modern consciousness of *art* and *society*" (1976, 32-3). He draws attention to a perceptual distinction between the aesthetics of an art form and the cultural meaning ingrained in the art form; however, this distinction comes from a highly Eurocentric sentiment of art, and is arguably not true for Ghanaian sentiments of music, as it plays into a sense of life which is mediated through musical communal events. We can take Williams's initial definition, i.e., meaningful expression formed out of active creativity and sensibility within defined

groups, and apply it to the function of aesthetics within African societies as approached by leading scholars.

Aesthetics, as a heavily ingrained and engaged aspect of culture, is a popular topic in African and Afro-diasporic studies. Within the field of ethnomusicology, John M. Chernoff's *African Rhythm and African Sensibility: Aesthetics and Social Action in African Musical Idioms* clearly and deeply highlights the relationship of music and social structure. After spending extended time living among and training with the Dagomba in the Northern Region of Ghana, Chernoff comprised a monograph in the 1970s about the depth of musical integration in Dagomba society. His argument and description revolved around his idea of African 'sensibility.' Turning back to Williams for a general sense, he defines the term as: "**Sensibility**: a social generalization of certain personal qualities, or...a personal appropriation of certain social qualities. It thus belongs in an important formation which includes TASTE (q.v.), *cultivation* and *discrimination*, and, at a different level, CRITICISM (q.v.), and CULTURE (q.v.) in one of its uses, derived from *cultivated* and *cultivation*" (1976, 280-83). Sensibility, therefore, both shapes and is shaped by group values and leaves traces of itself in the aesthetic formations of art, particularly within communities for whom art is so frequently active and participatory. Sensibility, as Chernoff uses it, is the way that "Africans relate to the world and commit themselves to its affairs" (1979, 154). In other words, it is a

way of ordering community and social ideals through certain mediums, music and the musical event being particularly significant mediums of expressing and maintaining a cultural sensibility. Music and the events it is associated with provide, according to Chernoff, a group-oriented means of bringing together the community through socialized, meaningful, experiences.

Here, we arrive at the importance of the musical 'event.' Arguably, the frequency of musical events in Ghana, whether casual or formal, is what reveals music's significance there. While staying in Kumasi in July 2016, one of the first loud differences of living I experienced, that being my first time in the country, came in the form of music unfurling from all directions at any time of day or night. On many days, I awoke to the 4:00 am sounds of Kete appellations being played for a local funeral, followed by Muslim prayers<sup>23</sup> at 5:00 am and Christian church services lasting from 6:00 am into the afternoon. As soon as morning light crept over the horizon, market women and children selling goods began to call out their wares in sing-song style. *Trotro* mates melodically shouted the names of their destinations while cruising down crowded streets, intermixed with taxis bumping their most beloved hiplife tunes. Often, in the mornings and late afternoons, I passed young kids playing hand-clapping games and singing small songs, as well as gatherings of teenagers listening to pop

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<sup>23</sup> I do not intend to refer to Sallah as musical, merely that the practice involves communal sound-making.

music on the radio. Every restaurant or public building with the ability to play pre-recorded music through loudspeakers seemed to do so, that is of course, if live music wasn't already occurring in some nearby space or if there wasn't a football<sup>24</sup> game broadcasting somewhere. One of my favorite passing moments of music occurred while taking a bus from Cape Coast to Accra, during which a young boy preached to the passengers and lead a pick-up choir of riders in several gently harmonized hymns.

While I enjoyed countless casual musical events, the majority of my time was spent rehearsing for and participating in formal ones. Working with the National Center for Culture's performance group meant spending hours a day working on song, percussion, and dance, beginning with a group rehearsal in the mornings and dissolving into smaller lessons and practices as the day went on. It felt as though the Amamresso Agofomma accepted one to two gigs per weekend day and at least two or three sprinkled throughout the week. If the group wasn't performing, they were rehearsing to perform, traveling to a gig, or preparing costumes and instruments for use. The majority of events this popular cultural troupe attended were of a traditional nature, meaning that there was a specific function for the performers to play that has been built and sustained for generations. Funerals, weddings, festivals, and events celebrating the Asantehene lasted as briefly as four hours, or as long as four days. Live

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<sup>24</sup> As in soccer.

music often ordered the schema of each event, drawing attention to arrivals, leading processions of important people, and encouraging lively dance. Kwabena Nketia describes this musical omnipresence in *African Music in Ghana*, stating: “Whatever the ultimate consideration may be, the musical bias of traditional organised events in Ghana is unmistakable. In many instances the musical activity takes a great deal of the total time allotted for the events” (Nketia 1963, 8). Considering the frequency of performance in long-standing community events and the formation of what I have been told was several Dansuomu ensembles in the 1950s and 1960s, the piece fits into the category of traditional music.

While Dansuomu is not historically traceable before the 1950s, the piece is arguably traditional due to its use in formal Ashanti events. Most of the performances that I watched and participated in at formal events involved the four formal items of Ashanti repertoire: Kete, Adowa, Fontomfrom and Nnwonkoro. Dansuomu was nowhere to be seen<sup>25</sup> at the time of my visit, however, and I found myself having to imagine the piece in the context of the events I was attending. The music and choreographed dance that Prof. Poku taught at Tufts played in my mind often, and the live Ashanti music I was hearing felt familiar based on my memories of university concerts and class practices. This feeling of familiarity without social understanding led me to pursue the question of

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<sup>25</sup> Outside of the two groups that performed specifically for my recordings.

how Dansuomu fell in line with traditional music-making styles, and how it related to other traditional items of repertoire. To answer that question, a consideration of what role it played and how it was shaped for that role during its quick development follows subsequently.

### **Cooking the Soup**

Every semester, without fail, Prof. Poku refers to each piece in the Kiniwe repertoire as a soup, one that must be tasted and tweaked before it is ready. Thinking of Dansuomu in particular as a soup is helpful in imagining the various ingredients that went into its creation. Recall from the previous chapter that Dansuomu was formed in the absence of Adowa due to Nkrumah's banning of it around the time of Ghanaian Independence. If the main social motivation behind the use of Dansuomu was the lack of Adowa, a popular soup that had the benefit of being stylized and practiced over generations, then it would seem to make sense that Dansuomu be constructed from flavors in other soups that were already beloved. In other words, while Dansuomu may not be a traditional piece with respect to being old, it can be thought of as a new combination of traditional ingredients. Said ingredients did not just fall into a pot and start cooking, however; they were incorporated over time as the piece grew in practice and popularity.

Drawing from historian Eric Hobsbawm's 1983 publication, *The Invention of Tradition*, the concept of 'invented tradition' may be a means of factoring development over time into the notion of Dansuomu as traditional. He defines invented traditions as "a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past" (Hobsbawm 1983, 1). Within the context of a tradition that has been invented--although arguably this is true for all traditions--Dansuomu demonstrates an art form that was perhaps borrowed from neighboring Akan communities and shaped to fall more in line with Ashanti performance practices so that it could serve a formal communal purpose. This begs the question: before the vegetables and spices were mixed into the soup, what was the stock made up of? The memories, stories, and responsibilities held by senior female members of the Twedie and Amamresso performance groups provided valuable insight into the question of early development and practice.

### Women and Development

During casual conversations with the Amamresso Agofomma, I asked several of the performers that were working with me about whether their being a man or woman affected the types of skills they developed for

performance. Often, I was given a quick answer, that men usually played the drums and/or danced, and that women usually sang and/or danced; but, that everyone *could* do everything, it just didn't tend to work that way. No one seemed to feel that there were explicit reasons for the gendered roles; rather, that it was just how things were done. In fact, late one night at a funeral in Hwediem, some of the women began to play the *atumpan* and *bomaa* used in *Fontomfrom* with ease, while the men jokingly danced and sang. Likewise, from many of our rehearsals, it was obvious that all members of the group felt comfortable and familiar with each instrument part, every song, and most choreographed or freestyle dance movements. The gendering of performance then, surely had more to do with the social tendencies of women and men than music-making abilities.

