



Research Paper

## Ndwomkro Musical type as Cultural Preservation medium among the Akan in Ghana

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### ABSTRACT

Many traditional musical types exist in Ghana. These musical types are affiliated or associated with the ethnic groups. Few examples of these musical ensembles could be identified as Kpalongo, Kete, Agbaza for Ga, Asante and Ewe ethnic groups respectively as well as Ndwomkro which was the focus for this study. The study was a qualitative research and for that matter adopted interview and participant observation as some of the research instruments in carrying out the research. The research sought to find out whether Ndwomkro musical type could be regarded as a traditional music as well as discussing some social values that are hidden in this musical type. Purposive and snowball sampling methods were used to sample the population for the study. The study revealed that Ndwomkro musical type has a link with traditional events such as funerals and as such could be classified as a traditional musical type. Also, the study pointed out some values that are embedded in the musical types as communication, socialization and carrier. In addition, this musical type serves as a preserver of culture among the Akan as the unique identity of the Akan is seen through the performance of the musical type.

**Keywords:** Cultural preservation, Ndwomkro music, traditional institutions, verbal Communication, non-verbal communication

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### I. INTRODUCTION

Music and dance have been with us as Africans before the arrival of the westerners, who introduced formal education hence formal music.

Even in the midst of formal education in recent days, traditional music still competes with other musical types. This confirms Agordor (2004) that despite the acculturation and pressures from music from other Western world, traditional music still thrives well. Traditional musical types are those that have themes taken from the environment, and makes use of proverbs, riddles and figurative expressions within the immediate environment. Traditional music also deals with traditional establishments such as chieftaincy, festivals and funerals.

One major characteristic of this musical type is that it is owned by the community in which it is performed, unlike other types that are owned by individuals. According to Ndah (2018), traditional music in Ghana are ethnic based. He enumerated many musical types and related them to the ethnic groups in Ghana in

which those musical types are performed, for example Adowa and Adzewa musical types are associated with Ashante and Fanti ethnic groups respectively, Borborbor and Agbadza among the Ewe people. Ndwonkro musical type which is one of the oldest in Ghana could as well be associated with the Asante ethnic group. One thing worth noting about this musical type is that anyone among the audience who is originally not part of the performance is permitted to associate with the performance to either sing, clap or dance.

Ndwonkro musical type which is purely women dominated is performed by the Akan ethnic group in Ghana. This ensemble started as a game song among women who use it to tease themselves (Aning 2006). The ensemble purely remained women dominated until recently that men are needed to help in the playing of the drums. Ndwonkro could be performed during funerals, naming ceremonies. Women put on cloth above their breast, serving as official costume during its performance.

Ndwonkro being a traditional music serves as a form of identity; as it could be associated with a particular ethnic group, it could as well help in the use of the Ghanaian language; through the use of the proverbs and other expressions that are used in the songs.

The ensemble helps in socializing the members in a community. This is because during its performance, members come together to dwell in harmony. Ndwonkro could be performed during the life cycle events to add colour to it; as music and dance has become part and parcel society as it features in all aspects of social and religious lives (Ndah 2018).

### **Statement of the problem**

Traditional musical types have been with the African for so long; yet its relevance is not appreciated by the African. Personal observation has shown that much attention is not accorded them. Some are still with the opinion that music for that matter traditional types are regarded as something for those who are not academically good. It is in view of this that this study is proposed to sensitize the people of aesthetic values that are embedded in Ndwonkro musical type as well as how the musical type could be used as a cultural preservation tool.

### **Objectives**

The study would help to:

1. Identify Ndwonkro as a traditional folk musical type.
2. Bring out the social values that are hidden in the Ndwonkro musical type.
3. Examine how Ndwonkro could be used to preserve culture.

### **Research questions**

1. To what extent could Ndwonkro musical type be regarded as a traditional music?
2. What are some of the social values embedded in Ndwonkro musical type?
3. To what extent could Ndwonkro music be regarded as a culture preservation tool?

### **Conceptual framework and review of related literature**

The conceptual framework of the study is pegged on the theory of arts as preserver of culture and history (Doughan 2012) which argues that all the arts either the visual, performing or verbal could be used to preserve culture. He cites example of the Asafo song *Oboromakoma* which the people of Fante sing to remember their warriors who led them during their migration from Techiman. (*Obudumakoma, Odapagyan, Oson*) as well as other visual arts that are mounted in Mankesim in the Central Region of Ghana in honour of these heroes.

