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Ruptures, Junctures, and Difference: The Role of Music and Ritual Performance in Framing “Tradition” in Contemporary Royal Ceremonies, Ghana

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ABSTRACT

Royal rituals and festivities are vibrant sites of cultural continuity among the Ewe of Ghana. The rituals exhibit elements of hyperreal, sonic, and sacred/secular sensibilities that frame performance and embodied affectivity. The royal event complex engages the multisensory, the carnivalesque and interstices of the sacred/secular in Ewe spirituality and religious outlook.

Keywords: sonic affectivity, sacred–secular continuum, multisensory, contestations, Ewe performance

IZVLEČEK

Kraljevski obredi in praznovanja so živahna okolja kulturne kontinuitete ljudstva Ewe v Gani. Izvedbo in utelešeno afektivnost teh obredov zaobjemajo elementi hiperrealnih zvočnih in sakralnih/sekularnih senzibilnosti. Kraljevski večplastni dogodki prepletajo multisenzoričnost, karnevalske in vmesne sakralne/sekularne duhovnosti in religioznosti ljudstva Ewe.

Ključne besede: zvočna afektivnost, sakralno-sekularni kontinuum, multisenzoričnost, tekmovalnost, performativnost ljudstva Ewe

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Introduction

Since the 1980s there has been significant growth and diversification of religious expression in Ghana which is associated primarily with Ghanaian Christianity (Asamoah-Gyadu 2005; Meyer 1999, 2015; Wijzen 2017).¹ Some of these developments are reflected in national political campaigns and cultural programs closely linked to the larger project of Ghanaian postcolonial national identity reconstruction (Chazan 1982, 2019; Heaton, James and Oheneba-Sakyi 2009; Meyer 1998). I have investigated and articulated in great detail the sphere of religion and spirituality in everyday Ghanaian experience during recent field research projects on Ewe royal ritual and performance traditions that highlight the significant place of sonic manifestations within the complex interweaving of the multimodal and the multisensory. Drawing from the research conducted, the narrative of the present study will gradually introduce, clarify, and justify the use of terms and concepts such as rupture, rapture, disruption, eruption, and disjuncture. These concepts will be particularly useful for explicating how the complex multimedia and multimodal arena of performance facilitates the mediation and contestation of authenticity, cultural authority, (re)invention, difference, and politics of in/exclusion in the royal events.

This paper argues further for a reconsideration of sacred and secular dichotomies in light of fieldwork data on Ewe royal traditions and recent scholarship on African religions, spirituality, and local cosmologies (Olupona 2014; Olupona and Chiorazzi 2015; Platvoet 2004; Platvoet and van Rinsum 2003; Shaw 1990; Wiredu 2011; Zielińska 2013). Specific aspects of musical performance, ritual and related enactments are examined to demonstrate not only their affective impact but also how they alter the qualities of ongoing interpersonal transactions and ritual flow. By isolating and interrelating the expressive-aesthetic mediums and resources of sound, movement, gesture, proxemics and the sensorium, this essay also demonstrates how and why the Ewe contexts of religion, spirituality, and cultural norms refine analytical notions and assumptions in the interdisciplinary fields of performance, sound, sensory, religious, and ritual studies. Thus, a secondary purpose of the paper is to provide new

1 In Ghanaian and in general African histories, the “Cross preceded the Crescent,” that is, Christianity reached Africa before Islam. In Ghana, the years 1471 and 1482 are often noted as the period in which Portuguese Christian missionary work began in the country, formerly known as the Gold Coast. Since then, Christianity has grown to become the dominant religion, with recent statistics showing 70% of Ghana’s population as Christian. Ghanaian Christianity is further distributed along several denominational and independent church affiliations, especially as indicated in Sasu (2012), in a census report by the Ghana Statistical Services (2012), by the World Religions Index (Index Mundi 2020), John S. Pobee (1975), and Hans Werner Debrunner (1967). Recent publications by Meera Venkatachalam (2015) and several texts by Birgit Meyer (1999, 2002, 2012), illuminate the specific location of the Ewe people in the Ghanaian Christian heritage. There is also a small segment of Ghanaian Christian population that is represented by Rastafarianism and Ethiopianism (MacLeod 2014).

insights and challenges that will broaden and enrich perspectives on religion and spirituality, with important implications and suggestions for rethinking conventional methodological approaches.

Much of the general domain of religion and spirituality in everyday Ghanaian life shares many features with most other African societies, past and present. There are, however, certain features that seem more pronounced in the contemporary Ghanaian context and the following examples serve to articulate such differences.

Religion and Spirituality in Contemporary Ghana: Secularizing the Sacred, Sacralizing the Secular

It is a very common to see and read Biblical and Quranic verses in paraphrased form and inscribed boldly on the back of private cars and public transportation vehicles. Very often these diverse snippets of scripture coincide with and thus reflect and reinforce indigenous belief systems and cosmological orientations. For example, recent favorites include “God First,” “Grace,” and their local variants such as *Adom* (Akan), *Dromɔ* (Ga), and *Amenuweve* (Ewe) and many others that find parallels and correspondences in local onomastics where indigenous beliefs and attributes of a Supreme Being and Destiny are adduced and affirmed.² Similar practices are found in privately-owned and other businesses that are in turn complemented by other everyday practices; one example is the relative freedom in playing or broadcasting Christian music and devotional readings from the Bible in secular public or government spaces such as bank offices, supermarkets, etc. By comparison, the performance or broadcasting of specific types of indigenous shrine music out of its traditional context is not favored because of the expected contextual requirements, and the exposure to diverse non-shrine audiences and/or the uninitiated.

In Ghana, religion, spirituality, and the reinscription of the sacred in secular public spaces as a performative spectacle is easily observed and often commented on by visitors from neighboring African countries. A sentiment of interest, for example, was observed by an African scholar in the following comment by Burkinabé who stated “[...] even taxis are born-again.”³ This singular observation, however, does not seem to consider the indigenous worldview

2 Ghana is multilingual and multiethnic, but a large segment of the national population can speak more than one language and many individuals are thus able to decipher these inscriptions with much ease. The concept of a “Supreme Being” is common in many (indigenous) African religious systems and worldviews and coincides in many ways with the Christian “God.” An alternative viewpoint on relationships between the indigenous idea of a “Supreme Being” and the Christian “God” is presented in Greene (1996). As indicated elsewhere, Ghana is overwhelmingly Christian, with Pentecostals and “charismatic” denominations leading in popularity.

3 Dr. Mercy Akrofi-Ansah of the Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, shared this story with me (Personal communication, February 2022).

within which the varieties of Ghanaian Christianity and their related symbols, ideas, and retranslations are located. Similarly, such foregrounded readings can also obscure hidden or overt proselytizing intentions behind these inscriptions – i.e., “to win souls for Christ,” as often expressed in the Ghanaian context.



Figure 1: Contemporary Charismatic or Pentecostal Christianity shares some basic beliefs and Old Testament theological orientations with local versions of Rastafarianism/Ethiopianism (see “Lion of Judah”).⁴



Figure 2: Grocery shop with street vending. Note the coexistence of the Christ-centered affirmation and the food/drink advertisement: “Restore Your Energy.”

4 All the photographs were taken by the author, except when stated otherwise.



Figure 3: “Chop Bar” (rustic and informal restaurant or food vending outlet). While the immediate “Great Provider” context references God/Christ, there is also the possibility of an advertising subtext, such as the *chop bar* “provides great service and great food.”



Figure 4: Alternative, intertextual reading of a public favorite inscription often found in funeral brochures and posters – “What a Shock.”⁵



Figure 5: According to the provisional 2021 census, between 17 and 20% of Ghana’s population is Muslim.

5 “What a Shock” and “A Life Well Lived” are common expressions employed when sharing deaths and funeral notices.

