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Preface

Knowledge about the relationship between music, health and wellbeing is probably as old as humanity itself. Ritual specialists across the African continent and elsewhere have been making use of the therapeutic and curative potential of music and dance for millennia. Similarly, for a considerable period of human existence, ordinary people have utilized song, dance and play to enhance individual and collective wellbeing. Various philosophers have also tried to comprehend the healing powers of the performing arts. Philosophical inquisitions of such nature have further emphasized the close connection between art and humanity. More recent research in musicology, dance and performance studies, psychology, neuroscience and medicine – to mention but a few of the relevant fields – has added much to our understanding of the socio-cultural, psychological, as well as, biological foundations of human-music interaction. Such studies are shedding light on the influence of music on affective behaviour and our basic brain chemistry. Against this backdrop, music, dance and related art forms are increasingly employed in both informal and formal therapeutic settings to treat illness, alleviate pain, cure mental disorder and promote general human wellbeing.

The idea for this Special Issue on *Music, Health and Wellbeing: African Perspectives* grew out of a collaborative research at the Department of Music and Dance, University of Cape Coast, Ghana, under its institutionally adopted research agenda for the 2013-17 academic years. After scrutinizing the literature on the relationship between music, health and wellbeing, it was observed that, while scholarship in this field is generally increasing, it is only a handful of academics in Africa who have given this topic extensive scholarly attention. It is worth stressing, however, that the healing potential of music and related performing arts is culture-specific. Consequently, some of the therapeutic uses to which certain kinds of music are put in one cultural environment may not necessarily be applicable in another setting. While there is growing consensus that music can have a transformative impact on the health and wellbeing of individuals and communities, there is the need to investigate this phenomenon more systematically in African cultural contexts, from diverse ideological and disciplinary perspectives.

The purpose of this Special Issue is, therefore, to further explore the transformative potential of music and cognate creative performances by investigating their role in formal and informal health care, as well as, the promotion of individual and collective wellbeing. The articles in this issue probe the expressed topic of investigation from various disciplinary and interdisciplinary perspectives. Emmanuel Acquah (pp. 1-16) examines the impact of choral singing on wellbeing in a Ghanaian university setting. His findings suggest that
singing in a mixed choir has a great impact on the health and wellbeing of students. It helps them to connect socially, to cope with stress, and to increase emotional and spiritual wellbeing. Kathy Armstrong (pp. 17-35) observes similar effects on North American students performing in Ghanaian dance-drumming ensembles in Canada. Her article identifies the ecological factors that enhance the health and well-being of students involved in the performance of the Ewe dance-drumming piece Gahu. Drawing on Christopher Small’s notion of “musicking”, she stresses particularly the participatory aspect of performance that enables people at various skill-levels to partake in music and develop relationships through it.

Florian Carl and Rosemond Kutsidzo (pp. 36-58) highlight everyday music experience in Ghana, employing the Experience Sampling Method (ESM) to examine how people use music in potentially beneficial ways to boost subjective wellbeing. They contend that their research participants used solitary music listening as an important means of regulating their emotional states and energy levels. They further ascribe a similar therapeutic function to music even where it is publicly performed as a social and participatory event. This became particularly clear in the intersection between music, religion and social dance. Michael Frishkopf et al. (pp. 59-90), on the other hand, report on Participant Action Research (PAR) and interventions that use music and dance-drama as a social technology to promote community health in the Northern Region of Ghana. Their project “Singing and Dancing for Health” employed “edutainment” and community engagement to disseminate preventive health messages and sensitize communities, thereby improving public health and community wellbeing in sustainable ways.

Katrin Lengwinat (pp. 91-115), in her detailed ethnographic study, explores Afro-Venezuelan music rituals for health and community wellbeing, with specific interest in the infusion of Afro-Catholic traditions into Corpus Christi and the Feast of Saint John. While she affirms that people use these rituals to address and cure specific individual health problems, she also stresses that the festivals provide people of African descent in Venezuela with contexts within which group solidarity, identity and resistance are expressed, reinforced and celebrated. Writing on a different cultural performance, Christopher Mtaku (pp. 116-129) investigates the twin ritual which is practiced by the Bura people of north-eastern Nigeria. The ceremony, known locally as the kamta bulikur, is based on the people’s belief in the extraordinary powers of twins. Mtaku argues that traditional music and musicians play a significant role in the health and wellbeing of twins by counteracting and containing the work of spirits that may intend to cause them harm or disrupt the tranquil order of the society at large.
The article by Eric Otchere, Isaac Amuah and Margaret Numekevor (pp. 130-150) revisits the setting of formal education in Ghana. They take a critical look at the promotion of ‘affective wellbeing’ in the teaching of music in Ghanaian basic schools. While the curriculum for music was designed to educate children holistically, their findings rather suggest that the emphasis, in actual teaching, is on the cognitive and psychomotor domains, to the detriment of the affective domain. “The outcome of such an educational system,” they conclude, “is to produce people who know and understand (theoretically) … yet do not have the moral zeal … to take the necessary action” (p. 146). Lastly, Rebecca Uberoi (pp. 151-175) provides an in-depth ethnographic account of how members of Christ Apostolic Church in Dublin, Ireland, “dance away” their sorrow. Dance plays a paramount role in the spiritual lives of the Yoruba migrants attending this church by deepening the feelings of wellbeing and community, as well as, connecting with the divine. However, Uberoi also contends that there is a dissonance between the spiritual practices of first and second generation Yoruba migrants. While dance is an expression of identity for the first generation, their children have adopted many features of the Irish host culture and seem to move away from participatory dance performance, indicating an overall different attitude towards the relationship between individual and community.

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Rebecca Uberoi
Choral Singing and Wellbeing: Findings from a Survey of the Mixed-Chorus Experience from Music Students of the University of Education, Winneba, Ghana

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Abstract: Choral singing, termed ‘mixed chorus’, is an integral part of the academic activities of the Department of Music Education, University of Education, Winneba. However, the impact of the singing on the wellbeing of the students and lecturers is largely unexplored. With 350 participants, this study contributes to filling that gap. Using questionnaire and interviews, the article examines the health benefits of singing in terms of emotional, psychological, social and physical wellbeing. It concludes that the mixed chorus has a great impact on the total health of the participants. However, this impact is dependent on some generative mechanisms needed in the training of choral singers.

Keywords: singing, wellbeing, mixed chorus, University of Education, Winneba (UEW), generative mechanisms

Public health professionals and researchers are increasingly giving serious consideration to the idea that the fitness and wellbeing of individuals, institutions and communities are dependent on multiple factors that call for collaboration across and within sectors. This is probably due to the redefinition of health by the World Health Organisation (1946) which recognises freedom of choice and emphasizes the role of individuals and communities in defining what health means to them. Epp (1987) comments on this new perspective of health from a broad range of factors, such as human biology, lifestyle, the organisation of health care, and the social and physical environments in which people live:

Health ceases to be measurable strictly in terms of illness and death. It becomes a state which individuals and communities alike strive
to achieve, maintain or regain, and not something that comes about merely as a result of treating and curing illnesses and injuries. It is a basic and dynamic force in our daily lives, influenced by our circumstances, our beliefs, our culture and our social, economic and physical environments. (p. 420)

Given the dynamic force of health in our daily lives, there is the need to examine other possible activities and circumstances that facilitate the wellbeing of the people. It is for this reason that this study is undertaken to explore the extent to which choral singing can be one of such broad factors for solving contemporary problems relating to health and wellbeing.

Indeed, the effect of music on the emotional, psychological, social and physical wellbeing of performers and even listeners is quite remarkable. Music provides self-acceptance, sense of purpose or fulfilment in life, impression of continued growth or feeling of interpersonal connectedness, happiness and subjective wellness which Schmutte and Ryff (1997) describe as common strands in psychological wellbeing. If choral singing has the potential to positively affect the health and the total wellbeing of people, then it is very important in our lives. Choral singing, for instance, permeates the musical cultures that are cultivated and performed all over Ghana. This is seen from the proliferation of youth choirs and other choral groups across the country (Amuah & Acquah, 2013). Many different curricular programs in Ghana’s music institutions also attach particular importance to the correct and proper use of the voice as a means of expression. As a result, the Department of Music Education of the University of Education, Winneba in Ghana, organises choral singing, termed ‘mixed chorus’,¹ three times in a week during the semester to provide all students with the opportunity to experience choral singing. The mixed chorus sessions are led by lecturers who design strategies of training and decide on the repertoire to be used in order to ensure proper and effective singing during the performance.

The role of singing in our communities has become pervasive because it continues to be used for many purposes, including advertisement on the radio and television. Generally, it is known that singing does not only accompany church liturgies and rites of passage in Ghana but also promotes nationalistic and local pride through national anthems, team loyalty and support at sporting events. Socially, it facilitates romance during courtship and bestows a sense of individual spirituality (Hays & Minichiello, 2005; Storr, 1992). Several research works have been conducted on choral music, with the scholarly objective of demonstrating the healing capability of this creative genre. For instance, A-

¹ A term used to refer to choral singing involving men and women
bridge (1996), Winter, Paskin and Baker (1994), Maranto (1993) and White (1992) report on how choral music helps in reducing stress, anxiety, depression, helplessness and low self-esteem by enhancing the function of the immune system. Music does not just evoke imagery and associations, it can also elicit physiological and psychological responses (Tomatis, 1991), alter the perception of chronic pain (Rider 1987; Schorr, 1993), soothe the soul of restless people and assist them to engage in social activities such as dancing and clapping to perform daily routines (Bunt, 1996; Davis, 1999) and assist in forming friendship and social networks (Kahn, 2001; Blacking, Byron & Nettl, 1995). Bright (1995) also stresses how music elicits cognitive, physical and emotional responses.

The idea behind the institution of the mixed chorus in the Department of Music Education may not be due to any of these healing effects; it is rather a requisite part of the musical training of all students in the Department. As Ahmet (2015, p. 879) argues, ‘Choral training is the most fundamental, effective and widely studied field in Music Education’. Moreover, choral education does not only teach culture and love of music but also allows a large number of people to study and train together (Eguz, 1981). Inasmuch as students are professionally trained in this department, it is imperative that choral training becomes part of their academic program. This is because it is one of the ways to develop their musicianship and hone their skills in musical interpretations. It is worth stating that there are other benefits that the performers and trainers gain, in terms of emotional, social, psychological and physical wellbeing, which are not consciously known. Some questions then come to mind: Is there any therapeutic effect of the mixed chorus experience? How can the mixed chorus be strengthened to ensure the total wellbeing of the performers and trainers? Although questions relating to singing and its benefits have been widely addressed by scholars (Small, 2011; Dillon, 2006; Staricoff 2004; Biley 2000), many of these studies have been done outside Ghana. In this paper, I address these questions by discussing the effect of singing on wellbeing in the context of the mixed chorus experience in the Department of Music Education of the University of Education, Winneba, Ghana. In dealing with the subject of this study, I review literature on singing and wellbeing, show the methodology used, present results and discussion, and conclude with suggestions on some generative mechanisms appropriate for choral performance and training that would consequently yield the desired therapeutic benefits. Henfridsson and Bygstad (2013, p. 909) use the term ‘generative mechanism’ in digital infrastructure to mean ‘the causal powers that explain how and why such infrastructure evolves over time’; while Tsoukas (1989, p. 551), from the realist line of reasoning, explains the term as ‘the causal powers at work independent of the events they generate’. In this study, I use the
term to refer to the training techniques and facilitating ideals which are fundamental to good choral singing and its positive effect on health and wellbeing.

**Literature Review**

A substantial increase in research relating to music and health has been recorded over the past few years. Some of these investigated how the arts in general, particularly music, have contributed to the health and wellbeing of participants. Scholars, such as Dillon (2006), Staricoff (2004), Lipe (2002), Blood and Zatorre (2001), and Biley (2000), assert that singing and other activities involving music are a fundamental part of human existence. Thus, enjoying and performing music have been recorded since the earliest civilisations. Marek (2007) confirms:

> Throughout the history of Western music, vocal music has served as the archetype for musical expression at least in part because many theorists, musicians, and pedagogues embrace the idea that the human voice reaches the deepest feelings of the human spirit. (p. xix)

Though Marek’s assertion is in the context of Western music, it addresses a general fact which is very pertinent to the crux of this study. The mixed chorus is undoubtedly vocal and therefore has the potential to make a major contribution towards the general wellbeing of performers and participants. Vocal music contributes towards positive self-esteem, enhances feelings of competence and independence and lessens the experience of social isolation (Hays & Minichiello, 2005). This is why Amuah and Acquah (2013, p. 111) recommend the need for every youth to participate in choral singing as it is capable of developing the logical thinking and the emotions of individuals. The mixed chorus experience is likely to make a major contribution not only towards professional skills but also the health and wellbeing of participants. This is because singing in the musical arts has often been discussed as a channel for human emotion and expression (Kivy, 2001). Further, the health benefits of musical engagement cut across the age dichotomy (Cohen, Bailey & Nilsson, 2002). Active participation in singing with the appropriate generative mechanisms is likely to contribute to self-expression and mood enhancement, sense of place and belonging as described by Duffy (2005). Participants in music, and for that matter singing, usually feel accepted, valued and needed, and therefore partake in lifelong learning (Davis, 1999; Kahn, 2001; Small, 2011).

These scholars were not specific whether these benefits are connected with group music-making or individual performances. Nonetheless, I believe
that they see the need for singing and music-making in general. A number of studies on the benefits of singing have been undertaken with diverse samples of singers, and these provide evidence from reports on a range of social, psychological and health benefits associated with singing. Bailey and Davidson (2002/2005), for example, interviewed choir singers from a range of social backgrounds in Canada while Silber (2005) explored the impact of a singing group established in a women’s prison in Israel. In the reports of these scholars, they stress the need for everyone to sing. The work of Clift, Hancox, Morrison, Hess, Kreutz and Stewart (2010) is of particular relevance to this study. In their research, 600 choral singers were drawn from English choirs to complete a questionnaire to measure their physical, psychological, social and environmental wellbeing. They provided accounts of the effects of choral singing on quality of life, wellbeing and physical health in response to open questions. Their accounts revealed that singing may impact wellbeing and health positively, especially through focused attention, deep breathing, social support, cognitive stimulation and regular commitment. The discussion in this paper will also focus on the positive outcomes of singing on health and general wellbeing of the performers of mixed chorus in a Ghanaian context. It will also explore the generative mechanisms that could be put in place in the training and performance of singing to create the desired effect.

Bright (1997) has suggested that singing can have an evocative effect on a person’s emotions, memories and past connections in life. He further shows how it can be used to facilitate people’s enjoyment of shared interests and activities. The author, consequently, justifies music’s claim as a branch of preventive medicine. Singing can help in the interpretation of meaning in our lives and provide people with another level and dimension for understanding life experiences (Kenny, 1999). This is because much evidence shows the impact of singing on a wide variety of emotional, physical and spiritual benefits for even those with speech disorders. For instance, Healey, Mallard and Adams (1976) examined whether singing could reduce stuttering. Participants were therefore asked to read or sing the lyrics of songs. The reduction in stuttering was greater in the singing than in the reading condition. The greatest reduction was observed when familiar lyrics were sung. Similarly, Andrews, Howier, Dozsa and Guitar (1982) examined the effects of 15 different fluency-enhancing methods (including singing) on a number of stuttering measures. In the singing condition, participants were asked to sing any song of their choice for 10 minutes. Results showed that singing reduced the frequency of stuttering by over 90%, presumably due to the increased duration of phonation. Further evidence of the benefits of singing in increasing fluency has been shown by Davidow, Bothe, Andreatta and Ye (2009). For this reason, it is significant that the benefits of the mixed chorus are
explored and disseminated in order to strengthen bonds of togetherness and sharing because ‘one of the primary functions of music, which includes singing, is to enhance the quality of individual experience and human relationships’ (Blacking, Byron & Nettl, 1995, p. 49).

**Methodology**

The mixed chorus in the Department of Music Education of the University of Education, Winneba, is organised three times a week for all students in the following programs: the four-year Bachelor of Music (B.Mus.), four-year Bachelor of Arts (BA) in Music Education, and the two-year Diploma in Music. The mixed chorus is held on Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays for one hour from 7.30 a.m. to 8.30 a.m. and it is mandatory for every student, irrespective of their choral background. The choir performs one grand concert almost at the end of every semester to commemorate either the birth or death of Christ. Additionally, during election years, peace concerts, where students in the mixed chorus are required to perform, are sometimes organized. As a result, musical pieces used in the chorus are either religious or patriotic in nature.

In finding out the therapeutic benefits of the mixed chorus and how it can be improved, I adopted a descriptive survey method. A survey is a means of ‘gathering information about the characteristics, actions or opinions of a large group of people, referred to as population’ (Tanur, 1982, p. 77). It became necessary to adopt this method because surveys provide an avenue for more honest and unambiguous responses. Therefore, choosing this research strategy allows for the collection of large amounts of data in an efficient manner (Kotzab, 2005, p. 126). In the current study, this was done using questionnaire and interview.