For example, only a day or two after I arrived in Kumasi, I was delivered into the good graces of the 'group mother,' as some referred to her, and told she would take care of me and teach me what I needed to learn. Sister Abena was often the earliest to arrive at the Center, as well as the last to leave due to her preparation and teaching responsibilities. Not only did she look after the costumes<sup>26</sup> and know exactly what every member of the group should be doing, she also appeared to be one of the most knowledgeable singers and most graceful dancers. After morning rehearsals, we would sit under a tree and sing songs together, one after

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<sup>26</sup> i.e. folding, organizing, transporting, and hand-washing with the help of other women.

the other until she felt satisfied with my (admittedly slow) progress. Many of the songs were printed in a book that she occasionally referred to for spelling or phrasing; however, the majority of information came from her own memory and experience. Some days we were accompanied by other young girls benefiting from her tutelage, and a small group of us would repeat the basic movements of Adowa while she directed a critical eye at the subtlest movements. She was also the one who led me through the performance of Adowa at the Zongo Festival mentioned previously, as well as the female freestyle dancer for both of my recordings of the Center's Dansuomu. While Sister Abena was not my primary source for Dansuomu's history, she maintained a detailed knowledge of the appropriate songs to teach and was able to deliver a lively performance of Dansuomu despite the group's very infrequent use of the piece.<sup>27</sup> Likewise, she knew the stage set-up and which fabrics should be worn by the musicians and dancers, men and women.

After getting to know Sister Abena through the Center for National Culture, as well as the circle of women that did the same activities to a lesser degree, it was interesting to then meet and talk with the older women of the Twedie performance group in a small town setting. Similarly, my main point of contact was the woman who organized the gig, led the songs, and stepped out into the rain to deliver a dance for my recordings,

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<sup>27</sup> This was true for most of the performers in the recording. It is interesting to note that none of the youngest members of the group participated in the Dansuomu recordings.

Akuah Twereboa. When I returned to Twedie the next week to give out copies of the recordings and to interview some of the members, she had the most to say about the history of the Twedie group and their relationship to Dansuomu. When I asked her what she knew about the beginning of Dansuomu, she answered in relation to how the piece came to Twedie. She claimed that a local man, Agya Ampofo, visited the town of Nnere Behi, and brought back with him the knowledge of Dansuomu. He presented it to the town and a decision was made to form a Dansuomu ensemble.

Geographic Map of Nnere Behi, Twedie, and Kumasi<sup>28</sup>



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<sup>28</sup> Note that the location of Twedie is imprecise.  
<https://www.google.com/maps/place/Nnerebeh,+Ghana/>

When I inquired further about what Dansuomu was like in the time of her parents, she said “The very beginning, it was like Nnwonkoro.”<sup>29</sup> This insight is interesting because Nnwonkoro consists of a mostly female ensemble based on lyrical content, and antiphonal singing. It is also interesting to note that of the original Twedie Dansuomu members she listed - Akosua Praman, Adwoa Komaa, Ama Diyia, and Agya Ampafo - the only man was the one who brought the piece from Nnere Behi to Twedie. The Twedie group also had to collect calabash, or *koraa*, and bamboo clappers from the Volta Region, said Akuah, as they were an instrument used by female ensembles outside of the Ashanti Region. Akuah’s description of the early Twedie group supports the idea that it was like Nnwonkoro, with the addition of calabash and bamboo clappers, in that the members were mostly female and the performance was mostly vocal. Taking shape only a decade before Dansuomu, Nnwonkoro and its history may parallel the piece with respect to development.

#### Nnwonkoro and Women’s Songs

In addition to Akuah Twereboa’s claim that the performance of Dansuomu in its early days was made up of a female vocal group like Nnwonkoro, there are musical similarities that imply that Nnwonkoro songs may have formed the stock of our soup, and that women may have

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<sup>29</sup> Prof. Poku was the translator for this interview, which was conducted in English and Twi. The quotes are pulled from his translation of her words.

been the cooks. For example, many of the songs that Sister Abena taught me, I noticed over time, were also used in performances of Adowa and Nnwonkoro. The specific songs and lyrics are highlighted in the following chapter; for now, I turn to the scholarship of Kwasi Ampene for a closer look at the formalization of Nnwonkoro as an Akan staple of cultural repertoire. In his 2005 publication, *Female Song Tradition and the Akan of Ghana*, Ampene opens up his writings on Nnwonkoro by recognizing that, “while visitors to Akan communities at any period of history could not fail to notice the wide variety of vocal ensembles involving women and the contributions of women to social life, some types of these ensembles are centuries old whereas others are of recent creation” (2005, 17).

Ampene walks his audience through a historical narrative of the Akan region of Ghana, positioning the reader as a ‘time-traveler’ experiencing different moments of Nnwonkoro as it has existed through time. In the 1800s, according to him, the performance of what are now known as Nnwonkoro songs occurred during casual musical events in which women sang together in the moonlight of late evening, performed military chants for the men departing or returning from battle, or sang during puberty rites. Further, he claims that Nnwonkoro was considered a form of spontaneous entertainment music<sup>30</sup> that encouraged participation via singing and hand-clapping (Ampene 2005, 17-8). He then steps

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<sup>30</sup> Although they were not necessarily known or considered Nnwonkoro songs at the time.

forward in time to the 1920s, stating that “Nnwonkoro was still associated with recreational evening singing and occasionally performed at funerary rites, while adowa was reserved for funerary celebrations and festivals” (18-9). Moving into the 1940s, the decade in which Nkrumah returned to Ghana, Ampene discusses the formalization of Ghana’s first Nnwonkoro ensemble, Tete Nnwonkoro. The ensemble was founded by Nana Afua Abasa in 1944, and slowly caught on with women in nearing towns through the 1950s; similarly to the way Dansuomu developed and spread a few years later. In the subsequent decades, both Nnwonkoro and Dansuomu grew in ensembles that became part of the formal repertoire of communal ceremony, particularly funerals. The following chart aligns their parallel growth, followed by their divergence in popularity approaching the new millennium:

<b>Development By Decade</b>		
<b>Decade:</b>	<b>Nnwonkoro</b>	<b>Densuomu</b>
1940s	Tete Nnwonkoro founded in Menhyia	(unknown)
1950s	Catches on among other female groups in Kumasi	Begins as vocal ensemble and grows into dance/drum piece
1960s	Commercialized through radio and performing for hire	Spreads to other communities and locations
1970s	Recordings available nationally and internationally	Experiences height of popularity in socially ceremonial practice
1980s	Performed in schools, festivals, and church services	Begins to decline in popular use and funerary celebrations
1990s	Celebrate the re-interment of W. E.B. DuBois and Nkrumah	Recorded by Smithsonian Folkways from Kyekyewere
2000s	Founding of Nnwonkoro Association in Kumasi	Barely taught in schools and passed to new generations

Chart created by author

As can be seen from the chart, Nnwonkoro and Dansuomu both experienced healthy growth from their formal ensemble beginnings. Nnwonkoro spread in a less rapid fashion from the establishment of Nana Abasa's ensemble, while the beginning of Dansuomu ensembles are more ambiguous but spread much more quickly. Then, after a few decades of frequent performance, Nnwonkoro was fixed as a staple of Akan repertoire, while Dansuomu declined in use, eventually disappearing altogether. Their relationship in time and musical aspects spurs several questions: Did Dansuomu get its beginning as inspired by the formalization of Nnwonkoro groups, i.e., was the professional female vocal ensemble a growing trend at this time, or rather, why was it a trend at this time? And, if they both formed around the same time and came into a

period of popularity within cultural repertoire, why was Dansuomu only temporarily in practice while Nnwonkoro grew so much as to have the Nnwonkoro Association established in Kumasi in 2002? Ampene describes the social success of Nnwonkoro as an act of decided adaptability in tradition for the sake of keeping the interest alive:

Obviously, the ongoing vitality and utility of nnwonkoro depends not on the creation of a totally new tradition, but on the continuous development and transformation of the old. The degree of innovation in the performance practice of the genre suggests that tradition is dynamic and not static...It is evident in my discussion that the current generation does not just practice what has been handed down but has made creative additions to the nnwonkoro repertoire that are based on contemporary experience. (Ampene 2005, 39)

Nnwonkoro and gatherings of women at a funeral.  
Sister Abena giving a lesson. (Left)



Twedie Group performing Dansuomu, led by Akuah Twereboa. (Right)  
Pictures by author. July 2016.

