

KPATSA: AN EXAMINATION OF A GHANAIAN DANCE IN THE UNITED STATES

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ABSTRACT

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Kpatsa is a dance of the Ga-Adangme people in Southern Ghana. Mythology says that Ga-Adangme hunters first learned it from the dwarfs; beliefs about its role in Ga-Adangme society vary. Today, *kpatsa* is an important teaching piece in Ghana and has also become a popular piece for Ghanaian performers teaching within the United States. This thesis is an examination of *kpatsa* as it was taught to the author.

In Chapter One, I examine *kpatsa*'s place in society. I begin with a discussion of its mythological origins, and then discuss its historical uses. Next, I examine how *kpatsa* is used in Ga-Adangme society today. I then examine how and why *kpatsa* has changed as it moved from the Ga-Adangmes, to the Ghanaians, and then to the United States.

Chapter Two examines *kpatsa* and education, beginning with how *kpatsa* is used to teach about Ga-Adangme culture, and then moving to how *kpatsa* is taught in Ghana. Finally, I look at how teaching methodology changes when *kpatsa* is taught in the United States.

Chapter Three expands on this discussion by describing my experiences as a student of *kpatsa*. First I examine my personal reactions and the teaching methodology I experienced. Next, I examine my experiences teaching *kpatsa* to the Bowling Green State University Afro-Caribbean Ensemble.

Chapter Four places my experiences with *kpatsa* in the context of appropriation. I begin with an examination of the scholarly arguments for why appropriation is wrong. I then present my teacher's reasons for why Americans learning Ghanaian culture is acceptable. Next, I attempt

to reconcile these two different ideas, concluding with suggestions to the performer on how to deal with these conflicting points of view.

The final chapter provides a transcription of *kpatsa* as I learned it from Kofi Ameyaw and how I taught it to the Afro-Caribbean Ensemble, including the drumming, singing, dancing, and choreography.

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INTRODUCTION

I became interested in Ghanaian dance in 2004 when I had the privilege to travel to Ghana as part of a workshop sponsored by Bowling Green State University (BGSU). Although I had been an avid dancer as a young child, I had since lost interest, and had no intentions of studying dance while I was in Ghana. Instead, I planned on studying drums and the *gyil*, a northern Ghanaian xylophone. After a couple of lessons, however, my *gyil* teacher, Bernard Woma, discovered that my thirteen prior years of piano left me bored in the beginning *gyil* class. He suggested that I try something else. I joined the only class that was open: dance.

Ghanaian dance became my new love, and it was through this medium that I came to understand Ghanaian music as a whole. Although I had been reminded time and again that dance, song, and music are one, it was dance that taught me the most about African music. Dance remains the lens through which I see this musical world. Throughout this paper, however, I also provide insights into the drumming and singing. I hope that the reader will find this thesis helpful, whether he or she is drawn to African music by dance or by drumming and singing.

My Teachers

Since my trip to Ghana, I have spent six semesters involved with the BGSU Afro-Caribbean Ensemble, run by Dr. Steven Cornelius. Through this ensemble, I have been able maintain connections with Mr. Woma, but have also met other talented performers, such as Kwesi Brown, Sulley Imoro, and Kofi Ameyaw. All are instrumental to this thesis.

Bernard Woma is from Northern Ghana. It is said that when he was born, his hands were clenched in the position of a *gyil* player, and thus he was given a *gyil* and began playing at two

years old. Mr. Woma's fame as a talented gyil player continued to grow. He worked with the prestigious Ghana Dance Ensemble, in which he earned the distinction of master drummer. For part of the year, Mr. Woma is a student and teacher at State University of New York at Fredonia. When he is not teaching in the United States or touring with his company, Saakumu, he runs the Dagara Arts Center, a school for traditional music in Medie, Ghana. The school hosts American students such as myself, but also works extensively with school children throughout the region.¹

I met Kwesi Brown when he was a master's student in ethnomusicology at BGSU. Before coming to BGSU, Mr. Brown earned a degree in music education from the University of Education in Winneba, Ghana. He has taught and performed in Europe and around the United States, as well as within Ghana. He is currently working towards his PhD in Folklore and Ethnomusicology at Indiana University, where he leads the African Music Ensemble.²

Sulley Imoro is a well-known dancer in Ghana, following after his father, also a renowned performer. Mr. Imoro works at the Dagara Music Center with Mr. Woma, which is where I had the pleasure of first meeting him. In Ghana, he also has taught at the University of Ghana at Legon. Mr. Imoro has toured around the world, and has spent many years working with students both in Ghana and abroad.³

David Akramah Cofie was a dance major at the University of Ghana, and has had teaching experiences around the United States. Today, he works extensively with the annual BaoBao festival in Colorado. Besides being a musician, Mr. Cofie is also a writer and is considering going back to college for his MFA in Creative writing.⁴

¹ Woma, "Biography," *Bernard Woma*.

² BaoBao Fest, "Dancers," *BaoBao Festival*.

³ McKigney, "Ghana Native Brings African Culture," *The Ithacan Online*.

⁴ BaoBao Fest, "Dancers," *BaoBao Festival*.

Kofi Ameyaw is currently teaching the African Ensemble at Eastern Michigan University, where he is also a student. He has been performing since he was nine years old, and was a member of both the Pan-African Youth Orchestra and the senior orchestra, with which he toured in North America and Europe. In addition to teaching at the college, Mr. Ameyaw does outreach programs to the surrounding area, and works as a private instructor. As a performer, he plays with the Bernard Woma Trio and also has his own jazz-influenced band named Sunkwa.⁵

Thesis Overview

In Chapter One, I examine *kpatsa* in the past and present. I begin with an examination of *kpatsa*'s mythology. This mythology is important, because it gives the *kpatsa* dance its basic movement. I then examine the numerous contexts in which *kpatsa* occurs. I conclude the chapter with how *kpatsa* has changed, including where it is performed, and how it looks and sounds.

Chapter Two is about teaching and learning. First, I examine *kpatsa*'s use as a method of teaching culture. I then examine *kpatsa*'s use as a pedagogy piece. I next discuss Ghanaian teaching methods, and conclude with by contrasting those methods to how *kpatsa* is taught in the United States.

Chapter Three allows me to reflect upon my role as a student, and then teacher, of the drumming, singing, and dancing that constitutes *kpatsa*. As a student, I examine both Mr. Ameyaw's teaching methods, and my reactions to them. As a teacher, I examine my personal methodology, with particular focus on the changes I made when teaching and performing.

The fourth chapter examines appropriation in light of my role learning *kpatsa*. I begin with a general discussion of appropriation, and then examine the problems as presented by experts. I then discuss the opinions of my teachers. Next, as my teachers completely disagree

⁵ Sunkwa, "Sunkwa Band Members," *Sunkwa Music*.

with the scholars, I attempt to rectify these differences by examining the contextual arguments of each side. Finally, I suggest ways in which a performer might cope with and respond to these issues.

My final chapter is a transcription of kpatasa as taught to me by Mr. Ameyaw. This includes the drumming, dancing, singing, and choreography.

Literature Review

Being new to dance ethnography, I found a few books extremely helpful in orienting myself to dance studies. This included *Dancing from Past to Present*, edited by Theresa Buckland (2006), and *Moving History/ Dancing Cultures*, edited by Ann Dils and Ann Cooper Albright (2001). These two collections examined dance and dance research from various areas of the world within a cultural context. *Meaning in Motion: New Cultural Studies of Dance*, edited by Jane Desmond (1997), also provided understanding into what cultural issues arise from dance performances. Finally, *African Dance: An Artistic, Historical, and Philosophical Inquiry*, edited by Kariamuw Welsh Asante (1996), provided similar knowledge into dance cultural studies, but dealt specifically with issues surrounding African dance. Judith Lynne Hanna's chapter, "Dance" in *Ethnomusicology, an Introduction* (1992), added further insight into the ethnomusicological history of dance.

Two books, *Culture and Customs of Ghana*, by Steven Salm and Toyin Falola (2002), and *Ghana: Understanding the People and their Culture*, by John Kuada and Yao Chachah (1999), were helpful in providing general knowledge about cultural studies in Ghana, as well as background information about Ghana's various ethnic groups and their differences. C.O.C.

Amate's *The Making of Ada* (1999) also provided an extremely detailed overview of Ada, the city where kpatsa is believed to have originated.

Many scholars have written about Ghanaian music. Their work provided foundational reading for my research. Kwabena Nketia's *African Music in Ghana: A Survey of Traditional Forms* (1962) provided an extensive overview and analysis of Ghanaian music. *The Music of Africa* (1974), also by Nketia, presented a broad overview including everything from instruments to cultural uses, and drew many of its examples from Ghana. Kofi Agawu is another Ghanaian scholar who has written on African music. His book *African Rhythm: A Northern Ewe Perspective* (1995) furnished a scholarly analysis of music's cultural place from the perspective of someone within the culture being studied. Ofotsu Adinku's *African Dance Education in Ghana: Curriculum and Instructional Materials for a Model Bachelor of Arts (Hons.) Dance in Society* (1994) also provided insight into what a Ghanaian believed was most important in Ghanaian dance education.

Several Western scholars are known for their work on Ghanaian music. John Miller Chernoff's *African Rhythm and African Sensibility: Aesthetics and Social Action in African Musical Idioms* (1979) offered an analysis of music's place in Ghanaian society, as well as a detailed account of his field experiences. David Locke provides a different view of research with *Drum Gahu: A Systematic Method for an African Percussion Piece* (1987). Locke presented not only notation, but also a detailed description of one piece and its use, allowing the reader to both recreate the music and also begin to understand its importance. Finally, Sharon Friedler's bibliography "Dance Research in Ghana" (1997) proved helpful in locating good resources.

With the exception of brief statements in Ghanaian music books, I found only a few sources specifically on kpatsa. Ofotsu Adinku's "The Kpatsa Dance of the Dangme" (1994) was

a key resource. Adinku offered a detailed description of the piece as it existed in Ada, including organization within the performance groups, reasons for performances, and a description of the dance, music, and songs. *African Drumming Workshop: Kpatsa from Ghana* by Trevor Wiggins and Johnson Kemeh (2007) provided both some general analysis and a good comparison with my kpatsa transcriptions and dance movements. *Traditional Dance of Ghana: Instructional DVD*, created by Vijay Rakhra and Nana Yaw Koranteng with the Aziza Music and Dance Ensemble (2002) gave yet another version of kpatsa for comparison, although the DVD offered no explanations about the meaning, history, or culture surrounding the piece. My best resources on Kpatsa, however, were my teachers: Bernard Woma, Kwesi Brown, Sulley Imoro, Akramah Cofie, and Kofi Ameyaw. Together, they provided me not only with descriptions of the dance, drumming, and singing, but also personal insights and experiences with kpatsa's cultural place.

Finally, for the issue of appropriation, I mainly relied on two edited books. The first was *Performing Ethnomusicology: Teaching and Representation in World Music Ensembles*, edited by Ted Solís (2004). This book provided insight from a variety of ethnomusicologists grappling with issues surrounding running and participating in a world music ensemble within the United States. Each writer offered a different viewpoint on an aspect of appropriation, and provided insights on how to walk the fine line between appropriate and inappropriate appropriation. *Borrowed Power: Essays on Cultural Appropriation*, edited by Bruce Ziff and Pratima V. Rao (1997), discussed appropriation of all forms, including music and dance but also writing, art, and scientific culture. Although it drew a large majority of its examples from issues surrounding Native American communities in Canada, it held important insights into cultural beliefs and struggles from both insider/outsider and pro/con perspectives.

CHAPTER ONE: KPATSA PAST AND PRESENT

Kpatsa has a rich history and has, over time, been performed in a variety of settings and by a large assortment of different groups. Although originally associated with a specific ethnic clan, it has grown in popularity and spread across Ghana, allowing performers from all over the country to participate. This growth, combined with a change of settings, has led to dramatic modifications in both how the piece appears, and how it is used within the culture. Despite these changes, however, performers have maintained a sense about what elements are essential to create a good kpatsa performance.

Origin Myths

Kpatsa originated with the Ga-Adangme people of Southeastern Ghana. Depending upon the writer, this group is known by many names: Adangme,¹ Adangbe,² Dangme,³ Dangbe.⁴ They are often referred to as Ga-Adangme because many people believe that the two groups, the Gas and the Adangmes, are closely related.⁵ While other theories contradict this shared heritage, the history of interaction due to the close proximity of these two large groups makes the actual lineage of the clans unimportant for the purposes of this thesis.⁶ Unless referring specifically to the Adangme and not the Gas, I refer to this group as the Ga-Adangmes, because although kpatsa is an Adangme dance, it is also important within the Ga community, and I wish to emphasize this

¹ Nketia, "Traditional and Contemporary Idioms," 34.

² Salm and Falola, *Culture and Customs of Ghana*, 8.

³ Amate, *The Making of Ada*, 1.

⁴ Obeng, "An Analysis of the Linguistic Situation," 64.

⁵ Kuada and Chachah, *Ghana*, 13.

⁶ C.O.C. Amate provides a detailed discussion of the history of the Ga-Adangme clan in *The Making of Ada*.

connection.⁷ Geographically, the Ga-Adangmes may be further divided into major regions, each of which shares a slightly different dialect and culture. Kpatsa is most closely connected with the Ga-Adangmes from the town of Ada, along the Volta River. This group may be called the Ada-Dangmes, or simply Adas.⁸ As I wish to look at the broader context of the piece, however, I will avoid such regional designations.

For the Ga-Adangmes, the kpatsa dance has mystical origins. One of my teachers, Akramah Cofie, a Ga, said the mythology states that a hunter from the Ada region discovered a group of little people, called dwarfs, performing kpatsa.⁹ Among the Ga-Adangmes, dwarfs are mythical creatures with magical powers, and can be equated with the Western concept of fairies: They are small, rarely seen, magical, and often play the role of trickster.¹⁰ According to legend, dwarfs have one leg that is shorter than the other, and therefore have an uneven gait. The rocking, limping step that results from the unevenness is known as kpatsa.¹¹ At times, this word can also refer to the dwarfs themselves.¹² Legend states that a hunter was able to use magic to conceal himself from the dwarfs, and thus observed them and learned the dance, which he then brought back to the village to teach.¹³ Mr. Cofie explained that, although hunters were the first to teach many Ga-Adangme pieces, it is common for these hunters to claim that the dance was taught to them by an animal or mythical creature. Mr. Cofie feels this may be a defense

⁷ I choose this over the Ga-Adangbe spelling because I find it is more common in scholarly writing, although I have not encountered any explanation for the difference. Agordoh actually used the terms interchangeably in *African Music*.

⁸ Adinku, "The Kpatsa Dance of the Dangme," 66.

⁹ Akramah Cofie, interview with the author, May 5, 2008.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Adinku, "The Kpatsa Dance of the Dangme," 67.

¹² Akramah Cofie, interview with the author, May 5, 2008.