Finally, in this preliminary study designed to better understand contexts for Ghanaian religion and spirituality, one must also consider the dynamics and dialectics of culture and tradition, and postcolonial efforts to establish cultural autonomy, a sense of national unity and progress, and local articulations of modernity. For example, it is a common practice during the national holiday, Ghana's Independence Day (March 6) that religious leaders from different faiths and religious orientations (i.e., indigenous, Christian, and Muslim) are invited to take turns in offering intercessory prayers. One invited Baptist minister told me he decided not to attend the event and recite a prayer because he might have to share the same platform or space with an indigenous priest. But since that particular incident in the 1980s, adherents of diverse faiths and religious expression have become more tolerant in such contexts, as they align with the national goals of unity in a multiethnic (pluralistic) society.⁶ This is not surprising as there is an overwhelming consensus on the dominant place of religion and ethnicity in Ghanaian national politics (Aidoo and Botchway 2021; Langer and Ukiwo 2008; McCauley 2014). In the discussion that follows, it will become increasingly clear that there is a deeply embedded disposition in Ghanaian society towards the blending of the sacred and the secular into one stream as observed in the previous examples of textualization in public and mobile spaces/sites. The case examples from contemporary royal ceremonies will illuminate shifting sites where indigenous traditions are reproduced, thus ensuring significant continuities, especially with music and ritual performance as the enduring core.

Contemporary Royal Funeral and Installation Rituals and Ceremonies⁷

Most royal funeral and new chief installation ceremonies and rituals in the diverse multiethnic Ghanaian contexts and histories possess common core features. First, there is a general pattern and sequence of procedures that include ritual confinement or seclusion. The number of days of confinement and

6 In April 2022, one of my field projects as part of the Easter festivities included the installation and final public display of two new "development" queen mothers (i.e., honorary titles not strictly designated through royal lineage, the role of the honorary queens being the encouragement of projects to advance a town's socioeconomic and sociocultural progress) in Alakple, an Ewe inter-lacustrine town. During the installation ceremony an indigenous religious expert and a Catholic Rev. Father (Catholicism began officially in 1930 in Alakple and remains a predominant denomination in the town) took turns to say prayers for the success, safety, progress, and prosperity of the new queens and for the entire town. Details on the Catholic missionary work in Alakple is available in Francis Fiakporu (2013).

7 Secondary sources that confirm and elaborate on the historicity, diversity and yet rootedness and enduring values and practices in past and contemporary chieftaincy and associated rituals in the multi-ethnic Ghanaian context include Adotey (2021), Arhin and Brempong (2002), and Hagan and Odotei (2001).

details concerning specific private rituals, including the time before public display (known in Ghana as “outdooing”) vary from one community to another, and are also dependent on past histories and contemporary exigencies and pragmatic concerns.⁸

Other stages of the royal funeral and installation rituals include swearing of oaths twice: one during the confinement period and private ritual of installation, and a second that is often a formal response to each oath during the public display of the new chief or king. In the case of royal funerals and in the Ewe context, there is a private “withdrawal” or “taking away” of names given during initiation or installation (as often encountered in rites of passage in other world cultures) and this also occurs in oathlike fashion. Similar practices are also found in non-royal rituals, especially in the installation of new indigenous spiritual leaders or priests, or in “releasing safely” into the world of ancestors and into “former states” in the case of funerary rites.⁹ The official installation rituals are always preceded by a dramaturgical “capture” or “arrest” of the new-chief-to-be for the confinement rituals, a practice that recalls elopement rituals of several cultures. Thus, in any of these cases, royal and non-royal, there are important symbolic performances that mark transition and change of status, including aspects of liminal stages that are often identified with rites of passage, especially in the works of van Gennep (1909), Victor Turner (1968, 1974), and Richard Schechner (2022).¹⁰

I have chosen to focus on five select cases which represent important aspects of ritual and general performance practices that are common to most of the four royal funeral and installation ceremonies that I researched within a six-month period from July 2021 to January 2022. These ceremonies involved the final funerals and subsequent installations, as presented in Table 1.¹¹

8 Today, most royal, and non-rituals such as widowhood rites that would require individual confinement for several months are now being adumbrated due to several changing factors such as vocational and socioeconomic considerations. Similarly, there are now shifting criteria for selection that privilege wealth and advanced education over established heredity and line of succession.

9 The taking on and assignment of a new name in many rites of passage is integral to the expected transformation, change or reversal of status, including rebirth – i.e., symbolic enactment of dying and being reborn, critical moments in liminal states and necessary achieving the desired transformation that is central to some rites of passages worldwide.

10 See Avorgbedor (1999) for a comparative overview of the structure, content, and function of rites of passage.

11 There are hierarchies in local chieftaincy and in indigenous rule and governance. Briefly, and for the purpose of this paper, the top of the hierarchy in the Ewe system includes a paramount chief (*Togbegā*, for the northern Ewe, and *Awoamefia* for the Southern Anlo Ewe) who is the overall head of a cluster of village or town units and districts, and the *Dufia*, the head chief of subchiefs of a particular town. Paramount chiefs can also serve as clan heads (there are several clans composing southern and northern Ewe societies and lineages). Within the town and at the level of a confederation of towns and chiefdoms, there are also special military-style formations (common in ancient wartime), known as Left, Middle, and Right wings and led by the respective chiefs.

Table 1: List of royal funerals and installations

Royalty	Status/Rank/Position	Event type	Area/Location
Togbui* Gligui Tengey Dzokoto VI ¹²	Paramount Chief, Dufia (town chief) and Head of Bate Clan	Funeral	Anyako, Volta Region of Ghana
Togbui Gligui Tengey Dzokoto VII	Paramount Chief, Dufia and Head of Bate Clan	Installation	Anyako, Volta Region of Ghana
Togbui Nyaho Tamakloe VI	Paramount Chief, Miafiagā (Left Wing commander),** Dufia and Head of Adzovia Clan	Installation	Whuti, Volta Region of Ghana
Togbegā*** Gabusu VI	Paramount Chief and Head of Torkoni Clan	Funeral	Gbi-Hohoe, Volta Region of Ghana
Mamagā Dewotornyoy I (buried July 2021)****	Paramount Queen Mother	Funeral	Gbi-Hohoe, Volta Region of Ghana

Comments for Table 1:

* “Togbui” is the southern Ewe dialectal variation and orthography; “Togbe” is the northern Ewe designation. These are indigenous titular designations for a chief, elder, ruler, etc. “Mama” is the female equivalent in both southern and northern Ewe contexts. The suffix “gā” is the alternative local designation for “Paramount.”

** See Footnote 11 for details on the military formations, hierarchies and responsibilities pertaining to civic, social, and spiritual welfare and jurisdictional matters.

*** There is no new installation yet.

**** Mamagā Agoe Dewotornyoy I succeeded the late Mamagā Dewotornyoy I.

Shared and Common Features of the Ceremonies

Some features common to these events include the spread of the events over several days, processions, open and closed rituals, administration of oaths, multiple and concurrent music, dance, and theatrical performances presented on multiple stages and sometimes at different times; media promotion and coverage of the event (print social media, and drone aerial photography);¹³ involvement in and knowledge of local church affairs; stool¹⁴ candidates with

12 These Roman numerals designate positions in linear succession, such as in King George I, II, or IV.

13 Details on the growing interest in drone technology and its possibilities in enhancing general ethnographic and visually-oriented research are documented in Adotey (2021).

14 This church service, known as a Thanksgiving Service, is also routinely held for general non-royal funeral occasions. Families of the deceased come forward to render special appreciation verbally; sometimes the chosen speaker initiates spontaneous singing which the entire congregation may join in on. The song is usually related to the theme of gratitude, both to God, pastors, and to the entire congregation. In the case of the Thanksgiving Service terminating a royal event, the chief or someone else is designated to perform this role.

considerable formal education and wealth; symbols of power and status (royal drums); the presence of MCs; and a church service called “Thanksgiving Service” to close the event.