After the rationale for the study had been explained to them, 345 undergraduate students who were randomly sampled during mixed chorus sessions, were asked to complete a 20-item questionnaire. For the purpose of allowing participants to express their views on how they have benefited therapeutically from the mixed chorus experience, a few of the questions were designed to elicit open-ended responses. Although their general opinion about the mixed chorus were sought, the questionnaire focused on participant’s own health, rather than asking about the possible effects of singing on other people’s health.

Attention was given to the comments written on the questionnaire by the participants in order to explore the issues addressed by this survey more concretely. More appropriately, responses to some of the open-ended questions were discussed according to the class levels of students in groups created for each class on the social media platform WhatsApp. Personal views on the healing effects were revealed during the discussion.
Three hundred and nineteen participants returned the questionnaire after four follow-ups, which yielded a response rate of 92.4%. In addition, interviews were undertaken with a purposive sample of five lecturers who train the students at mixed chorus sessions. These five lecturers were interviewed to find out how singing affects the emotional, psychological, social and physical well-being of the performers and how the mixed chorus can be improved using specific mechanisms. All interviews were conducted in the offices of the lecturers and recorded with their permission and then later transcribed for analysis. The interviews were informal, with the discussion focusing on the benefits of singing on the general well-being of the performers and trainers. During the interviews, specific therapeutic and healing values of singing were discussed. This led to the discussion of certain generative mechanisms that could be employed in the training of singers to ensure their total well-being.

**Results**

Participants indicated a range of significant health-related outcomes for participating in singing. Apart from the acquisition of professional skills, the 20 items were designed to cover some constructs in connection with singing, health and well-being. Participants’ endorsement of the items ranged from 72% to 90%. They also reported that they had experienced most of the items on singing and well-being from the mixed chorus experience. However, 10% to 28% reported that they had not experienced it much, conceding though that the mixed chorus was very important to them in terms of improving their sight reading skills in music. It is actually not surprising that some students benefited less from the mixed chorus because existing literature corroborates the position that large ensemble participation, including choral ensembles, in schools is a positive motivator for some students and also discourages others (Kratus, 2007). It is likely to experience such situations, especially where the mixed chorus ensemble is mandatory, making all students, whether interested in singing or not, to participate in it. Nevertheless, most participants indicated how they feel happier with themselves and content at developing relationships with others through the mixed chorus experience.

The singing experience between the students and the lecturers was intensely found to be individualistic and extremely personal for most of them because personal meaning that related to performance practice, social identity, psychological benefit, emotional well-being, therapeutic benefit and social well-being were expressed idiosyncratically. This includes how singing affects the lives of the performers and how it facilitates connection with life experiences. Others are intellectual stimulus, emotional satisfaction, spiritual growth and capacity building. The results of the study showed that singing has direct links
with health and wellbeing, stimulus and motivation. The data further revealed that the mixed chorus is an important part of the lives of the students and the lecturers because it also provides ways for defining and redefining their understanding of emotions, and maintaining personal wellbeing. The following are some few idiosyncratic responses from some of the participants.

Richmond, a level 200 Bachelor of Arts, Music Education student describes his experience in the mixed chorus:

“I am a shy person, especially when I see females around. My whole education has been through non-coeducational institutions but I am blessed that this mixed chorus has helped me adjust tremendously. I was almost becoming socially isolated but attending school here to do music and take part in the mixed chorus has lifted my self-esteem, self-belief and social life. I can’t really tell how it happened but that is how I feel.”

Rita, a level 200 B.Mus. student shares her experience on the WhatsApp platform:

“Anytime I have headache and sing together with friends at mixed chorus, my pain vanishes. Experiencing the sounds of harmony peeling through my whole being, my moodiness, as a result of my ill health, flies away.”

When asked to give her opinion about the therapeutic benefit of the mixed chorus, Mrs Arko-Mensah, a lecturer of the department and a participant of this study, commented:

“In fact, I believe all of us have not really been conscious of the therapeutic benefit of the mixed chorus. All we know is that it is part of our academic training, and it is compulsory for every student but I have my own joyous experience; the satisfaction alone I get from training the students at mixed chorus is a medicine for me. The fulfillment and excitement of singing at chorus cannot be described in words. It is always a soothing moment for me.”

Ransford, a Diploma One student, expresses some benefits he has gained from the mixed chorus:
My mother was involved in a terrible accident while my father was incapacitated with stroke. There was no assistance anywhere to pay my school fees and so [I] suddenly suffered from depression. When I finally came to school, beginning the day with mixed chorus, meeting people, laughing along the way of some jokes from some of the lecturers, listening and singing in harmony always makes me forget about such situations.

Sylvia, a Level 400 B.Mus. student who had a health challenge, shared her therapeutic experience:

Sir, I was diagnosed of migraine and bleeding ulcer about two years ago. The doctor has advised me not to put too much stress on my brain. The pain I sometimes go through is unbearable and it makes me fall unconscious at times. I therefore find it difficult mingling with people because I can fall down like someone with epilepsy anytime my condition becomes severe. I just therefore avoid people to save me from disgrace in case my condition emerges. I have to be taking expensive drugs to get along but, anytime I attend mixed chorus and sing, my pain subsides and I feel as if nothing was wrong with me. I get hope and feel being part of a big family. As far as I continue to be a student here, mixed chorus is my efficacious medicine.

Each and every participant had something to say and that reflected in their responses to the questionnaire administered to them. The data gathered through interview also revealed that attentiveness, deep breathing, commitment, physical fitness, sharing and brain stimulation are some generative mechanisms which can foster the therapeutic effect of choral singing.

**Discussion**

The study showed the tremendous benefits of singing in the lives of the respondents as a greater percentage of them were more articulate about the importance of the mixed chorus and how it had contributed to their wellbeing and quality of their professional growth. The identified themes, which included emotional, psychological, social and physical wellbeing, in connection with singing at the mixed chorus were discussed. While singing at mixed chorus, for some respondents, was just part of an academic exercise, for others, it functioned as a way of sharing and connecting in their lives, linking life events, thereby promot-
ing personal wellbeing. For some it was therapeutic, and for others, it had a strong spiritual significance.

Under emotional effect, participants indicated how the mixed chorus released their tension and relieved them of sadness because it usually uplifted them spiritually. Students stressed that as members of the chorus, they became team players and therefore helped one another by reciprocally offering invaluable strength and support to cope with emotional stress. Sometimes, individual troubles and frustrations were held in check because singing at mixed chorus was predominated with concentration. Nevertheless, the joy of performing with attentiveness, the harmony, the resonance and chord progressions of song, affected the innermost beings and psyches of participants, including the performers and the trainers every time there was performance. Participants explained this, by showing how they reach new heights of being, singing together at the mixed chorus. They further claimed that it was an experience that did not exist outside the frontiers of the University. Participants also stressed that they feel positive during mixed chorus and their mood was raised as the lesson induced positive emotions. Invariably, problems carried from the home were forgotten due to the chorus, thereby improving their self-confidence.

Psychologically, the mixed chorus involves education and learning, which keeps the mind active and counteracts the decline of the cognitive functions of the brain. This benefit results from keeping the brain active and having to concentrate during the session, an act which prevents cognitive and intellectual deterioration. This became evident when participants affirmed that they become mentally alert and tolerant as they adjusted to the singing, in tune with other colleagues, of the various parts in the chorus. ‘It opens my mind and makes me become attentive to listen to those within my parts and the other parts as well’, affirms Kwofie, a Level 300 B.Mus. student.

In social terms, sharing and connecting with other colleagues in singing provide important opportunities for socialising, meeting and interacting with others. Students are always brought together at mixed chorus sessions thereby giving individuals the opportunity to attract and be attracted to the enjoyment of singing as the texts of the songs provide ‘imaginative play’ and spiritual fulfilment to them. Through socialisation, participants had a feeling of contentment and security and sometimes got distracted from their medical conditions, thus making them feel physically and psychologically uplifted. A typical example is that of Sylvia whose predicament is quite pathetic but for whom the mixed chorus offers a supporting network of social relationships which alleviates her feelings of isolation and loneliness.

Physically, most students find singing an athletic activity that provides not only inner happiness and contentment but also internal peace, which conse-
quently restores and rejuvenates their energy levels. It is true that singing involves deep controlled breathing, which counteracts anxiety. Deep breathing is likely to subdue anxiety and stress. Deep breathing involves an uninterrupted airflow, consistency of sound in all registers, phrasing and artistry, and all these have a positive effect on stress management. Mixed chorus involves a regular commitment to attend sessions scheduled within the week and that motivates people to avoid being physically inactive.

The study also reveals that singing can facilitate the improvement of health and wellbeing if some important generative mechanisms are put in place. It is therefore important that these mechanisms are stressed during singing at mixed chorus. This includes the articulation of chosen texts of the songs with emotionality. It is well articulated words with expressive diligence that yield a better understanding of the performance and needed emotional benefits of not only the performers but also the listeners. Emmons and Thomas (1998) comment thus on the singer’s dilemma in terms of expressing emotionality:

The singer’s indefatigable quest for a higher level of expression defines the basic elements of singing. They are two: the musical element of the voice (accurate, sustained vowels) and the expressive communication of speech (well-defined consonants). Singers and their teachers seek a diction that is as clear as speech. (p. 68)

Emmons and Thomas are of the view that clear diction in singing promotes good intonation, text comprehension and expressiveness in performance. Also, imagery-based exercises are relevant to vocal training to help participants develop and connect their minds and vocal capabilities to suit the intent of the composer. It is important to draw on the imagination in order to help the performer seamlessly integrate his or her understanding of the composer’s intent and their own interpretive choices. These ideas always engage the mind and body towards feeling and eventually expressing emotion. As Jourdain (1997, p. 103) puts it, ‘music interacts with the brain during listening, performance and understanding, culminating with the emotional aspect of music’. For example, singers can be made to articulate some text by imitating the breathing trend of someone who has just finished a sprint or marathon race. A child’s cry or a dog’s bark can be used as scenarios for imagery exercises which will have particular effects on emotional expression.

Loud speaking and exposure to background noise may strain the voices while incorrect posture may affect active singing and, for that reason, such musical practices should be avoided. This is why Gates, Forrest and Obert (2013) contend that:
most people, including singers, spend the majority of their vocal load speaking rather than singing. Singers’ spoken voice should be well placed, supported, and free of strain on the vocal mechanism. They should review their speaking mannerisms so as to promote healthy every day voicing. Incorrect posture may cause disconnection with one’s support mechanism, place undesired stress on the extrinsic musculature of the larynx thus affecting laryngeal height. (p. 24)

It is important that abuse of voices and incorrect postures are avoided in performance since sometimes, singers are not conscious of their posture during singing performances. Singers may also benefit from finding their optimal speaking pitch to avoid voice strains. Singing passages lying at the extremes of a singer’s range, an octave higher or lower than marked, and singing entrances at audible levels can be a threat to the health of the voice (Miller, 1996, p. 95). Students should therefore know their limits. Likewise, trainers need to audition students for correct part placement in the mixed chorus. To deal with this problem, McKinney (1994) suggests that the hyperfunctional phonation/laryngeal tension must be checked. McKinney recommends some self-introspective prompts which I find meaningful: Is your voice classification too high? Is the singer singing too loud? Is the breath support locked? Is the posture tense/rigid? Are articulatory muscle hyperfunctional? Does the student have wrong vocal models? Is there tension from personality problems? Indeed, positive responses to these questions will definitely induce good singing habits to yield the desired therapeutic effects.

Though the study sought to investigate the positive benefits of the mixed chorus, it was revealed that contemporary pieces are not included in the songs selected for the mixed chorus. Furthermore, warm-ups during training sessions have not been effective because they do not conform to the techniques of the song chosen to be learnt. Exercises are overstretched with high pitches. Continuity of such practice may affect the vocal health of the singers. Warm-ups should appropriately suit the repertoire at hand. This is because the principle that lies behind the notion of warm-up or cooling down is similar to that of athletes needing to warm-up their bodies before daily practice to reduce injury (Miller, 1996). Miller is of the view that these exercises keep the body healthy because singing in itself cannot be done without good health.

Individuals are able to meld the psyche, intellect and emotions. Singing is meant to bring together the whole physical and spiritual being of a person. The benefits of mixed chorus surpass any other art form in respect of spiritual revitalisation, intellectual stimulation, and physical pleasure. Finally, singing re-
quires of performers constant practice. In an academic institution like this, it is extremely hard to juggle both chorus sessions and other curricular commitments. However, constant practice will help the singers to be musically imaginative (Elliott, 1995).

**Conclusion**

The mixed chorus experience in many ways can serve as a mechanism for measuring and maintaining a sense of wellbeing. It appears that it can provide people with alternative solutions to everyday challenges, such as overcoming stress, maintaining an active physical and cognitive function, finding ways of remaining socially relevant and feeling less isolated. It is one of the most important ways to maintain physical health, psychological wellbeing, social activity and cognitive sharpness because it also involves reading, at sight, unknown pieces in the course of training. It is, however, suggested that contemporary pieces be included in the musical repertoire to serve the interest of students who are into that genre. This study has proved that the mixed chorus experience has therapeutic benefits and enhances the wellbeing of all participants. If it is well executed with the associated generative mechanisms, the ramifications for health and wellbeing would be immense. Skills such as breathing, articulation and good posture, must be developed and established to create positive emotions, sharpen the brain and nurture we-feeling. When these are put in place, indeed, the mixed chorus experience will be one of the key factors of solving problems relating to health and wellbeing.
References


The Ecology of Gahu: Participatory Music and Health Benefits of Ewe Performance in a Canadian Drum and Dance Ensemble

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Abstract: Ghanaian music and dance provide a rich environment for social interaction, which is a significant contributory factor to health and well-being, both for individuals and the communities in which they live. The vibrant and energetic drumming and dance of the popular Ewe piece Gahu offer numerous opportunities for participatory music-making, not only in Ghana but throughout the world, in performance, educational and community settings. Through video analysis and discussion of cross-disciplinary research, this article identifies the ecological factors present in a Canadian university performance of Gahu that play a positive role in the health of the students involved.

Keywords: Gahu performance, dancing, health, entrainment, participatory music

Ghanaian recreational music and dance are a source of inspiration and pleasure to many, drawing Africans and non-Africans alike into the inclusive, full-body, artistic experience that both of them provide. The compelling sounds of interlocking rhythms on drums led by circular patterns on iron bells, supported by the perpetual motion of dancers and group singing, combine in a manner that has both an invigorating energy and timeless appeal. Factors such as the make-up of the individuals creating the music, the social relationships between them, and the space and time of the event, are instrumental in creating an environment conducive to improving social, mental and physical health. In examining links between music and wellbeing, it is useful to reflect on information from several disciplines for connections and insight. In the introduction to The Oxford Handbook of Medical Ethnomusicology, Benjamin Koen and his colleagues acknowledge the complex ways in which music and healing are intimately related to our “biological, psychological, social, emotional and spiritual
domains of life, all of which frame our experiences, beliefs, and understandings of health and healing, illness and disease, and life and death” (2008, p. 4). Collaborations between researchers and scholars across disciplines are contributing to a wider pool of knowledge. These disciplines include the physical and social sciences, medicine, music and healing arts. Drawing upon research from these fields, as well as a discussion of *musicking*, participatory musics and entrainment, this article will examine the ecological factors present in a Canadian student performance of Ghanaian drumming and dancing that provide an environment conducive to positive health.

Ecology deals with relationships and interactions among individuals. These interactions are what Christopher Small (1998) describes in his concept of “musicking”. He writes, “if we widen the circle of our attention to take in the entire set of relationships that constitutes a performance, we shall see that music’s primary meanings are not individual at all but social” (p. 8). This kind of social interaction is a significant contributory factor to health and wellbeing, both for individuals and the communities in which they live, as Clift and Hancock (2010), Putnam (2000), and Stige (2006) have shown. Research conducted with choirs clearly documents the health advantages of singing in a group setting. Advantages include increased positive mood, focused concentration, controlled deep breathing leading to reduced anxiety and stress mitigation, improved immune system, social support, and cognitive stimulation (Clift & Hancock, 2010). Although both passive and active music-making have been shown to provide health benefits to individuals in clinical therapeutic settings (Bernatsky, Strickner, Presch, Wendtner, & Kullich, 2012), the environment of those engaged in the music-making including the interactions and relationships among people, are highly important and can amplify the benefits of music. In therapeutic fields, positive impacts on health and wellness have been shown when the focus moves from the individual participation of the client to include interaction between the client and the therapist, and in some cases a larger community (Stige, 2006).