¹³ Adinku, "The Kpatsa Dance of the Dangme," 67.

mechanism employed by the hunters to avoid criticism of their dancing, because they claim they are merely imitating what they saw.¹⁴

Regardless of the truth of the legend, the importance of kpatsa's connection to the dwarfs is clear, as the most basic movement of the piece imitates their uneven stepping. Mr. Cofie says that this movement is achieved by keeping one foot flat while the other alternates between stepping on the ball and the heel, creating a sense of height fluctuation. Kpatsa drumming, which seems to fall towards a stress on every other beat, reinforces this unevenness. He stated that originally, the entire dance consisted exclusively of variations on this uneven movement. Today, however, he is disappointed that many of the groups who claim to be performing kpatsa do not utilize even this most basic step from which the dance gets its name.¹⁵

Originally, upon learning this legend and hearing Mr. Cofie's complaint, I was embarrassed to admit that the version of the dance I had learned was one of those that lacked the dance's namesake movement. As I watched other kpatsa performances, however, I realized that in a very basic form, the uneven movement was actually present. Instead of using the ball and heel of one foot while continuously keeping the other foot flat, many of the performances I saw, including the one I learned myself, alternate between the feet. In the version I learned, one foot is lifted and tapped on the ground three times, and then the dancer transfers his or her weight and does the same movement with the other leg. While this in itself does not create the level changes of the ball-heel movement described by Mr. Cofie, other groups performed a similar movement to the one I learned, but managed to raise and lower their torso while tapping their foot, giving a

¹⁴ Akramah Cofie, interview with the author, May 5, 2008.

¹⁵ Ibid.

more uneven appearance.¹⁶ I believe this demonstrates a gradual movement away from imitation of dwarfs to a more aesthetically based motion.

Traditional Kpatsa

Agordoh defines “traditional” music with a quote from Nketia, who states that it is “music associated with the traditional African institutions of the pre-colonial era. It is music which has survived the impact of the forces of Western forms of acculturation, and is, therefore, quite distinct in idiom and orientation from contemporary popular and art music.”¹⁷ My use of the term follows this definition, in that the “traditional” music I speak of has some connection to a non-Western influenced world, and that it follows some of the assumed conventions of “traditional” African music: It has many uses, is associated with dance, is percussive, and is audience inclusive.¹⁸ I have to agree with Myers, however, when she states that the term “traditional” is “an impotent concept that refers, in the world of music, to everything and therefore nothing.”¹⁹ I use the term because it seems to be unavoidable; not only did my teachers use it, but Nketia even used it within his definition. To me, “traditional” remains the ubiquitous term for music belonging to, or somehow referencing, an idealized past.

The original context of kpatsa is unclear. When I began my research I found that some performers connect kpatsa to the well-known female coming of age ceremony, *dipo*.²⁰ Coming of age ceremonies, like the *dipo*, were used to mark the transition of girls into women ready for marriage and family, although in modern Ghana, this meaning is becoming more symbolic than

¹⁶ Vijay Rakhra, Nana Yaw Koranteng and The Aziza Music and Dance Ensemble demonstrate this adapted movement in “Kpatsa Steps,” *Traditional Dances of Ghana*.

¹⁷ Agordoh, *African Music*, 21. Agordoh does not make clear which Nketia writing this quote comes from.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 25–26.

¹⁹ Myers, “Introduction: Ethnomusicology,” 11.

²⁰ For one example of an artist making this association, see Madison Center for Creative and Cultural Arts, “Edi Kwasi.”

literal. Two of my teachers, Mr. Brown and Mr. Imoro, agreed that kpatsa was a part of a coming of age ceremony, but not part of the dipo.²¹ Yet Mr. Cofie, one of my teachers who is Ga, although not Adangme, insisted that any association of kpatsa with any such ceremonies only arises because the piece is from the same ethnic group as dipo.²² The fact that kpatsa is not connected with the dipo makes sense, because kpatsa originated with Ga-Adangmes living in Ada, while the dipo ceremony is done by Ga-Adangmes living in the Krobo region of Ghana (Figure 1). This connection is such a commonly held belief, however, that it still seems possible that in the past, kpatsa was associated with an Ada coming of age ceremony. In the very least, knowledge of this possible connection is helpful in understanding the dance, because some versions, such as Mr. Brown's, incorporate movements typical of coming of age ceremonies which emphasize the womanly features of the dancers.

There is another contradictory belief that the piece is, and always has been, nothing more than recreational. Mr. Cofie explained that although anthropologists and ethnomusicologists like to try to link everything from particular ethnic groups together, and to suggest a ceremonial purpose behind all dances, not every piece has such connections; some are purely recreational. According to Mr. Cofie, recreational dances do not have links to any ceremonies, and may therefore be performed wherever and whenever people want. Although Mr. Cofie did not grow up in traditional Ga-Adangme area, he spoke to me about learning the dances with other children in the city as a way to connect with his heritage. Mr. Cofie believes that the fact that kpatsa is a recreational dance explains why it has been embraced by Ghanaian youths.²³ According to Agawu, recreational dances “represent recent coinage; they more obviously bear the marks of

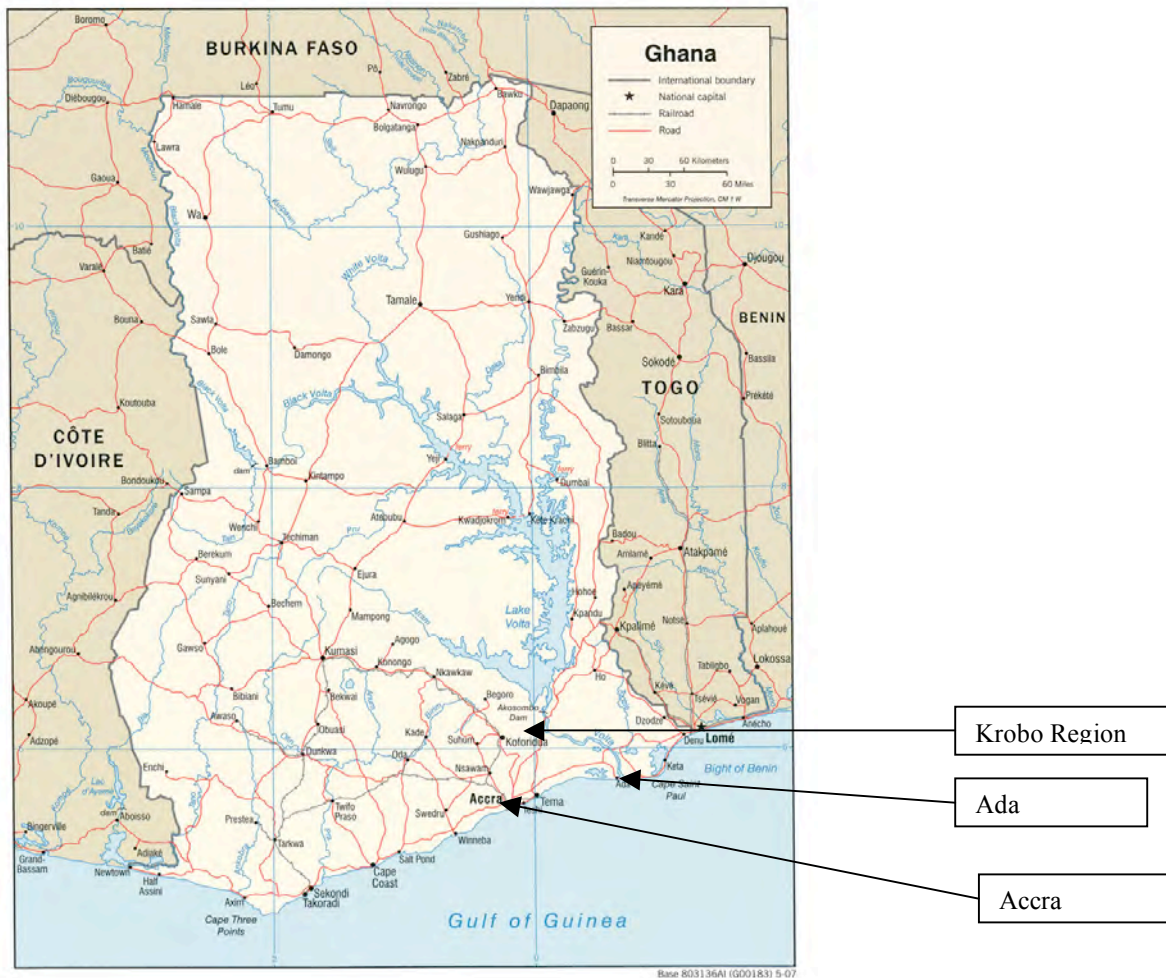
²¹ Sulley Imoro, interview with the author, May 6, 2008; Kwesi Brown, interview with the author, April 24, 2008.

²² Akramah Cofie, interview with the author, May 5, 2008.

²³ Ibid.

post-colonial Ghana.²⁴ Therefore looking at kpatsa as a recreational dance, instead of as part of a coming of age ceremony, suggests a different form of growth and development.

Figure 1: Map of Ghana. Courtesy of the University of Texas Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin.



The fact that these two seemingly contradictory theories exist reflects the complicated history of pieces like kpatsa. All of my teachers learned kpatsa outside of its original context. Therefore, the ideas about this original context were unclear. What is important, however, is that

²⁴ Agawu, *African Rhythm*, 100.

many pieces, and possibly kpatsa, were at one time connected to important ceremonies and rituals. Today these pieces are being recontextualized. So while it is possible that kpatsa was connected to a ceremony, it is also correct that today it is important as a recreational dance and is known only, at least by some, as such.

Kpatsa in Modern Ghanaian Society

Within the Ga-Adangme community, kpatsa is often played whenever music is needed. This may include everything from gatherings of leaders and visits by dignitaries,²⁵ to Easter and Christmas celebrations.²⁶ According to Mr. Cofie, however, kpatsa may be performed “in full regalia” for special occasions, and for two festivals in particular: the Ga *homowo* and Adangme *asafotufiam*.²⁷ Homowo means “hooting at hunger,” and the homowo festival essentially taunts the idea of hunger, teasing it with supposed security in the harvest.²⁸ In another version of the legend, as told by Kuada and Chachah, the Gas were plagued by a severe drought. When the drought finally ended, they were so happy they “hooted at the hunger.”²⁹ Prior to the festival, a one-month ban on dancing, drumming, and loud noises honors the ancestors.³⁰ Once the festival begins, Gas come from all over the country to visit with family, and remember the ancestors,³¹ and it is said that the ancestors will punish those who do not celebrate.³²

According to Mr. Cofie, the other festival where kpatsa is commonly performed is the Ga-Adangme festival, *asafotufiam*.³³ The *asafotufiam* serves as an opportunity to reconnect with

²⁵ Agordoh, *African Music*, 128.

²⁶ Adinku, “The Kpatsa Dance of the Dangme,” 75.

²⁷ Akramah Cofie, interview with the author, May 5, 2008.

²⁸ Salm and Falola, *Culture and Customs of Ghana*, 152.

²⁹ Kuada and Chachah, *Ghana*, 86.

³⁰ Salm and Falola, *Culture and Customs of Ghana*, 152.

³¹ Kuada and Chachah, *Ghana*, 86.

³² Salm and Falola, *Culture and Customs of Ghana*, 152.

³³ Akramah Cofie, interview with the author, May 5, 2008.

extended family, including those who have passed on into the world of the ancestors.³⁴ The asafotufiam takes place during the first week of August, and is reminiscent of the celebrations given for returning warriors.³⁵ The asafotufiam also provides an important opportunity for a “*durbar*,” a ceremonial gathering of the traditional leaders.³⁶ As the asafotufiam is held in Ada, kpatsa’s city of origin, it is not surprising that the piece would play an important role.

Being two ethnic groups with their traditional lands located close to Ghana’s urban capital, the Gas and Ga-Adangmes have been heavily involved with Ghana’s growing exodus from rural areas into the cities. As of 2002, 33% of Ghanaians lived in urban centers, and that number continues to grow.³⁷ For the Gas and Ga-Adangmes living in these urban areas, kpatsa’s connection to traditional life remains high. For example, even though Mr. Cofie described participating in the piece as a form of after-school entertainment, he also mentioned that performing this piece together in a relaxed context provided a means for urban Gas and Ga-Adangmes to find emotional and cultural closeness to their ethnic group.³⁸ Kpatsa’s ability to connect people with their family and heritage, while not a historical purpose, has become a specific and important meaning of the piece with these relocated communities.

Outside of Ada and other Ga and Ga-Adangme regions, a common place to see kpatsa performed is in events by the numerous cultural troupes that exist in Ghana. The two most famous of these troupes are the Ghana Dance Ensemble (GDE), which is connected to The University of Ghana, and the National Dance Company of Ghana, which is connected with the National Theater. Many of my teachers were first introduced to kpatsa through membership in one of these ensembles. These and other folkloric ensembles make it easier for cross-ethnic

³⁴ Amate, *The Making of Ada*, 145.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 142.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 145.

³⁷ Salm and Falola, *Culture and Customs of Ghana*, 12.

³⁸ Akramah Cofie, interview with the author, May 5, 2008.

interaction and sharing to take place. For example, one of my teachers, Mr. Woma, is from the area along the northern Ghanaian border, far from kpatsa's origins, but by joining a performing ensemble, Mr. Woma was able to learn and become experienced in playing and performing kpatsa.³⁹

Outside of these professional troupes are the smaller ensembles. These ensembles are often groups of semi-professionals known as mutual-aid societies. Recreational music, like kpatsa, is the most common repertoire of these voluntary associations.⁴⁰ Mutual aid societies earn money performing, but more importantly function as a means of developing camaraderie and a social safety net.⁴¹ When one member encounters hard times due to poor crops, sickness, or death either in the family or by the member him or herself, the other members gather together to support the family and, in the case of a death, provide important entertainment at the funeral.

Kpatsa Changes

Thomas Turino, who writes on the different interactions between audience and performers, defines participatory music as “a special type of artistic practice in which there are no artist-audience distinctions, only participants and potential participants performing different roles, and the primary goal is to involve the maximum number of people in some performance role.” He then defines presentational music as “situations where one group of people, the artists, prepare and provide music for another group, the audience, who do not participate in making the music or dancing.”⁴² When Mr. Brown described kpatsa in a traditional setting, he described a participatory setting; two old women would start, and slowly everyone would join in, including

³⁹ Bernard Woma, interview with the author, May 2, 2008.

⁴⁰ Nketia, *African Music in Ghana*, 17.

⁴¹ Locke, *Drum Gahu*, 5–6.

⁴² Turino, *Music as Social Life*, 19.

the drummers, who would enter without any specific part to play. No one would get tired.

However, his experience with *kpatsa* on the stage is very different. On stage, everything is highly choreographed and practiced, with little to no opportunity to simply react in the moment. In this sense, as *kpatsa* becomes more commonly known in a stage setting, many of the piece's changes relate directly to its change from participatory to presentational.⁴³

As a piece undergoes the transition from participatory to presentational, it tends to follow a predictable pattern of changes.⁴⁴ The physical shift of the piece from the village to the stage necessitates many of these changes. For example, Mr. Imoro described the need to change the choreography from a circular formation, which fit perfectly in the villages where the audience surrounded and even joined in with the dance, to a linear one with clear a clear front and back.⁴⁵ Such an arrangement was better suited for a theatrical venue, where the audience would not only be separated from the performers, but would also see the dance only from one direction.