Table 2: Types, levels and varieties of performances (limited to royal contexts)

Sonic form, source, type	Special traits or performance engagement	Special subcontexts, comments, observations
<p>Royal ensembles, such as <i>atrikpui</i>, <i>atompani</i>, <i>afli</i>, etc.</p>	<p>There are surrogate instruments such as animal horns and talking drums (<i>lāklēvu</i>) that imitate the snarl of a leopard and perform appellations and honorifics.</p>	<p>The royal ensembles continue to play sporadically throughout the entire event.</p>
<p>Special sonic articulations such as: <i>aseyetsoto</i>, <i>bobokpakpa</i> (involving disguised voice and falsetto) <i>asifunu</i> (ululation employing vocal and bilabial vibrations activated by the palm) and others</p>	<p>These are performed mostly by women.</p>	<p>They are performed to signal moments of grave danger, spectacular accomplishment, arrival, and departure of royalty and to signal the climax or conclusion of special rituals such as prayers and offerings to tutelary spirits.</p>
<p>Speech surrogates (instruments such as whistles of Western origins, animal horns and talking drums (<i>lāklēvu</i>, lit., wild animal drum) that imitate spoken forms</p>	<p>These are performed sporadically and they imitate the snarl of a leopard and perform appellations and honorifics. They are an important accompaniment to royal processions.</p>	<p>The leopard, its voice/sound, and skin are all significant status symbols in many West, East, Central, and Southern African royal traditions.</p>
<p>Hyperreal, exotic, innovative and modified musical instruments</p>	<p>Musical and surrogate instruments (including drums, and other percussion instruments) receive further symbolic visual exaggeration and decoration through the attachment of ritual paraphernalia such as cowries, miniature copper bells, raffia, etc. together with the dressing of these instruments in ritual color combinations of white, red, indigo, and black.</p>	

Sonic form, source, type	Special traits or performance engagement	Special subcontexts, comments, observations
Guest and professional (hired) groups	They perform mixed and specialized repertoire such as contemporary neo-traditional and popular ensembles and include brass bands, DJs, and special guest performers of other ethnic origins.	The brass band that performed at the Dzokoto funeral blended indigenous <i>agbadza</i> styles with the general brass band repertoire of martial music – marches, and popular tunes. In the case of Togbui Dzokoto funeral a special divination society (<i>afa</i>) performed their repertoire.
Special guests or acts	These include non-royal ensembles and emerging popular groups such as the neo-traditional style known as <i>Borborbor</i> .	In the case of Togbui Nyaho Tamakloe's final installation ceremonies a very popular musician called Samini appeared and took everyone by surprise, especially when he performed songs familiar to the audience.
Musketry, variety, comedic, magical acts, prayers, libations, eulogies, appellations, etc.		Some of the eulogies witnessed demonstrate high-level competence, skill, and close familiarity with tradition; they are serious performances.
Christian repertoire	The emphasis and source of music depends largely on church affiliations and membership of the royalty.	A church service called Thanksgiving Service is held on the last Sunday of the week(s) of the festivities. In the case of an installation the new chief may present the thanksgiving in a form of a mini sermon.



Figure 6: Program of activities for day 9, last day of Togbegā Gabusu VI funeral (Hohoe).¹⁵

The diversity and spatio-temporal locations of these events and their ultimate qualitative feel and sensibilities may quickly suggest the common analytical category of “cultural performance.” The Ewe royal examples, in particular, possess a propensity of complex and extended features that would enrich conventional notions and applications of “cultural performance.” For example, (a) the total event occurs over several days; (b) the nestedness of sub-performance events sometimes creates temporary affective highpoints, bringing the events to the forefront; (c) the events manifest much complexity, intensity, plurality, and simultaneity, including their length and distribution in time, space, and place; (d) open, nonlinear structures encourage unexpected, but significantly emergent choreographies, and the staggered arrivals of special performing groups that enhance levels of expectation, anticipation, and the overall qualitative impact; (e) large, mixed audiences who attend are often drawn to the events through longstanding, institutionalized and reciprocal arrangements

15 Such artworks for the various daily activities for the burial rites are available for download at the official web page of Gbiduko Development Union: https://gbidukor.org/details.cfm?Download-Artworks-for-Daily-Activities--Burial-of-Togbega-Gabusu-VI&corpnews_scatid=12&corpnews_catid=5&corpnews_scatlinkid=181.

and facilitated further through national and regional associations and networks of chiefs as well as national and foreign dignitaries.

Sonic and Corporeal Sensorialities and Out-of-Body Experiences in Royal Ritual Ceremonies

The variety of symbols and regalia closely associated with Ewe royal or chieftaincy institutions privileges both symbolic and highly constituted musical and “non-musical” sounds, instruments, and ensembles. In Ewe society, this variety is further enriched by extant traditions and genres of music and dance, including those reserved for religious spaces such as those devoted to ancestral, tutelary, and divination spirits (e.g., *yevevu*, *afavu*, *adevu*, *kɔkuvu*, and a more inclusive terminology or nomenclature of *trɔvu* or *voduvu*; i.e., the general category of music and dance associated with a broad range of the Ewe world of religion and spirituality).¹⁶ Corporeal sensoriality would seem to be the most plausible means to conceptualize and represent the complex range of events, both private and public that unfold during royal ceremonies and ultimately endow the ritual performances with experiences of awe, deep affect, and eidetic memory.¹⁷ Within this broad domain of the bodily (ritual embodiment) reside and emanate the close constituents of sonic and gestural manifestations. It is within this broader conception and reality of corporeal sensoriality that we can easily reconfigure and thus better appreciate the meanings of conventional terms often associated with sonic-centered events (e.g., not just “verbal,” especially in the case of formulaic, heightened, or patterned utterances) such as “paramusical” and “paralinguistic.” Examples from the afore-mentioned royal contexts will also further illuminate current directions in deeper explorations

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- 16 General characteristics, genres, functions and contexts of Ewe music and dance repertoire are found in Amegago (2012), Fiagbedzi (1977), and Gbolonyo (2009). For additional sources on the generation, employment and function of special sonic expressivities and symbolisms among the Anlo-Ewe, see Avorgbedor (2004, 2020). For details on the general spiritual phenomenon including shrines among the Ewe, see Friedson (2009), Greene (2002), and Montgomery and Vannier (2017).
- 17 One of the early, promising studies concerning the nature of eidetic memory and the place of the senses was based on research in Ghana (Feldman 1968). Unfortunately, very little has been accomplished since then. I hope, with Henry Drewal’s current research interests in what he calls “sensiotics” (Drewal [n. d.]) much progress can be made, especially when the African data is the focus. Part of the expected outcomes of this essay is thus to invigorate and broaden current research in sensory ethnography, especially the project at the Centre for Sensory Studies (<https://centreforsensorystudies.org>) and interdisciplinary research in Sensory Studies (<https://www.sensorystudies.org>), including key publications such as *Ways of Sensing: Understanding the Senses in Society* (Howes and Classen 2014), *Ritual, Performance and the Senses* (Bull and Mitchell 2015), *The Life of the Senses: Introduction to Modal Anthropology* (Laplantine 2015), and *Doing Sensory Ethnography* (Pink 2009). My essay, “Körperliche und nicht-körperliche Expressivität in der afrikanischen Performance” (Avorgbedor 2013) explores several dimensions of performance, the performative, and the intersensory in extended contexts of Anlo-Ewe performance and in everyday life.

of “performance,” “cultural performance,” the “performative,” and “sensory ethnography,” etc.