The importance of relationships and community are also reflected in the participatory nature of music itself. An ensemble of Ghanaian drumming, singing and dancing encompasses many of the elements found in participatory musics as outlined by Thomas Turino (2008). These large social and musical gatherings facilitate multiple layers of skill, experience, and intent in the music-making, often emphasising participation over artistic output. Many participatory musics use rhythm as a central unifying factor (Turino, 2008). Recent research in science and medicine supports the premise that rhythm plays an important role in wellness and the promotion of healing (Thaut, 2013; Clayton, Sager, & Will, 2004). The concept of rhythmic entrainment is important to the discussion
of music and health connections. Ethnomusicologist Martin Clayton has been examining entrainment and its application to music. He describes the concept as “the process by which independent rhythmical systems interact with each other” (2012, p. 49). The gradual process of entrainment such as between drummers and dancers in a Ghanaian-style ensemble, brings the rhythms and movements into a “consistent relationship that continues to be negotiated on an on-going basis, providing an intimate connection between participants” (Bluedorn, quoted in Clayton et al., 2004, p. 10). The factors outlined above – the participants; the space and time of the event; the relationships among those involved; rhythmic entrainment; the participatory nature of the music – have a significant impact on the health and wellbeing of members in a Ghanaian-style drum and dance ensemble. In this article, the ecological factors identified will be further discussed in relation to music and dance.

The focus of the present investigation is an analysis of the Ewe drum and dance piece Gahu, as it was performed on 23 November 2012 in the Kailash Mital Theatre at Carleton University in Ottawa, Canada, by two student ensembles that I direct—the Carleton University West African Rhythm Ensemble (WARE) and the Baobab Youth Performers.¹ Gahu is a recreational piece of the Ewe people of south-eastern Ghana. A rich texture of stick drumming, dancing and singing, Gahu developed among the Ewes in the 1950’s, and according to Kobla Ladzekpo, “was brought to Ghana by Yoruba speakers from Benin and Nigeria as a form of satirical commentary on modernization in Africa” (quoted in Locke, 1987, p. 5). The Gahu instrumental ensemble usually consists of gankogui (double iron bell), axatse (gourd rattles), and three supporting drums—sogo, kidi, and kagan—that are played with sticks, built in the shape of wooden barrels, with antelope skin heads and represent a range of sizes: large, medium, and small. These five supporting parts form a dense fabric overtop which the lead drummer plays on the large gboba drum, also a barrel-style drum that is played with sticks. In some instances, the tall atsimevu lead drum is used for certain sections of the piece. The gboba periodically calls rhythmic variations to which the sogo and kidi respond. Commonly, in Gahu performance, the dancers form a circle around the drums, and travel as a pulsing, rhythmic unit, and also respond to calls from the lead drum with corresponding pre-determined moves. In a Ghanaian village-style Gahu, the drum variations and choreography

¹ The full video for this performance can be found at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WLWNUdn2D6E and select stills, photos and thick description are provided in this article. Time codes will be indicated in brackets (e.g., 1:01). The video analysis described in this article provided preliminary data for the quantitative and qualitative research I subsequently undertook with the Carleton West African Rhythm Ensemble for my MA thesis (Armstrong, 2016).
may be relatively simple, whereas cultural troupes in schools and urban centres often have more change and complexity in their arrangements, typical of presentational styles. Songs occur throughout, led by different singers in call-and-response style, most often in the Ewe language, with some Yoruba lyrics present from Gahu’s origins. Participants enjoy the high-spirited and playful elements of the music and dance. These vibrant musical characteristics have made Gahu a popular artistic export and it is taught and performed in a variety of settings throughout the world, including many educational institutions (Dor, 2014; Locke, 1987 & 2004).

Participants

The West African Rhythm Ensemble (WARE) is one of several performance groups available to the students in Carleton University’s Music Department, which resides in the School for Studies in Art and Culture. The ensemble is comprised primarily of undergraduate music students, most of whom have never played percussion or danced in this style before. WARE, along with ensembles in other genres, contributes to the overall musical education of students enrolled in the Bachelor of Music degree program. Baobab Youth Performers ensemble is an educational afterschool arts program for teens from across the Ottawa region that employs West African rhythms, songs, and movement as the impetus for community connection. Leadership skills are developed through mentoring opportunities and public performances. Similar to WARE, Baobab Youth members generally have no prior experience with this music and dance before joining the group. As director of both ensembles, I bring them together occasionally for collaborative events and performances, as it provides a rich environment for community connection, multi-age groupings, leadership and mentoring opportunities, as well as, an economical means of working with visiting Ghanaian guest artists. The guest artist for this performance was Nani Agbeli, a dynamic and highly skilled performer in traditional Ghanaian drum and dance styles. At the time of the performance Nani Agbeli was director of Tuft University’s Kiniwe Ensemble in Medford, Massachusetts. He is currently the Director of West African Music, Dance and Arts at the California Institute of the Arts. Coming from the Ewe village of Kopeyia, near the Ghanaian border with Togo, Nani grew up in a family of drummers, inspired and taught by his father, the late Godwin Agbeli, a well-respected performer, teacher and researcher of Ewe music and dance. Nani’s relative youth, magnetism, high standards, and excellent teaching skills were inspiring for the students in the two Canadian groups.

My own involvement with this style of music dates back to 1984, when I was first introduced to Ghanaian rhythms, as part of my undergraduate studies, as a percussionist at the University of Toronto. In our sessions, the drumming
was not accompanied by dancing or singing, yet the transformative nature of the rhythms was clearly evident and compelled me to look further into the music and dance. In addition to the percussion class at the University, I participated in workshops and later joined a community ensemble whose members were both Canadian and Ghanaian-born. Eventually I travelled to Ghana in 1990 for several months of immersive study. Through subsequent years of studying in Ghana, and teaching and performing the music and dance in diverse settings, my appreciation of the transformative power of this performance has only grown as I have observed a multitude of health benefits in those participating.

Figure 1: Still (1:01) from the recording of a Gahu performance on 23 November 2012 at Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada, by WARE and Baobab Youth Performers.

Ethnomusicologist Steven Friedson (2009) has said that Ghanaian Ewe music “does more than expend energy – it makes it!” (p. 117). Just what is it about this music and dance that creates such extraordinary energy? Figure 1 shows the first video still (1:01) of the Gahu performance on 23 November 2012 at Carleton University. This Canadian setting is a formal stage in a hall that seats approximately 450 audience members and has professional lighting and sound capabilities. The performers are arranged in a circle, with the drums in the center, radiating sound and energy out to the dancers and back again. This typical Gahu formation is often seen in Ghana. Performers are a self-contained unit, engaging primarily with each other and not so much with the audience, as is otherwise common on a stage such as this. In this performance, there were approx-
imately 45 people involved, generally moving and playing together. Occasionally, an individual performer may catch the attention of the audience for various reasons: perhaps a louder singing voice, foot movements that might be slightly out of sync, particularly integrated movements, and so on. The basic dance movement involves advancing in the circle by taking two steps with each foot, alternating right, right, left, left, and with the weight on the back leg which is held straight, thereby producing a subtle and stylistically desirable hip movement. The upper body leans forward slightly and the arms sway in tandem across the body, swinging in the opposite direction of the front foot. These movements produce a balanced effect that is both grounded and forward-moving. It is clear though, that not everyone moves at precisely the same time, particularly at the beginning of the piece (1:02). Concepts of groove, synchronicity and entrainment will be discussed in the course of this article. Some call-and-response singing in the Ewe language is heard on top of the gankogui and axatse, and soon the supporting sogo, kidi and kagan drum parts begin with their interlocking patterns (1:02). When the lead drummer plays the first variation call on gboba, the dancers signal acknowledgement by raising their arms before bending low in a more vigorous move (1:03). The tempo then increases, guided by the gboba, and the group starts to cohere their movements to a greater extent. The lead drummer calls the dancers to exit the variation and we see them respond by returning to the basic move, with noticeably more energy and connection to one another than they had exhibited at the opening of the piece.

**Relationship**

Christopher Small (1998) views a musical event as an encounter between human beings, with relationship at the heart of the meaning. Having introduced the participants in this performance, let us now consider Small’s question: “What does it mean when this performance takes place at this time, in this place, with these participants?” (1998, p. 10). This is a critical question and one that is central to understanding the health value of the performance of Gahu. For members of WARE and Baobab Youth, Gahu is a foundational piece in their repertoire, one that is performed every season, along with other styles of Ghanaian recreational music. The repetition of Gahu every year provides returning members of the groups with familiarity while, at the same time, offering newcomers a well-honed structure in which they can learn new skills and socially connect with other members. With many options for drum and dance variations as well as songs, Gahu can be experienced as both the same and new to those participating. In my role as an educator and director of these ensembles, I look for ways to challenge individual students by having them change roles in pieces every year. This provides an experience of ‘flow’ (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990) for the
participants, important in the discussion of the links between music and well-being.

Csikszentmihalyi states that when there is an absence of stress, combined with a balance between challenge and skill level, participants can experience flow, leading to feelings of pleasure, focus and motivation (1990). The experience of Gahu is different every time, due to the composition of the group, the setting, the emotional and physical engagement of the participants, and the overall energy and flow generated by the experience. I can say from my own perspective, having led and participated in hundreds of performances of Gahu over three decades, that no two events are alike. This addresses the question Christopher Small poses above (this performance, this time, this place, these participants) as it is the subtle and not-so-subtle differences in each performance that contribute to Gahu being such an engaging and enriching experience. Being in-the-moment is crucial to this style of music. The nature and meaning of the experience lie in the actions of people. Performing on stage can produce feelings of nervousness and anxiety that may inhibit the focus on the present moment. However, the style of music and the abundance of participatory factors encourage the students in this performance to deeply engage with the music, one another, and the energy of the guest artist. Both Baobab Youth and WARE are accustomed to performing participatory styles in various presentational settings. In my teaching, I try to bring certain fundamental qualities of a Ghanaian Gahu experience to my students, while acknowledging our outsider efforts—the diverse individual cultural experiences (or backgrounds) and norms that performers inevitably bring into the performance. Many of those fundamental qualities I consider important in my teaching are found in characteristics of participatory musics, which I will discuss later in this article.

Small (1998) highlights not only the relationship between sounds, but also the participants’ relationship to the outside world, observing that musicking is a way of engaging in the relationships between relationships, which, in his opinion, is where the meaning lies (p. 48). For instance, in this performance of Gahu, we do not only see the establishment of musical and social relationships among the participants, as well as, between them and the audience, but everyone brings in their relationship with the outside world, thereby providing meaning based on their own projections. This could include feelings of belonging or exclusion, concepts of education and music or experiences related to Africa and the community. Musicking is a way of knowing our own world through the experiential order of relationships. “In knowing it, we learn how to live well in it” (Small, 1998, p. 50). For students in the formative adolescent and young adult years, participating in Gahu provides a framework within which to explore their identity in relation to others.
In addition to the relationships between the participants, one of the most important components of this analysis is the concept of participation itself. A definition of the term that resonates with this study comes from music therapist Brynjulf Stige (2006):

Participation is a process of communal experience and mutual recognition, where individuals collaborate in a socially and culturally organized structure (a community), create goods indigenous to this structure, develop relationships to the activities, artefacts, agents, arenas and agendas involved, and negotiate on values that may reproduce or transform the community. (p. 134, emphasis in original)

Stige’s definition reflects his experience and research in community music therapy sessions, underlining the idea that musical interventions for promoting health involve a series of relationships, and not only the individual participation of the client or patient. In this way, participation becomes more than the acquisition of knowledge and skills; it is about becoming part of an evolving community (2006, p. 127). This reflects the kinds of experiences members of WARE and Baobab Youth Performers have, as they form a community while obtaining new skills and working on a collaborative activity. Participation in this kind of drum and dance ensemble provides many opportunities for bodily knowledge and social interaction: interlocking drum patterns that “speak” to one other, musical dialogue between the lead drum and dancers, full body engagement with rhythm, active listening and non-verbal communication. Each of the groups in this video performance have navigated these musical and personal relationships within their respective groups in the context of a positive educational environment. There was a mutual recognition when WARE and Baobab Youth met to work together in preparation for this particular concert collaboration. Their prior experience with this music and dance along with my teaching style provided an environment that encouraged certain values and expectations such as inclusivity, social connection, and the freedom to make mistakes and to be themselves, collaborative effort, and personal challenge, including the acquisition of new skills (Armstrong, 2016). Joining together for this larger concert al-

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² Active listening refers to a way of listening that requires full concentration and attentiveness. A term used in therapy and conflict management fields, it promotes deeper understanding between people. Learning how to listen for and respond to complex drum patterns develops a similar kind of active listening. My students have remarked on their increased ability to focus, to absorb content in academic lectures, and to interact socially and musically with peers as a result of their engagement with Ghanaian drum and dance repertoire (Armstrong, 2016).
lowed for connection to a wider community, fostering personal enjoyment and a positive educational environment.

**Participatory Music-Making**

In his book *Music as Social Life*, Thomas Turino (2008) observes that in participatory music-making throughout the world, there is often no distinction between audience and performer, and that everyone present can and should participate, to the best of their ability (p. 29). This reinforces a feeling of belonging, which has strong social health implications (Centre for Addiction and Mental Health et al., 2013). The primary focus is on the doing, or musicking (Small, 1998, p. 8). The social factor of the event is valued over the quality of the sound (or in the case of Gahu, sound, and movement). In his research, Turino (2008) has identified some features and practices that are frequently found in participatory musics throughout the world. They are important to our understanding of the connections between health and Ghanaian music and dancing. These features both inspire and support participation and contribute to social cohesion, which has been shown to increase health and wellness (Stige, 2006; Clayton et al., 2004). We shall consider four of Turino’s (2008) characteristics of participatory music-making here, beginning with form and repetition.

The form of participatory music is usually open and depends on contributions from the individuals participating. The musical events are not fully pre-planned, and embody many in-the-moment decisions. The music contains cyclical patterns and ostinati, and the form is often made up of short sections. The constancy of these sections provides security for the performers; repetition might be boring for an audience but for the participants it actually heightens the intensity of the experience.

Rhythmic repetition and social synchrony: These important features of participatory music-making include repetition and mirroring, in both gesture and body language. This occurs in dance and music and provides a level of comfort for the participants. It is a tacit identification between people that helps them feel connected and successful in their endeavor. These musical features become signposts and markers since the music is not scripted. This results in a *felt* sense of belonging.

Musical texture, timbre, tuning, and density: Some shared musical elements contribute to participatory musics throughout the world. These traits inspire participation without too much worry that an individual will be singled out. Elements such as a dense texture, overlapping parts and buzzing sounds on the instruments, all provide a cloaking function. In addition, Turino notes that the acceptable tuning of instruments and voices is “wider” in these styles, again allowing for maximum participation.
Virtuosity and soloing: One might be under the impression that music in participatory cultures does not allow for exceptional talents to be seen and heard. This is not the case. Virtuosity is certainly present and valued, however it is usually situated within the texture of the larger experience, otherwise it would discourage participation. Often one can see examples of call-and-response that allow for brief soloing and virtuosity. This also appears in dance forms, when one dancer takes to the floor in the center of a circle for a brief time before the next soloist. This sequential (and sometimes simultaneous) soloing is common.

With these characteristics in mind, one can state that Gahu offers an ideal artistic experience for Canadian students, inviting them into a community of social music-making. If we apply Turino’s participatory framework, we see that the musical form of Gahu is open, led by the large gboba drum and framed by the cyclical gankogui pattern. The texture is dense, with several overlapping and interlocking stick drum patterns as well as a few axatse rattles providing a buzzing rhythmic background. There are many examples of observable gestural mirroring among the drummers, dancers, and between these two performing groups.

Figure 2: Still (1:03:30) from Gahu performance on 23 November 2012.

This mirroring can be seen in the visual examples provided. Several Ghanaian styles of music and dance support multiple levels of skill and experience, and Gahu is no exception. Participants in the particular performance under consideration here encompassed a range of ages, as well as a variety of musical and non-musical backgrounds, rhythmic skills, comfort with movement, and experience with the style of music, allowing for mentoring opportunities during re-
hearsals and performances. With a basic competence, the groups could work with a very gifted guest artist, in this case, Nani Agbeli, who particularly stood out in this student performance, while soloing on top of the texture of rhythm and dance. In the second video still in Figure 2 we can see some of the participatory factors and relationships present.

At this moment in the performance (1:03:30), the lead drummer calls the second variation in this Gahu. The *sogo* and *kidi* supporting drums respond with a rhythmic answer. This changes the sound of the drumming texture and puts the constant pattern of the *kagan* drum into a new rhythmic relationship with the other instruments. The dancers also respond to the call by placing their hands on their hips and leaning forward, while continuing to move forward with the double foot step. Part two of this variation sends the dancers even lower, accentuating the uniformity of their movements. One of the drummers turns his head and expresses his appreciation of this new energy, making eye contact with some of the dancers. It is apparent that the group’s cohesiveness has increased during this second variation due to the intensity and synchrony of movement and sound, and participants’ engaged facial expressions. Once again, the lead drummer calls the dancers and drummers to exit the variation and return to the basic patterns, noted by the synchrony of the dancers and increased rhythmic consistency among the drummers.