The movements have also changed. When audiences are no longer able to look forward to joining in the performance, or even participating as witnesses to a ritual or ceremony, performers must entertain the audience by showcasing great talent and ability.⁴⁶ Mr. Cofie confirmed this change when he stated that as soon as traditional arts schools picked up the dance, new movements were added in order to appeal to the audience.⁴⁷ As mentioned by Mr. Brown, complicated movements may be created without meaning, and simply because they look good.

⁴³ Kwesi Brown, interview with the author, April 24, 2008.

⁴⁴ Turino discusses the different changes that result from transitioning between participatory and presentational music forms throughout his book, *Music as Social Life*.

⁴⁵ Sulley Imoro, interview with the author, May 6, 2008.

⁴⁶ Turino, *Music as Social Life*, 234.

⁴⁷ Akramah Cofie interview with the author, May 5, 2008.

For example, instead of using simple variations on a single movement of the uneven gait of the dwarfs, Mr. Brown said that many movements today are being drawn from modern dance.⁴⁸

Kpatsa has become a popular piece throughout most of Ghana, despite the fact that many young Ghanaians have never seen it performed in a traditional setting. When they learn the dances, many of these young performers are like Mr. Ameyaw, who stated he did not care what the meaning of the piece was when he was learning it.⁴⁹ Without knowing, or caring to know, what the meaning is, the movements no longer have to reflect that meaning. For example, if a performer did not know that the uneven stepping of traditional kpatsa comes from the dwarfs, the mythical creators of the dance, they would have no reason to maintain that movement. As another example, Mr. Brown, who was the only one of my teachers who detailed the connection of kpatsa to a coming of age ceremony, described how many of the traditional movements are designed to allow young girls to demonstrate their newly developed womanhood, especially by showing off their breasts. Today, however, he feels many of the new movements lack any meaning, and are simply for show.⁵⁰

Change is nothing new to kpatsa, however. Ghanaian traditions have been evolving and changing since they began.⁵¹ This spirit of innovation has encouraged cultural troupes to alter the kpatsa performance. Mr. Imoro, for example, admitted to adding a few movements of his own when performing the dance, but explained that he felt this was okay after seeing other groups adding movements.⁵² Mr. Woma also described changing the arrangements, and in particular, the order, so that his dance troupe may perform kpatsa “in a way they feel is good for them to dance

⁴⁸ Kwesi Brown, interview with the author, April 24, 2008.

⁴⁹ Kofi Ameyaw, interview with the author, May 24, 2008.

⁵⁰ Kwesi Brown, interview with the author, April 24, 2008.

⁵¹ Salm and Falola, *Culture and Customs of Ghana*, 167.

⁵² Sulley Imoro, interview with the author, May 6, 2008.

or perform.”⁵³ Even though these changes are aesthetic, however, they reflect kpatsa’s presentational status. After all, changes cannot be made to choreography if there is no set choreography to begin with, and furthermore, such changes are more dramatic when performed by a group than when improvised by a solo individual within a large gathering.

In the face of all these changes, I asked my teachers if there was something that must be preserved in order for kpatsa to be recognizable. Mr. Cofie stated that he wants to see the uneven gait in a kpatsa performance, and felt that the bell rhythm must also be present.⁵⁴ Mr. Brown stated that the drum rhythm is the most important.⁵⁵ Mr. Woma spoke of a general feeling of the dance that is consistent between kpatsa performances.⁵⁶ Yet all of them also admitted changing the dance in slight ways themselves, as long as these changes fell under their idea of being acceptable. Mr. Brown, for example, felt that while it was okay to incorporate movements from modern dance and other styles, he did not feel that such pieces should still be called kpatsa. He stated that adding moves without changing the titles destroys the dances, and that “If you’re going to change a lot of things, then call it something else.”⁵⁷ Mr. Cofie was also okay with adding new movements because of the historical tradition of improvisation in kpatsa, and added that many who criticize others about their movements themselves add movements that “have no part in the dance at all.”⁵⁸ Although each of the performers has set ideas of what is right and wrong, these boundaries vary from person to person.

Interestingly, the one point where my teachers agreed was upon what makes a good kpatsa performance. All spoke of some variation on the audience and performer interaction,

⁵³ Bernard Woma, interview with the author, May 2, 2008.

⁵⁴ Akramah Cofie, interview with the author, May 5, 2008.

⁵⁵ Kwesi Brown, interview with the author, April 24, 2008.

⁵⁶ Bernard Woma, interview with the author, May 2, 2008.

⁵⁷ Kwesi Brown, interview with the author, April 24, 2008.

⁵⁸ Akramah Cofie, interview with the author, May 5, 2008.

mentioning the performers' ability to connect with and share their excitement and enjoyment of the dance as key. To illustrate, Mr. Woma shared a story about one of his favorite performances. In this performance, a group of Ghanaian public-school students had come to Mr. Woma's school, the Dagara Music Center, to work on kpatsa. The songs that the students chose to sing for their performance encouraged everyone to come together and celebrate their Ghanaian culture and identity. To Mr. Woma, these songs were extremely meaningful and touching, which made the performance enjoyable. "I felt it," he said.⁵⁹ Even though the performers may be on a stage, and the audience may be unable to join in the dancing, it seems clear that the audience's reaction to a kpatsa performance has not diminished in importance.

The version of kpatsa performed in the National Theater by a troupe of professional performers is dramatically different from that done by urban Ga children looking to connect to their heritage, which is in turn different from the dance done by the dwarfs and seen by the hunters. Despite this, though, kpatsa has served as a means to unite people, whether by providing entertainment after long days of work, or by nurturing a sense of pan-Ghanaian culture. Because of this, what remains important is the performers' ability to connect with their audience, regardless of whether that audience is able to join in or must simply feel inspired by watching a spirited performance.

⁵⁹ Bernard Woma, interview with the author, May 2, 2008.

CHAPTER TWO: TEACHING AND LEARNING

I begin this chapter by examining kpatsa's many uses as a teaching tool. Next, I examine why kpatsa has become so popular as a learning piece. Finally, I discuss the different methods that are used to teach kpatsa, including the oral teaching style using in Ghana, and the adaptations Ghanaian teachers made when they came to the United States.

Kpatsa as a Cultural Teacher

As a door to culture, kpatsa serves multiple purposes. Ga-Adangmes learn about their ethnic clan and its societal expectations. Other Ghanaians learn about the Ga-Adangmes, but more importantly about the larger idea of a unified Ghanaian culture. For Americans, kpatsa serves as an easy introduction to both Ghanaian music and culture.

Kpatsa served an important role in teaching young Ga-Adangme about their ethnicity, and what was expected of them by society. Mr. Brown and Mr. Imoro stated that kpatsa was part of a coming of age ceremony, that the dance represented the transition from girl to woman, and that the movements exemplified what was required to be a desirable Ga-Adangme female. According to Mr. Brown, during the ceremony, the young girls were sequestered for two weeks to be taught how to be a wife and mother. At the end of the ceremony, the young women would emerge and dance kpatsa to demonstrate that they had received their training and were qualified to fulfill the female's role. The women would hold their breasts, and shake beads around their waist to draw young men's attention to their womanhood.¹ Mr. Imoro explained that by

¹ Kwesi Brown, interview with the author, April 24, 2008.

performing this dance, the girls announced to the town, and to themselves, that they were now women, with all the freedom and responsibility that came with this designation.²

Even without being part of a coming of age ceremony, kpatsa teaches Ga-Adangme social mores. This is especially true of the songs that accompany the dance. According to Mr. Woma, many of these songs comment on social behavior as a form of “social control.”³ According to Adinku, the vocalist becomes a commentator, drawing from human experiences, such as “wickedness, love, gossip, cowardice, hypocrisy, foolishness, lust, adultery or nepotism.” Adinku explained that often the vocalist presented these ideas in response to the behavior of a specific individual within the community, with the intent to draw attention to both positive and negative behavior. In the case of positive behavior, the individual is lauded; in the case of negative behavior, the individual is encouraged to change their way, and the rest of the community is expected to learn by example. Even though this is done without the mention of specific names, these statements are “portrayed in such a fashion that it often leaves no doubt in the mind of listeners” who the song is about.⁴

According to Chernoff, “music’s explicit purpose, in the various ways it might be defined by Africans, is essentially, socialization.” By participating in performances like kpatsa, children have the chance to explore how people within the community interact, and to experience cultural values.⁵ While this is true for those who live within the traditional communities, it is also true for those who live outside the community. Even though their traditional lands are located closer to Accra than many other clans, Gas and Ga-Adangmes living within the multi-ethnic, urban areas can become distanced from their heritage. Therefore, for Gas like Mr. Cofie, learning kpatsa

² Sulley Imoro, interview with the author, May 6, 2008.

³ Bernard Woma, interview with the author, May 2, 2008.

⁴ Adinku, “The Kpatsa Dance of the Dangme,” 78–79.

⁵ Chernoff, *African Rhythm and African Sensibility*, 154.

builds a link to culture.⁶ Festivals where kpatsa is performed, such as the homowo and asafotufiam, place an emphasis on the ideas of returning home and reuniting families.

Performing kpatsa together provides one way of creating this sense of unity.

Despite admitting to originally learning the piece without any cultural context, my teachers generally spoke about taking an interest in this missing information. In this sense, their learning kpatsa served as a bridge to learning about the ethnic group as a whole. As Mr. Woma stated, he and his colleagues become “performer scholars.” He explained that this is especially important because they teach as well as perform, and need to be able to explain the pieces to their students.⁷ Because I do not know where each of my teachers learned his knowledge, I cannot explain why these “performer scholars” disagree on kpatsa’s original uses. I suspect that, over time, the actual use of kpatsa has become irrelevant. To stage performers, it does not matter whether the piece is recreational or tied into a ceremony; what matters the most is that it looks good and communicates something about the culture to the audience. Whether or not kpatsa was actually used in a coming of age ceremony, connecting it to this teaches the audience about how important these ceremonies were to the Ga-Adangme. Conversely, performing it as a recreational dance shows yet another Ga-Adangme musical value.

Another reason why the actual meaning may be unimportant is because, in some contexts, pieces like kpatsa have become part of the larger idea of pan-Ghanaian, cross-ethnic culture. Today, these pieces are taught to students in elementary schools because of the development of a Ghanaian cultural program to prevent Ghanaian culture from being lost.⁸ These students may then participate in competitions, and according to Mr. Woma, many become quite

⁶ Akramah Cofie, interview with the author, May 5, 2008.

⁷ Bernard Woma, interview with the author, May 2, 2008.

⁸ Agawu, *African Rhythm*, 103.

skilled at performing despite their young age.⁹ The reason for studying these pieces seems to be a mix of the desire to preserve and continue Ghanaian traditional culture, and to foster a pan-Ghanaian identity out of the many diverse ethnic groups that inhabit the country. Mr. Woma, who runs his own school, is touched by seeing Ghanaian children singing about and enjoying Ghanaian culture. He believes this training is important for Ghana's future. Once, a group of school children that were learning kpatsa at his school in Medie sang a song, asking everyone to "come and let's share and let's perform together, come and let's celebrate our culture, come and let's celebrate our identity." He explained, "To see young people saying these kind of things, you think that, well, this is not going to die. This is going to continue."¹⁰

For Westerners, the goal of learning kpatsa is often to understand at least something about the dance's meaning and history, although the Ghanaian teachers sometimes have to modify the way they present it. For example, although Mr. Brown's version of the dance involves girls touching their breasts and other gestures to demonstrate their womanhood, he explained that he does not want to end up in jail, so he cannot do those types of movements here. As a result, he may change them, preserving only the important details about the dance representing the transition into womanhood. As growing up is something everyone can easily relate too, this allows them to understand the piece and begin to understand Ghanaian life, despite "cultural differences."¹¹

Kpatsa As a Piece for Learning

Kpatsa is an important teaching and training piece for teaching both young Ghanaian traditional performers and American students. There are two main reasons for this: it is easy to

⁹ Bernard Woma, interview with the author, May 2, 2008.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Kwesi Brown, interview with the author, April 24, 2008.

learn and fun to perform, and it lacks the serious overtones and required extra-musical knowledge of religious or cult dances. My research suggests that most Ghanaian folkloric performers have learned the piece at some point; all of my teachers have had multiple experiences with kpatsa as performers. Mr. Brown even told me that he had performed this dance in almost every dance troupe he has been in.¹² Many of these performers used kpatsa when teaching their students, both Ghanaian and foreign. Yet, while nearly every dancer learns kpatsa, because of its simplicity, some advanced artists and professionals avoid performing it.

All of my teachers agreed that kpatsa is supposed to be a fun dance. When describing the dance, Mr. Cofie explained that when performing, “people are just happy to be doing a dance that dwarfs do.”¹³ Adinku described recreational dances, among which he specifically mentioned kpatsa, as “light-hearted in approach,” and suggested that such dances are ideal for the first years of study.¹⁴ Although some performers today develop complex movements that contradict this,¹⁵ recreational dances, like kpatsa are meant to be easy and inclusive for all levels. For example, Mr. Cofie describes how children would gather to perform kpatsa, playing on paint buckets and whatever else they could find, simply for the enjoyment of it; there was no specific training required to participate, because the movements and drumming were simple variations.¹⁶ Because such versions of kpatsa are fun and easy to learn, the piece is a good introduction to Ghanaian music.

Kpatsa is also an ideal entry piece because it lacks the specific religious associations of other dances. In his proposal for a three-year degree in traditional Ghanaian dance, Adinku suggests that ritual dances should be studied only in the third year. The first year, students learn

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Akramah Cofie, interview with the author, May 5, 2008.

¹⁴ Adinku, *African Dance Education in Ghana*, 45.

¹⁵ Kwesi Brown, interview with the author, April 24, 2008.

¹⁶ Akramah Cofie, interview with the author, May 5, 2008.

recreational dances, such as kpatsa, and the second year, social dances, which are dances associated with social events, such as the dipo dances. Adinku felt that this would allow the student to gain both a basic understanding of the dance movements in the first year, and an understanding of how dances are used in social interaction in the second year, before attempting to learn and understand the more rigorous and formally organized ritual dances.¹⁷ Adinku stated that in order to understand ritual dances, the student must also learn what was expected of ritual dancers, including “their training, taboos, costumes, paraphernalia, the music they use, make-up, the uses of movements and dance, the place of the gods and their moral significance,” as well as learning “performance etiquette, performance area, spatial organization, time and context of the performance.”¹⁸ Recreational dances like kpatsa, which may be performed whenever and wherever,¹⁹ have less extra-musical knowledge demanded of the student.²⁰ This is especially true of foreign students, who have little to no cultural references with which to understand the extra-musical expectations of ritual pieces.

Despite the fact that kpatsa is a popular piece, and is learned by most Ghanaian performers, some groups choose not to perform it. Mr. Woma stated that in his experience, kpatsa is “one of the least performed dance pieces by professional artists.” When asked why he thought this was, he explained that it is often thought of as an “adolescent dance” and is done by performers looking to “introduce themselves.”²¹ In this case, it seems that it is kpatsa’s very popularity as a teaching dance that condemns it in performance. Thus, while considered important to learn, it is quickly discarded for dances that demand and demonstrate greater skills

¹⁷ Adinku, *African Dance Education in Ghana*, 47.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹⁹ Akramah Cofie, interview with the author, May 5, 2008.