The following sub-topics are as well review in relation to the study.

1. Concept of traditional music.
2. Roles of traditional music in Ghana.
3. Adowa as a musical tool to preserve culture.
4. Ndwonkro among the Akan.
5. Ndwonkro as a cultural preservation tool in Ghana.

### **Concept of Traditional Music**

Traditional music is seen among Ghanaian Communities during traditional events such as festivals.

Ndah (2017) explains traditional music as those musical types that have link with traditional themes such as proverbs, idioms, figurative expressions within society. He substantiates that traditional music has a link with traditional events such as festivals, funerals, and the institution of chieftaincy.

In concord with the topic under review, Kquofi et al (2015) explains that, traditional musical types are those that are performed by a group of people who have one philosophy and as well associate with Ghanaian institution for that matter performed during traditional occasions such as chieftaincy affairs; thus enstoolment or enskinment in addition to life cycle events such as puberty, marriage, festivals and death.

To support the earlier scholars, Dzansi-Mcpalm (2006) describes Ghanaian Traditional music as an embodiment of issues that go on daily in societies. She further discuss that, culture values of indigenous Ghanaians are expressed in musical arts (music, dance, drama, and poetry and costume arts)

Amuah et al(2002) as well posit that, all traditional music in Ghana are associated with dance and as well have an association with traditional Ghanaian social and political institutions such as chieftaincy. They add also that this traditional music is mostly important at the royal courts.

Observing the thought of all the scholars on the topic under review one could deemed that, traditional music has a time and reflections of the immediate society and it has effects on the social, political and Religion lives of the people in the environment.

### **Roles of Traditional Music in Ghana**

The relevance of the traditional music in Ghana cannot be underestimated. In every aspects of lives of a Ghanaian, there is music performing.

Arthur (2009) discusses the following points as the role that performing arts play in the Asante Culture.

a. Installation and enstoolment rights for kings, among the Asantes. She discusses that traditional music plays a panegyric roles during the chieftaincy affairs in the Asante Kingdom as anytime the king sits in state, the *Kwadwomfo* to recount the exploits of their Kings who fought for the Asante state.

b. Communication: Arthur explains that traditional music communicates among people. She explains further that among the Asante culture, when Otumfuo Osei Tutu II was nominated and accepted by the community a song was sung. This song helps the elders to confirm acceptance of his choice. The same way if he was not to be accepted a song would have been sung to show his rejection.

c. Entertainment role: The song minstrels sing to make the King happy.

d. Music is used to inspire and encourage the commander in chief of the Asante Army during warrior situations.

To confirm the assertion of Arthur, (Ndah 2017) as well adds that, music entertains as it affects the affective domain of the individual. He explains that music functions during festivals, church, as well as beaches and clubs for pleasure.

According to Ndah, music communicates in two forms, namely verbal and Non-verbal. He explains verbal as the messages that are sung through the rendition of the music. He shares that such messages directly influence members of society. The non-verbal occur through the appellations that are played on drums, the movements and the gestures that are displayed during the dancing. He cites an example that, among the Asantes and the Ewe people, when chief and other important personality die, *Atumpan* drums are played to announce the death. In addition, he shares that, music serves as a career for those who choose it as a career. He substantiates that, career exist either in the Popular, Art or Traditional musical sectors for those who have talent and therefore perform for a fee.

Ndah supports Arthur (2009) by stating that music performs panegyric roles in a sense that, traditional music for example is used to exalt or dignify the traditional authorities to show their power. He cites some traditional musical ensembles as being related with traditional authorities to show their superiority. He explains that, among the Ewe people of Kpando, Ho and Hohoe, *Akpi* and *Adevu* musical ensembles are used to accompany chiefs when they are on a procession. Among the Asante people as well, *Kete* ensemble is played to accompany Otumfuo when he is in procession to a durbar. This is because the musical type depicts the supreme powers of the king.