Case Example I: *Hatudada*¹⁸

Musketry is an intense and elaborate technique and practice; it is suggestive of infinite temporality and thus an “out-of-this-world” experience, considering the reach and extended audiation associated with the resulting “sonic booms.” The “reach” is best understood in relation to the sheer amount of aerial, geophysical and bodily vibrations/reverberations that erupt and accompany the firings. Because the northern Ewe are well known for their special skills and technology in local gun manufacturing, they exhibit spectacular prowess that is far superior to the southern Ewe. In my recent field experiences with royal funerals among the northern Ewe (e.g., Hohoe) I observed physical destruction by the debris and aftershock of each firing session:¹⁹ for example, parts of one expensive royal umbrella were torn by live ammunition (the use was generally proscribed, however), and the perturbations. Individual audience members felt as if they were literally being lifted off-ground by the sudden booms, to the point where one of my research fellows suggested carrying along earmuffs (such as those used on long-haul flights) to subsequent events like these.

It is difficult to fully narrate the scope of intensity, frequency, and overall impact of musketry to someone who has never witnessed the tradition, especially in case examples 3 and 4 (Gbi-Hohoe) and surrounding areas of northern Ewe communities. Unfortunately, it was virtually impossible to capture the sonic booms and reverberations with audiovisual equipment.

There are broader cosmological foundations and applications of gunshots, which are sometimes employed in ritual cleansing, healing, and exorcism rituals. The overall impact of both the sonic reach and the proxemics and semio-aesthetics in which the shots are framed can be better understood by locating *hatudada* in its systematic procedures, techniques, ambience, skill, and audiencehip which includes the audience’s frequent comments. Gunners assume, in sequence, linear, half-circle, and finally squatting positions, and in both prescribed and intuitive fashion; they target clouds, tree branches, corners, etc. They often simulate the shooting of an animal or hunt, and merge seamlessly with ongoing *asafo* (i.e, music and dance of warrior groups who exhibit gestures and songs of bravery and taunt); this further encourages the simulation since the *asafo* dance form and its prescriptions privilege innovative and creative

18 This term means musketry, salvo or literally, group gun-firing.

19 The firing intensifies at some critical stages of rituals, such as before the onset and at the conclusion of, for example, the final journey with the royal corpse to the funeral service or burial site, initial announcement of death, before a procession from the sacred installation space, at the conclusion of a midnight ritual, etc.

gestures and movements, including those of hunters performing their normal *adevu* dance (hunters' music and dance).²⁰ In this non-hunting performance context – i.e., royal rituals and festivities – the gun thus becomes a prop but at the same time completes the sense of “authenticity.” Since much of the *asafó* repertoire draws on *adevuu* (or shares many of its music, dance, and costume features), the connotations and dialogics of appropriation and reinterpretation regarding *hatudada* are relevant here.

It is now important to address *hatudada* and the issues of safety, in the sense of possible physical-neurological damage to individuals and material entities, and general ecocritical considerations. *Hatudada* is a performance, and by extension a highly and sensuously framed type of performativity. The sonic varieties, including their affective intensities, are enriched and diversified through the use of a variety of gun and rifle types, including their specific techniques, timbre, and capacity.²¹ For example, a notable variety of gun type is the *aprim*, a miniature cannon derived from early Portuguese prototypes which were once stationed close to slave forts dotting the Ghanaian coast to ward off competing enemy traders.²² The *aprim* has been quickly appropriated and reinvented to serve local purposes and the creativity continues to improve on the level and reach of the sound product. The musketeers are sometimes hired and work as professionals; they wear distinct uniforms, whether amateur, semi-professional or professional, especially on these special occasions.²³ The number, frequency and overall accompanying choreographies or bodily maneuvers are determined also by the status of the deceased (i.e., in both royal and non-royal funerals), general community relevance and ritual type. For example, one of the most impressive displays of sonic “violence” and “timed” explosive rupture-rapture scenes occurred on one of the funeral days reserved for a special ritual called *dɔdada* (curing/healing of illness or disease, which is more prevalent in northern than southern Ewe communities).²⁴ In this royal practice, *dɔdada* is both a

20 Audio examples are replete in the performance videos that are publicly available on YouTube, for example, and are cited in different segments of this paper.

21 There is an increasing interest in sound studies, especially those associated with warfare and violence. My field examples and their unique traits would complement and at the same time extend arguments and theoretical conclusions found in, for example, Abe (2016), Goodman (2010), and Thompson and Biddle (2013).

22 For details of the *aprim* and related firearms, see Kea (1971) and Ijoma (1982).

23 The uniform is integral to the armaments and expected visual display.

24 This practice and its associated beliefs represent a very complex subject which is yet to receive full attention and satisfactory explanation, especially when some of the details are formulated in esoteric language. In addition, both researcher and informant(s) must use much discretion, especially when some aspects of the rituals are protected and are not accessible to the general public. At the moment, there is at least one PhD student with a religious studies background researching the topic at the Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana. One team researcher, Dr. Edem Adotey, spent much of the night witnessing aspects of the ritual, but outside of the immediate precinct, and managed to engage in conversation with some key participants.

simulacrum and a surreal and dramaturgical reinterpretation of normative or generic *dɔdada*. Although the ruler or chief may be clinically dead, such deaths are not publicly announced immediately, and even when finally announced the message is usually couched in special metaphors (or culturally appropriate codings), such as *fia mu zi* (the chief has tilted the stool and *fia yi kɔfe* (the chief has gone to the village). There are many tactical and deeply cosmological foundations for such retranslations and characterizations that are beyond the scope of this paper. For example, it is necessary to locate and thus elaborate on the understanding of *dɔdada* within the more complex existential realities and rituals associated with “divine kingship” in African societies.²⁵

Three factors account for the unusual framing of this funerary ritual, with significant sonic markings at its core: it is not open to the public, it is held at night and consummated at midnight.²⁶ The midnight salvos set out denouement and confirmation of the *de facto* status of the deceased, thus opening the way for the rest of the event to unfold.

Case Example 2: Sonic Imaginaries, Surreal and Hyperreal

The overall proxemics (i.e., creative approaches to place, space, placement and the dynamics of such arrangements and their interaction with and impact on ongoing frames of communication and performance moment), site of activity/setting, and the spectacular sonic articulations (salvos, royal drums, ululations) that close the ritual but continue sporadically throughout the rest of the night elevate levels of anxiety and surprise; previous states of anxiety, on the other hand, lose momentum with the closure of the ritual, at least temporarily. The cathartic and supersensory consummation of the acoustically destabilized ritual at midnight enables the sudden eruption of moments of rapture, and the state of being ushered into a *new day* with the sense of an altered self. A more recent example, observed while writing this paper, masterfully reveals the closing moments of the official ritualistic formal opening of the funeral for the late subchief Togbe Kwasi Afele II at Ho, a town located about 77 km or 47 miles from Hohoe. Videos of this event began to appear on YouTube, and the footage²⁷ beginning at 4:38 onwards illustrates how the traditional libation (i.e., pouring of a special liquid in symbolic and patterned ways to the accompaniment of the formulaic recitation of prayer, petition, etc., and directed

25 For details on divine kinship in the African context, see Fagg (1978), Meyerowitz (1960), and Olupona (2014).

26 Both relative time reckoning (i.e., identifying a moment in history but relative to some other event or situation such as “around the time of the last solar eclipse” or “when a performing ensemble was being formed”) and chronomic-solar, temporal orientations are employed in ritual, everyday social and formal transactions.