²⁰ Even if Mr. Brown and Mr. Imoro are correct and kpatsa is a coming of age dance, this would make it a social, not ritual, dance. According to Adinku, social dances require only a little more outside knowledge about the general social behavior of the community, making kpatsa, as a social dance, still an acceptable choice for beginning dancers. *African Dance Education in Ghana*, 18.

²¹ Bernard Woma, interview with the author, May 2, 2008.

of the performer. As a classically trained Western musician, I compare this attitude towards kpatsa to the one held by many classical music performers towards pieces such as Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier*. While they are both considered important pieces, are expected to be learned by nearly everybody, and demand a fair amount of technical skill, they are rarely performed in a professional concert setting and are considered "student" pieces.

Ghanaian Teaching Methods

In his article, "The Reliability of Oral Tradition," Mantle Hood describes two types of traditional music: "ingenuous music," which he defines as "an artless and relatively naïve expression lacking in its development the idea of *conscious* improvement, therefore *unstudied*," and "cultivated music" which is "an expression which has evolved through a conscious effort to improve and refine the various attributes of its disciplines."²² Although I take issue with the use of the term "naïve" within this definition, the idea that some music is learned simply through being in the culture while other types must be consciously studied can be observed in Ghana, where much of the "teaching" that occurs happens without the use of formal training.

Traditionally, according to Nketia, it is believed that "natural endowment and a person's ability to develop on his own are essentially what is needed" to learn music and dance. Because of this, "exposure to musical situations and participation are emphasized more than formal training."²³ This is especially true of recreational dances like kpatsa, where the "students" would learn the piece by watching and observing, and little knowledge outside of what can be learned through general social interaction is required.²⁴ For instance, Mr. Cofie first learned kpatsa by

²² Hood, "The Reliability of Oral Tradition," 201.

²³ Nketia, *The Music of Africa*, 59.

²⁴ Salm and Falola, *Culture and Customs of Ghana*, 175.

watching and joining in with other children.²⁵ He did not need to be formally taught the ways which kpatsa could help him connect to his heritage, he simply experienced it. Mr. Ameyaw described how, as a young child, he would hear and watch the drummers playing, and would clap along. Then, by the time he began formally training and playing kpatsa at the age of nine, he already had extensive knowledge of the music.²⁶ Even if kpatsa was associated with a coming of age ceremony, and was performed only by girls after a period of special training, this absorption method would remain; by attending such ceremonies throughout their life, general knowledge of the piece would have been already acquired before the girls were formally trained because while growing up, children would have watched and imitated the performances.²⁷

Even when taught more formally as a “cultivated music,” the use of imitation as a teaching method remains in place. Mr. Woma described his learning experience as simply observing the senior drummers.²⁸ Mr. Imoro had slightly more formal training at the arts center, because the teacher would call out instructions to the dancers. Even here, however, the main instruction was through demonstration.²⁹ Mr. Brown shared a similar experience, where as a student in the schools, he would observe what the dancers were doing and join in, even when he had to “make it all up” because he did not yet understand it.³⁰ Instead of learning through notation, Ghanaian drummers and dancers learn vocalizations meant to imitate the drums so that they can learn and remember the rhythms. These vocalizations are also taught in an imitative, call and response type format.³¹

²⁵ Akramah Cofie, interview with the author, May 5, 2008.

²⁶ Kofi Ameyaw, interview with the author, May 24, 2008.

²⁷ Chernoff, *African Rhythm and African Sensibility*, 94.

²⁸ Bernard Woma, interview with the author, May 2, 2008.

²⁹ Sully Imoro, interview with the author, May 6, 2008.

³⁰ Kwesi Brown, interview with the author, April 24, 2008.

³¹ Ibid.

What is interesting is that Ghanaian “ingenuous” learning can occur even without seeing the particular piece performed. Mr. Woma explained that Ghanaian students “live with the music, live with the feeling” making all Ghanaian music easier for them to understand than an American “who is coming from a totally different tradition and understanding.”³² Mr. Ameyaw provided one example of this. He said that his brother, who is not musically trained but grew up hearing Ghanaian music, finds it extremely easy to learn new pieces because “he knows what is coming and what is not coming.” His students, who generally come to the music after childhood, do not have this advantage.³³ Mr. Imoro provided a different explanation. He suggested that even if Ghanaian students do not know a specific dance, such as *kpatsa*, they are likely to know others, such as *kpanlogo* and *adbadza*. Because of the similarities between these and other dances, knowing them makes *kpatsa* easier to understand and learn. Mr. Imoro clarified, however, that if a Ghanaian did not grow up with this knowledge, they would find learning difficult, “because if you do not understand something, you cannot do it. You have to learn something before you can do it.”³⁴ Therefore, this learning results because of a common Ghanaian culture. Although the various music styles in Ghana are very different, they also have a lot in common.³⁵

The Americans Are Not African

Many Ghanaian musicians today end up following a predictable pattern moving from the rural villages, to the urban centers, and then abroad, often to Western countries.³⁶ Regardless of what drives this migration, the result is that many skilled Ghanaian performers end up working at

³² Bernard Woma, interview with the author, May 2, 2008.

³³ Kofi Ameyaw, interview with the author, April 24, 2008.

³⁴ Sulley Imoro, interview with the author, May 6, 2008.

³⁵ These commonalities form the basis of most books proposing to cover “African Music,” or even “Ghanaian Music.” For example, see Nketia, *The Music of Africa*; Nketia, *African Music in Ghana*; Asante, “Commonalities in African Dance”; and Chernoff, *African Rhythm and African Sensibility*. Others disagree that there is a set of commonalities, cf. Scott, “Spectacle and Dancing Bodies that Matter,” 264.

³⁶ Salm and Falola, *Culture and Customs of Ghana*, 176.

least part time in the United States.³⁷ Because their American students lack the “ingenuous” knowledge, however, Ghanaians must adapt their teaching styles.

Every one of my teachers agreed that American students are different from Ghanaian students. When asked to explain how, Mr. Woma laughed and exclaimed, “Because the Americans are not African!” However, Mr. Woma does not believe that the idea of ingenuous ability is exclusive to Africa. He clarified that when he tried to learn how to play the piano and the drumset, he faced similar cultural differences. As a student of Western music and a teacher of Ghanaian music, Mr. Woma has tried to use his training to help him make connections and bridge the gap between the two worlds. For example, Mr. Woma explained that in Ghana, people do not feel or depend upon knowing where the downbeat, or “the one” is. He explained, “We don’t have ‘the one’. The one is supposed to be the metronome of your heart and understanding.” Through his knowledge of Western music, however, he has learned that if a Western-trained student is struggling, showing where the “downbeat” can be felt solves the problem.³⁸

Mr. Brown faced a similar experience. Although he was resistant at first because it felt unnatural, he eventually began teaching Ghanaian dancing and drumming with counting and Westernized meters. Another modification Mr. Brown has made to his teaching style was breaking the movements and rhythms down into smaller pieces. While this was partly a result of Western students’ backgrounds, it was also a result of the learning environment. In Ghana, he explained, “every evening you can just go and hang around and learn.” The problem is that when teaching a weekly class in the United States, “you can’t be repeating the same thing over, you

³⁷ For more information on the Ghanaian migration experience, see Peil, “Ghanaians Abroad,” 1995.

³⁸ Bernard Woma, interview with the author, May 2, 2008.

need to move forward, so then that means that you have to break it down. You have to adopt a Westernized way to break things down for them to be able to understand.”³⁹

There are limits, however, to what modifications the teachers feel are appropriate. Mr. Woma, for example, worried about Westerners attempting to write Ghanaian music down. He felt that although it may be helpful, they risked writing the material incorrectly. He explained, “If you don’t understand it well and you write it down, then you write it down the way you understood it or the way you heard it. Then you might play it back to them [Ghanaians] and they’ll be like ‘what’s that?’ ” Mr. Woma allows Western students to feel the non-existent “downbeat,” because it encourages cultural communication. If, however, he feels that a Western learning method, such as notation, prevents his students from understanding the music, he is understandably against it.⁴⁰

³⁹ Kwesi Brown, interview with the author, April 24, 2008.

⁴⁰ Bernard Woma, interview with the author, May 2, 2008.

CHAPTER THREE: SELF REFLECTION

Learning Kpatsa

When I decided to study with Kofi Ameyaw, I knew very little about him. I had met him when he performed the prior year with Mr. Imoro and Mr. Brown at Bowling Green State University's World Percussion Night. As I was performing that night myself, however, I was unable to observe much of his playing. Admittedly, the decision to study with Mr. Ameyaw was mainly based upon convenience and recommendation by one of his colleagues. I did know that Mr. Ameyaw leads an African ensemble at Eastern Michigan State in Ypsilanti, Michigan. As this was only an hour's drive from Bowling Green, he was much closer than any other recommended contacts. He became my default choice. Nervous and excited, I telephoned him. We negotiated a time and fee for the first lesson.

After brief introductions, my first lesson began. In order to understand my background, Mr. Ameyaw asked me what dances I had learned and was currently working on. Saying that I had performed kpanlogo, a popular social dance similar to kpatsa, Mr. Ameyaw asked me to demonstrate it for him. Although nervous without the comfort and aid of other dancers, I did my best to remember what I had learned. Commenting only that he would help me with kpanlogo too, he moved on to kpatsa, beginning with how to hold and play a *djembe*. Mr. Ameyaw stressed that this was not a traditional Ghanaian instrument, but as now "everyone has a djembe," he decided that it was important for me to learn the "right way" to play. Using descriptions and demonstration, Ameyaw taught me the three hand positions of djembe: tone, bass, and slap. Tone was the first position I learned, as it is relatively simple. Mr. Ameyaw had me try it first with my right hand, then left, then alternating while gradually increasing the tempo. The same

methodology was then used for bass and slap, working towards combining the styles, first tone and bass, and then bass and slap. Throughout the lesson, Mr. Ameyaw suggested visual cues, such as watching to make sure the bottom knuckles were along the side of the drum when playing tone, auditory descriptions, such as noting the ringing sound that was the goal for a slap, and visualization, such as imagining a string controlling the wrist while playing bass.

Mr. Ameyaw explained that perfecting these positions takes months, so he suggested that we “pretend” that I know them, and move on to changing between them. Mr. Ameyaw would play a pattern, and I would play the same pattern. As I joined in and picked up the rhythm, Mr. Ameyaw increased tempo until I was unable to keep up. Although at first I thought he was merely trying to show-off his talent as a drummer, he would continue playing at a fast tempo, and I soon realized he was waiting for me to join in and try again. Unable to enter at the incredibly fast speed, he allowed me to move on, explaining that he “always likes to challenge my [his] students.” Finally satisfied that I at least had the basics of djembe playing, Mr. Ameyaw introduced me to the easiest supporting drum pattern, and played lead while I accompanied him.

After learning one kpatsa pattern, Mr. Ameyaw began teaching me the kpatsa dance. While singing the lead drum, Mr. Ameyaw demonstrated the movements, adding in occasional counting and descriptions, depending upon what he thought I needed to fix. He gave special attention to making sure I understood where the drum signal to change movements began and ended, and had me practice multiple times making this transition. Like the drumming, most movements were learned first through demonstration, and after my attempts to imitate, explanation to help me improve upon details I had missed. As a final test, Mr. Ameyaw played the drums while I attempted to dance. Often, he jumped up from behind the drum to correct me. I danced at what was only slightly slower than what would become my final performance tempo.

By the end of the dancing lesson, I had learned three separate moves, and was instructed to practice them before my next lesson.

In order that I “get a piece of everything,” the lesson concluded with singing. Before learning the melody, Mr. Ameyaw rhythmically spoke the lyrics and I echoed him. Next, he used the same method with the melody. As I am not a comfortable singer, I was thankful that Mr. Ameyaw did not attempt to correct, or even comment on, my singing voice. We instead spent a large amount of time working on correct pronunciation. This was extremely difficult; again and again, Mr. Ameyaw would repeat the words, and I would unsatisfactorily repeat them back. Although to my ears, it sounded like I was saying the exact thing, I could tell from his reactions that there was something I was missing. Mr. Ameyaw explained that he was being “picky” because he wanted me to be able to teach it correctly. He sympathized with me, explaining that despite many years of living around the town, he was unable to say “Arbor,” as in Ann Arbor, the town that borders Ypsilanti. He continued to work with me, attempting to get me to say the correct pronunciation, until the end of the lesson.¹

Even though busy schedules prevented another lesson from occurring until January, this break allowed me time to practice. When my lessons resumed, we were able to start basically where we had left off in October. Over the next couple of lessons, we began to focus more on the dance movements, as that was what I was going to teach to the Afro-Caribbean Ensemble at BGSU. Mr. Ameyaw continued to use the same teaching methods he had used to teach me the first movements. At each lesson, Mr. Ameyaw added at least one new movement, and then worked with me to perfect the others. Mr. Ameyaw’s most common comment was that he wanted to make me “sweat more,” which I discovered meant that I was not performing with

¹ Quotes of Mr. Ameyaw taken from lesson tape dated Oct. 14, 2007.

enough energy. As he taught me, he began to work out a choreography, which changed each week based upon what movements I had learned.

We also began to work on more of the details with the drumming. Using the lead, two supporting parts, and the bell, Mr. Ameyaw had me play along with him, with the two of us alternating between all the different possible combinations so that I could hear how each part interacted with the other. A difficult moment for me came when Mr. Ameyaw asked me to sing one part and play another. At first try, I found this nearly impossible. Mr. Ameyaw patiently explained, however, where the beats lined up between the different parts, and, armed with this knowledge, I was amazed to find how easy it was. Singing the words with the drumming was even more difficult, as I had to focus on pronunciation as well as melody and rhythm, but Mr. Ameyaw was content with me learning how to play the bell and sing at the same time, a task that again felt nearly impossible until Mr. Ameyaw pointed out the connections between the two parts. These interactions, I discovered, were extremely important, and Mr. Ameyaw stressed this knowledge of how the parts interacted and where each part entered, especially in relation to the bell.

Challenges as a Student

The biggest challenge I faced was neither cultural nor educational; it was practical. As Mr. Ameyaw and I are both students, our time was limited, filled with homework and other scholastic obligations. The drive to Ypsilanti from Bowling Green, which had not seemed bad in theory, proved to be more difficult than imagined, as it required me to have at least three straight hours free for a mere 45-minute lesson. Compounding the issues were snowstorms, unexpected family obligations, and injury. As a result, we often spoke multiple times in a week, yet averaged

less than two lessons a month. While these issues may seem trivial, with the exception of injuries, they represented part of the challenge of learning Ghanaian dance outside of Ghana. Students who travel to Ghana often face a limited amount of time, but enjoy a concentrated number of lessons. Living on or near the same compound as their teacher eliminates travel time and other transportation issues. While Ghanaian musicians certainly have other obligations that can disrupt scheduled lessons, the limited amount of time a student is in Ghana demands that the teacher and student make each other a priority. This was impossible for Mr. Ameyaw and me.