**Rhythmic Entrainment**

Beyond the rhythmic synchrony we hear and observe between dancers and drummers, additional activity is occurring at a deeper physical and neurological level. New research into the functioning of the brain and body has provided us with a scientific understanding of the power that rhythm has to unite people and provide health benefits. In his book, *Rhythm, Music and the Brain*, Michael Thaut (2013) observes the recent shift in the music therapy paradigm, from a concept rooted in the social sciences to one that is informed by neuroscience (p. 113). We know that music plays an important function in bringing people together; it provides pleasure, and produces feelings of wellbeing. Throughout history, music has been considered a useful tool for developing emotional expression, providing a distraction from pain and suffering, increasing social interaction and building community (LaGasse & Thaut, 2012, p. 153). Thaut notes that music is found in all known cultures throughout history, which indicates that it may play more than an accompanying role in our biological and neurological functions. He writes:

Brain research involving music has shown that music has a distinct influence on the brain by stimulating physiologically complex cog-
nitive, affective, and sensorimotor processes. The fascinating consequence of this research for music therapy has been a new body of neuroscientific research that shows effective uses of music with therapeutic outcomes that are considerably stronger and more specific than those produced within the general concept of well-being. (2013, p. 115)

As I mentioned in my introduction, the concept of entrainment is central to our understanding of music and the brain, as well as to the present analysis. All organisms have the capacity to respond to external rhythm, such as patterns of day and night, weather, and tides, and these are necessary evolutionary tools. As humans, we have the added skill of being able to entrain to a wide variety of tempi, integrate what we hear into our minds and bodies, and then generate rhythmic responses to what we hear (Philips-Silver, Aktipis, & Bryant, 2010). This skill is important for communication, attracting individuals for mating, and gathering in groups. The integration of both the perception and production of rhythm makes it possible for humans to systematically alter rhythmic production, based on the rhythm we perceive in our environment (Philips-Silver et al., 2010). This enables us to achieve group synchrony, or social entrainment. Ethnomusicologists Will and Turow (2011) note that although the terms are sometimes used interchangeably in the literature, synchronization does not necessarily indicate that entrainment is taking place. Entrainment occurs when two or more autonomous rhythmic processes become more aligned over time, as a result of prolonged interaction. This means that they each must have an internal energy source that is capable of producing rhythm on its own. Resonance, for instance is not considered a form of entrainment (Will & Turow 2011, pp. 11-12).

For members of WARE and Baobab Youth Performers, the entrainment between drummers and dancers that evolves over the course of a 20-30 minute interpretation of Gahu is palpable. Entrainment is occurring at both the intra-individual and intra-group levels (Clayton, 2012, p. 51). Each performer is entraining within themselves and also within the group. After a prolonged period of interaction, the drummers have a tighter groove, and the dancers’ bodies are much more aligned with the drum rhythms and each other. Playing music together, dancing, and singing in a group are all forms of social and musical entrainment, but these are not only recreational pleasures. Entrainment has been studied in both biological and mechanical systems (Clayton, 2012, p. 49). As a form of social synchrony among humans, entrainment promotes cooperation and affiliation, which can facilitate higher-level organization that needs real-time processing of rhythmic information such as large-scale building projects, collec-
itive foraging and predation. The ability of a community to drum and dance together can make these processes more efficient and effective (Philips-Silver et al., 2010). Clayton et al. (2004) have been examining the implications of entrainment in music research. Looking at verbal and non-verbal signals, which can also be understood as language and gesture, they highlight the process of entrainment and the importance of the shifting yet consistent relationship that happens. They also observe that “entrainment appears to be one of the fundamental processes providing an intimate connection between individuals, others, and the world around them” (p. 16). In fact, research shows a connection between entrainment and positive affect in communities (Warner quoted in Clayton et al. 2004, p. 13).

Interestingly, “rigid entrainment and precise synchrony in human rhythmic processes are not necessarily associated with health or positive affect. Entrainment that is not too ‘perfect’ generally provides a more positive social experience” (Clayton et al. 2004, 13). This supports Turino’s (2008) notion that participatory musics inspire people to join in, where a high level of synchronization is not required, and where social enjoyment is paramount. My involvement with Ghanaian music and dance as a student, educator and performer has provided experiences in both professional and community ensemble settings. In these situations—the social synchrony that develops over time, along with the musical entrainment between participants and instruments—combine for highly pleasurable encounters. The energy is often electric and palpable and there is an enjoyment and delight in sharing the experience with others, musicking together with a common intention.

Groove is a concept that often comes up in discussions of rhythmic styles of music. In Music Grooves, Keil (1994, p. 96) states that “the power of music lies in its participatory discrepancies. Music, to be personally involving and socially valuable, must be ‘out of time’ and ‘out of tune’”. This suggests a kind of entrainment between instruments and people that is not too tightly aligned but remains in a consistent relationship. These traits are found in many styles of music, including the Gahu performance I am examining. The variable rhythmic synchrony along with the slightly wider tuning of some of the singing from the students is combined together in an experience which is powerful, personally involving, and valuable to the students in terms of their social, mental, and physical health (Armstrong, 2016). One of Keil’s alternate descriptions of participatory discrepancy is a “semi-conscious or unconscious slightly out of synce” (1994, p. 96). Participants in this Canadian performance of Gahu move in and out of the collective groove depending on their skill set, their level of comfort with the musical material and their enjoyment in the moment. Their complete focus on what they are doing can be observed. How synchronized they are with-
in themselves or in relation to the larger group is something they may be con-
sciously aware of, or perhaps that knowledge resides deeper, at a felt-sense lev-
el.

This felt relationship to rhythm is something James Burns (2010) has
written about in detail. His theoretical approach to analyzing several styles of
African music recognizes a multi-sensorial perception where the rhythmic back-
ground of clapping, dancing and singing is integrated into the understanding of
the instrumental rhythms that occur. His concept of rhythmic archetypes suggest
a whole-body perception of Ghanaian music. Burns describes these archetypes
as rhythmic patterns that exist both on the “surface-structural level and the deep-
structural level” (Burns, 2010). They exist in relation to a “shared rhythmic
background” and performers visualize and feel the timing rather than count
pulses. He argues that the “rhythmic archetypes produce a tactile image that be-
comes embedded into the tactile memory over time, creating both a physical and
mental impression of each rhythm” (Burns, 2010). I have observed this with my
university students who can competently play the rhythm of the sogo drum in
Gahu yet often cannot place it correctly within the timing of the whole piece.
Where it lies in the gankogui cycle, and the combination of open (bounced) and
closed (muted) sounds on the drumhead compels the player to develop a physi-
cal relationship with the part, one that is lodged in the larger texture of rhythms
and movements in order to play it correctly. This example highlights the com-
plex elements involved in playing Ghanaian rhythms, particularly the im-
portance of the relationship and entrainment occurring between rhythmic ele-
ments. Two additional Gahu examples will illustrate these points.

In the photograph in Figure 3, the lead drummer has called for another
variation, one that begins with the dancers’ arms raised, as well as a vocal re-
sponse to his spontaneous vocal call (WARE, 2012, 1:06:15). The energy level
all around is clearly heightened and the music reflects it with increased tempo
and additional synchrony among dancers. There is also more fluidity in the hand
motions of the supporting drummers. This two-part variation then shifts to a sec-
tion that sees the dancers engage in a weave-like movement, face-to-face, as
they move around the circle in opposing directions, meeting and visually gree-
ting other members of the ensemble. For some, even though they have practiced
the dance movements, there is an element of discomfort, as their age and Can-
dian lifestyle rarely calls for this kind of intimate interaction through the arts.
Also, these two groups do not know each other that well socially since they do
not often perform together. However, most are observed making some kind of
visible connection when passing other participants. Even those who may feel
somewhat awkward or inexperienced are responding to gestures from others
who are more relaxed and confident in their performing roles. An audible
“whoop” is heard when the lead drummer delivers them back to their original position with a cue to end the variation, showing pleasure in completing the movement.

Figure 3: Photograph of Gahu performance (photo credit: Lyndon Goveas)

Figure 4: Photograph of Gahu performance (photo credit: Lyndon Goveas)
In the picture in Figure 4, the dancers have exited the stage while the drummers rearrange chairs for the guest artist, Nani Agbeli, to perform his solo on the *gboba*. Initiated by Nani, this move allows for the finale to be more presentational in style, taking advantage of the large stage and turning to communicate with the audience (WARE, 2012, 1:13:00). It is still within the parameters of participatory music-making, allowing for the student drummers to be part of the highly-skilled solo demonstration. It challenges them to the edge of their physical limits, where they are fortified by the energy of the soloist. The dancers can be heard offstage expressing themselves vocally, connecting to the final display.

Describing a model of social entrainment, McGrath and Kelly suggest that during musicking there is a “profound association between different humans at both a physiological and physical level” (cited in Clayton et al., 2004, p. 10) and this contributes to a sense of identity and belonging. Belonging to a community facilitates empowerment and social capital, which are major determinants of health (Freeman, King, & Pickett, 2011; Stige, 2006). In Western approaches to therapeutic health research, the focus is often on an individual’s participation and experience. Stige (2006) advocates for a model that assumes there is more to participation than “being there” or “joining in” and that a collaborative approach is desired, one that effects change in all parties (pp. 122-123). This therapy model suggests that collaborative music-making, as in the case of Gahu, has a strong potential for providing positive health benefits. The relationships and experiences that come from participatory music-making allow us to accumulate social capital.

The paradox of our contemporary world is that through technology we are able to connect to almost any person and place we desire, at any time, and yet often we find ourselves becoming more isolated and shut away from one another. This contradiction can be overwhelming to many, producing feelings of stress and anxiety, as well as deeper mental, social and physical health problems (Armstrong, 2016; Centre for Addiction and Mental Health et al., 2013). It is clear from emerging research in several disciplines, that being in relationship with other humans is central to our health and wellbeing.

As mentioned in the introduction, connections between singing, and health and wellbeing have been well documented in past studies. In their international study of community-based choirs, Clift and Hancox (2010) employed the World Health Organization’s Quality of Life questionnaire, which measures physical health, psychological health, social relationships, and environment, in the context of a person’s culture and value systems, and in relation to their personal goals, standards, and concerns. This type of research would be valuable to undertake with participants in a Ghanaian-style drum and dance ensemble and...
one could project that similar results would be generated from these kinds of physiological studies and survey interviews.

From the preceding visual examples, descriptions and discussion, we have observed several ecological elements in the performance of Gahu that are contributing to the health and wellbeing of the students: composition of the participants and the relationship they build with one another, the space and time of the event, multiple characteristics of participatory music-making, moderate rhythmic entrainment in both the drumming and dancing, and social cohesion. These factors are all at play within a framework of participatory musicking. Participating in a Ghanaian-style drum and dance ensemble offers not only unique learning and social opportunities for those involved, particularly for these students, but a way of being in relationship with other individuals that facilitates positive mental, social, and physical health advantages. The patterns found in the drumming, dancing, and singing of Gahu, combined with the non-verbal gesturing, provide a shared language that is a powerful force. Our understanding and knowledge of the benefits of musicking has deepened with the recent advances in neuroscience in combination with the effectiveness of ethnographic studies. Participatory music-making is much more central to our health and success as a species than was thought before, and our experience of rhythm has been clearly identified as a major contributor to wellbeing. Ghanaian recreational music and dance has the capacity to promote and support health and wellness in multifaceted ways and in varied settings around the world.
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Music and Wellbeing in Everyday Life: 
An Exploratory Study of Music Experience in Ghana

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Abstract: In this paper we highlight the experience of music in everyday contexts in Ghana. Using the Experience Sampling Method (ESM) and semi-structured interviews, we examined how people experience and use music in everyday life in potentially beneficial ways to enhance subjective wellbeing. In contrast to previous research where music’s self-regulatory role has been highlighted primarily in the context of solitary music listening, for the participants in our study music also played a crucial role as a form of social and participatory performance practice. This was particularly evident in the strong connection between music, religion, and social dance.

Keywords: Ghana, music experience, wellbeing, everyday life, Experience Sampling Method (ESM)

Music has become a ubiquitous feature of everyday life. From the home to public transportation, commercial spaces, and work music forms an integral part of people’s daily experience. In Ghana, sound systems are regularly mounted in public spaces to entertain guests at social functions such as funerals or church programmes. Store owners in the commercial districts of towns use music to lure customers into their shops. Music played from radio and television sets forms a perpetual acoustic background in many offices and private homes. Apart from open sound sources, mobile music technologies and personal stereos are also widespread. Portable MP3 players and radio receivers, which are now
integrated into most mobile phones, enable users to exert much greater control over their everyday soundscapes. It is a common way of life to see people walking around while listening to music with their earphones. While we agree with Steingo that we must be cautious “against overly optimistic, technophilic approaches to music and mobility” (Steingo, 2015, p. 103), it is nonetheless true that recorded music has become more accessible and that exposure to music in everyday contexts has significantly increased over the past decades, particularly through the introduction of personal stereos and the greater presence of sound reproduction technology. This enables people to carry their personal music libraries with them wherever they go, empowering them to manipulate their everyday soundscape. However, due to often very high sound levels, open sound sources can also become a public nuisance that leaves individuals with little or no control over the sonic environment in which they find themselves (Carl & Otchere, 2015).

This pervasive presence of sound technologies and recorded music gives rise to a number of questions which we seek to address in this article. How do people engage with music in their everyday lives? Where and with whom do they experience music? What music do people listen to and why do they choose particular genres in specific circumstances? What are the effects of music exposure, both voluntary and involuntary, and how do people use music in everyday life? Beyond the objective to find answers to these questions, our study also sought to test the suitability of the so-called Experience Sampling Method (ESM), a procedure that was developed to capture everyday experience both qualitatively and quantitatively. ESM has been widely applied in psychological research (Christensen, Feldman Barrett, Bliss-Moreau, Lebo, & Kaschub, 2003). However, as far as everyday music experience is concerned, it has, to the best of our knowledge, not been tested in an African context yet.

For readers unfamiliar with the Ghanaian cultural context, there are a number of recent studies that help situate our research within the context of the popular culture of urban southern Ghana (e.g., Schauert, 2015; Plageman, 2013; Shipley, 2013; Feld, 2012; Osumare, 2012). Since our present study has a much more limited focus, we simply refer readers to this literature and reserve a more thorough discussion of our research findings on Ghanaian popular culture for the future. Studies that have addressed everyday music experience are more generally situated within two broader fields. On the one hand, there are studies on music preferences and everyday music experience within the social psychology of music (e.g., Helsing, 2012; Hanser, 2010; North, 2010; Sloboda, 2010; Juslin, Liljeström, Västfjäll, Barradas, & Silva, 2008; Juslin & Laukka, 2004; North, Hargreaves, & Hargreaves, 2004; North & Hargreaves, 1996). These studies mostly employ quantitative research procedures. On the other hand are studies
in ethnomusicology and cultural sociology that deal with the phenomenology of everyday music experience from a predominantly qualitative perspective (e.g., Becker, 2004; Frith, 2002; DeNora, 1999, 2000; Crafts, Cavicchi, & Keil, 1993). The prime focus of both of these strands of research has been on listening (e.g., MacDonald, Kreutz, & Mitchell, 2012; Juslin & Sloboda, 2010; North & Hargreaves, 2008). Also, previous studies of music in everyday life have almost exclusively focused on Western subjects, with very few exceptions (e.g., Rana & North, 2007).

The general assumption that arises from the literature and which forms the basis of our argument as well is that people use music in their everyday lives in potentially beneficial ways—to increase subjective wellbeing. We understand “wellbeing” here beyond its usual but limited meaning as absence of illness and use it in its much broader sense as “the invisible context enabling us to pursue possibilities and engage in projects. It is the condition of possibility enabling us to follow through aims and goals, to act on our desires, to become who we are” (Carel quoted in Ansdell & DeNora, 2012, p. 110). A number of studies have approached everyday music experience from such a perspective. Hargreaves and North (1999), for instance, stressed music’s role in the management of self-identity, interpersonal relationships and mood. DeNora (1999 & 2000), also, highlighted the use of music as a mode of self-regulation and self-modulation, describing it as a “resource for the conduct of emotional work” (1999, p. 31).