It is obvious that traditions change over time merely because they cannot be reproduced exactly the same way every time they occur; and, Ampene further argues that changes to the formality of the Nnwonkoro ensemble, as well as its amplification and addition of instruments in recent decades, was an active choice to keep the ensemble current while maintaining a continuity with the past. Ampene describes the musical adaptations that took place during the transition from casual to formal social setting, claiming:

As performance of nnwonkoro shifted from the private realm of moonlight performances in the village to the public realm of funerary celebrations and other festivities in urban settings, it became necessary to add percussion instruments in order to increase the sound output at bigger arenas. The addition of percussion instruments made nnwonkoro performances more 'interesting' and danceable' since Akans found it difficult to dance to vocal music lacking instrumental accompaniment. The incorporation of drums and percussion instruments had far-reaching consequences permitting men to join the all-female ensembles as instrumental accompanists... With the addition of percussion instruments nnwonkoro groups could compete for attention at funerary celebrations with well-established funeral bands, especially *adowa* groups. (Ampene 2005, 34)

Again, we can turn to the historical environment of Ghana from the 1940s onward for some insight into this traditional dynamism. Leading up to independence, the formation of a national identity played an important role in solidifying a potential government; but also, affected change with respect to traditional or cultural repertoires through music-sharing and the growth of professional ensembles, like the Amamresso Agofomma, who perform pieces not limited to the Ashanti Region or Akan community. Further, Nkrumah's heavy focus on Pan-Africanism and the pursuit of a contemporary African identity put in motion the institutionalization of certain levels of cultural performance. It may be that the growth of Nnwonkoro is due to individuals, as well as a national trend toward bringing Ghanaian 'cultural' or 'traditional' music forms to another level of public recognition. While Nnwonkoro shifted from semi-private/casual to public/formal music between the 1940s and 1960s, Dansuomu did the same thing in a slightly different context. Growing from what was probably an informal music-making practice, Dansuomu was spread to new locations such that it was able to fill the space left by the banning of Adowa at a time when the national stage of Ghana just forming.

### **Adding the Sugar**

I cannot claim that Dansuomu was shaped out of Nnwonkoro nor do I think it true necessarily; it may be that both art forms were inspired by

the same entertainment songs performed by Akan women for generations. The similar timing of their development may be more relevant to the contemporary political happenings, in that there was impetus for individuals, like Nana Abasa, to form ensembles that would reflect the cultural heritage and music of Ghana as a burgeoning independent nation. What's more, the sharing of traditional music between differing regions and communities in Ghana opened up considerably during the 1950s and 60s, allowing for intermixing of musical ideas. In *An Interview with J.H. Kwabena Nketia: Perspectives on Tradition and Modernity*, Trevor Wiggins discusses change with respect to modernity and independence with Nketia, who was positioned as the director of the University of Ghana's School of Music, Dance, and Drama in 1962, and later became director of the National Dance Ensemble in Accra.<sup>31</sup> While directing, Nketia worked with the artistic director, Mawere Opoku, to employ skilled musicians and dancers in an effort to exchange regional repertoires and formalize choreography. As an example, Nketia mentions the incorporation of an Ewe master drummer's style into Adowa:

**Nketia:** One of the interesting things we had during our work [with] a Ewe master drummer, Gideon Alorwoye, who was fascinated by Adowa. He learned to play Adowa and the teacher of the Adowa

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<sup>31</sup> Not to mention the various other professorial and artistic director positions he held later in life, including the establishment of Ghana's International Center for African Music and Dance.

dance preferred Gideon's playing of *Adowa* to the *Asante* drummer. Sometimes the result of this way of approaching it is to create a new kind of relationship between your performers, between your musicians. They begin not only to do each other's dances, but they begin to have a certain relationship beyond. (Nketia & Wiggins 2005, p.70)

In addition to regional sharing; people were interacting on personal and performative levels toward the formation of national music and dance. Not only were ideas shared and incorporated into new contexts, performers became carriers of knowledge outside of their own repertoires, and more exposed to other performers through national festivals and celebrations of Ghana as a unified nation under self-governance. The items chosen or collected under the umbrella of 'national' performance tended to be traditional or used significantly as entertainment music. Bringing said items to the national stage affected changes not only in their presentation, but also in their social use. Related, the expansion of radio, as well as developing production technology, created changes in the sounds and means of sound-making in the music itself. In the following excerpt, Wiggins implores Nketia to share his perspective on modern uses of tradition, and whether cultural consumption<sup>32</sup> overshadowed previous social significance of traditional music and dance:

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<sup>32</sup> For more on culture consumption, see:

Comaroff, John L., and Jean Comaroff. *Ethnicity, Inc.* University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2009.

**Wiggins:** To what extent is traditional African music still being developed as part of society, or has it become much more a conscious and cultural production?

**Nketia:** In the traditional setting it is going on in the usual way but changes in attitude are taking place in the country since independence and the deliberate attempt that we made to recontextualize [music in the new state]. Symbolic in the sense of giving us something to hold onto - this is our own - and this was really for the benefit of those of us who had left the culture. For those people who came [to perform], it was bringing them from the periphery to the centre, so politically there was also the sense of making them feel part of a new nation. Everything went on that way - now performing groups in villages know that they can also go to other places and they will perform to audiences that don't understand their language, so will make certain adjustments because of the audience. But the traditional thing is [still] going on in the true kind of context, in the ritual ceremony and social lives that you have in the community.

(Nketia & Wiggins 2005, 67)

Based upon Nketia's commentary, it is not fair to say that the function of social traditions in music and dance changed, but perhaps more accurately adapted to a changing political, and consequently cultural, environment, similarly to the way Ampene describes the changes to Nnwonkoro as it fought for a position of status in Ashanti ceremonial

repertoire. Dansuomu underwent the same changes, in fact, to incorporate the two *dewuro* and the *dewuta*, the *apentema*, and the *ntrowa*. During his interview, Nana Safo said that the Ashanti instruments created a more danceable beat and allowed for the incorporation of men into the ensemble. Whether this happened before or after Dansuomu was incorporated into funeral celebrations is unclear; however, Akuah Twereboa claimed that the participatory element of the drums and dance attracted people to the music and became part of the reason her group was hired multiple times a week at the height of its day. Dansuomu as a vocal, drum, and dance art form is what the piece is recognized for; and arguably the element of dance is the final pinch of sugar that made the soup sweet enough to function like Adowa in Ashanti communal events. The dance taught by Prof. Poku in *Kiniwe* is a flirtatious couples dance between men and women, which is choreographed to be the same in every performance. The choreography comes from the Center's group performances, perhaps stemming from Mawere Opoku's work with the NDC in Accra or from another source of artistic direction; however, in the performances of Dansuomu by both the Amamresso Agofomma and the Twedie group, the dancing was a form of solo or duo freestyle between a man and a woman.

While attending various events in Ghana, especially those related to life, death and the Asantehene, it became clear that dancing is an

important component of interaction. For example, at funerals the *Kete* ensemble would perform for each processional of important figures, such as chiefs and family members of the deceased. If a chief decided the music was sweet enough as he passed, he'd dance with the ensemble, attracting attention and earning the ensemble money in support of their playing. In other moments, solo men or women would step out to dance, either to entertain or to attract people attending the events to dance with them, or at least gather near. In order for dancing to be possible for community members who were previously unfamiliar with Dansuomu, it would make sense to incorporate established and recognizable rhythms to inform the dancing. An example of this is that the lead *dewuro* in Dansuomu, which is the reference instrument for all other parts of the ensemble, is rhythmically the same as the second *dewuro* in Adowa.<sup>33</sup>

### **Change and Continuity**

Arriving again at the issue of 'tradition,' I recall from earlier in this chapter the notion of music as culture, and culture as a way of life.<sup>34</sup> Music in the Ashanti Region obviously is a means of organizing important social events, which are in some ways the markers of cultural values. As Nketia writes in *African Music in Ghana*, "the traditional music of Ghana is

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<sup>33</sup> Further discussed in Chapter 3.

<sup>34</sup> For more on music as culture, see:

Herndon, Marcia, and Norma McLeod. *Music as culture*. Norwood, 1981.

essentially folk music developed and maintained by oral tradition by each ethnic group, and organised and practised as an integral part of everyday life... A study of the incidence of music in various communities shows that music making is socially controlled” (Nketia 1963, 107). Given that Dansuomu developed from smaller women’s vocal ensembles into a formal item of repertoire with the addition of drums and dance, and was/is taught through oral transmission like all traditional pieces, and was used in functions of daily activity and communal events, I think it fair to classify the piece as a traditional Ashanti dance/drum item of repertoire.