Another issue that I encountered was Mr. Ameyaw's suggestion that I learn *fume-fume*, another Ghanaian piece, as well as *kpatsa*. As he taught it to me, he would comment that I could teach both pieces. Worried that perhaps he had misunderstood my intentions, I attempted to explain my project and repeated that I was only writing about one piece, *kpatsa*. Yet Mr. Ameyaw continued to push *fume-fume*. Feeling pressed for time, I finally asked Mr. Ameyaw if we could focus specifically on *kpatsa*, promising to continue lessons later and learn *fume-fume* at that time. Mr. Ameyaw agreed, and I was able to progress through the piece at a faster pace. But after I had asked this, I began to wonder if I should have questioned Mr. Ameyaw's methods. As stated above, lessons were limited due to forces beyond our control, and I felt time necessitated a more focused approach. Watching old lesson tapes, however, made me think about Mr. Ameyaw's statement that he "didn't want to move too fast" and risk me misunderstanding the piece, and I wondered if my lessons on *kpatsa* would have been enhanced through learning a second piece at the same time. Learning two pieces would have provided comparison, additional drumming and dance technique, and helped to make *kpatsa* more than just a piece to be learned quickly so that I could move on. I wished that circumstances had been different, and that I had

been patient enough to follow Mr. Ameyaw's lesson plan, instead of pushing for the typical Western tunnel-vision focus.

The final challenge was being able to correctly imitate everything Mr. Ameyaw did. When singing, even when I felt like I was repeating something exactly, Mr. Ameyaw was dissatisfied, able to hear details that I could not pick out. Similarly, many of my movements imitated the basic appearance of Mr. Ameyaw's, but lacked that Ghanaian quality that made Mr. Ameyaw's moves look smooth and cool, and mine awkward and uncomfortable. Mr. Woma would suggest that this is because "Americans are not Africans," and that I, unlike Ghanaian students, had not grown up seeing, hearing and performing these and similar movements from childhood.² Just as certain syllables become lost forever if not used in childhood, it seems that I had an unshakeable American "accent" and was unable to fully overcome the differences between Mr. Ameyaw's dancing and drumming and my own, even when it was clear to me that something was different. Whenever this "accent" became extremely noticeable, Mr. Ameyaw let me know by laughing. Having become used to this reaction in Ghana, I knew this was not meant maliciously, and generally joined in the laughter, and then tried again. When I simply could not figure out how to make my body do what he was suggesting, Mr. Ameyaw utilized the mirror in the back of the room so that I could watch myself. Although this was often helpful, we both disliked this method as it felt "unnatural." He used it only as a last resort.

Teaching Kpatsa

Time constraints necessitated that I begin teaching kpatsa to the BGSU Afro-Caribbean Ensemble after only a few lessons with Mr. Ameyaw. Although I had extensive previous private one-on-one piano teaching experience and had led a lecture class, I had little experience working

² Bernard Woma, interview with the author, May 2, 2008.

with a large performance group, and none where a public presentation was the end goal. This lack of experience made me extremely nervous. I fought back doubts about my ability to lead, and tried to suppress worries that I would “teach it all wrong.” Although I knew that I was the “expert” on this dance, and no one would know if I did something “wrong” or not, I still wanted to honor Mr. Ameyaw’s arrangement. I couldn’t help but wonder what gave me the right to teach this dance when many more qualified performers were available. All of these fears raced through my head as I stood in front of the ensemble for the first time.

My first attempt at teaching presented a series of challenges that I had not even imagined. First, although I had learned the drumming before the dance, I realized that if I took time to teach the drummers, the large percentage of the ensemble, who were dancers, would be sitting around waiting. I also had learned all the drum patterns on djembes, and the Afro-Caribbean Ensemble was set up to play it on kpanlogo drums. I was aware from my first lesson that these drums were more traditionally accurate, but I felt unsure of how to adjust my djembe techniques to fit the other drums. To my relief, Dr. Cornelius, the professor who runs the ensemble, had previously performed kpatsa and volunteered to teach the drummers while I taught the dancers.

Being able to focus on the dancers, however, did not make the lesson go easier. Following Mr. Ameyaw’s lead, I began demonstrating the dance movements for the ensemble, asking them to copy me. Although a small percentage caught on quickly, I noticed that many of the dancers looked completely lost. I attempted to call out suggestions, which only led to slight improvements. Looking across the room, I was keenly aware that not a single person there looked “Ghanaian” in their movements. I wondered how I could help them when I myself had not yet achieved the correct form.

I pushed onward and attempted to introduce the dancers to the relationship between the movements and the drumming. I found it relatively easy to sing the lead drum pattern while dancing; however, when I attempted to incorporate the call, I found that I either screwed up the drum sounds or the movement. I had to explain how and where the movement changed, instead of demonstrating it for them. Luckily, by this time, the drummers had learned their part and were able to play while the group danced. For a short time, I rotated between the three simplest movements, changing each time the drummers played the call. Used to being led by the drummers, I found it uncomfortable to have them depending upon me to cue them to play the call. After only 20 minutes, I signaled Dr. Cornelius that I was satisfied and he could move on to the next piece.

I left feeling that this first attempt was unsuccessful, but I also learned a lot from it. I discovered that Mr. Ameyaw's choreography, which I thought I had mastered, felt unworkable when applied to a group of 18 dancers instead of two. I also noticed small gaps in my knowledge as I attempted to put what I had learned into explanations. When the dancers asked me for clarification, I found that I was unsure of how to answer them. I was disheartened, but also aware of where I needed to improve. In preparation for my next teaching experience, I watched my past lessons, and went armed to my next lesson with Mr. Ameyaw with a mental checklist of questions.

When my second teaching opportunity arose, I was much better prepared. Using the movements Mr. Ameyaw had taught me, and taking his idea of moving between lines and circles, I created a choreography that allowed for greater designation between sections, and allowed the movements to be extended over a longer period of time without becoming uninteresting. I sketched out the movements, drawing the general shapes created by the group

with lines and arrows to indicate placement and direction. I did not attempt to draw the specific movements themselves, choosing instead to give them names based upon their appearance. I also typed lyrics sheets for the song that accompanied the dance, and passed those out as learning aides. I knew that this was not the traditional way of teaching, but Mr. Ameyaw had written the words on the board when he was teaching them to me, so I decided it was acceptable. Having a set choreography seemed to improve both my ability to teach and the class's ability to learn, which made the rest of my lessons go much smoother than my first.

As I improved as a student, I found that I also improved as a teacher. I began to overcome at least some of the details that had prevented me from dancing like a Ghanaian, and as I did, I found it easier to help my students improve as well. My biggest discovery as a student, however, was learning simply how to let go. For example, singing and playing seemed impossible, yet when I learned how the two parts met and interacted, and simply focused on that while letting everything else happen, I was surprised at how easy it was. Similarly, when I encountered a movement that I just could not seem to copy, I found that the more I analyzed what Mr. Ameyaw was doing differently from me, the more difficult it was to reproduce. When I simply let go and moved, often the movement began to feel natural. I began to feel the drum parts as a whole, no longer hearing individual parts, and as such, knew almost intuitively how they fit together. Unfortunately, it was precisely this feeling that hindered teaching. Knowing where the call to change movements should fit by feeling, instead of by count, made it difficult to communicate how and why what the drummers were doing was wrong. Similarly, I discovered that students are often unsatisfied when, after asking for an explanation on how to correctly perform a certain movement, they are simply given a demonstration and told to "do it like this." Yet, I could not

help the fact that the more comfortable I became, the more words began to fail me in favor of demonstration.

Throughout the course of teaching, I did not give much information about the dance. This was partly for practical reasons; while I had been doing a lot of reading about Ghanaian music, I had come across only a few, short, approximately two-sentence descriptions of kpatsa's meaning and history. Based on of these descriptions, and because they fit with the movements I had learned, I believed kpatsa to be a social dance used to allow young men and women to act flirtatious, but I only shared this information with the group when it seemed helpful to encourage the dancers to experience and portray the fun, enjoyable nature of the piece. This was also in keeping with the tradition of the class, as, due to the limited amount of class time, the actual act of learning the music and dance has always taken precedent over cultural explanations about the pieces.

My Modifications

Although I tried to remain true to Mr. Ameyaw's choreography, I found it necessary to make slight modifications. These were mostly practical changes to the choreography, such as changing the order of the movements or changing the group's positioning on the stage. Changes were made to accommodate space and time requirements. Such changes were similar to Mr. Imoro's change from a circle to lines, as discussed in Chapter One. Yet other practical changes were made to fit the ensemble. As suggested by Dr. Cornelius, I added hand claps when changing between certain movements. Even though I had not learned the dance this way, the clap was appropriate as many dances utilize a signal at the end of each movement, such as the hand flip at the end of each kpanlogo section. The clap also served to energize the dancers, and help

prevent the repetition of movements within sections from becoming boring. Moreover, the clap allowed the dancers an opportunity to “regroup” and essentially start again if they had fallen behind the beat or otherwise become lost.

Another practical change I made was the exclusion of certain movements. I discovered that once I had choreographed the dance and taught it to the group, it was nearly impossible to make any unnecessary modifications. Even with only a couple movements, some of the group members had difficulty learning the order, and the rest had become secure with the order I had taught; both were upset whenever I suggested a change. After I had taught the dance, however, Mr. Ameyaw taught me a few new movements that he suggested I add in. Although I enjoyed these movements, and would have liked to add them to my choreography, I found that I had to keep the dance as I had first taught it.

I also added a few changes for my own aesthetic desires. Two of the movements that Mr. Ameyaw had taught me involved partners, and, in his choreography, the group would form two lines. One of these movements involved the partners lifting their arms and waving them up and down on the opposite side of his or her partner’s head.³ The second movement, however, consisted of one partner pointing to the opposite partner, then to him/herself, and then crossing his/her fingers together. The second partner would then answer back by pointing back at the first partner, then at him/herself, and then making a motion of brushing the partner away.⁴ It struck me that, although impossible in a line, forming a double circle would allow the rejected partner to actually move over to the next partner, instead of remaining stationary and trying again. This seemed to help emphasize the meaning of the movement, so I decided to incorporate this into the dance. Adding the stationary waving movement after a series of rejections seemed to further

³ See Chapter 5, page 70, Figure 21.

⁴ See Chapter 5, page 71, Figure 22–24.

emphasize the story, as the partners finally accepted each other and could dance together in celebration.

Yet I remained uncertain about this change. Although the ensemble thought it was extremely funny and enjoyable, I hoped that my change was not disrespectful to the tradition. My fears were alleviated when Mr. Ameyaw saw the final performance and was so excited by the movement, asked if he could incorporate it the next time he taught the dance. Relieved, I assured him I would be honored.

CHAPTER FOUR: APPROPRIATION

Intellectual copyright has become an important issue in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Yet, as Seeger writes, “Not all of the copyright debate centers on who wrote a song. Some of it swirls around what the minimum definition of a musical idea is.”¹ For example, the *taiko* ensemble Sukeroku Daiko fought against other taiko ensembles copying their taiko drum stand positioning. This and other such fights push music ownership beyond notes, scores, and recordings to styles and ideas. Without accepting this basic premise of ownership, appropriation could not exist, because it depends upon the idea that music can be, and is, owned by a person or group of people. Although it has occurred in the past, scholars today generally know better than to simply take pieces from the field and make money off of them without reasonable compensation to the original performers. But appropriation is much more complicated than compensation, or even debates about what is “reasonable” compensation. Instead, scholars today question why the collector is even in the field. Given that *kpatsa* has no connection to my recent ethnic history, questions about appropriation are applicable and important to consider.

In this chapter, I will present two opposing views on appropriation. First, I will present select scholars’ beliefs on why appropriation is so detrimental.² Second, I will present my teachers’ points of view on why they believe appropriation is acceptable. Third, I attempt to rectify the vast differences between these two opinions, ending with my personal suggestions for how a performer can balance and respond in a respectful manner.

¹ Seeger, “Ethnomusicology and Music Law,” 61.

² Not every scholar falls into this category, but I leave the presentation of the positive side of appropriation for my teachers.

Ziff and Rao define appropriation as “The taking—from a culture that is not one’s own—of intellectual property, cultural expressions or artifacts, history, and ways of knowledge.”³ Appropriation is a loaded term with strongly negative associations; however, in my analysis, I choose to use it to describe any creation using another’s culture. This is because, although I have my own personal views that, at least in certain forms, “appropriation” can be respectful and even necessary, I acknowledge the contentiousness of this issue. Attempting to classify what constitutes “appropriation” and is therefore negative, and what should be seen as “borrowing” or some similarly innocuous term, would assume that there is such a distinction, and this is an assumption that I do not wish to make.

Scholars’ Critiques

On the most basic level, appropriation can result in lost jobs and opportunities for members of the pilfered culture. Admittedly, some may see appropriated performances as “inauthentic” and therefore inferior. In other situations, however, the Westerner may have the advantage. For example, Western students may find other Westerners’ teaching style more desirable because he or she would lack the language and cultural barriers of a non-Western performer.⁴ In any case, basic economics state that music jobs, which are already well known to be in short supply, become even scarcer with more competition. Because of this, scholars could then argue that I must be aware that by learning, and then teaching or performing kpatsa, I potentially take that opportunity away from another artist, including possibly the very Ghanaian who taught me.⁵

³ Ziff and Rao, “Introduction to Cultural Appropriation,” 1.

⁴ Trimillos, “Subject, Object, and the Ethnomusicology Ensemble,” 46.

⁵ Locke, “The African Ensemble in America,” 170–171.

On a more theoretical level, scholars might question my right to learn kpatsa at all. The Western world has a well-known history of oppression on the African continent, taking everything from slaves to natural resources.⁶ In addition, the colonial legacy still has a strong influence, even in Ghana, the first sub-Saharan country to achieve independence. In this light, Westerners learning African pieces may simply be another example of the West claiming Africa's resources, only this time as a cultural resource. Hart states that "appropriation occurs when a member of one culture takes a cultural practice or theory of a member of another culture as if his or her own or *as if the right of possession should not be questioned or contested*. [My Emphasis]"⁷ It is this colonial legacy of disrespect and self-centeredness against which many are fighting.

Less provocatively, scholars also question what Westerners attempt to gain from learning these traditions. Is it simply a means of making oneself "exotic" and therefore mysterious and exciting? Does it merely, as Solís suggests, allow us, as learners, to "flatter ourselves" because we are "different" than our less-worldly peers, and thus better?⁸ Is this simply another instance of white America's history of embracing black music, just as blues and jazz were absorbed?⁹ Does my interest even somehow harm the very music that I wish to study? After all, kpatsa is important as an identity symbol to Ga-Adangmes and Ghanaians alike. Scholars would argue, however, that the power of this symbol is diluted when Americans, who have no such cultural connections, also learn and perform kpatsa.¹⁰

⁶ Locke further discusses how these issues relate specifically to African music as opposed to other forms of world music in "The African Ensemble in America."

⁷ Hart, "Translating and Resisting Empire," 138.

⁸ Solís, "Introduction," 4.

⁹ Hall, "African-American Music," 31.

¹⁰ Root, "White Indians," 229.

In addition to lessening kpatsa's power as a cultural identity symbol, some scholars see such appropriation as a commodification of Ghanaian culture. Traditionally, kpatsa was never bought and sold. It simply existed as an important part of life. Teaching was simply part of social interactions, not a job. Although cultural groups, such as mutual-aid societies, perform for money, they are more importantly social safety nets and a means for communities to provide for each other. Even professional groups, such as the Ghana Dance Ensemble, arguably serve a higher purpose of educating urban born Ghanaians about their traditional heritage. But some Westerners remove kpatsa from these contexts, and simply collect it as part of their repertoire. Even the very idea that such an important cultural artifact should, or even could, be bought is a very Western concept. In this light, the fact that Ghanaians freely choose to sell their culture is irrelevant. Just because something is for sale does not mean that it needs to be bought, and furthermore, many scholars would argue, it is our responsibility to purposely reject and discourage such sales.¹¹

Performers Have Their Say

During my interviews, I asked three of my teachers if they had any issues with Americans learning Ghanaian dances. While each stated that he had no negative feelings, each gave different reasons.