27 Available at the following link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3nmQ4g-CcG0> (“The Most Feared [...]” [2022]).

to ancestral and disembodied spirits) is soon followed by salvos and ululation, a consummation of the opening segment of the broader ceremony. The aesthetic/symbolic and general cultural significance of ululation, performed mostly by women, functions also in situations of great adulation, impressive music and dance performance, danger, alarm, or catastrophes (especially those at the threshold of life and death). Other forms of unique, surrealistic and hyperrealistic sounds frequently encountered in these royal performances include falsetto or disguised voice types, such as those employed to welcome and terminate a royal or ritual circuit (i.e., processions, or entourages where priests and devotees visit sacred places in succession), or in conversation with the spirit world.²⁸

The inherent spirituality and symbolism in these contexts acknowledge expected cultural norms and beliefs about the supernatural. Such norms and beliefs are related to the fact that the royal head is also an embodiment of ancestral and guardian spirits that seek to ensure the welfare and security of the people, as noted under “divine kingship.”²⁹ Sacerdotal functions and resources are further consolidated and ensured through court priests and diviners, often seen in close proximity to chiefs during public events; their role is to attend to the spiritual welfare of the chiefs. In addition, many Ewe communities normally identify with at least one guardian spirit at the town level.³⁰ The choreographed, dramaturgical placement of the midnight ritual climax also demonstrates and expands on popular notions about the cathartic ramifications of beliefs and experiences associated with the mystical “meeting” or “knocking together” of year[s] often referred to as *fe-kpekpe* (literally, old and new years colliding) – that is, the passing of the Old Year and transitioning (collision) into the New Year. An affective-experiential state, *fe-kpekpe*, is also identified with a sonic imaginary that mediates and reifies that phenomenal experience.³¹ *Fetatɔtrɔ* (i.e., turning over of the end of the year and ushering in of the new but mostly in non-Christian contexts), as often observed in general indigenous religious households, is another important annual cosmic, spiritual

28 Details of some of the unique sonic articulations in ritual contexts and in world shamanism are provided in Avorgbedor (2004, 2020).

29 See Footnote 24 for details on “divine kingship.”

30 In many southern Ewe towns, it was common practice to have three guardian spirits (*dulɛgba*): one located at the center of the town/village, and two in the north and south areas, respectively (Cudjoe-Calvocoressi 1974; Gilbert 1982).

31 “Sonic imaginary,” as used here refers to the sound that is associated with the colliding of the old and new year at the critical midnight moment. While there is no actual physical sound that is heard in relation to this transitioning/collision, there are times when observers at a midnight watch would hear coincidental sounds emanating from the action of winds blowing through tree branches, especially those that ruffle the roofs of the meeting space. This imagining and identification of natural, coincidental sounds with those of the general repertoire of folk belief and superstition, nevertheless, have an important influence on beliefs about physical, social, and spiritual wholesomeness, and are hence phenomenal.

phenomenon that is well celebrated through an elaborate, and all-night music-making vigil.³² As detailed elsewhere, there are other nocturnal and midnight, performative events that involve deeply affective sonic expressions, such as the employment of disguised voices and timbres, sounds of livestock at the threshold of death, and extreme cacophonies designed to alter and improve relationships between mortals and the spiritual realm, including personal and social well-being. Thus, both experimental and pragmatic criteria are instantly involved in the material, dramaturgical, and multisensory constitution, and exploration of hyperrealities of sound effects, both in royal and other indigenous ritual contexts (Avorgbedor 2020).



Figure 7: Hyperritualized drum in a procession with paraphernalia played on the back of a porter (left) who symbolizes a “path-clearing” spiritual guide with ritual paraphernalia on his head.³³

These ritual and symbolic performances thus form a critical corpus or catalogue of performance expressions, sonic manifestations, and related beliefs that are creatively engaged in ensuring the efficacy, continuity, and general social, physical, moral, and spiritual well-being, both of individuals and communities. While some observers and analysts may view these performance activities and their affective outcomes as creating commotion, disturbance and a breach of peace, the institutional and cultural framework with its rootedness in the world of spirits would caution such premature conclusions. In addition, these “sanctioned” or necessary private or public cultural events are legitimated further through procuring an appropriate police permit; in fact, the police also

32 See Friedson (2009) for contemporary versions of *fetatoɔrɔ*. “Shrine” here refers to a constellation of spirit-based beliefs and practices often loosely referred as *vodu* or *voodoo* in Ewe societies.

33 Photo by the research team member Sela Adjei.

provide security at many levels. These symbolic and conventional sounds and the mechanisms that produce them are the central or primary defining parameters that distinguish formal royal events from the everyday or ordinary ones.



Figure 8: Female musketeer in prescribed costume on the left (Togbegā Gabusu funeral, Hohoe).³⁴



Figure 9: Male musketeers in “white” costumes appropriate for auspicious contexts (i.e., not for mourning the dead but celebrating an event that is pleasurable and instills a sense of happiness) such as an installation ceremony (Anyako, installation of Dufia Togbui Tenge Dzokoto VI).

34 Photo by the research team member Sela Adjei.

Case Example 3: Reflections on Gender, Musical Production, and the Role of Women in Ghanaian Expressive Culture

The range of sound practices and the audience's related liminal states in *batu-dada* are further enriched through strategic, yet seemingly theatrical moments when women are recruited to perform in the traditionally all-male tradition.³⁵ As part of contemporary forms of negotiating tradition in response to the forces of modernization and everyday realities, there is a growing tendency toward revising former attitudes and practices that uphold the separation of male and female spaces socially, musically, and in political, educational and religious (indigenous, Christianity, Islam, etc.) contexts. For example, since the 1990s, local news media, the elite class, and global forces have encouraged active discourse concerning more conscious advocacy and appreciation of the role of women and their contributions to Ghanaian society. Although there is no sure way to measure the level of impact this advocacy has had in indigenous circles, independent studies confirm a growing presence and participation of women in contexts and spaces once reserved for men, including some indigenous performing ensembles. A deeper understanding of the ritual ceremonial examples presented can be achieved by noting the power, reach and influence of the media in disseminating information about the increasing organization of new music and dance ensembles that serve multiple purposes, including the highlighting of women as lead drummers, etc.³⁶ However, new directions and innovative tendencies in contemporary Ghanaian culture and society include this new tendency in which the sudden translocation of female power and visibility is received both with much acclaim and consternation, as indicated in this news item: "Rare Act: Female Pallbearers at Tafi Agome."³⁷

35 In my updated (i.e., December 2021 and June 2022) conversations with Madam Beta Sarfo, one of the leading female kingmakers and cultural knowledge experts of the Gbi-Hohoe area and who is often closely involved in performing installation rituals, explained that sometimes women who never gave birth are allowed special moments to display courage and bravery by taking part in the musketry. There are, however, many deeper and hidden aspects to her narrative and I intend to explore them further through engagements with additional independent cultural experts, including males. With her explanation in view, one could readily see some socio-psychotherapeutic values of this female participation.

On June 19, 2022, I spoke briefly with Mr. C. K. Galley, a well-known kingmaker and installation expert in the southern Ewe community. He played a central role in a March 2022 royal installation ritual at Dzita. At that event, a procession of women was led by a woman with a rifle. When I asked Mr. Galley about the symbolic import of this gesture, often reserved for men, he simply (in my estimation) said, "once they show courage and are interested, we allow them."

36 There are, however, indigenous practices where, for example, women ritual leaders take full responsibility for preparing the corpse and serve as pallbearers, a responsibility usually reserved for men, as I have often witnessed in non-royal funeral contexts.

37 This issue of *The Spectator* includes a picture of women pallbearers – coffin aloft on their heads – ion the way to the graveyard ("Rare Act [...] 2022).

Although the number of female gunners involved in each musketry moment is still much smaller than that of males, their presence and overall performance skills not only reinforce consternation and local debates; they also introduce useful “cognitive dissonance” that also enables sites of useful ruptures. Such ruptures are prerequisites for transforming moments of raptures associated with the sublime and the liminal; they also are among markers of the highpoints of excess and ecstasy (i.e., extreme joy, overpowering emotion, pleasure or “rapturous delight,” according to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary) that occur during these events.³⁸ With the presence and participation of women in such contexts, however, the powers and privileges associated with virility are complemented but through subtle insertions of the seemingly subversive, sacrilegious-transgressive, or disruptive. I suggest that the example of a female “transgressor” who “transgresses” when performing “sacred” or tabooed drums cannot and should not be interpreted as a symbolic reversal or questioning of a male-centered practice. This is because the materialities, sensibilities, and beliefs about sound practices and those contexts generally associated with “artistic license” in many cultures often complicate assumptions and criteria about what is appropriate, sacred, acceptable, etc.