A recent review of the body of literature on music and wellbeing in everyday life came to the conclusion that “responses to music occur frequently enough and for a large enough proportion of the population to be of relevance from a public health perspective” (Västfjäll, Juslin, & Hartig, 2012, p. 407). As research has, so far, been dominated by Western perspectives, our study can be understood both as a contribution to this field as well as a counterweight to the prevailing bias on Western listeners, highlighting the experience of music and its role in the management of subjective wellbeing in a Ghanaian setting. While our own background is in ethnomusicology, in this study, we purposely deviated from an ethnographic approach because we thought it would be interesting to test ESM in a Ghanaian context. We are aware of the limitations of such an approach and, consequently, the findings of this study. It is our hope that our research will be complemented by ethnographic research and more qualitatively-oriented studies in the future. Yet, we generally also see the need for a more integrated approach that moves towards a mixed methods paradigm (Bergman, 2008). We therefore see this study as a contribution to the broader dialogue encompassing psychological, sociological and anthropological perspectives on music, which are, still, too often divided along geographical and methodological lines.
Method

Participants

A total of 20 participants volunteered to take part in the study, responding to a call for participation that was published on notice boards around campus at the University of Cape Coast in Ghana. Seventeen of our volunteers were students, among them four students from the Department of Music and Dance and the rest from other faculties and departments. The three remaining participants were staff of the University, a clerk, a research assistant, and an administrator. Overall, five of the participants were female and the rest male. The majority were in the age range of 20-25 years, two were between 26-30 years and the other two above 30 years. All participants had Christian religious backgrounds.

Since one of the objectives of this study was to test the viability of ESM, it was necessary to find volunteers rather than randomly sample participants. This therefore ensured a high level of motivation and sincere interest in the questions our study sought to address. As an additional incentive to stay focused on the study, which was conducted over a period of two weeks, we gave out scratch cards with call credit worth five Ghanaian cedis to participants at the end of each week. We chose the university campus as location because we needed participants who were sufficiently literate and we also needed to be able to easily communicate with all of them throughout the study. An initial meeting with all participants was held on the day before the study commenced. At the meeting, we explained the details and objectives of the study and familiarised everyone with the response form. After the first week, half-way into the study, we briefly met with participants again to find out whether there were any challenges and to collect the first batch of response forms.

Procedure

ESM was first developed in the 1970s by social psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi together with colleagues at the University of Chicago (Csikszentmihalyi, Larson, & Prescott, 1977; Csikszentmihalyi & LeFevre, 1989). Originally, the method utilized electronic pagers that sent messages at random times, asking respondents to complete self-report forms containing both open-ended and scaled items designed to capture specific aspects of everyday experiences. ESM was part of efforts to overcome the shortcomings of experimental approaches that measure interactions and reactions to stimuli in decontextualized settings. The advantage of ESM over other procedures such as surveys, diaries, or the day reconstruction method is that it does not rely on retrospective verbal data but records people’s experience as it actually evolves in everyday real-life contexts. In contrast to ethnography, which relies on the researcher’s observations, ESM potentially allows glimpses into everyday experi-
ence which would otherwise remain hidden, as it actually uses participants’ self-observations.

Since the pager technology was not available to us, we adopted an approach that relied on the Short Messaging Services (SMS) of mobile providers (text messages), a technology that is wide-spread and could conveniently be utilized. On each day of the study, which was conducted over a time period of 14 days, we sent out one text to each participant at a randomly assigned time between 6:00 a.m. and 9:00 p.m., amounting to 20 messages per day and a total of 280 messages over the two-week period. The random time schedule was divided into 15 one-hour time slots for each day and constructed in such a way that the messages would be sent out to each participant in a different time-slot on each of the 14 days, thus achieving an approximately equal distribution of episodes for each participant, as well as, between participants. Table 1 shows the randomly generated texting schedule, the numbers 1-20 in the table representing the individual study participants.

Table 1: Two-week texting schedule

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The messages prompted respondents to immediately (or otherwise as soon as practically possible) fill a response form, a copy of which they had to carry along at all times throughout the course of the study. The form itself was adopted from a previous study conducted in the UK (Sloboda et al., 2001) and then modified to meet the demands of our specific context. It comprised two sections. The first section asked respondents whether they heard any music when receiving the text message. It then asked about their location and the main activity in which they were engaged at the time they were texted. In case there was no music, we also inquired whether participants experienced any music since they were last texted.
The second section asked more specific questions as to the nature and context of the music experience, in case there was any. We asked: Whom participants were with when they heard the musical sound? What genre was it? Through what medium? Then there were scaled items asking about respondents’ mood or emotional states immediately before and after hearing the music. We also wanted to know the degree of choice people had over the music being heard, their reasons for choosing a particular song, the impact of the song on them, and the activity in which they were engaged. Finally, the response form included a number of open-ended items where participants could, in their own words, detail the reasons for listening to a chosen music and the effects of that musical type on them.

The second instrument we used was semi-structured interviews which we conducted with all participants after the two-week period. Each interview took about 20-30 minutes. The major objective for doing this was to gain additional insight into participants’ experience with the ESM procedure and to identify possible problems associated with the method. We also wanted to find out whether the study period represented typical weeks with regard to exposure to music. Again, we wanted to determine whether the task of self-monitoring influenced participants’ overall perception of music. Additionally, the interviews were meant to give us complementary narrative data about participants’ everyday musical experiences. For this purpose, we randomly picked three to four of the completed response forms and asked those who provided the selected responses to elaborate on the exact circumstances and the nature of the reported experience in the respective episodes.

Results and Discussion

Viability of Method

Our participants returned 258 response forms out of a total of 280 time slots that were sampled, representing a response rate of 92.1%. Only 22 text messages (7.9%) remained unaccounted for. There were two respondents who, due to time constraints, returned only five and seven response forms out of the total of 14 assigned to each participant. One of them decided to quit the study after the first week. Nonetheless, the response rate of over 90% was relatively high.

Another indicator for the compliance of respondents was the time that elapsed between receipt of the text messages and the filling in of the response forms. In this analysis, we included a total of 248 forms with valid data (one respondent had problems with the time settings on his phone during the first week and was therefore not able fill in some portions of the forms). Based on the valid data, the average time participants took to respond to our text messages was 49.9
minutes. Cumulatively, 34.4% of the response forms were filled within five minutes after receipt of the text messages, 66.8% of responses occurred within 30 minutes and 80.2% within an hour after receiving the texts. There were significant differences in the response time between the participants, however. Our most committed participant took an average of just about two minutes to complete the response forms while the least committed participant took an average of over four hours to respond.

The authors of two previous ESM studies on everyday music experience who also used text messages instead of pagers reported that they relied on free-of-charge text messaging websites and automated schedules to send out messages to their participants (Rana & North, 2007; North et al., 2004). After pre-testing this method, however, we realized that this technology did not reliably work in the Ghanaian context, due to frequent problems with internet connectivity. We therefore decided to manually send out the text messages, prompted by an hourly alarm. A few problems, relating to technical delays in the communication networks, occurred which distorted our texting schedule. For instance, a few of the messages were not delivered instantly, resulting in a case where a participant received two messages in one day and missed a text on another. There were a few other instances where participants received their messages outside the 15-hour time window that we initially designed. In each case, the response forms were completed based on the time when participants actually received their messages.

Distribution of Episodes

Out of the total of 258 episodes, music was heard at the time when participants received the text message in 137 cases. Statistically, there was a 53.1% likelihood of respondents hearing music at any given time between 6:00 a.m. and 9:00 p.m. over the two weeks of study. By comparison, Sloboda et al. (2001) reported a 44% chance of music being heard within any given two-hour time slot between 8:00 a.m. and 10:00 p.m. and North et al. (2004) found the incidence of music exposure to be 38.6% within a 24-hour period. While both of these studies were conducted in the UK, similar research undertaken in Pakistan found that music exposure over a 24-hour period was on average 47.6% (Rana & North, 2007). Our study thus confirmed the generally high exposure of people to music in everyday life. In our case, participants were surrounded by some kind of music, be it self-chosen or imposed, roughly half of their waking hours.

For the remaining 121 episodes, participants reported that they had heard music since the last time they were texted in 69 cases and then filled in the response form accordingly with respect to that last musical experience. The total number of music episodes included in our final analysis was thus 206. Our data
showed no significant differences in the occurrence of music with regard to the time of the day. While we recorded slightly higher numbers of music episodes on weekends (Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays), the lowest number occurred on Mondays.

Table 2: Place of music and non-music episodes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place of episode</th>
<th>No music</th>
<th>Music</th>
<th>Total valid</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Home</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>47.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>26.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shops/Market</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertainment</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outdoors</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other venues</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total valid</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>239</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The question where participants were when they received the text messages was open-ended. We coded responses post hoc into seven categories as shown in Table 2. In 19 cases participants did not specify where they were when receiving the text message. Almost half (47.3%) of the valid episodes took place at participants’ home (which included halls of residence and hostels for the students who participated in the study). This was followed by roughly a quarter of episodes (26.8%) that took place at work (which, in our case, included lecture halls, the library, etc.). Other places where episodes occurred included entertainment venues (bars and restaurants) (6.7%), churches (6.3%), public transportation (none of our participants owned a car) (5%), and outdoors (5%). Our analysis showed clear differences with regard to music in relation to place. The mean presence of music was lowest outdoors (58.3%) and at the work place (59.4%) and much higher at home (84.1%), in church (93.3%) and at entertainment venues (93.8%). Most significantly stood out the episodes recorded in public transport, all of which (100%) included music.

The response form also allowed participants to freely specify the main activity they were engaged in when receiving the text messages. When coding the responses post hoc we identified five broad categories, labelled “time filler”, “personal”, “leisure”, “religion” and “work”. The “personal”, “leisure” and “work” categories were further divided into subcategories such as states of being, personal maintenance and travelling for personal activities, and in the case of “leisure” and “work”, specifying whether the activity was predominantly soli-
tary, involved interaction with others, or was mainly focused on a musical activity such as listening or performing itself (see Table 3). Table 4 shows the distribution of music episodes in relation to both place and the main activity.

**Table 3: Categorization of activities**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time filler</td>
<td>Waiting, sitting idle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal — being</td>
<td>Sleeping, taking a nap, waking up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>— maintenance</td>
<td>Bathing, washing, eating, shopping, cooking, medical check-up, ironing, getting dressed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>— travelling</td>
<td>Driving in a car/taxi, walking, going to work/home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leisure — others</td>
<td>Chatting, socialising, attending social programme, at football park</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>— solitary</td>
<td>Watching movie/TV, relaxing, reading, playing computer game, browsing the internet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>— music</td>
<td>Listening to music, watching performance, at a concert, choir rehearsal, singing, playing instrument, dancing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>Praying, worshipping, morning devotion, in church, connecting with God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work — solitary</td>
<td>Studying, typing, writing notes, library research, reading for study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>— others</td>
<td>In lecture, group discussion, in meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>— music</td>
<td>In a dance/music class, participating in departmental performance, practicing for performance studies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Out of the total 187 music episodes, music itself was the main focus in only 15 episodes (8%) as a leisure activity (mostly concentrated listening) and in 7 cases (3.7%) as part of work (students participating in a music or dance class). Thus, in the vast majority of episodes (88.3%), music accompanied other activities. Looking at the absolute figures, we recorded 36 episodes (19.3%) in which music accompanied solitary work such as studying or typing on a computer, followed by 32 episodes (16.6%) of personal maintenance such as washing and cooking. Music also commonly accompanied other leisure activities, both when people were by themselves (25 episodes or 13.4%) and socializing with others (22 episodes or 11.8%). In relative terms, certain activities stood out with regard to the mean presence of music, though, due to our sampling size and technique, we would again be hesitant to make any claims about the statistical significance of these variations. Nevertheless, there were activities where the presence of music was exceptionally high. Thus, 95.7% of leisure activities that involved
socializing with others, 91.2% of the personal maintenance activities and 84.6% of religious activities were accompanied by music. In the mid-range, we have 79% of all travelling episodes, 78.1% of the solitary leisure activities, 73.5% of solitary work episodes, and 66.7% of personal being episodes that were accompanied by some form of music. Time fillers and work episodes that involved interaction with others were at the lower end, with 50% and 46.4% respectively reportedly involving music.

Table 4: Place of music episodes in relation to main activity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time filler</th>
<th>personal maintenance</th>
<th>travel-</th>
<th>leisure</th>
<th>religion</th>
<th>work</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>being</td>
<td>travel-</td>
<td>others</td>
<td>solitary</td>
<td>music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shops/Market</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertainment</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outdoors</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With regard to the predominant musical styles that participants were exposed to, our research yielded similar results as a previous study on music preferences conducted on Ghanaian university campuses (Otchere & Carl, 2016). In the order of the frequency of their occurrence, the most common styles participants encountered were gospel music (38%), hiplife/hip-hop (21%), R&B, country and “cool” music (pop and rock ballads) (13.1%), highlife (10.7%), classical and choral music (9.3%), reggae (4.9%) and traditional music (including styles like jama) (3.9%). Our data did not indicate any significantly higher amount of choice exerted over any of these styles by participants, pointing to the fact that stylistic preferences were situational and context-dependent rather than absolute.

The most common media technologies through which music was played were, in descending order, the phone (MP3 player) (33.7%), laptop computers (17.6%), live performances (15.6%), public sound systems (13.7%), the radio (11.2%) and, at the low end, television sets (4.4%), audio cassettes (2%) and compact discs (2%). Considering that four of our participants were music students, the incidence of live performances might have been slightly higher than one would expect in a sample group excluding active musicians. A closer analysis revealed that less than a third (28.1%) of the live music episodes took place at the work place (music and dance lectures), while the other two thirds were at entertainment venues (34.4%) and in church (37.5%). While technologies like
the MP3 player and the computer were very common, they also potentially gave their users a higher amount of listening autonomy. The use of older technologies like audio cassettes and CDs was, on the other hand, expectedly low.

One aspect of everyday music experience that is completely absent from previous research is people’s bodily involvement with music, or, more specifically, dance. There were two items on our response form that asked about the presence of dance during episodes, as well as, the degree to which participants themselves responded to music with dance, rated on a scale from zero to ten. With respect to the total distribution of episodes, people reported that dance was present in almost a third (31.3%) of all music episodes. Interestingly, when asked about the degree to which they were dancing themselves, respondents, 50.7% of all cases, reported to have danced to at least a moderate degree (values of five and higher). This indicates that dancing might sometimes be present less explicitly during episodes, but the music nonetheless, quite literally, moved participants.

A one-way ANOVA \( F(7) = 4.036, p < 0.0001 \) with post hoc Tukey test showed a significant difference between the presence or absence of dance in relation to the place where episodes occurred. The post hoc test singled out particularly the church as a place where dance occurred significantly more often than at any other place, with 84.6% of all church episodes including both music and dance. Again, differences occurred with respect to the mean presence of dance in relation to the main activity in which participants were involved. Dance occurred most often when respondents were engaged in religious activities (70%). Leisure (music) (57.1%), work (music) (57.1%) and leisure with others (54.6%) were in the medium range, while all other activities were only slightly associated with dancing. Our data therefore revealed the specifically social nature of dance and also showed the particularly strong connection between religion and dance.

**Listening Autonomy, Emotional Responses, and Wellbeing**

If our initial assumption, that people use music in everyday contexts in potentially beneficial ways to increase subjective wellbeing, is correct, then one would expect that the degree of choice over the music that is being heard should have a bearing on the degree to which it contributes to potential mood changes. As Sloboda et al. (2001, p. 19) in their study of the functions of music in everyday life noted, “the degree of choice over the music being heard should affect psychological outcomes. In consequence of this, more beneficial outcomes might be expected when people were on their own”. Our assumption then implies a positive relationship between the level of listening autonomy and participants’ emotional responses to music.
Changes in mood or state were assessed through eleven bi-polar scales on which participants rated their mood both before and after experiencing music. The scales included pairs like “drowsy – alert”, “sad – happy”, “connected – lonely”, “relaxed – tense” or “tired – energetic”. To assess changes in mood, we calculated the mean mood factors before and after music exposure. We then subtracted the mean values for the mood states before from those after participants were exposed to music. The thus calculated mean changes were predominantly positive (Figure 1). For instance, our participants, on average, reported to feel more alert, happy, connected, comforted and relaxed after being exposed to music. Our participants also reported to have had higher energy levels and to have felt less bored after hearing music. Overall, our figures indicated more pronounced changes for specific moods and states particularly alertness, happiness, connectedness, comfort, and relaxation. We can, however, not rule out that it was the instrument itself that accounted for some of these differences, as some of the categories might have been more meaningful to participants and therefore triggered stronger responses. Generally, the language bias in data relating to moods and emotions posed specific problems which we will further discuss below.

Looking at the correlation between mean mood changes after hearing music and the presence of other people during episodes, we see clear differences in the extent to which mood factors changed (Figure 2). Mood changes were often much more pronounced when people listened to music alone. The greatest differences occurred with respect to alertness and connectedness and, at the middle level, with feelings of happiness, comfort, interestedness and participants’ state.
of relaxation. Generally speaking, then, when respondents were listening to music alone they reported a greater increase in alertness, happiness, connectedness, interestedness, relaxation and comfort than when they experienced music in the presence of others. Following the above line of reasoning about the relationship between listening autonomy and people’s use of music to increase subjective wellbeing, our data seemed to support this initial assumption.