What of the lingering issue of temporality? Referring back to the idea of invented traditions, Hobsbawm reveals that it is not necessarily the timeframe of the ‘invention’ of the tradition, but rather, the significance of its creation. He states:

The term ‘invented tradition’ is used in a broad, but not imprecise sense. It includes both ‘traditions’ actually invented, constructed and formally instituted and those emerging in a less easily traceable manner within a brief and dateable period - a matter of a few years perhaps - and establishing themselves with great rapidity... It is evident that not all of them are equally permanent, but it is their appearance and establishment rather than their chances of survival which are our primary concern (Hobsbawm 1983, 3).

Dansuomu serves to show the musical and political prowess of the Ashanti people through their ability to quickly develop and maintain cultural staples in the face of political adversity, and to do so with an air of continuity with the long-standing traditions of the past. The ingredients that make up Dansuomu soup, as have been discussed, certainly imply continuity with the past because they are taken from elements of music-making that were previously established through repetition in a sense of performance and oral transmission. Why then, if Dansuomu was made sweet by flavors already in favor, has it faded from repertoire?

In the previous chapter, Nana Safo referred to Dansuomu as a 'substitute brand,' implying that it diminished in practice when Adowa returned. Even though performers of Dansuomu benefited from the growing nationhood of Ghana, in that, traditional dances were taking on new levels of representation and public awareness, it may have been that the music, dance, and songs were too similar to Nnwokoro and Adowa to be performed during formal events. While I have spent the body of this chapter attempting to show the ways Dansuomu aligns with Ashanti traditions, I do not mean to ignore the fact that use of the calabash is an interesting twist. I will pay it due attention in the following chapter; however, I mention it now as another potential cause of Dansuomu's demise. The carrying and retrieving of large basins of water adds extra trouble to any traveling ensemble and the replenishing of calabash may

not have been easy to accomplish since the gourd doesn't grow in the region. These factors, as well as unknown others, may account for the disappearance; but the sweetness of Dansuomu, however short-lived, is due to the invention, or accumulation of its various parts. Let us now turn to the vitality of its life: the music itself.

## Chapter 3: Sing Higher!

### The Music Itself

In the previous chapters, I have established that Dansuomu was historically relevant to the Ashanti people during and after independence, as well as the possible motivations for the development of the piece and its function as a replacement to Adowa. In the current chapter, I will provide musical examples from the Dansuomu that I have become familiar with<sup>35</sup> to demonstrate its aesthetic continuity with other items of Ashanti traditional repertoire and to share with readers my view on what it is that makes Dansuomu so sweet. Dansuomu is made up of many parts; its appeal lies in the piece's sonic whole. This chapter includes transcriptions that bring attention to the rhythmic relationships between instruments, the antiphony that creates musical interest in song-style, and a brief description of the dance. I will primarily draw from the scholarship of Kwabena Nketia, Kwasi Ampene, David Locke, and William G. Carter to inform my notions of Ghanaian traditional and aesthetic qualities as they relate to Dansuomu. Before getting deeper into the musical intricacies of the piece, I will first give a brief overview of the ensemble and activities

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<sup>35</sup> Drawing from Kiniwe as well as the Twedie and Cultural Center performances of the piece.

present during performance in the respective settings of Tufts University, Kumasi's Center for National Culture, and Twedie.

During my stay in Kumasi, I attended and participated in multiple gigs for funerals, primarily, which frequently lasted more than four hours and sometimes continued for days. The high level of engagement with the community who hired the Amamresso Agofomma and the actual performance of pieces required a continued engagement with the music which incorporated both repetition and variation to maintain musical interest as well as a certain degree of joinability.

### **The Ensemble**

My first exposure and learning of Dansuomu began with Prof. Poku and the Kiniwe Ensemble. In the performances that I was a part of between 2015 and 2017, the Kiniwe ensemble incorporated two *dewuro* (boat-shaped metal bell struck with an iron rod), one to three *dewuta* (double-headed bell struck with a wooden stick), one *apentema* (hand drum), one or two *donno* (talking drum played with a curved stick), three *koraa* (large halved calabash gourds floated in a basin of water, struck by a stick with rubber casing), two to four *ntrowa* (rattles), and a host of bamboo clappers. The chorus was made up of male and female students from Tufts or the New England Conservatory<sup>36</sup>, and there were generally

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<sup>36</sup> As taught and led by Dr. Felicia Sandler.

four to ten dancers split evenly between men and women. The bamboo clappers were played by the chorus for the duration and the dancers at the end of the choreographed piece. The dance was a playful courting narrative, in which the women took up the first half before being joined by the men for the second half, ending in a leap-and-catch which served to show the pairing of each woman with a male counterpart. We never attempted freestyle, as it requires a deep understanding of how to move to the music and the variety of movements possible, as well as the ability to communicate subtly to a partner about shifts in movement. In the university setting, Prof. Poku taught all of us the basics of both playing the music and dancing to it, then placed people in accord with what they seemed to excel at best and what their preferences were. This led to women playing instruments and sometimes even dancing the male roles. His only request was that we wear the traditional performance cloth that would befit our gender.

Left to Right Back Row: Apentema, Koraa and Basin, Ntrowa.  
Front Row: Dewuro (2) and Dewuta, Bamboo Clappers.  
Below: Closer look at instruments above.



Apentema crafted by James Acheampong.  
Property of Tufts University.  
Photos by author, 2017.

### Amamresso Agofomma

The Center for National Culture's ensemble exhibits a clear difference in size and instrument quantity in comparison to other groups, which is reflective of the Amamresso Agofomma's position as one of the top performance troupes in the Ashanti Region. For the two performances of Dansumu I observed, they incorporated two dewuro, one dewuta, one donno, one apentema, one koraa, and multiple ntrowa and bamboo

clappers. Both women and men sang, but the majority of the vocal group was made up of women playing clappers and ntrowa. Again, the men played the apentema, donno, dewuros, dewuta, and koraa. The calabash, it should be noted, was borrowed from the drum shop of James Acheampong because the troupe barely had use for one in their busy performance line-up, and it was played by two musicians varying complementary patterns. The use of the donno, which was not part of the Twedie group's Dansuomu, was likely related to the dancers, a man and woman, who relied on an interaction with the drum to align the building energy of their dance to the music. The Center's troupe is also so large that not all of the members were necessary for the performance. Both recordings I took have eighteen to twenty performers in all.

Amamresso Agofomma on Stage at the Center for National Culture.



Snapshot from recording taken by author, 2016.

Couple's Freestyle Dance.

Snapshots from recording taken by author, 2016.



### Twedie Performance Group

At a certain point, not long after the formation of Dansuomu ensembles in the Ashanti region, the added instrumentation and consequent dance became a frequent practice. As is true for most traditional items in the Ashanti repertoire, each town or city has its own style of performance and sound which creates variability in practice of any given piece. Dansuomu is no different from this, as is evidenced by the Smithsonian Folkways recording of Dansuomu on *Rhythms of Life, Songs of Wisdom*<sup>37</sup>, which features only female singers and the use of

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<sup>37</sup> Vetter, Roger R. *Rhythms of Life, Songs of Wisdom Akan Music from Ghana, West Africa*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian/Folkways, 1996.

idiophones in Kyekyewere, Ghana as well as William G. Carter's research in Old and New Juaben which describes the piece as a primarily vocal group.<sup>38</sup> The instrumentation and rhythmic patterns taught to Tufts' Kuniwe students by Prof. Poku, as I found during my stay in Ghana, remained consistent with those of the Twedie group and Amamresso Agofomma, with the exception of some rhythmic variations and a range of instrument quantities. The Twedie ensemble employed one koraa, several sets of bamboo clappers, two or three ntrowa, one dewuro, and two apentema. The second apentema was played with one stick and one hand and played the pattern normally associated with the second dewuro.

