

SERENDIPITOUS SOCIO-CULTURAL DYNAMICS OF LOGBA TRADITIONAL MUSICAL ENSEMBLES IN GHANA

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ABSTRACT

Traditional musical ensembles have serendipitous propensities among the people of Logba in the Volta region of Ghana. Significantly, music plays significant roles in the phases of life of the people. Unfortunately, there has not been enough in-depth reflection on this cultural heritage and its impact on the socio-cultural and economic development of the people. This research adopts the qualitative research methodology to study and analyse the roles of 8 traditional ensembles play in creating and enhancing the social capital in the Logba area. The findings, however, reveal that traditional music serves as a medium through which life cycle events can be performed. The aim of this research was to create awareness among the people about how to appreciate their diverse, unique and creative traditional musical assets. This article is a useful document for musicians, historians and anthropologists as an exposure to the practical themes regarded as the core of the people's heritage.

Keywords: cultural heritage, life cycle events, musical ensemble, serendipitous, socio-cultural.

INTRODUCTION

Africa has contributed immensely to the world artistic tradition including the diverse musical ensembles with their unique aesthetic values as well as their serendipitous roles. An ensemble is a group of people performing a musical number together and /or a group of musicians playing musical instruments together. In each musical style different norms have developed for the sizes and composition of different ensembles, and for the repertoire of songs or musical works that these ensembles perform (Persaud, 2011; Teyi, 2010; Albright, 2005). Musical ensembles that are performed in communities in Ghana are done largely by instrumentalists whilst the rest are dancers (Dzansi-Mcpalm, 2006). In every society globally, the ensembles play significant roles. Nevertheless, the serendipitous roles played by Logba traditional ensembles in creating and enhancing the socio-cultural and economic development of the people cannot be overemphasised.

Logba traditional area is a typical community in the Volta Region of Ghana that upholds indigenous arts and culture of which traditional musical ensembles are held in very high esteem. These musical ensembles play very significant roles such as socio-economic,

religious, social and educational roles to the benefit of the entire Logba community in particular and the nation in general.

The aim of this research was to create the awareness among the people of Ghana, and for that matter Africa as whole, about how to appreciate the roles of their diverse and creative traditional musical assets. This awareness would instil in them the spirit of consciousness to protect and conserve their cultural heritage for posterity as well as for socio-cultural and economic development of their society. As a result, eight musical ensembles have been identified, studied and analysed in the Logba traditional area of the Volta region of Ghana in order to unearth their socio-cultural roles which contribute immensely to the social capital of the area.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Traditional musical ensembles found in Logba traditional area, as in any other African ethnic group, can be grouped as chordophones, membranophones, aerophones and idiophones (Teffer, 2006; Luunga, 2008; Dzansi-Mcpalm, 2006 & Wuaku, 2004). These traditional musical ensembles employ a lot of percussive instruments during performance. This phenomenon could be attributed to many factors including historical, economic and geographical settings of the Africans. According to Campbell (2002) and Aning (2006) traditional musical ensembles, especially in Africa, are used as a medium through which certain vices in the communities are addressed and corrected.

Before Western influence traditional music was already an integral part in the religious, social, economic, cultural and political developments of the various ethnic groups in Africa, and for that matter Ghana. Work songs among the people along the coast were being performed to motivate the fishermen to draw or pull or mend their nets at the beach. Also, traditional musical ensembles were effectively and efficiently employed to recount the good deeds of the dead person, create a platform for sympathizers especially females to express themselves through mourning, emphasize the pathos of the situation, honour the deceased person, to mourn him or elevate him, to adore him and to cherish his name.

Matczynski (2011) and Campbell (2002) describe traditional music as those that are performed by the people with common philosophy, and also connected with Ghanaian institutions and is therefore performed mostly during traditional occasions like chieftaincy affairs (enstoolment or enskinment) and ceremonies of life cycle events such as puberty, marriage, death, as well as recreational activities and festivals. Teyi (2010) also confirmed that African traditional music is one of the heritages that are associated with traditional African institutions. This form of music is distinct in idioms and orientation from other contemporary music such as art or popular music. All African traditional music are associated with dance (Persaud, 2011). Amuah et al (2002) assert that traditional music consists of all the musical types that are closely linked to traditional Ghanaian social and political institutions such as chieftaincy. They posit that traditional music is a special music that occupies a very important place at the royal courts. Dzansi-Mcpalm (2006) describes Ghanaian traditional music as an embodiment of issues that go on daily in our society. The cultural values of indigenous Ghanaians are expressed in musical arts (music, dance, drama, poetry and costume arts). Worship, whether confined to members of a cult or open to the general public, involves copious use of music (Aning 2006).