As intimated in the media report referred to above (“Rare Act [...]” 2022), the audience’s visual gaze of the female drummer seems to confirm her performance display as a “rare, transgressive act,” as suggested in the newspaper report headline about the female pallbearers. One can even postulate that she is performing double transgressivity as a female drummer, on special sacred royal drums, a practice that is normally considered to be taboo. Although conventional practice dictates that royal deaths are officially communicated to the

38 Examples of “rupture” includes moments of disagreements on ritual procedures, uncertainties concerning the appropriation and integration of Christian values; magical, exotic, and daredevil performance acts that challenge the audience’s expectations and leave them psychologically and emotionally disoriented because they are unable to find a reasonable explanation for such acts and their impact. A rupture is also denoted in the examples of gun bullets, sonic booms and reverberations that can tear down event canopies and pose a significant threat to the human hearing system. Raptures are more about the positive reception and appraisal of general performance affects, including deep satisfaction and emotional attunement with the flow of performance moments. Both “sublime” and “liminal” would thus be appropriate in characterizing these highpoints of artistic-aesthetic moments. Music and dance performances in ordinary, non-ritual contexts among the Ewe also encourage moments of exhilaration and highpoints. Rapture is also the state of being ushered into a new day with the sense of an altered self.

There are different stages of the liminal, often associated with rites of passage where stages and moments of initiation situate initiands at the threshold of life and death, or as summarized by Richard Schechner (2022, 66), one of the leading scholars on performance studies as follows: “During the liminal phase of a ritual two things are accomplished: First, those undergoing the ritual temporarily become ‘nothing,’ put into a state of extreme vulnerability where they are open to change. Persons are stripped of their former identities and positions in the social world; they enter a time-place where they are not-this-not-that, neither here nor there, in the midst of a journey from one social self to another.”



Figure 10: Female drummer (Yaa Godogbe) playing the sacred royal *atompani* (widely known in the literature as “talking drum”) pair to the audience’s awe and amazement.³⁹ Such drums and performance roles are normally a female taboo.⁴⁰

public through print media and social media videos, the female drummer contributed to the sensorial level of disseminating the news through narrating it by means of the talking drum. Because the video of her performance (see Footnote 36) circulated virtually, albeit briefly, I was fortunate to see the drummer physically perform on day two of the nine-day funeral event.

The performance by the female drummer who was a special guest mainly due to her popularity as a drummer in the community, must be read within and along with other acts involving the carnivalesque that often characterize these events. Her courage and display of competence parallel and complement those of ambulatory magicians, etc., all in pursuit of an audience’s enchantment, ritual efficacy, and the quest for out-of-the-norm experiences. The cumulative effects of these experiences and anticipations contribute toward effectual transformative experiences, mediated through sonic affect and related sites of affectivities.⁴¹ These ritual contexts, therefore, constitute an ideal arena for enacting and displaying the peculiar, avant-garde, “out-of-this-world,” and the hyperreal.

39 Video footage of this performance is available via the following link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hmK1Q_j4RDc&ct=97s (“Tribute from [...]” 2021).

40 Photo by the research team member Dr. Edem Adotey.

41 At first sight, these types of encounters may seem to disrupt the flow of events and thus suggest instances of chaos in which the audience must re-orient themselves to better appraise and contain these moments beyond seemingly subversive-transgressive and secularizing impressions.



Figure 11: Masked individual in funeral and *asafo* costume. The “white” face introduces and adds to the ruptures of exoticism, imagination, and inclusion but enacts visibility as difference.



Figure 12: Female performing groups play several other performance roles. Here, the visual is stressed, as well as the kinesthetic and the playing of the typical *akaye* (gourd-shaker) used in the funerary *aviba* genre.

Case Example 4: The All-Female *Aviha* Genre

The *aviha* (literally, crying song or song of sorrow) is one of the preferred, all-female genres closely identified with funeral occasions in northern Ewe communities; *akpalu* is the generic parallel among the southern Ewe.⁴² It is part of a parade or procession where effigies or enlarged photos of the deceased are displayed. Segments in the procession include the head portage, the singing and playing of both school-type hand bells and the singing of women's singing band songs (i.e., performed by older women's choirs popular in many mainstream Protestant denominations), and hybrid sub-performance elements with Christian, indigenous, and popular characteristics. Even when such hybridity is privileged or appropriate, expanding the concept to address specific processes and their interrelationships would be useful. For example, despite the significant place of Christian gestures (i.e., prayers, sermons, performance of final rites of interment, etc.), ideas and performances in these royal contexts, it is very important to consider how they are re-sacralized (i.e., made acceptable or appropriate) through different levels and types of recontextualization, or just through tacit consent. More so, the analyst needs to account for the state and quality of these hybridities by locating them in an essential historical continuum that includes shared cultural values, and, by attending to why they are located and emphasized in specific spatio-temporalities. The subversive, transgressive, transmedial, multisensory acts, together with sonic elements and meanings and beliefs associated with these hybridities, are useful for understanding how they provide safe, malleable, and yet significantly transformative spaces for realizing, and thus ensuring the validity and continuity of tradition and ritual.

Hybridities, Visualities, and Corporealities

While current postcolonial critical and revised theories of hybridity clearly caution and expand earlier boundaries, perspectives and contexts, the examples discussed here add new insights, especially in explaining how they demonstrate the interaction and transcendence of dichotomies of sacred-secular, profane/grotesque-sacred, male-female, etc.⁴³ For example, female pallbearers

42 For details on the phenomenon of death and dying and related rituals and performance types among the southern and northern Ewe societies see Adjandeh (2019), Anyidoho (1982), and Verdon (1982). For Akan and Ga ethnic groups of Ghana, see Addai (2016) and Potočnik (2017).

43 Any serious and updated discourse of postcolonial hybridities must necessarily engage the sacred-secular continuum as part of the everyday, and yet an essential way of being-in-the-world in many African sociocultural contexts. Even Steven Terpenning's brilliant analysis (Terpenning 2016) falls short of any significant insights, due to the lack of any awareness and appreciation of the sacred-secular and how it informs and influences sites, processes and meanings associated with conditions of hybridity. Such failures are too common, especially with Western analysts' categories that insist on binaries and linearity. The emerging corpus of literature devoted to a deeper

and drummers transform the ritual and proscribed spaces discussed into dramatic, creative choreographies that facilitate the crossing and inhabiting of such liminal and proscribed spaces safely, even if some voices show disapproval. Pallbearing in Ghana, in general, has also assumed new dimensions, both as art-entertainment and as sacred performance. For example, it is now very common to hire professional pallbearers who not only dress in exquisite costumes but are also competent and impressive dancers. Apart from their ability to delight those attending, they sometimes transport the appreciative audience into further liminal-interstitial zones as they display their performance skills, sometimes accidentally dropping the casket and even exposing its contents in the process.⁴⁴ In such a “failed,” disastrous case, the “sacred” status of the performance is violated, both from the viewpoint of secular adjudication and moral appraisal, and from the immediate ritual exigencies as well. Nevertheless, the “dancing corpse” (by association), the pallbearers, and the audience are normally able to negotiate the status of the sacred performance/duty, its purity and efficacy within popular culture, thus loosening and entangling, or one could say blending the strands of the sacred, secular, and the profane, all at once.⁴⁵ For example, such entertainment-oriented choreographic performance, an emergent tradition, would suggest triviality, play, and grotesque and even extreme secularity, but as seen in other contexts discussed above, the transcendent performative essence and intentionality of this “serious-sacred” performance of pallbearing possesses flexible borders, both generically and across experiential domains.

Christianity and the Anyako Dzokoto Funeral and Installation-Related Performances

In the Anyako Dzokoto funeral and installation performances, the issues of absence and partiality, in deference to accommodation of historical and

understanding and explication of African and African-derived cultures is promising, especially those examples which highlight and situate the sacred-secular continuum alongside questions of circular/linear/non-linear in indigenous African modes of time reckoning and “oral-literating” (my new terminology) of history. See, for example, Adjaye (1994), and Fulop and Raboteau (1997). Three sources that illuminate debates surrounding the origins and transmutations of “syncretism” (and ultimately updated in discourses of hybridity) include Bhabha (1994), Shaw and Stewart (1994), and Stewart (1999).