When Prof. Poku and I first met Akuah Twereboa to inquire about hiring the Twedie group for a recorded performance of Dansuomu, she asked that I provide some cedis for the purchase of calabash and clappers, as the group rarely used them in current day. This may be their reason for using only one calabash; however, more than one is not necessary, as the rhythmic variations can be played in succession instead of concurrently with other calabash. Their use of a single bell instead of a lead and second bell was uncommon to my experience of Dansuomu; however, the lead is the only bell necessary to lay the groundwork for the other parts, as it provides the reliant rhythmic schema that all other players can listen to in order to place their pattern correctly among the

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<sup>38</sup> Carter, William Grandvil. *Asante Music in Old and New Juaben: A Comparative Study*. University Microfilms International, Michigan US, 1984. Print.

arrangement of parts. Also noteworthy in regards to the Twedie group's array of instruments is the fact that they rarely perform the piece in current day, and they claimed that the younger members, i.e., their children and grandchildren, were away travelling for the summer. These factors combined could explain the smaller ensemble and quantity of instruments, despite Akuah Twereboa's claim that the ensemble incorporated more than twenty members in the late 1960s. During my visit, the ensemble was made up of about nine women and five men. Most of the women played clappers or ntrowa and sang with two of them taking turns being lead, and the men played the apentema, koraa, and dewuro. Akuah Twereboa performed a freestyle dance or two in exchange with two of the other women, and one of the men danced for a minute separately from the women. In addition to Dansuomu, the group performed a few Adowa and Highlife songs.

Twedie Group Performing Dansuomu in Courtyard.



Photo by author, 2016.

### William Carter's Research

The only published document I have found to date with mention of Dansuomu as an Akan art form is William G. Carter's Ph.D. dissertation, *Asante Music in Old and New Juaben; A Comparative Study*, written in 1984. The purpose of the dissertation was to compare music from rural Old Juaben and urban Koforidua (New Juaben) to ascertain aspects of change and consistency in regard to acculturation from the Western world. Within Carter's musical analysis, which employs classifications first established by Nkeita [Drumming in Akan Communities], he describes and analyzes 'Densuom' as a form of 'popular band music' in Juaben. As I

mentioned in the previous subsection, Dansuomu took form in different stylistic ways depending on the area to which it was brought and further developed. According to Carter with respect to Juaben, the piece was a 'recreational' style as opposed to an 'occasional' style despite being performed for the chief and sometimes during formal events (Carter 1984, 255). He reveals that Dansuomu was not a form of recreational music in Juaben until a musical director created an ensemble after travelling.

Carter describes the ensemble as one that

Illustrates the continued practice of traditional popular bands found among the Akan in Ghana today [1980s]. Dansuom is an imported style brought to Juaben in 1964 by one of its citizens, Mr. Kwame Kumah. It comes from Dua-Yaw Nkwante, 58 miles from Kumase, in the Brong Ahafo Region. Mr. Kumah had attended a funeral...and studied their playing techniques carefully. On his return to Juaben, he organized a group to perform Dansuom...The Chief arranged for the group to perform for him...After these requested performances, Dansuom received official recognition by the Chief and acceptance into Juaben society. It is regarded as one of the traditional musical types of Juaben (Carter 1984, 310-11).

When discussing Dansuomu with Akuah Twereboa, she seemed to think that the Dansuomu in Nere Behi may have come from the Brong Ahafo Region, and Carter's description substantiates her thoughts. Further, she claimed that the ensemble was mostly vocal in addition to the

koraa, clappers, and idiophones, which is similar to the ensemble that Carter documented in Juaben in the early 1980s. According to him, the instruments involved in the Juaben ensemble were the calabash in water basin--which he refers to as *densuom* and which he says was played by two people at once--as well as one dewuro, one dewuta, one donno, and several *firikyiwa* (metal thumb and finger instruments similar to castanets) and *koraa* (in this case, koraa refers to a gourd rattle with beads on the outside as opposed to the inside) (Carter 1984, 318-321). This instrumentation is similar, if not the same, to that of the Kyekyewere recording mentioned earlier. With respect to the vocals and lyrics, Carter says that all of the songs performed by Juaben's Densuom ensemble were composed by Mr. Kumah, the man who brought the piece to Juaben, and were sung by both men and women in leader-group fashion. Most of the lyrics reflect Mr. Kumah's concerns for the loss of morality in acculturated forms of popular music (Carter 1984, 345-6).

Carter's writings on Dansuomu demonstrate the variance in Dansuomu during its time of popularity in the Ashanti Region. His research revolves around a Densuom that features a largely vocal ensemble of men and women, with an instrumentation that sets up a favorable sound schema to the sung lyrics expressing ideas of traditional morality, and which incorporated infrequent freestyle dance. Perhaps the Dansuomu of the Center for National Culture and the Twedie group were

more driven by additions of percussion instruments and more frequent freestyle and even choreographed dance because those groups had previously been performing Adowa before it was banned. Dansuomu, which was spreading around the Ashanti Region, could be shaped into a suitable alternative. In the following sections, I describe the musical aspects of this version of Dansuomu, with which I am most familiar.

### **Rhythmic Complexity**

The heavy emphasis on rhythmic complexity that centers all of the traditional Ashanti items of repertoire that I have encountered so far, was at first astounding to me and hard to aurally grasp. David Locke, who's decades of work with analysis and transcription of African music provides a vast and impressive resource, describes the spiraling effect of West African polyrhythm eloquently in his introduction to *Drum Gahu; An Introduction to African Rhythm*: "Africans have carefully crafted the basic rhythm of each instrument in the percussion ensemble to add an important ingredient to the composite musical texture. Each instrument contributes its own powerful rhythm and as the parts repeat the players achieve their aesthetic goal, a beautifully integrated polyphonic whole" (1998, 7). Although he is specifically referring to Gahu, an item of traditional Ewe repertoire, this statement is true for traditional Ashanti items as well. After two years of slowly being exposed to polyrhythmic percussion music from

Ghana, I am still attempting to hear individual pieces as a whole instead of focusing on one part at a time, and I suspect this will be the case for several more years. I could spend the next decade only listening to Kete, for example, and still hear new interactions between drum parts that I hadn't noticed before. I have noticed, however, that there seem to be different levels of emphasis on rhythmic complexity with respect to percussion among the four main formal items of repertoire in Ashanti traditional use; Fontomfrom, Kete, Adowa, and Nnwonkoro, and that the complexity depends on the style and interaction of the music with its social function.

African traditional music and its social integration as a topic of study has been drawing the attention of scholars from the academic world for several decades, particularly within the discipline of ethnomusicology. I turn again to Kwabena Nketia to inform this notion, as many scholars of Ghanaian music are known to do. I employ his description of percussion, polyrhythm, and social function from *African Music in Ghana*:

The structural characteristics of African songs and instrumental African music are in part derived from the social contexts in which music is used, the contexts which make it necessary to provide for the interplay of leading musicians and other performers or to provide for changing situations, varying forms of movement and dancing, and in part from an intensive cultural use of common musical devices such as ostinato, sequence, repetition and variation, all of which

provide a ready means of elaborating or extending a piece indefinitely (Nketia 1963, 108).

Fontomfrom and Kete, which are played for the Ashanti King and various chiefs at formal events and festivals, both incorporate several different rhythms that are named separately and played during moments of procession and dance by the chiefs and their families. To my ear, these pieces exhibit the most varied and complicated patterns in interplay with each other. This may be because the messages of Kete and Fontomfrom are to announce important members of society and provide a mutually beneficial engagement between the Asantehene and the musicians who play for them. From what I observed, the King and the Asantehene know the rhythms of these pieces well and can execute the dances with style. Further, they may request preferred rhythms for the specific dance movements that they enjoy most. Adowa, which is not a suite, is primarily used during funerals and involves the circularity of repeated phrases to drive the dance, also referred to as Adowa, which invites non-members of the ensemble to be entertained or to join in the dance.

Nnwonkoro, having developed from a form of recreational vocal music, is still supportive of the songs being the focus of the sound, even with the added percussion and consequent dance. Within Nnwonkoro, the rhythmic complexity mainly derives from the interplay of leader and group with respect to song-style; therefore, the percussion provides more of a

backdrop to the vocals. Because Dansuomu underwent a similar transformation in the Ashanti Region during the banning of Adowa, I think it fair to understand the relative simplicity of the parts<sup>39</sup> as having derived from the version of Dansuomu that focused more on lyrics and engagement with the chorus.

That being said, there are markers within the instrumental components of the Dansuomu that I have learned and observed, that reveal rhythmic interactions that align themselves with aesthetics in the other items of traditional repertoire in the Ashanti Region. The following examples of bell pattern and koraa variations demonstrate this quality.