The meaning of traditional music performed by an ensemble is characterized by a large degree of diversity in terms of genres, styles, instruments and social functions, reflecting Ghana's own tremendous ethnic diversity. This type of music is largely indigenous to Ghana, making use of instruments, musical elements, and themes that are linked to pre-colonial genres and traditions (Matczynski, 2011). Boyer-Dry (2008), during a study on "Transforming traditional music in the midst of contemporary change", stated that traditional music is part of daily life of others; and at the same time, this musical type is hardly present in the life of others.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The main findings emerged as a result of analysing responses collected through interviews, questionnaire and participants' observations of eight traditional musical ensembles in the Logba community. The following discussion presents the serendipitous roles of the traditional musical ensembles in creating and enhancing the socio-cultural and economic development of the people of Logba traditional area in particular, and Ghana as a whole.

Traditional *Obrim* musical ensemble

Traditional *Obrim* musical ensemble is one of the oldest musical types, which is performed during most of the recreational, life cycle events (birth, puberty, marriage and death) and durbar of chiefs in the Logba traditional area. According to *Fo Koku Asigbetse*, one of the informants of this research, *Obrim* musical type migrated with the Logba people during their historic migration from Notsie in the current Republic of Togo. He narrated that before the walls of Notsie were broken for the Ewes to have their freedom, it was *Obrim* musical type that was performed. The initial instrument of the ensemble was made up of a carved pawpaw stalk sealed with a skin of a bat. This musical ensemble serves multi-purposes depending on the lyrics of what the performers sing. *Obrim* musical type is not a pure court ensemble which is limited to be performed at palaces but could be performed in the open at any time by any person or group of persons who are willing to do so.

Both men and women perform this musical type (Figure 1); and the dancing is also done in pairs, precisely a man and a woman in two files with left to right hand gestures being displayed in an aesthetically pleasant manner to convey specific messages (Figure 2). During the performance of this musical type, two important personalities' names are mentioned and given appellation by the song leader. For example, "*Tornye Agbotse yom mele, Tornye Asigbetse yom mele*" meaning "Father Agbotse, I pay homage to you, Father Asigbetse, I pay homage to you". These names, Agbotse and Asigbetse are prominent in the ensemble because on their journey through the wilderness, the drums got missing and it took these two people, who were cousins, to find the missing drums. They succeeded in retrieving the drums and rejuvenated the ensemble which made them become heroes and custodians of the *Obrim* ensemble.



Figure 1: *Obrim* ensemble at Yam festival



Figure 2: *Obrim* dancers at Yam festival

Serendipitously, this ensemble serves as an avenue of expression because the lyrics of the songs tell a lot of stories concerning current happenings in societies. Secondly, some historical facts which should have been hidden from the younger generation are also exposed during the performance of *Obrim*. Thirdly, it provides a platform for revenue generation as individual members who take part in the ensemble travel to perform in and outside Logba to generate income to earn a living. Fourthly, it serves as a place for the people to learn how to live in harmony with one another which brings about social cohesion. Also, it serves as a ground for training of the younger artistes and performers.

The ensemble offers the opportunity for new dancers to enhance their skills and expertise in the performance of other traditional musical ensembles. Furthermore, because of the geographical features at Logba, precisely *Akpom* waterfalls and the caves, tourists often visit the area and *Obrim* musical ensemble is used to entertain them as well as to showcase the rich culture of the people. Lastly, good communicative skills are acquired through the performance of *Obrim* ensemble. This is because the lyrics of the songs make use of riddles, proverbs, idiomatic and figurative expressions which can assist one to know how to properly use the Ghanaian language.

***Adevu* musical ensemble**

Adevu is a combination of two Ewe words “*Ade*” meaning hunt and “*vu*” meaning drum. *Adevu* ensemble came about as a result of the warriors and hunters. Whenever hunters returned from their expedition, especially after killing big and wild animals, the community

would welcome them with the ensemble to offer thanks to the gods for delivering them from the hands of wild animals. In the olden days, the people believed that some of the wild animals possessed formidable spirits that could turn against the hunters during their hunting expedition. *Adevu* was then performed to honour the hunter.

In this ensemble, the hunter demonstrates to the public the challenges he goes through before killing an animal. Nowadays, *Adevu*, which is performed by both men and women during durbar of chiefs, is done to show their dignity and bravery. This is because among the Logba people, every leader or chief is supposed to be strong or exhibit qualities of a warrior who can defend their state against external aggression. There is a special dress, a dyed-smock called *Adewu* (Figure 3) that the performers put on when performing the dance. The instruments that are used in the performance consist of a bell (*Oga*) and supporting drums (Figures 4, 5, 6 and 7). The bell sets the tone for the performance with its aggressive rhythm, before other instruments are cued in. The dancers hold a whisk or knife in their hands before doing the dancing (Figure 8).