Figure 2: Mean mood changes in the presence and absence of others

To find further evidence, we also analyzed the relationship between the degree of personal choice over the music and the quality of music experience. The degree of choice was assessed through a separate scaled item ranging from zero to ten (zero indicating no choice at all and ten indicating complete control over the music). For the purpose of our analysis, we rescaled this item to three distinct levels, representing low, medium and high listing autonomy. We then correlated the level of autonomy to a set of scaled questions about the overall quality of the music experience. Embedded in this set were questions about the importance of the music to the activity respondents were involved in, whether it enhanced the activity and also whether the music had any personal associations. Our analysis clearly indicated a positive relationship between the mean level of listening autonomy and the quality of the music experience (Figure 3), even if none of these variations amounted to the level of statistical significance. Nevertheless, it was evident that the higher the degree of choice, the more aware of the
music respondents were and the more they also considered it to be important to and an enhancement of the activity or that particular moment.

![Figure 3: Listening autonomy and quality of music experience](image)

When we correlated the level of listening autonomy to the mean mood changes, however, we got results that were not quite as clear (see Figure 4). The values for the mean changes of happiness, for instance, were high for both low and high listening autonomy. Energy levels increased relatively more when the degree of control over the music was low, even if our prediction would have implied the opposite. In other cases such as the “comforted-distressed” and “bored-interested” scales, listening autonomy did not seem to be a factor that had any impact on the outcome of mood changes. Overall, the values in Figure 4 are more interpretable than those in Figure 2 and do not readily support the hypothesis that listening autonomy and mood regulation are positively related.
Figure 4: Listening autonomy and mean changes of mood

This brings us back to a few critical remarks with respect to the assessment of emotions. As briefly mentioned above, we cannot completely rule it out that some of our respondents might have found it difficult to relate to the linguistic categories representing emotional states in some of the scaled items. Though no participant explicitly said so, some of the feedback we got in the interviews also pointed to the technical difficulties respondents had with the bipolar scales. The relatively high amount of missing data for the mood scales seems to confirm this, though the time factor must also be taken into consideration here. In general, capturing emotions in linguistic categories can be problematic, all the more so in a case like ours where we were confronted with a multi-lingual context and the first language of respondents is predominantly not English but a Ghanaian language.

Nonetheless, there were other indicators of listening autonomy and emotional responses to music. The first is the relatively high incidence of personal stereos, particularly MP3 players, which was the medium through which music was listened to in a third (33.7%) of all music episodes. By their very nature, mobile music players give their users almost complete autonomy over the choice of music that is being heard. The technology of personal stereos calls into question the notion of “somebody being alone” as well as the common distinction between the public and the private. Mobile music technologies actually allow users to “travel through any space accompanied by their own ‘individualized’ soundworld” (Bull, 2000, p. 3).
Another, and perhaps more important, point that we need to be mindful of is that it might not always be the degree of choice over the music as such, but the degree of choice over the context in which and with whom people opt to experience music, that yields more beneficial emotional outcomes. Here, we are particularly thinking about the role that music played as part of religious activities. If we look at the data, the degree of personal choice over the music being heard was relatively low with regard to the church and religious activities. However, both were, as we have seen, social contexts in which music and dance played a major role. One would certainly expect positive effects on mood changes when people musically engage in religion. One indication that this was actually the case is the high incidence of dance within religious contexts. The presence of dance might thus serve as a non-verbal indicator for positive emotional outcomes. Clearly, religious musical experience was not so much about listening autonomy, but more about the overall context in which music was being experienced. Here, the presence rather than absence of others and often a lower rather than higher listening autonomy could still contribute to positive changes.

Listening Choices, Self-Regulation, and Self-Modulation

In an open-ended item on our response form we posed the question, “If you chose to listen to music, what was your MAIN reason?”. To get a better sense of the general tendency of answers, we tried to group them into distinct descriptive categories. Major motives that explained why people reportedly chose to listen to music included spiritual inspiration, relaxation, concentration as well as the need to increase energy levels, turn around negative moods, take away boredom and cancel out ambient noise. Still for others, the motivation was to simply enjoy the music itself and the sheer pleasure of listening to songs. It must be noted that there was often more than a single reason for participants to choose a particular music, which made a simple frequency analysis less appropriate.

Consider, for example, the following episode, which took place on a Sunday evening. The respondent reported that he was in his room in the hostel together with two of his roommates. He was ironing his clothes, which was part of his basic routine. To increase his energy level, as well as, make the ironing easier and more entertaining, he chose to accompany the chore with gospel music playing from his computer. While ironing he was moderately dancing to the music. His alertness and happiness increased, he felt less irritable, more in the present and more relaxed. The music had strong personal association for him and he considered it to be very important to the activity thus enhancing the quality of the moment. As reason for choosing the music he wrote that it made his “faith
level grow” and that he listened attentively to the lyrics, which talked about “how to live a righteous life as a Christian.” Overall, the whole experience made him feel “so relaxed and comforted.” This episode illustrates the complexity of everyday experience and the overlapping motives for people’s engagement with music.

Issues relating to self-regulation and self-modulation, which clearly confirm the assumption that people decidedly used music to increase subjective wellbeing, also frequently came up in our interviews with participants. Consider the following excerpts:

*Respondent 14:* Whenever I’m sad, I tend to listen to more music than when I’m happy. So that I’ll be relaxed and I won’t feel like I’m... I’ll be relaxed. That is one of the significant things that I have learned. The more I’m sad, the more I listen to music.

*Respondent 3:* Music gives me energy, it boosts me and takes away the tiredness. I don’t feel tired when I’m listening to music and I’m doing my laundry… I become active.

*Respondent 18:* Music is a way to really enjoy myself without depending on anybody to make me happy. I can concentrate… like, listening to a certain music… and the music just gets me to where I want to be. Music makes me who I am.

Particularly in the last respondent’s statement the issue of listening autonomy is explicitly mentioned. For this respondent, a higher degree of listening autonomy translated into greater emotional autonomy. The respondent, who occasionally also worked as a deejay, expanded on music’s power to modulate moods at a later point in our interview. He explained that it was not only self-modulation but, at times, also the manipulation of others’ moods through music which could be a source of pleasure when a chosen music moved people on the dance floor with particular intensity.

As mentioned above and compared to previous studies, the relatively high incidence of music as part of religious activities among our respondents was striking. While, in general, the reasons to listen to music given by respondents seemed to confirm previous studies that stress the utilitarian nature of music in everyday experience, the spiritual aspect added another dimension of wellbeing which previous studies did not bring out. Clearly, religiosity in everyday life plays a much more important role in the Ghanaian context than, for instance, in the UK (Gifford, 1998, 2004). Speaking about the motives for choosing a particular musical genre, many of our respondents therefore stressed the importance of religious music and particularly their lyrics.
Respondent 1: When I wake up in the morning and I start singing it gives… like, it really sets you into the mood. At times you wake up, you don’t feel like doing anything. But when you sing, it gives you the energy. Like, something tells you [that] you must get up and… maybe, the day before your mood was very bad. But then, singing those worship songs … it washes all those worries away and gives you the encouragement [so] that you can move on.

Respondent 7: Sometimes, listening to gospel music … the lyrics in that music can shape my life, it gives me encouragement and positive feelings.

Respondent 5: If I want to thank God, I’ll start … like … singing … we have worship songs that thank God … like, the lyrics. So as I sing, I listen to the song in the background… Even some of the lyrics in the song can give you the words to communicate with God.

While the episodes respondents’ described here, in contrast to the more sociable dance episodes in religious contexts that we recorded, refer to more solitary situations in which listening autonomy was presumably high, it is interesting to note the frequent references to lyrics as well as singing (along) that keep coming up. These statements are consistent with answers to an open-ended item that was part of our response form, which asked, “Was there anything in the music that you found particularly important or noticeable?”. A word count of the string data showed that responses that referenced the “words” and “lyrics” of the music exceeded references to other musical characteristics such as rhythm, harmony or instrumentation.

Conclusion

Our results indicate that the Experience Sampling Method can be successfully adapted in the Ghanaian context, given that the level of commitment and motivation among study participants is high. Apart from a few challenges, the overall response rate of over 90% was, in our estimation, encouraging. Also, considering that roughly two thirds of responses occurred within 30 minutes after respondents received the text messages, the overall compliance rate of participants can be considered high.

Our relatively small sample size may not permit us to make conclusive generalisations beyond our study group. However, with a statistical value of 53.1%, this study confirmed findings of previous research works that found a high incidence of music in people’s everyday experience. Our study also showed that music was mostly not the main focus but rather accompanied other activities (88.2% of music episodes). In our study, participants experienced mu-
sic mostly in the company of others (86.7% of episodes) rather than alone. With regard to the degree of personal choice over the music that was heard, episodes were overall distributed approximately even. There were no significant differences in the degree of personal choice over music with regard to place, activity or musical style. There were, however, clear indications that people used music, when self-chosen, in potentially beneficial ways to increase subjective well-being. In this regard, the mobile phone/MP 3 player stood out as a device over which participants exerted significantly greater control in respect of the music that was being played.

The most common reasons why respondents chose to listen to music were spiritual inspiration and the need to increase concentration, release stress, increase energy levels, change, enhance, or maintain emotional states, connect both with themselves and with others, cancel out ambient noise, as well as take away boredom. Overall, positive changes in moods and states were more pronounced when participants were by themselves, which supports the assumption that people decidedly used music to enhance wellbeing. There were a few instances of negative changes in mood associated with music, indicating decreases in subjective wellbeing. These were mostly situations where respondents had little control over the music being heard. For example, negative changes in happiness and/or relaxation and a simultaneous increase in irritability and/or boredom occurred in a few episodes where music had either strong personal associations for respondents or where the music became a source of distraction and annoyance. Negative changes on the “involved-detached” scale were mostly associated with positive feelings and greater autonomy of listening.

Previous research on the functions and uses of music in everyday life has mostly highlighted solitary listening contexts rather than focusing on music as a form of sociability. While we certainly need more studies with more diverse sample groups and also diverse methodological approaches to confirm this trend, one aspect where our results clearly differed from previous research was the strong connection between music experience, wellbeing and religion. It was particularly social dance that was closely associated with religion, indicating that music and wellbeing are not exclusively, and perhaps not even primarily, an individualistic affair, but often a social and interpersonal process. In this regard we agree with Simon Frith who noted that:

[Studies on music and everyday life] tend to refer musical meaning to its emotional function for individuals, but music remains equally important as a means of communication and as a form of sociability. Most academic research on everyday music focuses … on music listening. But what is equally remarkable is the sheer amount of
music making in which people are engaged, and … that these musical activities are central for their understanding of who they are. (Frith, 2002, p. 46)

We do not necessarily believe that this is an either/or question. Our results actually support the view that everyday music plays a major role both as an agent of individual wellbeing and as a form of sociability and interpersonal communication. Beyond listening, music-making in the form of singing and dancing was clearly an important aspect of our participants’ wellbeing and daily experience, and it was particularly so in the context of religious activities where these more active forms of music participation took the centre stage.
References


Traditional Music as a Sustainable Social Technology for Community Health Promotion in Africa: “Singing and Dancing for Health” in Rural Northern Ghana

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Abstract: Music is a social technology of enormous potential for improving community health. This paper reports on a series of applied ethnomusicological
interventions, enacted as a participatory action research project in northern Ghana, for health promotion. Initial interventions, performed by local professional urban artists, proved effective. But as they were not sustainable, we followed up by training village-based amateur youth groups, rooted in the local community, to perform a similar repertoire. These methods can be transposed to other societies maintaining participatory musical traditions, leading to improved community health whenever behavior is a primary determinant, as is so often the case (WHO 2002).

**Keywords:** edutainment, Participatory Action Research (PAR), sanitation, malaria, Ghana

Music – along with allied performing arts such as dance and drama – is a social technology of enormous potential for community health, and one that can be harnessed through *participatory action research ethnomusicology*. Moving beyond the usual scholarly goals of interpretive or empirical understanding, such an ethnomusicology leads to a series of collaborative, non-clinical musical *interventions*, each designed to produce positive community health outcomes through awareness, social cohesion, and behavioural change, along with impact assessments providing guidance for the next one. This paper reports on a series of such interventions for health promotion, enacted as an on-going project entitled “Singing and Dancing for Health” in northern Ghana.

**Theoretical Reflections on Traditional Music for Health Promotion**

**The importance of Health Promotion**

*An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure* – nowhere is this truer than in matters of health. Some aspects of the health system require significant investment in infrastructure and personnel – hospitals, staffed by health professionals, or MRI scanners. But many public health issues can be addressed preventively through behavioral changes that are entirely within reach of the individual. Prevention is nearly always more economical and more effective, fending off costly illnesses through lifestyle often requiring no significant expenditures.

How to effect such changes? What is required is effective communication of health knowledge that translates into action, i.e. not simply conveying information, but conditioning a shift in collective attitudes, a social change enabling a corresponding shift in individual behaviour. Supporting such a shift towards healthier lifestyles, known as “health promotion” (Bunton & Macdonald, 2002; Corcoran, 2007; WHO, 2016), depends in part on health education. But dissem-
inating such knowledge to individuals, though necessary, is insufficient in itself; information can only support better health when it generates healthier behaviours, which are also likely conditioned by broader social factors that must simultaneously be addressed.

In the developed world, essential behavioral modifications center on lifestyle changes such as better nutrition, less alcohol, no tobacco, and more exercise to prevent chronic conditions such as heart disease, cancer, lung diseases, and diabetes. By contrast in a developing country such as Ghana serious health problems stem more from basic environmental issues, such as poor sanitation, leading to infectious diseases, pre-eminently malaria, lung, and diarrheal diseases, especially cholera. Here, prevention is crucial to a precarious health system. As Glanz, Rimer, and Viswanath note:

In many parts of the world, infectious diseases continue to pose grim threats, especially for the very young, the old, and those with compromised immune systems. Malaria, diarrheal diseases, and other infectious diseases, in addition to AIDS, are major health threats to the poorest people around the world ... like chronic diseases, their trajectory may be influenced by the application of effective health behavior interventions. Substantial suffering, premature mortality, and medical costs can be avoided by positive changes in behavior at multiple levels. (2008, p. 6)

Communication for Development, and Traditional Music as Development Technology in Africa

The crucial role of communication for development has been increasingly recognized in recent decades (Ansu-Kyeremeh, 2005; Ford, Williams, Renshaw, & Nkum, 2005; Asante, 2004; Pratt, Silva-Barbeau, & Pratt, 1997; Moemeka, 1994). Clearly, such communication is crucial for preventive medicine requiring behavioral change. But what sort of communication is required, particularly in rural Africa, where the rate of illiteracy is high, and media presence is limited? Knowledge must be transmitted in a form that engages community, so as to inform the individual but also to transform the larger social group.

The keys to community engagement, therefore, are communicative forms that enable active, grassroots participation: forms that are familiar, affective, and social. Towards this end, print material has limited value, particularly with low literacy, and even audio-visual messaging carried through mass media – radio, TV, or billboard – though reaching large numbers of people quickly, may be ineffective because such media are received passively and asocially. They raise awareness but often without the accompanying social transformations required
to produce action. As Macdonald remarks in a summary article on communication theory and health promotion, “mass media serve to inform and raise awareness admirably but they have limited effect in changing opinions or behaviour” (2002, p. 205). Several empirical studies confirm this limitation, e.g. Wimbush, MacGregor & Fraser (1998) on the impact of a mass media campaign to promote walking in Scotland. Furthermore, mass media channels (radio, TV) – while attractive – may be perceived by rural residents as alien.

Mass-mediated health campaigns carrying local expressive cultural forms enjoy considerable popularity, especially in urban zones (Frishkopf, 2017; Frishkopf and Morgan, 2013a & 2013b; more globally, see the work of the Vermont-based Population Media Center). But mediated forms lack the affective immediacy, social force and adaptive flexibility of interpersonal oral communications transmitted via face-to-face social presence. This modality becomes both more important and more effective in rural zones, where the entire village effectively functions as a single, coordinated, cohesive “community of practice”, a “group created over time by the sustained pursuit of a shared enterprise” (Wenger, 1998, p. 45) bound by mutual engagements, shared cultural practices, and common social commitments. This feature of the rural community is in contradistinction to the urban zone where a larger, more diverse population and the consequent division of labour preclude such unity (Barlocco, 2010; Durkheim, 1964).