He continues that, music serves as a tool to recall historical facts. He gives example of the migration of the Ewes from Nortsie (Republic of Togo) to the current location which is well presented in song with the text below:

*Agorkolifenu tasesetala*

*Eviawo kata wodzo leegbo*

*Esiwodzemola*

*Wozzo megbemegbe*

*Wowuatikuawo*

*Benaanemamlanomagabu o.*

Translates as the subjects of *Agorkoli* run away from him due to his tyrannical ruling styles. They walked backwards during the exodus so their footsteps would confused the enemies. They were dispersing seeds as they move along, they were making identification marks on trees and so their followers would pick good signals. He cites another example of the Asante folk song that narrate the bravery of *YaaAsantewaa* who led a war against the British. The text of the song is found below:

*Yekoahikoe*

*YaaAsantewaa*

*Obabesiaodzinaprimuanue*

*Wa ye bi ama yen*

Translatesas in this fight, YaaAsantewa, the brave woman, who could face the weapon of the British army, indeed she has done a lot for us

He again opines that, musical ensembles can help to showcase the culture of a group of people. He gives an example of how musical events are used to showcase the culture of the people of Logba in the Volta region of Ghana during their yam festivals. He supports his point by confirming the thoughts of Aryetey (2002) that traditional drumming and dancing which is part of Ghanaian culture is used to project the cultural identity of Ghana.

According to Ebeli (2015), music communicates. She explains that, communication that music sends out manifest through the performers; through the instrumentalists, and the audience. She citesTotoeme traditional ensemble among the people of Avatime and explains that, the ensemble is able to communicate and promote peace. She explains further that, the ensemble is used to project the cultural values of the people of Avatime in the Volta region of Ghana.

She opines that, the musical ensemble can be performed to accompany life cycle events citing example of *Ablade*(puberty rite) which is performed for female during the Easter durbar.

Ebeli further discusses that,Totoeme music is also performed to bid farewell to queen mothers of Avatime. She clarifies that, the same ensemble is performed during the enstoolment of Queen mothers.

Ndah shares further that, musical ensembles play a role during the life cycle events. He outlines these events as birth, outdoor, adolescent, marriage and death. He quotes Ampomah (2000) that among the Akan in Ghana, a befitting burial to the dead is crucial and in most of the times, that is done in dirges to bid farewell. He clarifies again that music plays a role during marriage ceremonies. He supports this point by discussing the thoughts of Lodonu (2009) who explains that, art forms such as music, singing and dance form part of traditional marriage among the people of Gbi in the Volta region of Ghana. Worship whether confined to members of a cult or open to the general public involves copious use of music (Aning 2006). He discusses that, among the Dagarti and Akan of Ghana, the Xylophone and *Atumpan* drums feature respectively in their ensemble for worshipping of their gods. Aning adds that, music functions as accompanying movement as well as holding the worshipers together. Amu (1997) equally shares that, traditional music can be performed during funerals. Amu supports this claim by discussing that *Adabatram* musical type performed by the people of Ho, Peki and Wusuta in the volta region of Ghana is played during the funeral celebration of important traditional personalities such as chiefs and heroes.

### **Adowa as a Musical Tool to Preserve Culture in Ghana**

Cultural policy document Ghana (2004) identifies musical forms and other artistic works as cultural preservation tools. Adowa has been identified as a recreational and funeral ensemble among the Akan. According to Ndah (2014), during the performance of Adowa musical type, the culture of the Akan which is preserved in the ensemble is brought to fore in the historical background of the musical type, the instrumental resource of the ensemble, the costume put up in the performance of Adowa as well as the occasion in which it could be performed. He stresses that anytime Adowa is performed, the cultural traits of the Asante or Akan is seen in the areas earlier outlined.

### **Ndwonkro musical type among the Akan**

In most of the social events among the Asantes, observation shows that Ndwonkro music plays a key role. According to Aning (1975),it starts as a game song that the Akan women were using to entertain themselves. He adds that, with time, the women were singing to mention the names of men around; who in turns present some gifts to the women (performers). Aning explains that the themes of Ndwonkro cover a wide range of social issues that prevail in society.

Aning continues that,this musical type dominates among the people of Kumasi and Mampong. He shaares that, during the performance of this musical type, the women form themselves in circles and the song leader begins the music with a call which the members respond to. Each of the members would have a chance to call a song for others to respond to; until all the members in the circle have their turn.

This researcher opines that, initially, it was only hand clapping that was to accompany the singing until modernization influence the ensemble with some instruments.