Figure 3: A hunter in *Adewu* smock



Figure 4: Bell (*Oga*)



Figure 5: Master drum



Figure 6: First drum



Figure 7: Second drum

The incredible performance displayed by this ensemble serves as a platform through which traditional leaders and important personalities in a society are honoured. This is because the

musical performance is a court music and anytime it is performed, it shows dignity and honour to the one being accompanied with the ensemble.

The *Adevu* musical type largely preserves the culture of Logba people because certain past events are usually displayed through the performances and their relationship between the present situations are succinctly unveiled. Nevertheless, the harmonization of the instruments in the ensembles gives a sense of harmonious living among the people. This can be seen in the individual instruments playing together to achieve holistic performance. Once all the performers come together to play as a group, oneness is also being encouraged.

***Akpi* musical ensemble**

Akpi is an executioners' musical type (Amu, 1997). Wuaku (2004) also indicates that *Akpi* musical type has a warrior spirit in it, and that the warrior effect is displayed by the bell. The study revealed that *Akpi* came about as a result of the co-existence of the people of Asante and the Ewe during those periods of war when the Ewe people had to play host to their Asante people. The ensemble was a warrior and a court dance that the Asante people were using to guard their chiefs. The Ewe people in the Logba traditional area learnt the chieftaincy institution from them and that led to the musical type being associated with the traditional chiefs. All the chiefs are regarded as brave people or warriors, and for that matter during festivals and durbars, they are dressed in rich *Kente* cloths with their full regalia to match, and they process through the principal streets. During the procession, the chiefs or their representatives (*Asafohene*) are carried in a palanquin amidst *Akpi* musical display by the ensemble (Figures 10 and 11).

The findings revealed that Logba people learnt the *Akpi* musical type from **Agate** people who are one of the Ewe communities. The performers of *Akpi* ensemble put on a special smock and it is performed during funerals of chiefs and important individuals as well as during durbar of chiefs. When the ensemble is being performed during funerals, the chiefs and elders are clad in red and black cloths (Figure 11). The *Akpi* songs adopt the call and response structure, and they also depict elements of bravery. *Akpi* and *Adevu* musical types share things in common; both of them are court ensembles that are used to accompany chiefs and other important figure heads to durbars. There are three sets of drums and a bell that are required in the performance of *Akpi* (Figures 4, 5, 6 and 7).



Figure 8: A dancer performing *Akpi* at a yam festival during a durbar



Figure 9: Dancer dancing to *Akpi*



Figure 10: Chiefs and elders processing to a durbar dancing to the tune amidst *Akpi* music



Figure 11: *Asafohene* clad in red of *Akpi* music

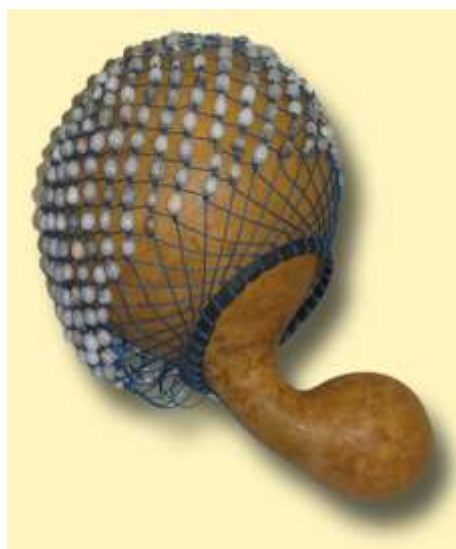
***Agbadza* musical type**

Agbadza is one of the oldest musical types performed by the Southern Ewe people in the Volta region of Ghana before it came to the Logba community. It is a social musical ensemble which cuts across daily activities among the southern Ewe people.