- 44 There was at least one such situation when the video circulated on social media. One could see and hear a bereaved family member wailing with grave concern over the accidental fall and exposure of the contents of the casket. See pre-dance movements of Chief Dzokoto’s pallbearers at 1:17:00 and also at 1:27:48 of the video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=szqIIDL0M0s> (“Togbe Dzokoto Anyako Funeral Part 7” 2021). In this and in other royal contexts extra care is taken not to trivialize or secularize the sacred royal institution beyond expected norms, and hence the original YouTube video which captured and depicted the pallbearers’ more “worldly” dance maneuvers was taken offline.
- 45 For details on modes and foundations of interactions of the sacred and secular in Ghanaian popular culture, see Collins (2004).

contemporary Christian values and practices, emerged on multiple occasions. During an interview session, one subchief of Anyako explained why he would not allow certain ritual procedures because of his Christian background and membership in Ghana’s Christian Chiefs’ Association – GCCA (Haun 2019; Kallinen 2021; “Tribal Chiefs [...]” 2019; Wee 2014; Yeboah 2016). I was privy to many expressions of dissatisfaction with instances of the omission, sequencing, time-placement, duration, and substitutions concerning music and ritual performances that were once central to these royal events, including ancient war music-dances such as *kpegisu* and *atrikpui*. However, there was one momentous dramaturgical formulation and translation of this challenge or contestation. This occurred when an *affi* (also known as *akɔfaɖɛ*, the Anlo Ewe *asafɔ* music and dance associated with the royal court) dancer improvised, according to a choreography that encourages improvisation with linguistically coded gestures, metaphorical movements, and facial expressions. During this dance, a copy of the Christian Bible was displayed and accompanied by several nonverbal interrogative gestures, the questions and concerns communicated through dance movements.



Figure 13: Dancer (middle) with Bible and ritual stool choreographic demonstration of “incompatibilities” of some Christian values and those of indigenous chieftaincy.

Simply understood, the message to the audience could be read as, “Why bring in these Christian values and practices, especially the music, prayers, and the clergy?” As suggested earlier, such spectacular embodiment of the contestations and issues of the crossing and mixing of the secular, sacred, profane, indigenous sacred, Christian sacred, Christian secular, indigenous secular, etc. are best approached and understood within a broader and larger fundamental local ontology in which the sacred and the secular operate as a continuum. For example, when the Anyako Dzokoto event included some *kpegisu* (war and royal ritual music-dance), the performers had to borrow one indigenous

drum used in a local church, The Apostolic Revelation Society.⁴⁶ While such “crossing/mixing” may not be intentional, but strategic and by convenience, it nevertheless evokes a more subtle and yet profound context for examining the relevance of the above concepts such as sacred-sacred, sacred-profane, sacred-secular-popular, indigenous sacred-Christian sacred, and “contingent sacred” in both indigenous and Christian contexts. The danced disputation and its integral sonic details discussed possessed both rhetoric and yet affectivities and competence that united to situate the entire performance experience in the multisensory, and in the kaleidoscopic sites of collisions, coalitions, disruptions, eruptions, disjunctions, ruptures, raptures, and resolutions.

The women’s processional performance (Figure 12) with emphasis on the kinetic, the sonic, color saturation, and elevated visualization of the framed royal portraits contributes to the overall lure and sensorial framing of the event. The procession’s multiple purposes, both in the case of indigenous royal music and the hybrid forms integrated the following elements: heralding or publicizing the event; confirming the visible participation and identity of women; enhancing the overall grandeur, diversity and richness of the event; refreshing the general complementarity, reciprocity, and mutual engagement between male and female domains; fulfilling specific role assignments specified in items on the agenda for each event, and amplifying through space and time, visibility and the kinesthetic and overall bodily engagements that are emphasized in Ewe performance practice.



Figure 14: Part of a burial ceremony for a queen mother (Mamagā, Gbi-Hohoe, July 17, 2021). Note the gendering of female sensualities through aesthetic black-red contrasts and saturations.

46 Details about A. R. S. are provided in Avorgbedor (1997). A. R. S. is an AIC (i.e., African-Initiated, African Independent Church, or African Indigenous Church) founded in 1939 by local charismatic leader the late Rev. C. K. Wovenu (d. 1999).



Figure 15: Aerial view of women's performance arrangement and proxemics (cf. also with Figure 14).⁴⁷

Even in the case of details provided in Figures 14 and 15, the description and analytical summaries remain porous, at best. For example, the angle of independent aerial (drone) photography captures the rotating, concentric and silhouetted circular movement of the same group of women mourners/performers as they intersect by means of express, fortuitous design. Such phenomena are imbued with further sensorial force through the predominance of the female body, the vibrant dynamism of color-coded gestures and shapes in tandem with the visual aura of sensuous movements. All these elements are a significant part of the socio-performative choreographies that symbolize the ideals, traits, and magnificence of local femininities, especially as emphasized in the context of the queen-mother's funeral. The agility, resilience, prowess and overwhelming bodily affectivities and sensualities are projected further through imaginative choreographing.⁴⁸ This mode of staging clearly privileges plurality of expression. It creates a synthesis of multiple sensory inputs (Hall 1966; Hobeika 2017) through a kaleidoscope of sonic and bodily gestures, and techniques of silhouetting in the spirit of proxemics. The saturation of colors, the photo-realistic and malleable bodily architectures within which sonic varieties are engendered situate this all-female performance at the edge of worldly sensibilities and those of the spiritual.

Case Example 5: Eruptions, Disruptions and *Zangbetɔ*

A final case example involves the appearance of *zangbetɔ*, which is an aspect of *vodu*, the official state religion in Benin which has become a growing tourist

47 Footage from the video of a Ho, Kufufu Anyi, official announcement of the funeral (day 1) of Togbe Kwasi Afele II, provided by Krelo Pictures is available at the following link: <https://youtu.be/3nmQ4g-CcG0> ("The Most Feared [...] [2022]).

48 For example, under the direction of the leader in Figure 15 (performance circle) participants observe and perform silence, jump, clap, place their hands over their heads, sing game-like songs and recitations, and perform mime, etc.

attraction among the Ewe and the Fon of Benin, Togo, and Ghana. *Zangbetɔ*'s newfound presence and popularity can be viewed as the manifestation of a dissonant, cataclysmic (unexpected, unplanned) eruption as in my experience it occurred in the arena where the funeral church service (i.e., for the late Togbegā Gabusu, Hohoe) was in progress. It creates dissonance because, *vodu* (*vodun*, *voodoo*, etc.) is supposedly antithetical to the Christian faith and akin to heathenism. On the other hand, *zangbetɔ*'s growing popularity and spectacular appeal and the enchantment associated with the “magical” transmutations, rotations, and sheer kinesthetic force executed by its adepts, often adds to the overall awe and affective-cathartic moments experienced by onlookers.⁴⁹ The eruption-disruption that occurred with the *zangbetɔ* performance at the royal funeral I attended, constitutes an unforgettable moment, especially since the performance continued concurrently with the church service held within the premises of the funeral.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have presented examples of various degrees of rapture, rupture, and disjuncture in Ewe royal funerary and installation ritual ceremonial events. These occurrences can be experienced and understood as sonic elements with their affective reach and potential neurological repercussions (musketry, drumming); gender-related taboos such as the appearance of female drummers and dancing female pallbearers; debates concerning authenticity and merchandising strategies of a commercial nature; interjected elements of the grotesque associated with choreographed theatricality, etc. Disagreements regarding ritual procedures such as the omission and substitution of ritual symbols and practices, the absence of expected or invited delegates and challenges associated with a growing presence of Christian values (and the dilemma posed by “Christian” chiefs),⁵⁰ and dissatisfaction with the performance of music and dance of other Ghanaian ethnic sources, are among the factors that support the premises of rupture and disjuncture. The large and diverse repertoire of music and dance which privileges skillful execution in these royal contexts combines with the extraordinary moments of magic and unexpected novel acts to raise the overall

49 *Zangbetɔ* is now performed (or provides guest appearances) in national and non-Ewe contexts – there are several examples on YouTube, for example: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TyBJHVEVMn0&ct=21s> (“Zangbetɔ’s Part 2 [...]” 2020); <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D7dVUUUgGjr0> (“Zangbetos, Magia [...]” 2020); <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=baX849Ug9EM> (Nomi 2015); <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1XT-iEjnO2s&ct=1043s> (Agbayanou 2019).