Manford et al (1993) however trace the origin of Ndwonkro and shares that, it was believed a mad woman saw dwarfs perform the music every night and she learns its performance; thus both the songs and the dancing from them, which she equally mobilizes the young children and taught them how to perform it.

The researchers agree with Aning (1975) that the musical type is performed by the Asante people. They add that Ndwonkro was originally called *AMANYINA* meaning defend and make firm. They discuss further that, mothers started using the song to cradle their children. This practice became popular and led to the name Ndwonkoro (song of cradle). They explain again that, in modern days, more instruments have been added to the musical type. Some of these instruments are *Frikyiwa* (castanet), *Dawuro* (Bells banana) *Adawuruta*(special Double bell)

Manford and his colleagues share with Aning that the Ndwonkro became popular in Kumasi and Mampong due to prominent women who took it upon themselves to form groups in many of the Asante states. They identify Maame**AfiaAbasa** from Kumasi who help formed the group in Manhyia. They made it clear that it was due to the effort of **MaameAbasa** in planting and nurturing of Ndwonkro that earn her the title *Ndwonkrohema*(Queen of Nnwonkro) of Manhyia in 1989. The scholars add that in order for Abasa to keep the culture of Ndwonkro moving in the family, she trained two of her children who are following her footstep in the performance of the Ndwonkro music.

Another musician identified by Manford and his team was Yaa Adusa who hailed from Asante Mampong. Yaa, popularized the musical type at Mampong by forming the *Kontonkyi* Ndwonkro group, and as well help other communities such as Dorma Ahenkora, Berekum and Kobreso to also establish Ndwonkro groups.

### **Ndwonkro as a Cultural Preservation Tool**

Nnwonkro is a traditional musical type that prevails among the Akan in current days. According to Ndah et al (2021), Ndwonkro is seen during life cycle events especially during funerals.

Aning (1975) equally explains that, the social issues that go on in society are arranged and sung in the Ndwonkro songs. He shares further that, cultural identity of the Akan has been preserved through the Ndwonkro songs. He cites an example of one of the songs *Amankwatia* which discusses the then Bantamahene of Kumasi. Mereku et al (2007) shares similar views of the earlier researcher and explain that the Yaa Asantewaa war has been nicely preserved in one of the Ndwonkro songs which describe Yaa Asantewaa as a brave woman who could stand up to the sophisticated weapons of the European; that indeed she has left a legacy for all to follow. The assertion of Mireku et al (2007) has been confirmed by Ndah (2017). The Ghana's cultural policy document (2004) stipulates that all the traditional musical assets in the state are heritages which are used to preserve the cultural identity of Ghanaians. The earlier researchers have discuss that Ndwonkro is a musical property of the Akan. This explains therefore that it is used to preserve and showcase the cultural lives of Ghanaians. Ndah (2014) as well opines that, some religious bodies fused traditional methods of singing with the Western styles in the liturgy of some churches. He explains that some churches such as Methodist and African Methodist Episcopal churches made use of *Abibinwom* and Ndwonkro in their music. This he explains has preserved the cultural identity which has spread to other religious denominations such as African Faith Tabernacle. This phenomenon above confirms the earlier assertion of Ampomah (2000) and Manford et al (1993) that Ndwonkro could be used as a tool for preservation of culture. They explain that the doctrines and philosophies of the Akan are embedded in the songs. They give example of Afia Abasa and Yaa Adusa's songs and argue that the cultural and behavior of the Kumasi as well as Mampong people of the Ashanti Region could be easily found in the songs.

## **II. METHODOLOGY**

The research design that is applicable to the study is qualitative research; which seeks to describe events and phenomenon according to Anderson (2006).

### **Research Tools**

Some of the research tools adopted during the study are:

\*Interview

\* Participant observation

Interview was used to solicit data from persons who deal directly with cultural and its related fields. This instrument was very useful as it gave room for the interviewees to give out more information related to the topic under study. Interview guide was used to guide in the line of questioning.