The research revealed that *Agbadza* came out from an old war dance called *Atrikpui*, which was being performed to welcome soldiers returning from war. As wars were becoming the thing of the past, *Agbadza* ensemble emanated out of it and became a recreational type for the people. The word “*agbadza*” can be interpreted in two ways:

- a. Broad-based dance
- b. Girdle that is worn by warriors during war

This musical type is given different names, which are *Kini*, *Akpoka*, *Ageshie* and *Agba*. These names have been given to distinguish the slight variations in their tempo. Also, the performance is divided into four variations namely, *banyinyi*, *vutsotso*, *Adzo*, and *hatsiatsia*. *Banyinyi* has to do with playing of some variations that are considered religious. This is followed by *vutsotso*, where the cantor calls all the participants by shouting “*Hododuioo*”, then they respond “*Hoo*”. In the *adzo* section, they only make exclusive use of the musical instruments. Songs in this section are short and repetitive. The *hatsiatsia* is the type accompanied by bells but the study reveals that the Logba people do not observe this section of the *Agbadza* ensemble. The *Agbadza* ensemble makes use of instruments such as *gakogui*, *axatse*, *kagan*, *kidi*, *sogo* and *atsimevu* considered to be the master drum (Figures 12, 13 and 14).

Figure 12: *Axatse* (castanet)Figure 13: *Gakogui* (bell)Figure 14: *Agbadza* drums (*kidi, kagan, sogo, atsimevu*)

During celebrations like yam festivals and Easter festivities, this ensemble is performed to entertain the audience in the Logba community. Also, it serves as a source of income generation for the people. The ensemble brings harmony among the Logba people because it is a recreational dance. The messages communicated in *Agbadza* ensemble educate the people because some of the themes largely focus on morality, civility and patriotism.

***Gabada* musical ensemble**

The research revealed that ***Gabada*** musical type was brought from the people of Wusuta in northern Volta of Ghana. It is an ensemble performed by both men and women for pleasure. The texts of the songs are drawn from the local themes and idioms. Some texts and dance movements were seen as profane by the Bremen missionaries who established the Evangelical Presbyterian church in the area in 1908, thereby calling for its ban (Amuah et al, 2003). The ensemble has, however, been modified and some of the undesirable elements in it have been taken out.

Gabada musical ensemble is a social musical type which is used for merry making after a hard day's work or it is performed to bring the people together during weekends when most of the town folks are relaxing at home. The text of the songs are meant to rebuke, ridicule and check indecent behaviours among the people, thereby playing a significant social role.

Profound showcase of creative skills and expertise in dancing are exhibited during the performance of *Gabada*. This boosts the morale of individual performers, especially those who aspire to join professional cultural troupes and perform for their livelihood. During the performance, the people display cultural assets, especially paraphernalia that are of cultural importance to society.

***Zibo* musical ensemble**

Zibo is one of the musical types found in the Logba area, specifically, Logba Alakpeti. The research findings revealed that this ensemble came about through a young man called Zibo Korku and the brother who had learnt the performance of this dance type from the people of Ho. The musical type performs multipurpose roles because it can be performed on most occasions such as festivals, durbars, funerals, etc. It is performed by both males and females and does not involve the use of any formal dress code except the leader of the ensemble who holds in his/her hand a whisk. The performers move in one file and move faster on the rhythms played and no other person is supposed to cross their path during the performance.

Zibo attracts many young people to its performance thereby fostering unity. Also, the ensemble is performed to correct wrong doings in the Logba area. This is done by exposing names of culprits who have done something wrong in the songs and by so doing, it deters others from doing same for fear of getting their names exposed in songs. The constant performance of this ensemble serves as a way of protecting and preserving the cultural heritage of the area for posterity.

***Vuga* (*Ukunango*)**

This musical ensemble has been learnt by the Logba people from the Akan people of Ghana. It is purely a royal musical type which is played only during emergencies, durbar of chiefs, and funeral of chiefs or important personalities in the Logba community. The study revealed that *Vuga* is similar to the *Fontomfrom* ensemble which is performed by the Akan. The only feature that differentiates them is that, *Fontomfrom* uses two long drums (*from*) and *Dawuro* (bell), whilst *Vuga* uses one long drum, without a bell. The ensemble is made up of two *atumpan* drums and one tall drum (Figure 15). The ensemble does not involve the use of vocals but rather instrumentals that deal with appellations and proverbs whilst the dancer exhibits many gestures at the same time jumping on the two legs. Dancers to this ensemble tie a cloth around their waist during the performance.



Plate 15: *Vuga* musical ensemble

The appellations and the proverbs that are played on the *Vuga* send messages to the chiefs and the people of the area. During emergency situations, it is used to summon the people to the palaces. The ensemble showcases the dignity of chiefs as it is a court ensemble. Its performance brings to fore the honour and dignity of the traditional leaders. Since the ensemble is an asset inherited from the past, continuity of culture is seen anytime it is performed, thereby preserving the heritage. Most importantly, some historical facts are remembered through the performance of the *Vuga* ensemble, for example, the migration and the war periods, during which the ensemble was learnt.