When asked about Western students, Mr. Woma explained that "I think music is a global language everyone should speak." He further explained that he wishes he could play the piano, and has worked on learning the Western drumset, illustrating that he truly believes that anyone who wants to learn should be allowed, whether they are Ghanaians hoping to learn American music, or Americans hoping to learn Ghanaian music. He added that music "is now transcending

¹¹ Ibid., 231.

the borders of traditional ownership to a global ownership.” Mr. Woma concluded with this thought:

The global phenomenon that is taking place is that everything doesn't belong to its own people, but is for the whole world. And that's what the whole world is about. We all inhabit this planet, and we should share its resources, its interest and its beauty and goods. We should share the global goods. And that includes music, that includes environment, and that includes education.¹²

Mr. Imoro was also happy to see Americans learning Ghanaian traditions. To him, students who want to learn Ghanaian music, especially if they are not even Ghanaian, are a source of pride. He explains, “Anytime I see somebody in America, or anybody that tries to promote Ghanaian culture, I'm so happy with that person.” He explained that what bothers him the most is when Ghanaians, with little to no music or dance training, come to the United States and other Western countries, promote themselves as experts, and teach the pieces incorrectly. He explained further that the Americans he knows work hard to learn the dances correctly, and then teach them the way they learned them, so he knows he “will not be offended because they know what they are doing.” He believes that some Ghanaians, however, see the opportunity for a job, and teach regardless, something he's “never seen an American doing.”¹³ My experience tells me that the idea that all American teachers “know what they are doing” may be overly idealistic and result from Mr. Imoro's good fortune to work exclusively with those who do. Mr. Imoro's statements, however, underscore what he sees as key for anyone, including Americans, who learn Ghanaian music: Paying proper respect for the music and honoring its traditions.

Mr. Ameyaw also held passionate views on this subject. He stated that kpatasa is a “social dance” and “music in general and dance actually are supposed to make people happy and supposed to bring people together.” He added, “So whoever is against that, I have a problem

¹² Bernard Woma, interview with the author, May 2, 2008.

¹³ Sulley Imoro, interview with the author, May 6, 2008.

with them.” Having foreigners interested in and learning Ghanaian traditions makes him feel “great.” He added that occasionally, past students will send him links to articles with people arguing that Americans learning Ghanaian traditions are “invading this [Ghanaian] culture,” so he understood where my question came from. Yet he felt this argument is “all crap” and explained that he always tells the writers that “they shouldn’t act like that, because this is a fun thing. In general, music is supposed to bring people together, and make people happy. And dancing is fun too. So why should people try to find ways to criticize other people for learning this or accusing them for learning?”¹⁴

Complicating the Extremes

Up through this point, I have presented two extreme points of view. One side holds that any form of appropriation is harmful. The opposite side holds that such sharing is only a reflection of a global world, and can even be seen as a source of pride. Can both be correct?

Webster’s Dictionary defines “appropriate” as “to take to or for oneself, to take possession of” and “to take without permission,”¹⁵ which implies both that there is something to take and that the object can be taken from the original possessors without their agreement. To me, this is the key disagreement between my teachers and the scholars; the scholars believe that cultural artifacts, like *kpatsa*, are something that can be taken. In this view, if a Westerner learns to perform and teach *kpatsa*, they have, in some sense of the word, “taken” *kpatsa* away from the Ghanaians. In the case of physical artifacts, like statues, this may be true; once a collector takes a statue out of the country, it is no longer there for those who created it to see and appreciate. But

¹⁴ Kofi Ameyaw, interview with the author, May 24, 2008.

¹⁵ *Random House Webster’s College Dictionary*, 2nd ed., s.v. “Appropriate.”

with music and dance, it is different.¹⁶ If I learn kpatsa from Mr. Ameyaw, I could take his job, but I could never take kpatsa. It is still there for him to teach, perform, and create with. And this, I believe, is the key idea that those who choose to teach outside of their own culture focus on. Music, like emotions, is infinite. One cannot take it and carry it away. Music can only be given and received. But in doing so, it is not destroyed or removed. Mr. Ameyaw stated that one of the reasons he taught me kpatsa is because he knew I wanted to teach, and he wanted me to teach my friends, and “it can grow from there.”¹⁷ Based upon these ideas, the act of teaching and spreading knowledge arguably increases, not decreases, the power of the music.

It is difficult, however, for me to disagree with the scholars, as most of what they discuss has to do with the ubiquitous and omnipresent “white privilege.” There is no denying that I grew up with comforts not afforded to much of the rest of the world. As a student, I was expected to work, but not at the expense of my education. Thanks to my family’s income level, I was able to live where I could attend a high quality public school, and therefore earn scholarships to college, and could delay my entrance into the working world even further with graduate school. So I realize that I have been afforded opportunities not granted to many of my peers. Scholars would say that this is a result of my “white privilege,” the unacknowledged benefit of years of oppressing and exploiting others. Until reading these scholars’ works and being made aware of this “white privilege,” I never stopped to wonder if I had a right to learn these pieces. As someone new to Ghanaian dance, and “foreign” dance in general, I simply assumed that if I asked, there was no reason why anyone would tell me no.¹⁸ As “white privilege” is seen as a subliminal force, it is difficult for me to rule out its possibility. How can I argue that I am aware

¹⁶ Susilo, “A Bridge to Java,” 66.

¹⁷ Kofi Ameyaw, interview with the author, May 24, 2008.

¹⁸ Root, “White Indians,” 231–232.

of the subconscious and unknown reasons behind my thoughts and actions? If I were, they wouldn't be subconscious.

I can argue, however, that simply writing my actions off as a result of “white privilege” oversimplifies the issue. After all, my teachers disagree with this viewpoint, even when, as in the case of Mr. Ameyaw, they have read some of these scholars’ works and are aware of their arguments.¹⁹ Those who believe any form of appropriation is lingering colonialism may suggest that my teachers are merely commodifying and sacrificing their culture in order to provide for themselves, or that, due to the lingering effects of colonialism, Africans still accept the Western world’s right to take what they want. Admittedly, all my teachers are able to make at least a supplementary income teaching and performing for Americans, a fact that could understandably make them more accepting of appropriation and the so-called accusation of “selling out” that is familiar to any musician trying to earn a living on their music, Ghanaian or not. One could also argue that, being an American myself, it is unreasonable to expect them to admit to me that they dislike Americans as students, and that, among other Ghanaians, they might speak differently. As Mr. Imoro said when asked if being a non-Ga-Adangme has effected the reception of his kpatsa performances, “Maybe the person could not come up and say it in front of me, but maybe they could say it somewhere. But nobody has come to say it for me to see.”²⁰ It is possible that the same could be true for my learning kpatsa, an argument that could be made to take strength away from my teachers’ “pro-appropriation” stance.

While I cannot prove that the above factors are not the cause of my teacher’s reactions, I disagree with the basic assumption that they are the only explanation. I feel that such arguments do not give enough credit to the performers and teachers themselves. To suggest that these are

¹⁹ Kofi Ameyaw, interview with the author, May 24, 2008.

²⁰ Sulley Imoro, interview with the author, May 6, 2008.

issues they cannot understand, have not thought out, or are unable to make conscious decisions about is extremely presumptuous, insulting, and even neocolonial. For example, if Mr. Imoro was willing to share his culture knowledge for no other reason than monetary gain, he would not be so insistent that it is taught correctly.

That said, I believe that my teachers' views on appropriation may not always be positive. I asked them their opinions in the context of discussing kpatsa, a social, recreational dance. The idea of unity and togetherness expressed by both Mr. Woma and Mr. Ameyaw are most easily fulfilled by a dance which is used both in Ghana and abroad as a way of bring people together. In addition, little understanding of kpatsa is needed to appreciate and enjoy the dance, and if enjoyment is the ultimate purpose anyway, then kpatsa can be successful no matter what.²¹ I do not know, but suspect, that their reactions to the question might be different if I were discussing a sacred, ritual dance, especially one that is still performed as such. Time and again, however, scholars have been denied access to these types of pieces, and often no amount of money can change the tradition bearer's mind. Therefore usually, despite previous theories on exploitation, the teacher remains in ultimate control. When the teacher decides something is inappropriate, the information is withheld. Belief that the Westerner has ultimate power, in my view, demeans the intelligence of the performer who is supposedly being exploited.

I do not mean, however, to diminish appropriation's possible harmful affects. There are necessary boundaries that exist. Clearly, there are situations where any form of appropriation would be inappropriate, such as if a student or researcher gained the teacher's trust, became privy to sacred information, and then in any way disregarded or violated that sacred knowledge.

²¹ Agawu, argues that appreciating Ghanaian music on its own, without cultural context, is not only possible, but also important. *African Rhythm*, 4.

As Mr. Imoro suggested, respect for the tradition is of utmost importance.²² Mr. Ameyaw echoed this, saying that he felt I was a good student because he could tell that I was really serious, which “meant a lot” to him.²³ However, Newton illustrates the complicated nature of “respect” when he accuses appropriators of attempting to justify their actions by claiming innocence through good intentions or by making false claims that appropriation is a form of “honoring” the cultural group.²⁴ It is extremely difficult to determine what constitutes respect, and where it crosses into disrespect. While some appropriation is more easily understood as offensive—such as Newton’s example of the use of Native Americans as sports mascots, showing a blatant disregard for accurate history and input by Native Americans—choosing to learn a Ghanaian dance, from a Ghanaian teacher, is different. Yet, if good intentions do not matter,²⁵ is it really different after all?

In the end, little regarding appropriation is clear-cut. When deciding what constitutes appropriation, even the concept of insider and outsider is cloudy. All of my teachers could be considered cultural outsiders to *kpatsa*. For example, on some levels Mr. Cofie is an insider to *kpatsa* because he is Ga and grew up identifying the piece with his cultural history. However, *kpatsa* is from the Ga-Adangme and Mr. Cofie is not Ga-Adangme, which suggests that he may be an outsider. Mr. Brown, on the other hand, has both lived around and performed with Ga-Adangmes, which has helped him gain somewhat of an insider status.²⁶ But Mr. Brown is neither Ga nor Ga-Adangme; by that standard he is an outsider.

Mr. Woma explained, “Our culture is about sharing.” This does not eliminate the complications, however. When speaking about his own culture’s music, Mr. Woma explained,

²² Sulley Imoro, interview with the author, May 6, 2008.

²³ Kofi Ameyaw, interview with the author, May 24, 2008.

²⁴ Newton, “Memory and Misrepresentation,” 199.

²⁵ Root, “White Indians,” 230.

²⁶ Kwesi Brown, interview with the author, April 24, 2008.

“There are people out there who are using my traditional instrument [the gyil] out of the context, calling themselves xylophonists, but I don’t dare go tell them they are doing the wrong thing because they are making music out of it.” When speaking about kpatsa, however, he stated, “I won’t call myself the best kpatsa player because this is not my traditional music. I learned it from musicians from the area, and I listened to it often, and I teach it very often in my center, so I have a very full understanding of it, but I’m not in the position as an expert performer of that music.”²⁷ Despite this cultural sharing, Mr. Woma obviously remains aware of what music is “his” music and what music he learned as an outsider. Further complicating the issue, pieces like kpatsa are becoming a symbol of Ghanaian identity, making all of my teachers “insiders” to these pan-Ghanaian traditions by virtue of the country of their birth.

So are my teacher’s versions of kpatsa an example of outsider appropriation, or insiders performing their cultural music? Or both?²⁸ As my colleague Heather Strohschein suggested, appropriation scholars “want to paint in black and white, and appropriation just isn’t that. It’s not even shades of grey. It’s neon yellow and magenta and vomit green.”²⁹ Instances of appropriation are neither good, bad, nor in the middle. Instead, they are complex blends that can be shocking neon yellow, enjoyable magenta, and even disgusting vomit green. We may love it, or we may hate it, but to attempt to call it black or white, good or bad, is to become color-blind to the beautiful and the ugly that make up each performance.

What is a Performer to Do?

If appropriation is complex, should performers simply walk away and refuse to get involved? This may be the easiest answer, but it would disappoint as many people as it pleased.

²⁷ Bernard Woma, interview with the author, May 2, 2008..

²⁸ Trimillos provides more insider/outsider discussion in “Subject, Object, and the Ethnomusicology Ensemble,” 38.

²⁹ Strohschein, personal communication, May 24, 2008.

The opposite side, to simply turn a blind eye, is equally unsatisfactory, especially for performers visually marked by race as outsiders, who by virtue of appearance alone can never hope to escape accusations of appropriation. This may be a case where ignorance really does equal bliss, but, to use another cliché, you can never go home. Once a performer becomes exposed to the problems involved with appropriation, they can never claim innocence. It is a question to which there is no simple solution. What I propose below is merely my personal suggestions to easing the problems of appropriation. I realize it is not a perfect, but feel this is a problem to which there is no perfect solution, at least not until the world drastically changes.

First and foremost, it is necessary to respect whatever tradition is being studied. This includes respect for the teacher, who must be treated as the professional performer that he or she is. Although I have studied in Ghana and am an ethnomusicology student, I had to make sure that I always turned off the “expert” part of my brain, and allowed myself to be fully humbled as a student, simply absorbing what my teacher had to say. Although this was difficult at times, I found it necessary to fully experience whatever was going on. Second, and along similar lines, I attempted to give the tradition that I was learning proper respect as well. This does not mean blindly copying everything that was learned without any modification whatsoever, as I believe this is generally impossible, no matter how hard someone tries. It does mean that I always tried my best to respect the tradition, and whatever changes I made, attempted to keep them within the same framework, without challenging or changing the original intent and meaning. Obviously, this is extremely subjective, and even the small changes I made may be unappreciated by some within the tradition; the fact that I was overjoyed at Mr. Ameyaw’s pleasure at my changes demonstrates that I still viewed him as the ultimate authority. Dawes echoes this point by saying:

When cultural appropriation is counteracted by the qualities of respect, sensitivity, and equal opportunity, the result is a work that is wonderfully developed and filled with the

richness of cultural interaction and dialogues. It is the difference between stealing and getting permission to take, borrow or share.³⁰

By allowing kpatsa to be given to me, and by respecting that gift, many of the negatives surrounding appropriation were averted.

The other important part of accepting one's place within appropriation is accepting and understanding the issues surrounding it. When I first began my research, I read an article that greatly disturbed me. In it, Anna Beatrice Scott, an African-African dance professor, writes about her experience as a black body, surrounded by white bodies, in an Afro-Brazilian dance class. She questions why people who "would not dare walk into an advanced ballet-barre floor class looking as raggedy as they did now," assume that they could do so for this type of class. She discusses how her skin color and its perceived authenticity, and not her extensive "knowledge" and "technique," made others see her as a skilled performer. What disturbed me, however, was her description of the inevitable "white girl with rhythm" who was threatened by Scott's presence in a space that had been a place for "white transgression of the taboo of passing in colored spaces." Essentially, this girl, until Scott's arrival, had transgressed her whiteness; Scott's presence, however, proved that that was impossible, making Scott appear dangerous and threatening.³¹

I share this excerpt not because I disagree or agree with it, but to present some of the challenges faced by those who become skilled at an appropriated art form. In the case of kpatsa, I have to remember that I can never become Ghanaian. I can become a skilled performer, but fundamental differences remain, as recognized by each one of my teachers, who gave resounding "yes" responses when asked if there is a difference between American students and Ghanaian students. If I try to pass as Ghanaian, skin color alone will create a world full of disappointment.