#### Dewuro 1 & 2

When discussing tradition and rhythm in Ghana, which does not rely on a written notation system, Nketia uses the terms meter, time, and cross-rhythm to describe the musical groupings of parts: “Rhythm is organised on a dual principle of METRE governing the grouping of durational values and TIME governing sections and phrases. Basic motifs of two and three units used in accentual patterns are arranged unilineally or multilineally. In the later arrangement cross-rhythms are produced which heighten the rhythmic tensions and enhance interest” (Nketia 1963, 108). In terms of meter, if it were to be assigned via individual part, they

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<sup>39</sup> Although far from simple.

would not all fall under the same classification; hence the description of this music's rhythmic complexity as polymetric. This is one of the overarching elements of interest in Ashanti music, because it creates an ongoing sense of tension and release as certain patterns fall together in time, then apart once more. Fitting within the polymetric scheme of Ashanti music is the cross-rhythm, or moment when patterns with differing metric qualities create tension between themselves. David Locke describes this as "an adding to or departing from the primary meter's ordering of time...In cross rhythm the new ordering scheme fits within the system of the main meter and, as a result of this superimposition, a patterned sequence of onbeat and offbeat accents is created" (1998, 34-5).

The interaction of the lead and second dewuro patterns demonstrate Nketia's dual principle well, and also highlight the foundational multilineal cross-rhythm of Dansuomu. In relation to time, I have split the full cycle of the dewuro parts into two measures to clearly demonstrate the tension and release of the cross-rhythm created. With this in mind, I have notated the examples below in 6/8. When discussing the meter of the dewuro pattern, I employ Locke's terminology with respect to beats per measure and the subdivision of each beat, i.e., duple ternary, meaning that the two beats per measure are split by subdivisions of three (1998, 35). Within this metric assignment, the cross-rhythm



Dansuomu and Adowa separate during the 1950s and 1960s. Regardless of the reason, providing the second dewuro pattern, which would have been familiar to Ashanti and many Akan people, allowed for the dance movements from Adowa to be transferrable to the musical scheme of Dansuomu. The second dewuro pattern, which I have not heard in any other Ashanti piece, still provides the 3:2 cross-rhythm for the sake of musical interest and moments of tension within the cyclic interlocking of dewuro parts.

#### The Koraa

Among Adowa, Kete, and Fontomfrom, there is a lead drum that sets the tempo, calls changes to the rhythms of the other drums, and influences the activity of the dance. Both Fontomfrom and Adowa rely on the *atumpan* (two large drums set in a stand and played by one musician with hooked sticks.) In Fontomfrom, the *atumpan* informs the rhythmic changes of the large pair of *bomaa* (two human-sized drums played by one musician per, also with hooked sticks) and in Adowa the *atumpan* calls changes for the dancers to follow or interact with. With respect to Kete, the lead drum is the *kwadum* (the largest of the set played by one musician with hooked sticks) which informs the other players, including the lead dewuro, what the tempo will be, which piece to play, and when to change from one piece to the next. The *kwadum* also informs the dancers

of which movements to perform or takes cues from dancers on which rhythm to play for a preferred movement (Paulding 2015, 165). The version of Dansuomu that I have learned and seen performed relies on both the koraa and the donno to inform the dance and heighten interest between each instrument's part. According to Osei Kwadwo, "When there was fire outbreak in a town or the farms caught fire, people were summoned with the talking drums to go and quench the fire. At the battlefield the drums were used to direct soldiers that they might not fall into the enemy's camp. When somebody got lost in the thick forest, he was rescued by the sounds of his chief's talking drums when a search party was organized to search for him. In those days, everybody understood the drum language. The talking drums were used and still being used in Adowa and Fontomfrom dances" (Kwadwo 2002, 116). The addition of the donno, therefore, may have been an aesthetic choice to transform Dansuomu into a more formal version of itself, or it may be that the instrument was added to better communicate with the dancers and to heighten rhythmic interest so that the piece resembled Adowa.

However, because the donno was an addition made to the Dansuomu ensemble in recent history, I consider the koraa to be the main instrument, if not the lead. Having a large calabash as the focus of the ensemble, as opposed to a pitched or powerful drum, is part of what makes Dansuomu a unique piece within the Ashanti repertoire. I

substantiate this with the research of William Carter, who writes that “[d]ansuomu may be atypical in its choice of instrumental resources. In the first place, the master instrument is not a drum...But given the array of instruments in the ensemble, its role as the master instrument is assured” (1986, 320).

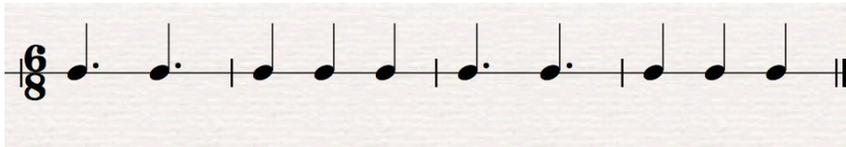
Further, recall from the introduction that the piece is named after the action of dipping the koraa into and out of water to produce a variance of radiating sound that both underlies and breaks through the sonic whole. What is more, the variations in rhythmic patterning of the koraa demonstrate a shift in perception common among Ashanti traditional music, i.e., hearing the beat to be in one place or another depending on how the rhythms are interacting and/or what part the listener is playing or focusing on. This demonstrates the koraa player’s ability to engage the other percussive patterns and support the structure of the songs and the dance through variations in its own rhythm; a quality common to the lead instrument.

### Koraa and Dance

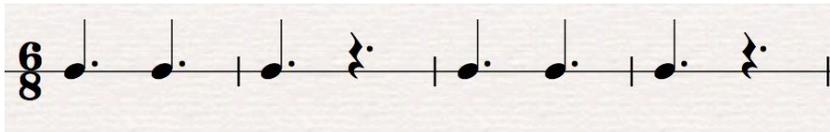
Having experienced Dansuomu primarily through the feeling of the dance and the songs, I tend to understand the beat as implied by the ntrowa and bamboo clappers, as they align with the regulated steps of the dance. The following notation demonstrates the relationship in time

between the lead dewuro, ntrowa, and bamboo clappers, as well as their relation to the alternating left and right steps of the basic dance movement.

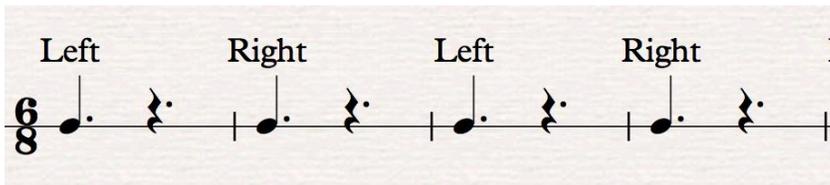
Dewuro 1



Ntrowa



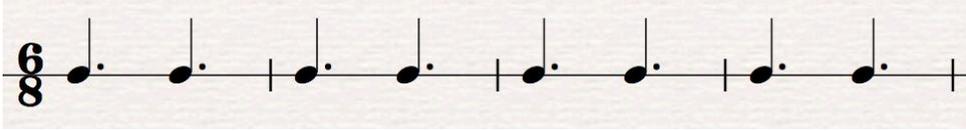
Bamboo Clapper



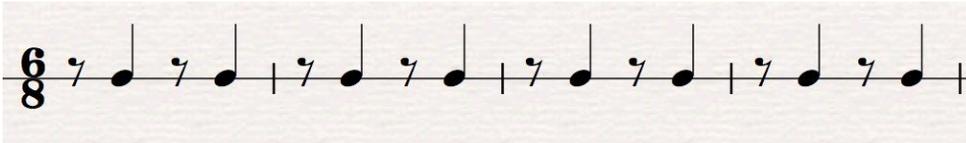
When discussing the placement of the beat with Prof. Poku, however, he revealed to me that the musicians, and according to him all members of the ensemble, would feel the beat not in accordance with the dance steps, but rather just after their arrival:<sup>41</sup>

<sup>41</sup> Please note that the term 'beat' could easily have been miscommunicated during this transaction, and I am not attempting to answer any questions regarding authentic beat placement; but rather to relay something told to me by my teacher.