Gawodor ensemble

This musical ensemble takes its meaning from two Ewe words *Ga* meaning money and *wodor* meaning work. So *Gawodor* means money works. It is a type that was being performed by the rich and the wealthy. The informant of this study revealed that this ensemble was founded by *Togbe Kodzokpo* who had made enough money in the community and for that matter wanted to display that status. In view of this, he owned a palanquin in addition to the musical ensemble. The dance movements of the ensemble were done by the dancer throwing both hands into the air. The ensemble is performed during festivals and merry-making events. Significantly, it is played to entertain people and make merry.

Socio-cultural dynamics of traditional musical ensembles in Logba area

Music is known to have dominated the social and cultural life of every society all over the world. From dawn to dusk, music permeates the daily activities of every community and Logba traditional area is no exception. The musical ensembles serve as a conduit through which some life cycle events are observed. For example, during birth, puberty and marriage rites, *Agbadza* and *Obrim* are performed to complement the celebrations. Also, during funeral rites these musical types are performed to sympathize with the bereaved families. If the deceased happens to be a chief or an important personality, *Vuga* ensemble would be played in instantly to announce the death.

The musical ensembles play communication roles through the text of the songs, gestures of the dancers and the appellations played on the drums. The messages that are communicated are that of praise, insults and encouragement. Whenever there are certain issues going wrong in the community for which nobody seems to say, musical performers sing them out during their performances for society to change. The *vuga*, for example, is used to summon people to the chief's palace or announce the death of an important personality in Logba. Below are some of the messages that are communicated by some of the musical ensemble through their song texts:

***Obrim* song text:**

Avɔnyuie talawo, menya avɔnyanya
Avɔnyuie talawo, menya avɔnyanya
Avɔnyuie talawo menya avɔnya
Avɔnyuie talawo menya avɔnyanya
Yee! Avɔnyuie talawo yee! Yee!
A vɔnyuie talawo yee

Literally, the above text is satirical in context, giving warning that those who know how to dress must know how to wash. This means that those who always want to be enjoying at the expense of others must also be on their own and work for it.

Akpi song text:

Vimase nue koyi loo

Vimase nue koyi loo

This song text translates that the child that refuses to take instruction should be taken away as a punishment. This text communicates that everybody must be submissive to authority or else face punishment.

Agbadza song text

Dekaw □w □ me muse lee

Dekaw □w □ me muse lee

Miwo deka midzra du do

Dekaw □w □ me muse le

The text above translates that unity is strength, unity is strength, let us come together and build the nation because unity is strength. This is a very good message through the text of the song which can bring about the spirit of patriotism.

Socio-culturally, the musical ensembles are used to showcase the culture of the people of the Logba area. During the yam festival, which is the major festival celebrated by the people of Logba, their cultural identity is displayed through their musical ensemble. Aryetey (2002) corroborates this by explaining that traditional drumming and dancing which is part of Ghanaian culture is used to project the cultural identity and heritage of Ghana. Therefore, these ensembles found in Logba area help in displaying the cultural identity of the people as well as educating the younger generation on some historical events and facts about these musical types.

Economically, musical ensembles in the area serve at a source of livelihood to the performers. On most occasions, all these ensembles found within the area perform at the office of the traditional council or they are invited to perform at programmes such as funerals, marriages and cultural festivals during which fees are charged.

The texts of some of the songs and the drum language help in educating, and for that matter, shaping the language structure of the people because the song texts make use of such literary elements such as idioms, proverbs, appellations and figurative expressions. This phenomenon equips the people, especially students to sharpen their communication skills.

What is more, these musical ensembles are performed to show honour or dignity to the traditional leaders like chiefs and other important personalities in the community. This study revealed that one hunter, *Anansa Akosihu*, who hailed from the Logba traditional area was welcomed with *Adevu* musical ensemble for being the first hunter from the community to have killed a wild animal. This was a way of honouring him. Besides, whenever Logba Chiefs are in a procession to a durbar, *Akpi* or *Adevu* musical ensemble is performed to accompany them to signify their authority and status in society.

CONCLUSIONS

Traditional musical ensembles play social, political, economic and religious roles in the lives of the Logba people. Additionally, the cultural identity of the people of Logba is largely showcased during the performance of the ensemble as they serve as a reminder to make the people aware of their origin. Through the performance of these musical types, some cultural values and norms about the people of Logba are displayed for the younger generation to observe. The awareness of the roles of traditional musical ensembles in the Logba area would give policy makers in Ghana, especially the Ghana Education Service (GES) the opportunity to make teaching and learning of traditional music a topmost priority in the educational curriculum for all schools at all levels.

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