50 In a provocative essay, a published version of a public lecture by a local Akan chief Nana Susubiribi Krobea Asante, we witness advocacy for the legitimization of a “Christian chief,” highlighting traditions, practices and beliefs that in his opinion support or are shared by some biblical examples. He then concludes, “I find unrelenting and indiscriminate condemnation of chieftaincy by some Christians somewhat puzzling in view of the enormous contributions made by traditional leaders over the years to the reception of Christianity and Western education in Ghana” (Asante 2018, 45).

affectivities and expectations concerning ritual efficacy and performance excellence. The field data pose challenges to current technologies, perspectives, and practices in visual and sensory ethnographies; they also clarify and uphold the dynamics and close interaction of religion and spirituality in African contexts. With new compelling data, the study illuminates the growing field of sonic studies and calls for close attention to and a deeper understanding and appreciation of local cosmologies within which ritual and performance traditions are enacted; it also acknowledges the limits of conventional research paradigms and tools concerning the world of religion and spirituality.

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POVZETEK

Prelomi, spoji in razlika: vloga glasbe in obredne performativnosti pri določanju »tradicije« v sodobnih kraljevskih slovesnostih v Gani

Prispevek se opira na primere izbranih kontekstov kraljevskih pogrebnih in umestitvenih slovesnosti in performativnosti v skupnostih ljudstva Ewe v južni Gani, pri čemer so v ospredju raziskave dogodkov v letih 2021 in 2022. Analize teh dogodkov temeljijo na mnogih, a medsebojno tesno povezanih analitičnih perspektivah: zvok (zlasti zvočni afekti), senzorične študije, študije performativnosti, avtohtoni estetski konstrukti in prakse, postkolonialne kritike in določanje hibridnosti ter fenomenologija religije in duhovnosti. Primeri poudarjajo perspektive, ki preizprašujejo sakralno-sekularne binarnosti.

Avtor meni, da sodelujoči obredne dogodke nadvse skrbno načrtujejo in izvajajo, ob tem pa še dodatno dajejo prednost izraziti ustvarjalnosti in združevanju različnih oblik izvedbenih praks ter mnogim simbolom s področja multisenzoričnega in hiperrealnega, da bi tako dosegli največji afektivni učinek doživetega dogodka. Analiza nadalje proučuje izrazito kreativnost (ter njen končni cilj), ki jo povezuje s spreminjajočo se prostorsko-časovno sestavo udeleženih v dogodkih, z njihovim izkustvom zvočnih in gibalnih manifestacij, ter jo opazuje kot poudarjeno na osnovi udejanjanja domačnosti, izjemnega, grotesknega, eksotičnega ipd. Premise preloma, zanosa, razdora, razlike in zbliževanja so nepogrešljive pri razumevanju tega, kako udeleženci določajo vmesnost in multisenzoričnost izvedbe, pa tudi, kako medsebojno delujejo, da omogočijo cilje obredne učinkovitosti in odličnosti izvedbe. Pri identificiranju sodobnih avtohtonih obrednih in performativnih tradicij ljudstva Ewe so pomembni sledeči vidiki ustvarjalnega pogleda in sodobnosti: soočanje krščanskih in avtohtonih verskih vrednot, opuščanje in nadomeščanje obrednih ter izvajalskih konvencij ter njihove specifične vsebine. Prispevek razpravlja o različnih značilnostih, mehanizmih in izvajalskih strategijah, ki utelešajo in razkrivajo napredne in prožne pristope k vprašanju spola in pripadnosti celo v obrednih ali svetih kontekstih, ki so sicer poznani kot zelo konservativni.

Zbrani terenski podatki postavljajo izzive sodobnim tehnologijam, perspektivam in praksam v vizualnih in senzoričnih etnografijah, obenem pa razjasnjujejo in potrjujejo dinamike in vzajemno delovanje religije in duhovnosti v afriških kontekstih. Raziskava dodaja sveže podatke in osvetljuje rastoče polje zvočnih študij, poleg tega pa poziva k večji pozornosti, globljemu razumevanju ter ovrednotenju lokalnih kozmologij, znotraj katerih se udejanjajo obredne in izvajalske tradicije. Obenem prepoznava omejitve konvencionalnih paradigem in orodij pri raziskovanju sveta religije in duhovnosti.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

DANIEL KODZO AVORGBEDOR (perazimm@gmail.com) completed his PhD degree at Indiana University (Bloomington) in 1986 and is a retired Associate Professor who currently teaches and conducts research on a contractual basis in the School of Performing Arts and the Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, Legon. Previous positions include a joint appointment in the School of Music and the Department of African-American and African Studies at The Ohio State University, Columbus (1995–2010) where he also served as coordinator of the Ethnomusicology program from 2004–2008. Professor Avorgbedor is past President of the Midwest Chapter of the Society for Ethnomusicology and was recently appointed as Vice-Chair of ICTM's Study Group on Sacred and Spiritual Sounds and Practices, and Editor-in-Chief of a new journal, *Analytical Approaches to African Music*. Professor Avorgbedor has received major grants from the H. F. Guggenheim and Wenner-Gren Foundations; Carnegie-Mellon (team), and the National Endowment for the Humanities (team). He guest-edited a special issue of *The World of Music* devoted to Cross-Cultural Aesthetics (2003) and his research focuses on urban ethnomusicology, African Diaspora studies, and bodily expressivity and the multisensory in Anlo-Ewe performance practices.

O AVTORJU

DANIEL KODZO AVORGBEDOR (perazimm@gmail.com) je doktoriral leta 1986 na Univerzi Indiana (Bloomington) in je upokojeni izredni profesor, ki trenutno poučuje in raziskuje na Šoli za uprizarjajoče umetnosti in Inštitutu za afriške študije na Univerzi v Gani (Legon). Predhodne zaposlitve vključujejo poučevanje na Fakultetni šoli za glasbo in Oddelku za afroameriške in afriške študije Državne univerze Ohio v Columbusu (1995–2010), kjer je bil med letoma 2004–2008 tudi koordinator programa etnomuzikologije. Profesor Avorgbedor je nekdanji predsednik Srednjehodnega oddelka Etnomuzikološkega društva (Midwest Chapter of Society for Ethnomusicology) in je bil pred kratkim imenovan za podpredsednika Študijske skupine za Sakralne in duhovne zvoke in prakse, delujoče pod okriljem Mednarodnega sveta za tradicijsko glasbo (ICTM), ter glavnega urednika nove revije *Analytical Approaches to African Music* (*Analični pristopi k afriški glasbi*). Profesor Avorgbedor je prejemnik večjih štipendij fundacij H. F. Guggenheim in Wenner-Gren ter štipendij za raziskovalne skupine Carnegie-Mellon in National Endowment for the Humanities. Bil je gostujoči urednik medkulturni etiki posvečene posebne številke revije *The World of Music* (*Svet glasbe*, 2003). Njegovo raziskovalno delo se osredotoča na urbano etnomuzikologijo, študije afriške diaspore ter telesno izraznost in multisenzoričnost izvajalskih praks skupnosti Anlo-Ewe.