Writing about southern Africa, media scholar Ocholla (2006, p. 2) identifies three conditions as marking “information poor” communities in southern Africa: economic disadvantage; geographical isolation; and illiteracy; rural northern Ghana exhibits all three. Ocholla goes on to observe that

Although information can be accessed textually, electronically, visually, audibly and orally, most information poor communities prefer information orally and such information should be provided closest to them by sources familiar to them such as colleagues, neighbors, relatives and friends as attested in most studies. The conception of knowledge sharing through “community of practice” works fairly well in this environment. (Ocholla, 2006, pp. 3-4)

There are many ways to achieve such face-to-face presence in communication for development. Some researchers have explored the use of adult education classes for public health education, relying on diffusion through sharing information with friends and family to expand the scope of impact beyond the classroom (Freedman, Miner, Echt, Parker, & Cooper, 2011). However, such an approach is relatively expensive; diffusion is limited by class size; and the class-
room approach presumes availability of time and inclination for adult education, which is not typically a culturally local channel.

The importance of community-engaged diffusion of health information through local communication channels has been widely recognized as appropriate to rural African settings. However, such methods of education, on the one hand suffer from comparatively low literacy and media access, and yet, on the other, also benefit from much greater community cohesion, as compared to urban areas or the West, affording opportunities that may not be available in urban areas (Ford et al., 2005).

What appears to be required, then, is a form of information diffusion that is at once “mass”, “face-to-face”, and local. It should be affective, culturally engaging, interpersonal, and intergenerational, productive of affective social relationships while flowing through existing ones. Traditional music culture fills this bill. A catchy song in traditional style, building on traditional proverbs and introduced into the midst of a festival context, gathers a live audience of hundreds of participants; its messaging is far more powerful and memorable due to face-to-face communication in a context of communal focus, recognition, and approval. Contemporary popular mediated forms (e.g. hip-hop, or “hiplife” in Ghana) are undoubtedly important to the youth – as evidenced in the success of “Sanitation” (Frishkopf & Morgan, 2013ab). However, traditional music is live and multigenerational, and thus capable of nucleating broad social gatherings, sustaining, and forging powerful bonds infused with musical content, including health messaging, that connects one generation to the next. Furthermore, unlike mediated forms, live music can dynamically adapt to context, as each village – even each context – presents unique requirements and offers unique opportunities.

Oral expressive culture, including music, song, dance, drama and storytelling – collectively labelled “oraculture” by Ugboajah (1985) – are particularly important for community-based communications in sub-Saharan Africa, as demonstrated, for instance, in a study on nutrition communications (Pratt, Silva-Barbeau, & Pratt, 1997). Others have also noted the importance of harnessing traditional modes of communication in Africa (Osho, 2011; Ansu-Kyeremeh, 2005; Asante, 2004).

While “low tech”, interpersonal oraculture also possesses an inherent mass power beyond the context of performance, through its potentially exponential rates of “word of mouth” diffusion, as receiver becomes, in turn, transmitter, to the boundaries of the sociocultural community. A mediated version of such diffusion had to await the cassette era (before which copying media was hardly feasible), but face-to-face culture had always enabled it, especially via songs, which are easily remembered, relayed from one person or community to the
next, passed synchronically onwards in geometrical progression, as well as, dia-
chronically through successive generations, ultimately absorbed into the durable
oral tradition. “Viral” culture diffusing rapidly through social networks did not
emerge with online social media; it is an age-old phenomenon in pre-
technological social networks as well, through live face-to-face or “word of
mouth” performances.

Community-based diffusion through face-to-face networks, while slower
than mass mediation, is also a more trusted form of communication. Even in our
post-modern, media-rich, Internet-based society, information received through
face-to-face interactions is considered our most reliable source, most persuasive
and conducive to diffusion. Behavior change research that weighs mediated
against interpersonal diffusion acknowledges this as well (Nielsen, 2013, p. 2;

Further, such dissemination, unlike the rapid decay of contemporary me-
diated “memes”, diffuses more durably in two dimensions, one spatial-social
(synchronic), and the other temporal-social (diachronic), thanks to two key
properties of oral transmission: (1) information receiver becomes information
sender, enabling diffusion through interpersonal communication; (2) supporting
each act of interpersonal communication is a prior social relationship, which is
subsequently strengthened. Diffusion transpires synchronically, through a social
network representing a contemporary community, and diachronically, from one
generation to its descendants. The former modality potentially transpires with
exponential speed at least to the boundaries of the social network, while the lat-
ter ensures sustainability over time. Both serve to strengthen social cohesion.

Diffusion is no doubt enhanced by encoding a message as poetry, and
then setting the poem to music as song, increasing its appeal and memorability,
as music and poetry serve a mnemonic function in many cultures (Rainey &
Larsen, 2002). Thus, music can function as a powerful mode of dissemination
for public health information even – or perhaps especially – in the absence of
electricity and its attendant gadgetry, and a fortiori in rural societies where trad-
tions are more familiar and social groups smaller and more cohesive.

The power of traditional music as a social technology for health promo-
tion stems from the fact that music acts on three levels simultaneously: cognitive
communication of information (so-called “communication for development”, in
this case health education); affective reinforcement through traditional music’s
cultural resonance and authority; and the resulting galvanizing of intergenera-
tional social groups, face-to-face communities of practice centred on music.
Musical messaging, centered on an imperative for behavior change, supports
better health primarily through “prevention” rather than “cure”, and through
everyday behavioral changes effected via individual choice, rather than social or technological interventions from the health establishment.

Music for health promotion has a long history within “edutainment”; many of its uses have been enumerated in Barz and Cohen’s edited collection; documenting how African expressive arts “gained prominence as agents for addressing HIV and AIDS,” including case studies from many African countries (Barz & Cohen, 2011; Barz, 2006). These studies show that much musical AIDS education has centered on popular music disseminated through the mass media, but there are also many instances of more traditional community-based music-making performed live.

While it enjoys large support among musicians and ethnomusicologists, on the whole – that is, within the field of health promotion at large – traditional music is insufficiently recognized and operationalized as a powerful and economical social technology for community health promotion in Africa.

Such an approach can be particularly effective in rural areas, where such music – performed live on traditional and civic holidays – still enjoys broad, multigenerational popularity. Unlike in the West, or even in urban Africa, the community of musical practice in villages is typically the entire village, even if everyone does not participate in exactly the same way, because the village social network is dense and the culture relatively homogeneous. Our initial interventions were exogenous – dance drama performances created by professionals in Accra and Tamale; while there was a certain level of village participation (we invited local groups to perform; local “opinion leaders” made speeches), the primary village role was as spectator. Being formulated in the local language and musical style and presented live in a traditional setting, the performances were familiar and deeply engaging. But they were viewed – at least in part – as coming from outside. We nevertheless selected this approach to ensure quality, impact, and conformity to budgets and timelines.

But we hypothesize that once such an intervention is “adopted” by the villagers themselves, through an expansion of the collaboration to include villagers as active participants, the intervention can be absorbed into the social fabric and its associated oral tradition to become community-based. Reproduced through oral tradition, it enters the community of practice, and becomes a sustainable cultural form of great power for non-clinical community based preventive medicine (National Academy of Sciences, 2012, p. 23). In short, the propagation of health information over a performing arts substrate takes advantage of the status of traditional live music as a participatory “community of practice”, in which everyone plays a role. Here, performance and social structure are mutually reinforcing, as music tightens and rejuvenates social bonds, bonds which themselves serve as conduits for music-based health information.
The Dance Drama, and Health Promotion

So long as the musical genre is sufficiently flexible any traditional style can be adapted for health promotion by suitably modifying lyrics, or placing music in a context where health-promotion meanings are established, such as a larger multi-art performance event, one sustaining attention and engaging all the senses, communicating in parallel through music, song, dance, gesture, costume, and narrative drama. Obviously, some measure of flexibility is crucial here; in particular, sacred repertoires, genres, and ceremonies, whose contents have been sacralised through long usage and connection to sacred or secular authorities (e.g. divinities, chiefs) do not lend themselves to adaptation. However, there are other forms – often modern “recreational” types – that do allow for such creative play. While such forms have sometimes fallen into disuse under the influence of modernity, they can be revived when endowed with a contemporary social role, meaning, and purpose.

In Ghana one such contemporary form is the dance drama, a light entertainment non-participatory genre, drawing on Ghana’s long-standing storytelling tradition, perhaps influenced by the popular ‘concert party’ (Cole, 2001), and by government-sponsored ensembles formed post-independence to celebrate local culture in a staged setting, such as the Ghana Dance Ensemble under director Francis Nii-Yartey, disseminated via mass media (Schramm, 2000, p. 347). The dance drama is a compound form whose rich weave of music, lyrics, dance, narrative, humor and costume, completely open to creative interpretation, can powerfully focus social attention on key issues, such as the necessity of adopting specific healthy behaviours, and rejecting unhealthy ones, while quickly gathering a large audience through its familiar multisensory aesthetic force. Dance dramas are bound together by traditional music (and dance) which serves as an affective and highly meaningful substrate for the transmission of health information in an intensive social setting. Presented in this way, memorable health messaging reaches a wide audience with the power to alter behavior and promote better health.

The power of traditional music reconfigured within the dance drama context inheres in its ability to gather and move multiple generations at a socio-affective level. In this way, health promotion messages diffuse as more than simply informational; rather they are memorably wrapped in an aura of traditional musical content, verbal style, identity and authority, reinforced by the witnessing presence of the full community, particularly with the support and attendance of opinion leaders, such as chiefs, imams, elected officials, Ghana Health Service representatives, and other notables, whose official blessing is underscored through eloquent public statements. With the force of such authority, messages are thus infused into the social fabric, instilled through a performa-
tive setting of affective communality that typifies such public performance occasions. Meanwhile the social fabric itself is transformed and strengthened, particularly along its vertical inter-generational dimension, helping reverse the social anomie that has so often accompanied rapid social and economic change in rural areas (and is often accompanied by a decline in traditional music making). Social cohesion is in itself a key resource for promoting better health (Wilkinson, 1997; Kawachi & Kennedy, 1997; Kawachi, Kennedy, Lochner, & Prothrow-Stith, 1997).

Social Background: Northern Region and the Dagomba

Judging by its population and scarcity of resources, Ghana’s Northern Region appears among the least well-served by the country’s national health system. With a population of 2,479,461 according to the last census, the Northern Region is Ghana’s fourth most populous, yet its literacy rate of 37.2% is the lowest across all ten regions (Ghana Statistical Service, 2012, pp. 22 & 41). The region is the third most rural (69.7%) with the lowest population density (35.2/km²). Electronic media play a limited role; only 0.86% of rural households contain a computer and rural internet usage is just 0.78%; only 12% of rural residents own a mobile phone. These are the lowest regional rates in Ghana. Here, one also finds the lowest number of health professionals per capita (Ghana Health Service, 2010, p. 16; Ghana Statistical Service, 2012, p. 21). These facts suggest that live traditional performance should be especially useful for dissemination of health information in rural northern Ghana.

As dance dramas center on language and music, and we did not wish to deal with the additional complications of translations and multilingual performers, we needed to select just one ethnic-linguistic group. We therefore picked Dagbani, the language spoken by the Northern Region’s majority ethnic group, the Dagomba, who traditionally inhabit the kingdom of Dagbon. Ghana’s Dagbani speakers number about 1.1 million (Dagbani, 2016). Dagbani is also the primary language of our artistic collaborators, Youth Home Cultural Group, a well-established NGO based in Tamale.

The traditional lands of the Dagomba, extending from just west of Tamale to Togo, are savannah; malaria is endemic, and sanitation problems are rampant. In order to leave open the possibility of comparison from as many angles as possible we selected three contrasting Dagomba villages across this zone: Tolon (a district capital of about 4000); Ziong (a smaller town); and Gbungbaliga (the smallest, near Yendi, the traditional capital of Dagbon). A fourth village, Jekeri-yili, lying within greater Tamale yet exhibiting features of remote rural settlements, served as a convenient yet realistic location for performing and filming each dance drama before a live audience (Figure 1).
Figure 1: Ghana’s ten regions and the locations of research

The Dagombas are celebrated for their elegant performance culture, featuring twirling dancers and interlocking pressure and bass drums. In rural areas, many genres of traditional performance have receded due to poverty and urban migration, except for those attached to the chieftaincy and religious holidays for which music is crucial (MacGaffey, 2013; Corke, 2000; Locke, 1990; Chernoff, 1979; Staniland, 1975; Oppong, 1973; Kinney, 1970). However, this loss is a consequence of socio-economic change, not a desideratum. Local communities welcome the revival of such genres, whether for health promotion or any other purpose.

Modernity brought the dance drama to the Dagombas, via the cities. Visually, acoustically, and dramatically spectacular, and drawing on traditional dance styles, the dance drama easily draws a large audience in the region. While not as participatory as traditional genres such as Damba (Kinney, 1970; Locke, 1990), community participation is potentially open, and the dance drama easily incorporates other musical styles. Its relative novelty enables greater artistic freedom; the dance drama draws on traditional culture without being constrained by it. Mediating tradition and modernity, the dance drama is therefore well-suited for adaptation to development communications, and has often been used in this fashion by our research partners, the Youth Home Cultural Group (YHCG, 2016) in other contexts.

“Singing and Dancing for Health”

“Singing and Dancing for Health” is a performative public health initiative, a series of Participatory Action Research (PAR) interventions focused on dance dramas combining music, dance, costume, poetry, narrative, melodrama, and comedy – as a social technology for preventive medicine in rural Dagbani-
speaking areas of Ghana’s Northern Region. Participatory Action Research implies that the initiative was collaborative from the outset. From the point of project formulation, the team – involving researchers, artists, and public health experts from Canada and Ghana – made key decisions together. PAR also implies evaluative research, in the form of impact assessments, as a means of guiding the project through its multiple phases towards greater effectiveness (Figure 2). Initial team discussions revealed that two key health problems addressable through behavior modification are malaria and lack of proper sanitation, and we therefore resolved to develop two dance dramas to focus on each of these.

![Figure 2: The PAR paradigm – a collaborative, community-engaged research cycle for positive social change (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005, p. 276)](image)

The initiative thus far has run through two phases in three villages, representing two different approaches to musical interventions for rural public health. In the first, the core team comprised members from Canada and from the urban area of Tamale; key village residents – the chief, elders, imams, elected officials, teachers, and representatives of Ghana Health Service – were also involved in order to enhance uptake, acceptance, and diffusion (Puska et al., 1986). Evaluative research showed this approach, centering on performative interventions by professional artists guided by music and health researchers, to be effective. However, these interventions proved unsustainable and socially disengaged, due to their exogenous nature and on-going expense. Using outside professionals meant that performances were costly, and recurring costs could not be sustained. Further, impact was limited because performance was socially extrinsic to the rural community of practice, even if content resonated strongly with local musical and community life.

In the second phase, we expanded the core team to include village youth – supported by teachers and parents – as active participants. This time, we de-
ployed the external team’s professional artists and craftspeople; not to perform, but to convene, equip, and train local groups. This phase thus centered initially on *pedagogical* interventions resulting in the formation of youth groups capable of rehearsing and performing the new health repertoire independently on school, civic, and traditional holidays. These endogenous groups are in principle sustainable; as amateurs, members do not require payment. Rather, participation is its own reward; they represent a community caring for itself. Though the outcome of this phase will take time to assess, we anticipate that these groups will establish a new strand in the local oral tradition, and will also serve to strengthen local social cohesion through intergenerational involvement.

**Methods**

We applied a Participatory Action Research (PAR) paradigm (Fals-Borda, 2005), forming a collaborative, multinational core team to set the research agenda, carry it out, assess and analyze evidential data, both quantitative and qualitative. This team included a variety of participants: Canadian university researchers (engaged in ethnomusicology, global health, public health, medicine), Ghanaian researchers (in community health, family medicine, communication), Ghanaian writers and artists (scriptwriters, choreographers, actors, musicians, and dancers, in Tamale and Accra), Ghana Health Service officers (in the three research villages), and local opinion leaders in the communities where we worked.¹

The boundaries of participation are deliberately fuzzy and open in PAR, and the broader team included also local opinion leaders (chief, elders, imams, teachers, elected officials), Ghana Health Service, traditional village music groups (who performed prior to our intervention), subjects for surveys and focus groups, and the audience, taking an active role in watching and responding to performances.

Members of the core team included the following groups, individuals, and roles. The performing group was largely drawn from the Youth Home Cultural Group (YHCG, 2016), a Tamale NGO founded in 1985, augmented by two professional comedic actors. Besides training performers, YHCG also includes workshops producing instruments and clothing, and thus was able to supply the village youth groups we established. Four members of YHCG took on special roles: Abdul Fatawu Karim, artistic director, led rehearsals and developed choreographies; Abu Sulemana, project manager, coordinated operations, handled local finances, and assisted with music, data collection, and media production.

¹ While we subsequently learned of a number of Ghanaian theater for development projects (e.g. Centre for Popular Education and Human Rights, and the Agoro Project in Cape Coast), we were not aware of them at the time we formulated this.
Alhassan Mohammed Assau and Zakaria Ibrahim served as trainers in dancing and drumming, respectively. Two local researchers, Mubarak Alhassan, and Ibrahim Zukpeni, helped develop, administer, and code the survey, and also assisted in audio-visual documentation.