³⁰ Dawes, "Re-Appropriating Cultural Appropriation," 116.

³¹ Scott, "Spectacle and Dancing Bodies that Matter," 264.

But if I study kpatsha as a Westerner, and present it as a Westerner doing the best I can with music that I love, I can be successful.³² After all, I should not “apologize for not being what I can never be.”³³ As an American, African music and dance is a part of my culture, as it has influenced every style of music, from jazz, blues and hip-hop to classical music.³⁴ Although I may relate to the music in a way that is different from those of African descent on many levels and for many reasons, any suggestion that I have no basis to relate to African music ignores this important aspect of American culture.

As a performer, I must understand where negative feelings of appropriation come from—“the sense of abuse and exploitation felt by disenfranchised minorities.”³⁵ Dawes describes a number of abuses that have occurred, ranging from issues about money to complete false representations, such as referring to a group of Aztecs as Mayans. With this history, it is understandable that people would be weary of appropriation, and believe that “we [those being appropriated from] are the only ones who can fairly treat our experiences.”³⁶ For many, it has become hard to trust outsiders, even those who appear well intentioned. Without valid attempts to understand those who might question my motives, I, and any other performer, run the risk of becoming defensive and self-righteous, only furthering the negativity that surrounds appropriation. But with this knowledge, and a lot of respect, such negative images can be diminished.

Censorship might make people feel more comfortable, but it does nothing to eliminate racism; time spent fighting about who has the right to learn or perform is time poorly spent. It

³² Locke, “The African Ensemble in America,” 179.

³³ Solís, “Introduction,” 11.

³⁴ Gottschild. “Stripping the Emperor,” 332.

³⁵ Dawes, “Re-Appropriating Cultural Appropriation,” 117.

³⁶ Ibid.

would be better to use it to promote Ghanaian music for all performers, native and otherwise.³⁷ As a student of Ghanaian music, I hope that any public presentation, including this thesis, works not to satisfy my audience, but to spark their curiosity.³⁸ My hope is that, by seeing me, someone outside of the Ghanaian tradition, love this music so passionately, I inspire others to find Ghanaian performers, and learn what it is truly about.³⁹ In this way, appreciation of Ghanaian music will spread and fears about loss jobs will become less important as more performance opportunities are created. Best of all, we all work to spread the happiness, and togetherness, that is the heart of kpatsa.

³⁷ Philip, "The Disappearing Debate," 102.

³⁸ Vetter, "A Square Peg in a Round Hole," 121.

³⁹ Trimillos, "Subject, Object, and the Ethnomusicology Ensemble," 42.

CHAPTER FIVE: TRANSCRIPTION

The transcription that I offer below represents only the version of kpatsa taught to me by Mr. Ameyaw. The varieties of music and dance that constitute a kpatsa performance, however, are infinite. Nonetheless, I hope that by presenting the following transcription, the reader is able to picture more clearly, and then understand, what my personal encounter with kpatsa entailed.

Instruments

Bell

In kpatsa, the rhythmic pattern played on the bell serves as the timeline of the piece. It is the anchor to which every part is bound. Even if a player has difficulty knowing where his or her part fits into the total ensemble, knowing how it fits against the bell allows the player to maintain the part. Being the only metal instrument, it is easily heard over the ensemble. There are multiple types of bells, but the one used by the BGSU Afro-Caribbean Ensemble is a double bell (see Figure 2). This bell is commonly called the *gankogui* (from the Ewe language), but when used in kpatsa, it is called the *gogota*.¹ Although it slightly resembles the agogo bell, it is “dirty” sounding, with a less definite pitch.² The bell pattern, seen in Figure 3, is repetitive and plays continuously throughout the piece.

¹ Wiggins, *African Drumming Workshop*, 22.

² *Ibid.*



Figure 2: Double Bell



Figure 3: Notation of the Bell Line

Djembe

The drum transcriptions and photographs that I offer are played on a djembe drum (see Figure 4). It should be noted that this is not the traditional drum used for kpatsa, however it is commonly used today, especially within the U.S.³ Imoro suggested that this is because the djembe is loud and “they [Americans] love it.”⁴ It is also commonly used because the djembe is prevalent throughout the United States. The “traditional” drums used in Ghana today are the kpanlogo drums. Even in Ghana, however, the djembe may be substituted.

³ Kwesi Brown, interview with the author, April 24, 2008.

⁴ Sulley Imoro, interview with the author, May 6, 2008.



Figure 4: Djembe Drum

The djembe has three main hand positions: tone, bass, and slap. For tone, the second knuckle down from the fingertip should rest along the side of the djembe (see Figure 5 and 6). The tone position produces a generally strong, high-pitched sound. Bass position involves the entire hand hitting approximately the middle of the drumhead (see Figure 7 and 8). The bass position creates a lower sound. The final position, slap, is one of the most difficult to master because of the snapping of the wrist that is required. To play, the hand should be slightly more towards the middle of the drum than in tone position, but closer to the edge than in bass (see Figure 9 and 10). All three positions create different sounds, but all should have a loud, ringing quality when played correctly. Within my transcriptions, tone is represented by a note on the middle line, bass by a note on the bottom, and slap by a note on the top. Stems pointing up indicate the right hand, and stems pointing down indicate the left hand, although the hands may be reversed at the player's discretion. The choice of which hand plays which note is not crucial

as long as the correct rhythm is played. It is, however, strongly suggested that the pattern of alternation is followed.



Figure 5: Tone Position



Figure 6: Tone Being Played



Figure 7: Bass Position



Figure 8: Bass Being Played



Figure 9: Slap Position



Figure 10: Slap Being Played

Lead Drum

The lead drum has two main patterns, and plays an important role in controlling the dancers and form of the piece. The first is the call, Figure 11, which is used to mark the beginning and end of the piece, as well as to notify the dancers when to change from one movement to the other. The second pattern is also important, because it is the most distinct, as it most closely mimics the dancers movements (see Figure 12). Together with the bell, these patterns identify kpatsa.

Although the lead drum provides an important pattern, it is also the drum that has the most freedom to improvise and embellish, as well as occasionally solo. In Figures 11 and 12, the two noteheads with an x are ghost notes, and represent the most basic of these embellishments. These notes are like quiet tones, and are used to help the drummer maintain the beat and to add aesthetically pleasing embellishments. These ghost notes may be added anywhere throughout the pattern. I chose to notate only the two ghost notes, however, because when first learning the pattern, all but these two may be dropped while still maintaining the basic pattern. I did not learn, and do not include, any suggestions for soloing, but adding the ghost note embellishments would be a good place for a beginning kpatsa drummer to start.



Figure 11: Notation of the Call As Played By the Lead Drum



Figure 12: Notation of the Regular Lead Pattern

Supporting Parts

The supporting parts should not be thought of as disposable even though their patterns may vary between groups. Generally, within a piece, the supporting drummers will maintain the same pattern throughout a performance, even while the lead drummer is calling for dance changes. All together, these three parts (lead and two supporting) make the complex rhythmic sounds of kpatsa.



Figure 13: Notation of the Pattern for Support Drum One



Figure 14: Notation of the Pattern for Support Drum Two

Ensemble

Figure 15: Ensemble Transcription

Bell

Lead Drum

Support Drum 1

Support Drum 2

REPEAT UNTIL MOVEMENT CHANGE,
TO CHANGE, GO TO 1ST ENDING
TO END, GO TO SECOND ENDING

Bl.

LD.

Sup. 1

SUP. 2

FIRST ENDING

Musical score for the First Ending, featuring four staves: Bl., LD., Sup. 1, and SUP. 2. The score is written in a single system with a repeat sign at the end. The Bl. staff contains a sequence of quarter notes: G4, A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, F5, G5, A5, B5, C6, D6, E6, F6, G6, A6, B6, C7, D7, E7, F7, G7, A7, B7, C8, D8, E8, F8, G8, A8, B8, C9, D9, E9, F9, G9, A9, B9, C10, D10, E10, F10, G10, A10, B10, C11, D11, E11, F11, G11, A11, B11, C12, D12, E12, F12, G12, A12, B12, C13, D13, E13, F13, G13, A13, B13, C14, D14, E14, F14, G14, A14, B14, C15, D15, E15, F15, G15, A15, B15, C16, D16, E16, F16, G16, A16, B16, C17, D17, E17, F17, G17, A17, B17, C18, D18, E18, F18, G18, A18, B18, C19, D19, E19, F19, G19, A19, B19, C20, D20, E20, F20, G20, A20, B20, C21, D21, E21, F21, G21, A21, B21, C22, D22, E22, F22, G22, A22, B22, C23, D23, E23, F23, G23, A23, B23, C24, D24, E24, F24, G24, A24, B24, C25, D25, E25, F25, G25, A25, B25, C26, D26, E26, F26, G26, A26, B26, C27, D27, E27, F27, G27, A27, B27, C28, D28, E28, F28, G28, A28, B28, C29, D29, E29, F29, G29, A29, B29, C30, D30, E30, F30, G30, A30, B30, C31, D31, E31, F31, G31, A31, B31, C32, D32, E32, F32, G32, A32, B32, C33, D33, E33, F33, G33, A33, B33, C34, D34, E34, F34, G34, A34, B34, C35, D35, E35, F35, G35, A35, B35, C36, D36, E36, F36, G36, A36, B36, C37, D37, E37, F37, G37, A37, B37, C38, D38, E38, F38, G38, A38, B38, C39, D39, E39, F39, G39, A39, B39, C40, D40, E40, F40, G40, A40, B40, C41, D41, E41, F41, G41, A41, B41, C42, D42, E42, F42, G42, A42, B42, C43, D43, E43, F43, G43, A43, B43, C44, D44, E44, F44, G44, A44, B44, C45, D45, E45, F45, G45, A45, B45, C46, D46, E46, F46, G46, A46, B46, C47, D47, E47, F47, G47, A47, B47, C48, D48, E48, F48, G48, A48, B48, C49, D49, E49, F49, G49, A49, B49, C50, D50, E50, F50, G50, A50, B50, C51, D51, E51, F51, G51, A51, B51, C52, D52, E52, F52, G52, A52, B52, C53, D53, E53, F53, G53, A53, B53, C54, D54, E54, F54, G54, A54, B54, C55, D55, E55, F55, G55, A55, B55, C56, D56, E56, F56, G56, A56, B56, C57, D57, E57, F57, G57, A57, B57, C58, D58, E58, F58, G58, A58, B58, C59, D59, E59, F59, G59, A59, B59, C60, D60, E60, F60, G60, A60, B60, C61, D61, E61, F61, G61, A61, B61, C62, D62, E62, F62, G62, A62, B62, C63, D63, E63, F63, G63, A63, B63, C64, D64, E64, F64, G64, A64, B64, C65, D65, E65, F65, G65, A65, B65, C66, D66, E66, F66, G66, A66, B66, C67, D67, E67, F67, G67, A67, B67, C68, D68, E68, F68, G68, A68, B68, C69, D69, E69, F69, G69, A69, B69, C70, D70, E70, F70, G70, A70, B70, C71, D71, E71, F71, G71, A71, B71, C72, D72, E72, F72, G72, A72, B72, C73, D73, E73, F73, G73, A73, B73, C74, D74, E74, F74, G74, A74, B74, C75, D75, E75, F75, G75, A75, B75, C76, D76, E76, F76, G76, A76, B76, C77, D77, E77, F77, G77, A77, B77, C78, D78, E78, F78, G78, A78, B78, C79, D79, E79, F79, G79, A79, B79, C80, D80, E80, F80, G80, A80, B80, C81, D81, E81, F81, G81, A81, B81, C82, D82, E82, F82, G82, A82, B82, C83, D83, E83, F83, G83, A83, B83, C84, D84, E84, F84, G84, A84, B84, C85, D85, E85, F85, G85, A85, B85, C86, D86, E86, F86, G86, A86, B86, C87, D87, E87, F87, G87, A87, B87, C88, D88, E88, F88, G88, A88, B88, C89, D89, E89, F89, G89, A89, B89, C90, D90, E90, F90, G90, A90, B90, C91, D91, E91, F91, G91, A91, B91, C92, D92, E92, F92, G92, A92, B92, C93, D93, E93, F93, G93, A93, B93, C94, D94, E94, F94, G94, A94, B94, C95, D95, E95, F95, G95, A95, B95, C96, D96, E96, F96, G96, A96, B96, C97, D97, E97, F97, G97, A97, B97, C98, D98, E98, F98, G98, A98, B98, C99, D99, E99, F99, G99, A99, B99, C100, D100, E100, F100, G100, A100, B100, C101, D101, E101, F101, G101, A101, B101, C102, D102, E102, F102, G102, A102, B102, C103, D103, E103, F103, G103, A103, B103, C104, D104, E104, F104, G104, A104, B104, C105, D105, E105, F105, G105, A105, B105, C106, D106, E106, F106, G106, A106, B106, C107, D107, E107, F107, G107, A107, B107, C108, D108, E108, F108, G108, A108, B108, C109, D109, E109, F109, G109, A109, B109, C110, D110, E110, F110, G110, A110, B110, C111, D111, E111, F111, G111, A111, B111, C112, D112, E112, F112, G112, A112, B112, C113, D113, E113, F113, G113, A113, B113, C114, D114, E114, F114, G114, A114, B114, C115, D115, E115, F115, G115, A115, B115, C116, D116, E116, F116, G116, A116, B116, C117, D117, E117, F117, G117, A117, B117, C118, D118, E118, F118, G118, A118, B118, C119, D119, E119, F119, G119, A119, B119, C120, D120, E120, F120, G120, A120, B120, C121, D121, E121, F121, G121, A121, B121, C122, D122, E122, F122, G122, A122, B122, C123, D123, E123, F123, G123, A123, B123, C124, D124, E124, F124, G124, A124, B124, C125, D125, E125, F125, G125, A125, B125, C126, D126, E126, F126, G126, A126, B126, C127, D127, E127, F127, G127, A127, B127, C128, D128, E128, F128, G128, A128, B128, C129, D129, E129, F129, G129, A129, B129, C130, D130, E130, F130, G130, A130, B130, C131, D131, E131, F131, G131, A131, B131, C132, D132, E132, F132, G132, A132, B132, C133, D133, E133, F133, G133, A133, B133, C134, D134, E134, F134, G134, A134, B134, C135, D135, E135, F135, G135, A135, B135, C136, D136, E136, F136, G136, A136, B136, C137, D137, E137, F137, G137, A137, B137, C138, D138, E138, F138, G138, A138, B138, C139, D139, E139, F139, G139, A139, B139, C140, D140, E140, F140, G140, A140, B140, C141, D141, E141, F141, G141, A141, B141, C142, D142, E142, F142, G142, A142, B142, C143, D143, E143, F143, G143, A143, B143, C144, D144, E144, F144, G144, A144, B144, C145, D145, E145, F145, G145, A145, B145, C146, D146, E146, F146, G146, A146, B146, C147, D147, E147, F147, G147, A147, B147, C148, D148, E148, F148, G148, A148, B148, C149, D149, E149, F149, G149, A149, B149, C150, D150, E150, F150, G150, A150, B150, C151, D151, E151, F151, G151, A151, B151, C152, D152, E152, F152, G152, A152, B152, C153, D153, E153, F153, G153, A153, B153, C154, D154, E154, F154, G154, A154, B154, C155, D155, E155, F155, G155, A155, B155, C156, D156, E156, F156, G156, A156, B156, C157, D157, E157, F157, G157, A157, B157, C158, D158, E158, F158, G158, A158, B158, C159, D159, E159, F159, G159, A159, B159, C160, D160, E160, F160, G160, A160, B160, C161, D161, E161, F161, G161, A161, B161, C162, D162, E162, F162, G162, 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Vocals

I chose not to include the vocals with the ensemble transcription because there is no specific song that accompanies kpatsa. There is, however, a repertoire of commonly used pieces. The song that I learned is one of these. The language of the song is Adangme. The first two call and responses come from a commonly used song, while Mr. Ameyaw created the last line.