### Beat Implied by Dance



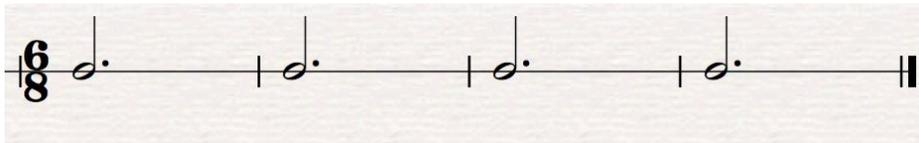
### Beat Felt by Musicians



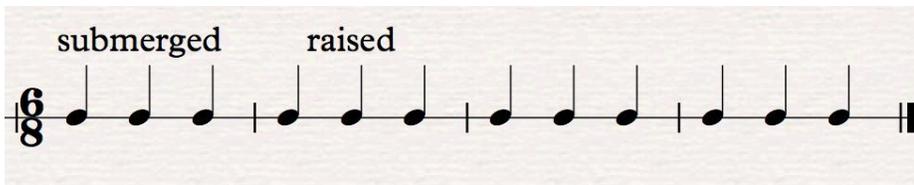
Interestingly, the variations that can be played on the koraa highlight both the beat that I became familiar with as a dancer and the beat that Prof. Poku described as the felt and understood beat of the musicians. This creates musical interest within the repetitive piece. According to Nketia, “[t]he placement of the rhythmic phrase in relation to the main beat is variable. It may start with it, or come before or after it. Off-beat phrasing is of particular interest to the African as a means of heightening the rhythmic tensions of a single line of music” (1963, 108). The notated variations below demonstrate three differing patterns that can be played on the koraa simultaneously or in succession in the event that there is only one koraa and one player. For the first variation, the koraa is not lifted out of the water basin, producing the lowest and most resounding tone. This strike aligns with the step of the dancers and the beat that is implied by the ntrowa and bamboo clappers. In the second and third

variations the koraa player submerges and raises the koraa out of the basin in accordance with the dewuro pattern to produce the low tone and varying high tones that rise as air rushes to the underbelly of the instrument. The second variation consists of the same pattern as the second dewuro, serving to bring out the 2:3 cross-rhythm. For added interest, this variation can be played so that only the first strike in a series of three is submerged followed by two higher tones. The third variation is the only one that begins with the beat described to me by Prof. Poku in each iteration of its quick phrase.

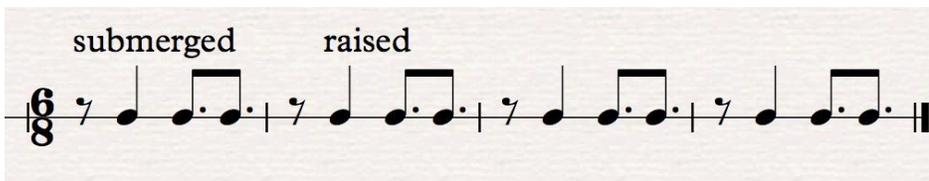
Koraa Variation 1



Koraa Variation 2



Koraa Variation 3



The flip of the beat that can aurally derive from the koraa variations, then, dances between the afterbeat (second of the three subdivisions) and the felt beat depending on the actions of the lead instrument player/s. The steps of the dance, in this sense, also add rhythmic interest to the overall scheme of the performance in that Ghanaians with the recognition of the felt beat would experience the step as an offbeat, something that further creates excitement within the repetitive cycle of the music. The steps of the dance, the dewuro cross-rhythm, and the highlighting of metric contrast by the koraa variations are not all of the elements that add interest to the sonic whole of Dansuomu, however, as the songs and their leader/group interaction also add to this spiraling scheme.

### **Song Style and Lyrics**

William Carter's research of Dansuomu in Juaben in the 1980s established that the lyrics of the songs were written by the musical director of the ensemble, Mr. Kumah. While it is indeed interesting that he felt the need to sustain the morality he associated with traditional music before the acculturation of ideas from the West, this was not the case with respect to the songs and lyrics that I have learned and observed during my own research. When the second dewuro pattern of Adowa was transferred to the first dewuro in Dansuomu, it affected not only the added percussion parts and the ability to translate the Adowa dance, but also

allowed for songs common in Adowa and Nnwonkoro to be performed with the instrumentation of Dansuomu. This was the case for the songs performed by the Twedie group, the Amamresso Agofomma, and the Tufts Kiniwe ensemble; who all freely borrow songs from other items of repertoires and genres for Dansuomu.

### Song Style

During my experience of these songs before my research in Ghana, I had been performing them without harmony and with very exact rhythmic orientation. During my daily lessons with Sister Abena in Kumasi, however, it became quickly apparent that they are much livelier and amenable to personal nuance than what I had experienced previously. The singing voice seems to be performed somewhat high in the throat. The sounds, which are made up of mostly vowels, are very warm and carry well over the booming instrumentation. Loudness and audibility is a positive quality, I learned, as every time I attempted to sing in front of the Agofomma Amamresso, someone inevitably encouraged me to “sing higher, SING HIGHER!!.”

Further to this point, there seemed to be no concern over the exact pitch a song began with as long as the range was reasonably close to that of a normal speaking voice, allowing all members of the chorus to contribute to the wave of voices with solidity and power. All of the songs I

have been taught align with Nketia's writings that "[m]elodies are built on varieties of pentatonic and heptatonic scales, each ethnic group specializing in one of them...The heptatonic tradition is found among the Akan [who]...generally sing in parallel thirds" (1963, 107). Every song I learned was based on a heptatonic scale and melodically moved smoothly up or down the scale without large intervallic leaps; the harmonies that thickened and beautified the main tune were almost always consistently parallel thirds. The overall effect, to me, was something astounding: the accumulation of voices sounding with relative closeness and cohesiveness never ceased to prick my arms with awe-inspired goosebumps. This feeling only heightened as the leader would create rhythmic variances in the melody before being met with a powerful response, or as the entire chorus would modulate upwards a step or two as the fire of the whole performance continued to rise.

One of the other sweet qualities of Dansuomu is that a performance of the piece always begins with a song before the rolling instrumentation enters the aural space. There is at first a solo voice, which must be loud enough to call attention to the onset of a performance, followed by the response of the whole ensemble. This song, which could be one of many, usually incorporates lyrics that indicate that the fire, so to speak, is about to be lit. This song may also function as a means of asking God or the beneficence of ancestors to provide the ensemble with the support

needed to perform well and with great vitality. The following example,  
Yeregu Nsa O, is the song that began the performances of Dansuomu that  
I recorded at the Center for National Culture.

### **Yeregu Nsa O (Twi)**

**Leader:** Aye yeregu nsa o, nsa o  
Nana e Nyame yeregu nsa o, nsa o  
Nana e yeregu nsa o, aye

**Group:** Aye yeregu nsa o, nsa o  
Nana e Nyame yeregu nsa o, nsa o  
Nana e yeregu nsa o, aye

**L:** Atenase o pe  
\_\_\_\_\_ nsa o

**G:** Atenase o pe

**L:** \_\_\_\_\_ nsa o

**G:** Atenase o pe (extended)  
Atenase o pe

### **(English Translation)<sup>42</sup>**

**L:** We are pouring libations  
Father God, we are pouring libations  
Royals, we are pouring libations

**G:** We are pouring libations  
Father God, we are pouring libations  
Royals, we are pouring libations

**L:** There will be no sleep

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<sup>42</sup> While Sister Abena could not fully translate each song that she taught to me, she was assisted by Ernest Domfeh, who graciously helped me understand, if not the direct translation, then the lyrical sentiments.

\_\_\_\_\_ libations

**G:** There will be no sleep

**L:** \_\_\_\_\_ libations

**G:** There will be no sleep (extended)  
There will be no sleep

The blank spaces left in the lyric chart are open to a variety of names or places, so that the song befits the the location or function of its use. For example, the leader could sing *Nyame nsa o* (God libations), or perhaps *Sister Abena nsa o* (Sister Abena libations), or even *Kumase Bantama nsa o* if the performance was taking place in the neighborhood of Bantama. Once this song, or a similar opening song is performed once or twice, the dewuro player plays one rhythmic cycle to set the temp before the rest of the instruments join. After the ensemble is musically in full swing the chorus begins again, usually led by one or two trading lead singers who decide when to change the song or modulate to a higher starting pitch.