Participant observation was as well used to gather data towards this study. This instrument helped the researchers to have firsthand information about the performance. It also gave the respondents the confidence to give out information without fear since the researchers were part of the performance. For the sampling methods used, purposive and snow ball were used to sample from the target population consisting of music students in some selected senior high schools, cultural coordinators in the Ghana Education Office and some performers in the cultural centres in the Asante, Bono and Eastern regions of the country. The breakdown of the population and sampling methods used is seen in a tabular form on table 1 below:

**Table 1:** Target, Accessible and sampling methods of the study

<b>Target Population</b>	<b>Accessible Population</b>	<b>Sampling Method</b>
Students	15	Random
Teachers	10	Purposive
Cultural coordinators	10	Purposive
Performing artistes	05	Snowball

**Total Population for the study = 40**

### **Analysis of Data**

Out of the 15 music students interviewed, all of them thus 100% were able to explain traditional music as having link with traditional institutions.

They unanimously agreed that Ndwonkro could be classified as traditional music. As to whether there are some values found in Ndwonkro, 10 students out of 15 representing 66.6% stated some good values found in Ndwonkro such as socialization, career, communication and cultural heritage. The remaining students state that traditional Ndwonkro could be attributed to idol worship and so there is no good values in Ndwonkro musical type.

As to whether Ndwonkro could be used as a cultural preservation tool, 66.6% agreed that Ndwonkro could be used to preserve culture. The remaining 33.3% maintained the earlier stand that nothing good could be found in any traditional music.

The teachers and all the cultural coordinators interviewed agreed that Ndwonkro music could be regarded as a traditional music and it could offer many values. They also agreed that the Ndwonkro could be used to preserve Ghanaian culture for that matter, they would advocate for its inclusion in the school curriculum.

Of the 5 performing artistes, all agreed that Ndwonkro could be grouped under traditional music and it could be used to preserve Ghanaian heritage and culture. They agreed there are some values found in the Ndwonkro music but they argued they wouldn't advocate for its inclusive in the school curriculum this is because such music are not well treated or valued in the school system.

### **III. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

The study finally revealed that, traditional music has link with traditional institutions for that matter musical type such as *Kete*, *Adowa*, *Agbadza* and *Ndwonkro* are traditional musical types which associate with the ethnic groups in Ghana. It revealed also that values such as socialization, cultural heritage, communication are but some social values that are derived from the performance of Ndwonkro. This aspect confirms the assertions of Arther(2009), Kquofi(2015) and Ndah (2014, 2017, and 2018), that traditional music helps in career, socialization, communication and cultural heritage.

The study proved that, the Ndwonkro musical type could be used as a tool to preserve culture. Through the verbal renditions of the songs and dance gestures, the costumes during the performance as well as the instruments in the ensemble encourage continuity of cultural preservation. Example was cited in one of the songs *Amankwatia* which described the achievements of **Bantamahene** in the Asante Region of Ghana. Example is also found in the YaaAsantewaa and the European during the war confirming the study of Ndah (2017).

The study as well confirmed the study of Doughan (2012) that Arts and Culture are the best preservation tools citing the example of the three warriors who led the people of Mankessim in the Central region of Ghana during the movement from Techiman.

### **IV. CONCLUSION**

Ndwonkro is a traditional musical type found among the Asante people of Ghana; it is a musical type mainly performed by the women. Performance of Ndwonkro helps in socialization as during the performance it encourages unity and cohesion among members; which is a core value good for harmonious living and nation building. In addition the words that are sung in the musical types communicate directly with the audience (verbally), as well as the non – verbal communication is also seen in the gestures and dance steps during performance. The songs equally helped in the correct use of the Ghanaian language through the use of proverbs, riddles, and figurative expressions. The whole Ndwonkro ensemble is regarded as cultural assets for that matter serving as a cultural preservation tool. The musical type could be as well used to preserved historical facts; for example life of KonfoAnokye in the Asante kingdom, OtumfoOseiTuTu, YaaAsantewa and the Migration of Ewe people from Nortsie to current day; are all preserved through traditional music such as Ndwonkro.

### **V. RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Akan communities should come together and establish a cultural festival to be showcasing Ndwonkro and other traditional musical types as there are good cultural values that are embedded in it.

Curriculum planners should think of rolling Ndwonkro and other similar musical types in the school curriculum to be studied since it helps to preserve the culture of the Akan as well as giving them unique identity.

Traditional authorities in the Akan states should liase with the Centre for National Culture to recruit the local talented artistes to perform this musical type record them and preserve them for posterity; so that it would not go extinct.

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