Lyrics:

Call:	<i>Naki le...</i> <i>Mibi Naki le jea jao</i>
Response:	<i>Naki le...</i> <i>Mibi Naki le jea jao</i>
Call:	<i>Naki le...</i> <i>Mibi Naki le jea jao</i>
Response:	<i>Naki le...</i> <i>Mibi Naki le jea jao</i>
Call:	<i>Naki le...</i> <i>Mibi Naki le Maaba Ofio</i>
Response:	<i>Naki le Maaba Ofio</i>

Although I do not have an exact translation, Mr. Ameyaw explained that the song is a lullaby being sung to a girl named Naki.⁵ A rough translation of the song is:

Naki it's late. (*Mibi Naki le jea jao*)
 Naki it's late.⁶
 Baby Naki, why are you crying?⁷ (*Naki le Maaba Ofio*)

The transcription of the song that follows is not definitive, because the notes may be transposed up or down, as desired by the singer.⁸ The singer is also free to add embellishments to fit his or her personal taste. Moreover, there are multiple versions of the basic melody itself. The piece is

⁵ Kofi Ameyaw, interview with the author, May 24, 2008.

⁶ Translation by Kwesi Brown, interview with the author, April 24, 2008.

⁷ Translation by Kofi Ameyaw, interview with the author, May 24, 2008.

⁸ Mr. Ameyaw himself transposed it over the course of my lessons.

pentatonic, except for a Bb (in the notated key). Although I chose to include only the bell and voice in the notation, in performance the other drums may be played softly in the background.

Figure 16: Vocal Transcription

Bell

Voice

CALL: Na - ki le Mi - bi Na - ki le jea ja - o RESPONSE: Na - ki

6

C. Bl.

6

le Mi - bi Na - ki le jea ja - o CALL: Na - ki le

11

C. Bl.

11

Mi - bi Na - ki le jea ja - o RESPONSE: Na - ki le Mi - bi Na - ki

16

C. Bl.

16

le jea ja - o CALL: Na - ki le Mi - bi Na - ki le Maa - ba O - fi -

21
C. Bl.

21

o RESPONSE: Na - ki le Maa - ba O - fi - o CALL*: Na - ki o

REPEAT AS DESIRED UNTIL END ENDING

*ALTERNATE CALL AND RESPONSE ON REPEAT

Dance Movements

There are an open-ended number of dance movements available for kpatsa. The ones that I offer here are those that I taught to the BGSU Afro-Caribbean Ensemble. They do not even represent the entirety of the movements I learned. Mr. Ameyaw told me that he believed that each of these movements represents something, however he was unsure of what those meanings were.

The piece begins with a traveling movement, which I referred to in class as the flapping movement. To execute this movement, the dancer leans slightly to the right, flapping the arm from the elbow to the hand up and down, while lifting up the right foot, tapping it down on the ground; each time the hands are up in the air. As the arms go up, the chest should be pushed outwards, as in Figure 17. When the arms are down, the body is contracted inward, forming a C position, as in Figure 18. The dancer does this movement four times, jumping to the left side on the fourth tap, and then repeating the movement on the left side. Each jump should move forward as well as shift the weight from side to side. There is also a variation on this movement where

instead of the fourth tap on the side, the dancer taps his or her foot behind while looking back over the shoulder, and then during the weight transfer, steps forward.



Figure 17: Flapping Movement Part 1- arms up, foot down, chest outward



Figure 18: Flapping Movement Part 2- arms down, foot lifted, body contracted

The second movement, which I refer to as the reaching movement, involves a similar foot movement, but instead of moving up and down, both hands point down, with the right hand below the other, and while the foot taps, the hands move together and apart; as the foot lifts, the hands come together, and as it touches the ground, the hands pull apart (see Figure 19). On the fourth reach movement, the dancer transfers his or her weight to the right, repositioning the left hand as lowest and tapping the left foot. A variation on this movement is to do the exact same movement, except on the fourth reaching motion, the dancer reaches up instead of down, as in Figure 20. This movement travels forwards, but at a very slow pace.



Figure 19: Reaching Movement-
in hands apart position



Figure 20: Reaching Variation-
reaching upward on 4th motion

The third movement involves waving the arms up and down, again maintaining the same foot movement, raising each arm twice before switching sides, as in Figure 21. The movement may be done alone or with a partner, where the dancers face each other, each with their arms to their own right side, and then switch to the opposite sides at the same time. Again, this movement travels, but very slowly.



Figure 21: Waving Movement

The last movement always involves partners. For this, one dancer is the “male” and the other is the “female,”⁹ although the actual sex of the dancers is unimportant. While the female faces the male, continuing to tap her right foot, the male points to the female (see Figure 22), then to himself (see Figure 23), then touches the first finger of both hands together. Then, while the male assumes the waiting position, the female responds by pointing to the male, then to herself, and then takes both hands and gestures away (see Figure 24). At this gesture, the males take a step and move to the next female. When the BGSU Afro-Caribbean Ensemble performed this movement, the females added a facial grimace to really enforce the idea of rejection. This is the only movement that has an obvious meaning, as the flirtatious nature of this movement is undeniable.



Figure 22: Pointing to the Partner- male and female



Figure 23: Pointing to Him (Or Her)self

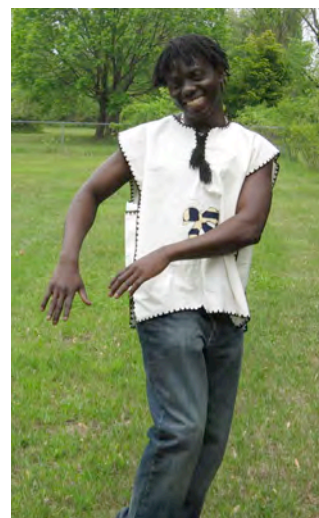


Figure 24: Rejection Gesture- by the female

⁹ This is a designation made by me, not Mr. Ameyaw.

Choreography

This choreography is a transcription of how it was performed by the BGSU Afro-Caribbean Ensemble. It is based upon choreography taught to me by Mr. Ameyaw, but modified to fit the specific needs and aesthetic desires of the group. The pictures are stills taken from the video footage of the World Percussion Night performance of kpatsa on April 17, 2008.

The ensemble entered from both sides, with the “males” on one side, and the “females” on the other. The dancers traveled with the flapping motion. Each of the lines headed to the middle of the stage, and then headed towards the back of the stage to curve around and form two circles (see Figure 25).



Figure 25: Ensemble Entrance

Once the circles were formed, the lead drum played the call, and at the end of the call, the ensemble immediately clapped and jumped to face the audience and sing (see Figure 26).



Figure 26: Singing to the Audience

Another drum call ended the singing, and again the group immediately clapped and turned back to continue moving in the circle while resuming the flapping movement. At the drum call, the group began the reaching movement, until another drum call signaled a return to the flapping movement. The next drum call signaled the beginning of the waving movement, this time continuing to face forwards without a partner (see Figure 27).

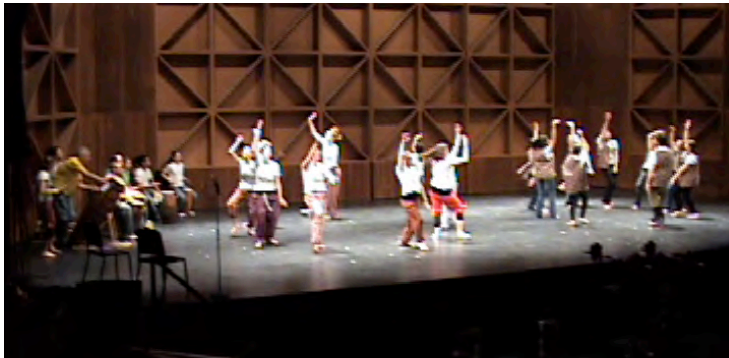


Figure 27: Solo Waving Motion

At the next drum call, the dancers returned to the flapping motion, and headed into lines. There was no designated leader for this; the dancers closest to the center of the stage in both circles led their circle into the lines (see Figure 28).

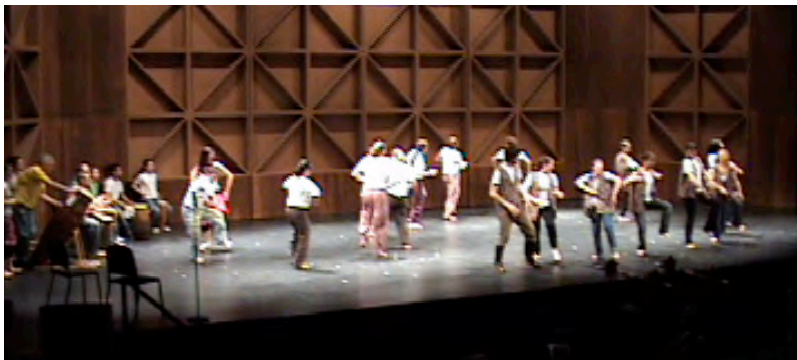


Figure 28: Creating the Lines

Once in the lines, the drum call signaled a change from the flapping to the reaching movement. At the next drum call, the ensemble clapped, and then began the reaching-with-arm-up motion as in Figure 29. The clapping was added to help the audience distinguish between these two similar movements.



Figure 29: Dancers in Lines- doing the “arm up” movement

The next drum call signaled both a return to the flapping movement, and for the dancers to create a double line, which then headed into a double circle (see Figure 30).



Figure 30: Dancers With Partners Creating a Circle

Once in the circle, at the next drum call, the dancers clapped, and then began the flirting movements. The females were on the outside circle, and at each rejection, the males took a step clockwise around the inner circle. (Figure 31).



Figure 31: Females on the Outside Circle- rejection motion

The next drum call signaled that the dancers had finally found a partner. The dancers clapped and then began the waving movement with each circle of dancers waving to the right, and then left, of the partner (see Figure 32).



Figure 32: Waving With Partner

The final drum call signaled the dancers to leave the stage, so the circle split and exited on the two sides, with the dancers doing the flapping movement, with the step/look backwards movement (see Figure 33).



Figure 33: Dancers Leaving the Stage

CONCLUSION

My experience with kpatsa reflects the reality of our globalized world. Just half a century ago it would have been nearly impossible to learn Ghanaian dance in the United States. No longer. I was able to work with a professional Ghanaian performer only an hour away from my home, had telephone access to several more, found multiple American groups on the Internet, and could even purchase how-to-perform-kpatsa videos. My teaching and performing kpatsa may have constituted appropriation, being that I had no cultural claim to the dance. But that work was part of a much larger trend, beyond kpatsa, Ghanaian music, and even African music. All over the world, music and dance is being presented, learned, and reconstituted by new performers for new audiences. Appropriation may be problematic, but it has become an unavoidable reality.

When cultures interact, they inevitably borrow and share. Appropriation is nothing new. What is new is the extent and speed with which it happens. Modernization, urbanization, nationalism, and other pan-global forces have fundamentally changed the way in which nearly all societies experience and express their cultural heritage. Identities may be weaker locally, but they extend outward in ways heretofore impossible. Because of these factors, kpatsa, like many pieces, has become larger than any one ethnic group. At one time, only the Ga-Adangme and those who interacted directly with them knew the dance; today, an American can learn it simply by getting on the Internet.

As ethnic boundaries become less distinct, and “traditional” cultural practices become less engrained, it becomes impossible to assume that being an ethnic insider assures being a cultural insider. The opposite is also true: it is wrong to assume that an ethnic outsider cannot be

a cultural insider. Kpatsa proves this. Many Ga-Adangbe do not know the dance, but most professional Ghanaians dancers do.

Kpatsa holds different meanings, depending upon who is performing it, and these different layers of meaning help to determine what is preserved. To Mr. Cofie, it is important to maintain the dwarf movement, as he knew about kaptsa's mythical origins. Kpatsa as a Ghanaian dance, however, presents another layer of meaning. For those within this layer, such as cultural troupes, kpatsa represents only one style of Ghanaian dance. For these performers, the drumming tends to be the most important, as it differentiates kpatsa from other Ghanaian pieces. The movements may be changed more drastically in an attempt to entertain the audience, however. For these performers, the traditional history may seem far removed and unimportant.

The final level where kpatsa exists is in the United States. This version of kpatsa presents very specific challenges. Here, the students of kpatsa are, with few exceptions, unquestionably outside of the tradition in every sense; they did not grow up with the music, and often have no ethnic relation to it. The American's extreme outsider position lends credence to the Ghanaian teacher's "insider" position. Thus, despite knowing that, according to Mr. Woma, music is a "global language"¹ and that my learning kpatsa makes Mr. Imoro "proud,"² I feel uncomfortable modifying the piece. I acknowledge a right of ownership by my non-Ga teachers. Among my teachers, however, being Ghanaian is not enough to give one "rights" to the piece, as Mr. Imoro explained about his frustration with non-trained Ghanaians teaching.

This study is important because it raises these important issues. There is no answer to who owns "kpatsa" as a concept. I believe that it depends upon what layer of kpatsa one speaks about. I can own part of an American layer, but no part of the Ghanaian one. My teachers can

¹ Bernard Woma, interview with the author, May 2, 2008.

² Sulley Imoro, interview with the author, May 6, 2008.

own the Ghanaian one, but not the Ga-Adangme. Each layer has specific rules governing what is appropriate. This is why as an American, I would find it difficult to question any Ghanaian's right to perform and modify kpatsa, although I personally attempt to honor and maintain the version I learned.

Kpatsa, however, represents just one of many artistic works facing such interactions. As global interaction continues to grow, layers of insider/outsider will become increasingly complex. For example, if American children are trained from a young age in Ghanaian traditional pieces, can they become insiders? On paper, their training may be nearly identical, and barely less culturally grounded, than many urban Ghanaian children's. After all, kpatsa is a social dance, and social interactions are important everywhere. Already, the idea of looking for cultural purity may seem outdated. Instead, researchers should look to the ways pieces are modified to fulfill different roles to discover new ideas about cultural growth, interaction, and understanding.

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