In addition to the sweet sounds of voices, the songs also serve to add another layer of rhythmic interest to the sound of Dansuomu. As I learned in rehearsals with Prof. Poku and during my lessons with Sister Abena, the rhythmic patterning of each song is taught through handclapping. As a learner, I could either clap the pattern of the ntrowa or the bamboo clappers to learn each entry point of a phrase or the

placement of each note in the melodic line. In doing this, I began to realize that, similarly to the variations of the koraa, the phrases or lines in every song did not start in one consistent place with respect to the handclapping. In other words, one phrase could be spaced so that it began on the beat, but the following phrase could begin on an offbeat depending on how much rhythmic complexity was involved in the song.

To demonstrate this quality, I will provide a notation of my favorite Dansuomu<sup>43</sup> song and arguably the one with the most rhythmic variation that I have learned to date, Okyirema E. The song is a call to the best drummer of the ensemble to show up for a performance, as the other members are concerned that he is not present. Note the invocation of Odomankoma within the transcription below. In Twi, there are a multitude of names with which to refer to God. As I have been told by various people I spoke to in Kumasi and Accra, Odomankoma represents god in the material world. I get the sense that the lyrics can be both practical and spiritual, in that the ensemble is calling for their lead drummer to provide great energy for the performance, and that they are calling on the earthly aspect of God to bless the performance with vitality and strength.

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<sup>43</sup> Although not limited to Densuomu, as this song seems to be quite popular in Ghana.

## **Okyirema E (Twi)**

**L:** Okyirema e, aye aye  
Aye aye, okyirema e  
Aye aye mefre kyire ma o  
Odomankoma kyire ma e  
Adenti na wa mma o

**G:** Okyirema e, aye aye  
Aye aye, okyirema e  
Aye aye mefre kyire ma o  
Odomankoma kyire ma e  
Adenti na wa mma o

### **(English Translation)**

**L/G:** Best drummer, aye aye  
Aye aye, best drummer  
Aye aye, I am calling you to come  
Odomankoma, best drummer  
Why don't you come?

In my experience, this song was not sung until the musicians had been heating up for a while, pushing the tempo faster and faster. It also usually fell in line with the growing interactions of the dancers as movements became more severe or quick. Further, Okyirema E was often a song during which the leader would modulate upwards stepwise to add to the growing energy of the performance. In the following transcription, note the entry point of each phrase in relation to the repetitive pattern of the ntrowa. Note that the transcription does not reflect the minute swing of sung notes that is hard to capture via a graphical interpretation of the

following song; but rather is employed to show the rhythmic variance of each lyrical line.

### Okyirema E

The musical score for 'Okyirema E' is presented in three systems. Each system consists of a Percussion staff and a Treble Solo staff. The time signature is 6/8. The key signature has one sharp (F#).

**System 1:**  
 Percussion: O kyi re ma E A ye A ye A ye A ye O kyi re  
 Treble Solo: Musical notation corresponding to the lyrics.

**System 2:**  
 Perc. (6): ma E A ye A ye Me fre Kyi re ma O O  
 Tr. Solo: Musical notation corresponding to the lyrics.

**System 3:**  
 Perc. (11): do man ko ma Kyi re ma e A den -ti Na Wa Ma O  
 Tr. Solo: Musical notation corresponding to the lyrics.

### Engaging Musicality

In considering Dansuomu an invented tradition, I return to the question of its very rapid development between the time Adowa was banned and the time Dansuomu was a popular piece frequently performed at formal events in its stead. In this chapter, I have cited secondary source

literature to demonstrate the musical qualities of Dansuomu that related it to other items of traditional Ashanti repertoire, as well as to show that it varied in practice from other Akan ensembles. The primary source settings of my own research make it clear that the added percussion instruments, the transferred dewuro pattern and its consequent cross-rhythm, the variation in rhythm of the koraa, and the layer of rhythmic complexity added by familiar songs, were purposefully crafted to create musical interest within a piece that was quickly becoming used at events where the beloved Adowa was no longer available. In other words, in order for people to be able to dance, sing, and engage with Dansuomu in a similar fashion as they would with Adowa, some changes and additions were required. Engagement in musical activity is the material goal of the music and musicians who perform traditional Ashanti pieces. Therefore, the cyclical nature of the music must contain moments of excitement, the leader must be adept at highlighting interesting moments in the temporal landscape of the piece, the dancers must know when to step and move, and the singers must know when to sing and what to sing. If people are to dance and to sing and to engage in the superstructures of their Ashanti society through organized moments of sound, then the music must be sweet in a familiar way. The Ashanti-crafted Dansuomu that I have come to enjoy immensely certainly fulfills that requirement. Further, Dansuomu

contains its own unique sound through the use of the koraa as lead instrument.

## Conclusion

### Summation of Thoughts

The development of this thesis took many turns, as most tend to do. I approached the work with a mind for considering primarily women's roles in traditional music-making among Ashanti people, as well as with the intent to focus on the dance and songs of Dansuomu, with which I was basically familiar before visiting Ghana. During my fieldwork in Kumasi, however, I was lucky enough to speak with people concerning the historical and social environment of Dansuomu starting in the 1950s as it was affected by Ghanaian Independence, and the political actions of both Kwame Nkrumah and the people of the Ashanti Region. Therefore, the bulk of this material took shape as a discussion of Dansuomu as a tradition that was crafted out of Ashanti resilience to political adversity at a recent time in Ghanaian history when regional cultural exchange was highly valuable to the nation. I call on a quote from Kelly M. Askew's 'As Plato Duly Warned: Music, Politics, and Social Change in Coastal East Africa' in which she describes the benefits of understanding political and musical qualities as being mutually influenceable:

While today's academic climate ostensibly favors the dissolution of binary oppositions such as art/society, symbolic/material, superstructure/base, bias towards the material remains. This has the

effect of relegating aesthetic principles and processes to the margins of economic and political matters and, moreover, perpetuates a passive view of artistic practice that I wish to contest here. Rather than viewing art forms and aesthetic principles as derived from and shaped by society/politics/history, I argue by way of musical data... that economic and political practice need not be conceptualized as distinct from aesthetic principles (Askew 2003, 610).

In order to bridge a gap between music scholarship and political/economic scholarship, Askew relied heavily on the qualities of two kinds of Swahili musical genres to argue for the academic consideration of deeper links between art and social structures and values. While I recognize that it would take years more of fieldwork and study for me to argue boldly that the aesthetics of musical prowess and political dominance of the Ashanti Region are directly reflected in Dansumu, I hope that my portrayal of the story of its historical development scratches the surface of the relationship between music and political perseverance among the Ashanti. In a small country housing different groups of Africans, the Ashanti have fought many battles, both physically and politically, to maintain the region and its resources. This vitality is often portrayed in their traditional music through lively performance and engagement with the community during significant events from funerals to festivals. Because Dansumu was so quickly adapted to fill the missing role of Adowa in the 1950s, and despite that quick transformation, became

a beloved piece of Ashanti repertoire before fading out of practice, I have attempted to convey at least some of the force and history behind the Ashanti musical sweetness present in pieces such as Dansuomu.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

While I have learned more than I could have imagined at the outset of this thesis, there is still much I was unable to cover or argue due to my limited experience. There are several topics of interest with respect to Dansuomu that I was unable to explore with as much detail as they rightly deserve. The foremost in my mind is the potential to discuss the societal involvement of women in Ghanaian, and Ashanti, government and economy. The arts, with special consideration on behind-the-scenes roles of women as members of ensembles and teachers, would provide an opportunity to learn more about the responsibilities of women to upkeep cultural traditions of the region. If a more thorough history of Dansuomu could be derived from further interviews and scholarship from Ghanaian literature, I believe it could accredit Ashanti women for their support of society. In addition to the roles of women, the pure music should receive a much more intricate analysis. In particular, the vocal style of Akan female groups possesses beautiful qualities of cohesion and flow that deserve better understanding and description.

Finally, there is some urge to continue the study of Dansuomu because it may be at the very end of its bout of cultural relevance, at least for the foreseeable future. While I am not a diehard preservationist, I had the experience with meeting and talking members of the Twedie ensemble who expressed a desire to keep the art form alive so that it could continue to be taught to younger generations. As I discovered during my short stay in Kumasi, there are only a handful of people interested in maintaining Dansuomu, and while I place no judgement on this truth, the time in which people have living memory of the piece's limelight is growing smaller. That being said, the performance of Dansuomu through Tufts University shows the possibility of the piece to be appreciated in the United States for as long as it is taught. With respect to Dansuomu on Ghanaian soil, time has shown that there are any number of events and influences that could bring the practice of Dansuomu back into popular use in some form or another in the future.

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