In Canada, David Zakus, Professor of Distinction in Global Health at Ryerson University, served as global health advisor and guided the project’s scientific dimensions. His research assistant, Hasan Hamze MPH, conducted statistical analyses of the survey data. Michael Frishkopf, Professor of Ethnomusicology at the University of Alberta, developed the initial concept, sought and obtained funding, and worked closely with Ghanaian partners throughout the project.

Phase I

Overview

In the first phase, described in greater detail elsewhere (Frishkopf, Hamze, Alhassan, Zukpeni, Abu, & Zakus, 2016), our central concern was to design dance dramas to combat malaria and cholera, by manipulating the art form’s aesthetic elements to gather a community audience and transfer key health messaging, redundantly through multiple registers (cognitive, emotional, and social), relevant to knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors that might help reduce the incidence of these endemic diseases.

We developed two such dance dramas addressing two key health issues: malaria and sanitation/diarrheal diseases, for performance in three rural Dagomba villages. Performed together in an afternoon, the power of performance drew each village out and together, enabling health messaging to be widely diffused (cf. Weare, 2002). Knowing that local participation is crucial to acceptance, we worked collaboratively with opinion leaders and Ghana Health Service in each locale. Doing so helped guide the project effectively, and ensured positive receptivity and uptake. Statistical analysis of impact assessments (surveys, tracking, focus groups, testimonials) indicated effectiveness (Frishkopf, Abu, Mubarak, Zukpeni, Hamze, & Zakus, 2016).

Our hypothesis was that the impact of such interventions would prove measurably effective in raising awareness, changing attitudes, and inculcating healthier behaviors. This impact would first affect those in attendance, and our aim was to maximize that number (to the capacity of the performance space), but also would subsequently diffuse – through social networks defined by family, friend, and work connections – to other, non-attending villagers as well. The fundamental method was therefore simple: develop the dance dramas (scripting, composing, choreographing); rehearse and refine them; publicly perform, film, and subtitle them (thereby testing the method, while generating a media version
for future presentation and possible broadcast); conduct pre-intervention surveys; perform and observe the intervention; conduct post-intervention surveys; and analyse resulting data.

**Timeline**

Frishkopf first met members of YHCG in 2008, when he brought his summer students to study with the group in Tamale; such visits continued annually through 2010, and recurred in 2013. In January 2014, he returned to Tamale to conduct ethnomusicological research on the Prophet’s Birthday festival (Damba), with support from members of YHCG. In light of recent collaboration with Liberian artists resulting in a music video and documentary addressing sanitation issues in urban Monrovia (Frishkopf & Morgan, 2013a & 2013b; Frishkopf, forthcoming), he initiated discussions with YHCG on how music could help address the most urgent health issues facing the rural Northern Region. In contrast to Monrovia, the consensus was that live rather than mediated music would be more successful, as well as more appropriate for YHCG, and that malaria and sanitation should be prioritized as most critical to public health.

At the end of that month he returned to Canada, and – collaborating with David Zakus – succeeded to obtain funding from the Killam Foundation the following May, with contributions also from the University of Alberta’s Faculty of Arts, Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry, and Canada’s DFATD (Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade, and Development).

Guided by YHCG’s Sulemana Abu the team expanded to include additional team members: videographers, researchers (Alhassan and Zukpeni), and an Accra-based writer. The latter developed dramatic scripts in English, centered on the two health issues these were vetted and edited by Zakus and Frishkopf for scientific accuracy and narrative flow. YHCG then translated the scripts into Dagbani and infused them with artistic life – songs, choreography and costumes – shaped by traditional performance styles. Rehearsals continued throughout the summer. Grant money purchased needed supplies and equipment, including a laptop, camera, audio recorder, and portable stage and printed banners, posters, and t-shirts.

That September, we mounted performances in Jekeriyili, a village within greater Tamale, a natural setting for filming; footage was edited and subtitled for mass dissemination (available at http://bit.ly/sngdnc4h).

We also developed a list of potential village research sites, narrowing it to three: Tolon, Ziong and Gbungbaliga (see Figure 1). The Ghanaian team visited each village, applying community entry strategies in order to gain local cooperation by explaining the project and its benefits to opinion leaders – chiefs, elders, religious leaders, teachers, elected officials and Ghana Health Service officers –
and performing traditional cultural protocols. We photographed each village, considered possible sites for performances, and distributed posters (Figure 3). These strategies also served to publicize the coming intervention.

Figure 3: Poster for “Singing and Dancing for Health”

Meanwhile, we developed an elaborate Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices (KAP) survey instrument (Warwick, 1983; WHO, 2008), which was vetted by statistical and survey research experts in Canada, and subsequently refined, translated and tested by the Ghanaian team. We carried out pre-intervention survey research in November 2014, sampling each adult village population at random for a total of 80 surveys per village, over the course of three days (each survey required nearly an hour to administer), attempting to obtain a random
sample by soliciting interviewees at a number of places (school, market, homes, street) and varying times of day (Figure 4).

![Surveying](image)

**Figure 4: Surveying**

Next, we performed the interventions themselves in December of the same year in the three villages, comprising one full afternoon in each village. Arriving in the morning, we set up the stage and sound system, strung up our banners and put up additional posters, thereby attracting attention. By early afternoon we were ready to begin. A parade of drummers and clowns through the village served to draw an enormous crowd to the performance ground (Figure 5). A DJ played popular music at high volume to attract more onlookers, and we opened each performance with a local village music-dance group. This was a strategy to integrate local performers into the project and connect with the communities through artistic exchange. There followed speeches from the opinion leaders we had contacted – the chiefs, imams, Ghana Health Service representatives, and elected officials – emphasizing the importance of the project. Our international team, including leading members of YHCG, gave short speeches as well. The two dance dramas (malaria and sanitation) were then presented in sequence (Figure 6). Each drama combined music and dance with dramatic narrative and comedy that kept the large audiences (an estimated 400 at each performance) focused, and often in stitches (Figure 7).
Figure 5: Clowns parade with drummers to gather a crowd

Figure 6: Dance drama performance in Ziong
The two professional comedic actors adeptly stirred the crowd through humorous antics, costumes, and gestures (as it turned out they were local celebrities, well-known through video films shown in local cinema houses). The audience also appreciated the skilful music and dancing displays combining traditional Dagomba dances with health-oriented gestures and lyrics. Many of these dances, though traditional, are no longer actively performed in Dagomba villages. Thus, for an afternoon these professional artists injected dazzling aesthetic color to the humdrum struggles of ordinary rural life, for which residents appeared most grateful. The performances were highly appreciated by all.

After the interventions, we carried out follow-up research until March 2015, using four methods:

*Focus Groups.* During the two weeks post performance, we conducted one gender-balanced focus group session at each village site in order to elicit comments from the youth, representing the future of each community, and appearing most likely to have the time and energy necessary to participate (Figure 8). Each group comprised 20 twenty junior high school students. (These groups later served as starting points for the introduction of local drumming-dancing groups.)

*Tracking.* We enlisted 30 articulate and observant volunteers – ten from each village – to agree to share their telephone numbers with the core research team, in order to be contacted approximately every two weeks for reports on observed behavioral changes in their homes. Each volunteer provided four short reports. The fundamental question was: “What is your perception of the attitudes
and practices of family members in the same household after the intervention?” We also sought suggestions for improvement.

![Image](71x442 to 522x780)

**Figure 8**: Focus group with Tolon youth led by Alhassan and Zukpeni, convened at a local junior high school. Similar focus groups were conducted at Ziong and Gbungbaliga.

Testimonials. After the intervention, we conducted interviews with six leading figures (two per village), in search of testimonials we might use to promote the project. As it turned out, everyone had something positive to say. One chief remarked, “We learnt a lot from the performance, especially keeping our surroundings clean, sleeping under mosquito [nets] and washing of our hands with soap”; another, “I want to thank your team for the fantastic work you did. Indeed, the performance went well because I learnt many lessons from the dance drama.” Another resident observed: “The whole performance was great, especially the Malaria and Cholera songs. It reminded us of the Dagbon tradition and triggered us to change our attitudes towards healthy living.” Another said: “Oh my God! The performance was one of the best I have ever witnessed. In fact, I had so much fun and education on malaria and cholera prevention.”

While of limited statistical validity, these personal perspectives offer a humanistic response absent from numerical tables of data. Amidst the praise, participants sought continuity, indicating that once was not enough: “I can’t wait for more performances in this community and beyond”, said a chief, while a resident remarked, “If these performances continue, it will help change our attitudes towards our health”, and another, “We are looking forward to more performances”.

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Follow-up Surveys. We returned to conduct another 60 random surveys in each village; we did not attempt either to resurvey those whom we had interviewed the first time around, or survey only those who had attended, in order to be able to understand the extent of diffusion from attendees to non-attendees. Of these 180 individuals, approximately 80 had in fact attended the interventions. All surveys were scanned and coded using CDC’s Epi Info software (CDC, 2016).

Finally, we produced descriptive statistics and conducted rigorous correlations, focusing on the two datasets exhibiting maximal contrast: all pre-intervention surveys, and the post-intervention surveys of those who actually attended the intervention (we opted to analyze diffusion rates in a later round).

Interim Results and Reflection

Survey data largely confirmed our understanding of the low literacy agricultural profile suggested by official reports (Ghana Statistical Service, 2012; Ghana Health Service, 2010). The large majority of subjects had stopped attending school at the primary level, and were either farmers or merchants by occupation. Thus, the performance culture approach to health promotion was indeed indicated.

Impact assessments – both quantitative and qualitative – showed that dance drama interventions produced significant positive change, and indicated that these three village educational performances were effective in raising awareness and changing health behaviors. This confirmed our hypothesis that dance drama is an effective social technology for progress in public health, especially in regions of high illiteracy and poverty rates (for details of this study see Frishkopf, Hamze, et al., 2016).

But qualitative data, extracted from interviews embedded within focus groups, tracking and testimonials, while laudatory, also indicated an implicit deficiency: we had not made allowances for continuity. The project was successful in raising awareness and improving behaviors, towards better health. But there was no guarantee that such changes would be permanent, and – due to cost – the project was not sustainable.

We were determined to provide generous compensation to our professional team members, for whom music is a livelihood. Transportation entailed additional costs; ‘roadies’ were required as well, to assemble and disassemble the stage, to say nothing of the sound system and its operator, and traditional protocols. In total, the project cost amounted to about 5000.00 CAD per village performance. While we compensated all participants fairly, it was impossible to imagine how we could raise the funds needed to provide such continuity, since the total cost would linearly increase over time.
What was missing, then, was a means of ensuring sustainability and community engagement; while the project proved the efficacy of the dance drama method to raise awareness, instill knowledge, improve attitudes, and change behaviors, time and consequent forgetfulness might easily reverse such gains. The resulting benefits might ultimately be lost with the passing of generations. More importantly the project ought to be more deeply rooted in the community itself.

Indeed, the problem concerned more than just financial sustainability; it concerned also social sustainability through local engagement. We posed as a PAR project, but with what level of participation? Community participation is crucial not only to guide a project, but to ensure its long-term viability, because in supporting itself, the community acts out self-interest, and naturally adapts to changing conditions.

While our team was multinational and participatory – Ghanaians were involved in key artistic and research roles – village-level participation was as yet limited to promotion by opinion leaders, along with the local “warm up” bands. Even if they were Ghanaians from the same ethnic group, the core PAR team were not community members at the village level. Our project could not yet be construed as a self-motivated community addressing and serving itself.

Certainly, our efforts had not been wasted – we had succeeded not only to raise awareness and change attitudes and behaviors, but also to stir enthusiasm for traditional music functioning in this new health promotion role. How to follow up?

Phase II

Overview

As turning a bend in the road reveals new vistas, the answer swung into view: if music and related performance arts had demonstrable value as a social technology for health promotion, the next step was to effect a “technology transfer”, by implanting it within each village, to be sustained and nurtured locally. In an effort to create a truly community-based project, whose sustainability would hinge not only on self-motivated community participation (Zakus, 1998) but also on adaptation to local conditions, it would be necessary to launch local, self-reproducing social formations carrying such messages: village-based amateur ‘singing and dancing for health’ groups, whose performative knowledge – in the twinned domains of both art and health – would be transmitted through oral processes, dynamically adapting to local conditions.

Their interest and enthusiasm having been piqued by our professional performances, residents would, we hoped, enthusiastically join such groups. The professional, urban Ghanaian artists – primarily from YHCG – would now as-
sume a new role as initializers, selecting, equipping and training the new groups, before setting them in motion. Motivated by a sense of obligation to community service, care and pride, and drawn from the local population, these groups would be far better connected to the local population and village life, their performances supporting community integration via traditional culture and health messaging.

Such groups, performing at traditional and civic events without payment, achieve several congruent goals. Reviving traditional performance types, and pride in local culture, they gather multiple generations and catalyze greater social cohesion through performance and participation; they serve as effective community mobilization devices; and they have the potential to become health agents and incorporate health-oriented dance dramas, either in full, or via performance of component songs and dances, into the local oral tradition, to adapt according to needs, and to be sustained through the generations. Thus, absorbed into the fabric of local culture, we believe that sustainable “singing and dancing for health” becomes possible.

Once set in motion, we expect that these groups, their social organization and messages having been inaugurated as new local traditions, will self-reproduce through the usual processes of traditional oral transmission across generations.

We therefore resolved to return to the same villages to establish, equip and train local youth groups – comprising volunteer members eager to participate out of a sense of musical interest, civic duty and cultural pride – to perform traditional Dagomba dances freighted with health promotion messaging.

Thanks to generous grants from folkwaysAlive! and the Department of Music at the University of Alberta respectively, a new Tolon youth group was inaugurated in July 2015. The inauguration of a second group in Ziong followed in March 2016. By contracting the Youth Home Cultural Group to provide training and supply equipment (drums and costumes), we simultaneously helped to support this worthy organization.

The following discussion outlines the process of group formation and launch for Tolon, the largest of the three villages in which we had worked, the closest to Tamale, and the one where a number of team members had extended family and titular connections.

**Timeline**

In May 2015, before embarking on the Tolon “singing and dancing for health” youth group project, we once again secured the moral and political support of Tolon’s chief (Tolon Naa) and village elders, as well as other opinion leaders and Ghana Health Service. Still enthusiastic following the performances
of the previous December, the chief was solidly supportive of the project, not only for its potential in health promotion, but also as a means of sustaining traditional culture.

Training and equipment were supplied by the Youth Home Cultural Group. Besides training and performance in traditional music and dance, YHCG also includes training in the manufacture of handicrafts, including drums and costumes, sold to tourists and student visitors, among others. The group was thus eminently well poised to undertake both the training and equipping of the Tolon group. Two of their most experienced teachers were selected to provide two weeks of training: Alhassan Mohammed Assau for dance, and Zakaria Ibrahim for drumming. At the group’s home base, members specialized in drum construction and costume tailoring assembled the requisite number of each (Figure 9).

![Image: Costumes for the Tolon group.](image)

We returned to the same Tolon junior high school where we had previously conducted focus group discussions with the support of the school’s teachers. These teachers now helped audition students who expressed interest in joining the fledgling group. The two YHCG trainers then selected the most talented and dedicated students as members. In consideration of practical limitations on teaching as well as those imposed by standards of traditional performance, we
limited the group to 20 members, comprising 10 boys and 10 girls to assure gender balance.

There followed two intensive weeks of training, under the expert tutelage of the two instructors, with superb support from Sulemana Abu. We also engaged researcher Ibrahim Zukpeni to document the entire process with video and still camera recordings (Zukpeni, 2015a). The total cost of equipment, training, and documentation came to around 5000.00 CAD per group, almost precisely the cost of a single village performance.

The youth were taught two traditional dances presented within the dance dramas: Tora (for the girls) and Bamaya (for the boys). These dances, like those of other ethnic groups in Ghana, are multi-art, combining poetry, song, drumming, and dance. As in many other rural areas in the Dagomba region, their performance had drastically declined in recent years, such that the younger generation no longer knew them, though some of the parents did. The traditional drumming and dance was coupled with songs based on proverbs, selected or revised for their relevance to health education and promotion. Some of the newly-composed lines refer directly to team members, thus strengthening social connection through song.

Bamaya song:

Denyeli nyegsaa dahama n kani anduni y anima denveli nyagsa dahama n kani, Niri ghun jaa niri ghun jaa a sheela niri ghun jaa ghuni m bangda atun tumsa, onaa paa yaa a naa paa yaa a sim nig baa ka dem korigi adem naa paaya and sabtaa yeai yi yi sabtaa begu neeya.

Meaning: Good things are so sweet but difficult to come by; those who dislike you will always look for your downfall; tell me where my enemy would have had me if not through my friends? The day of hygiene and cleanliness has broken; let’s all uphold and defend it.

Note: Except for the newly composed final line, this indigenous Bamaya song consists entirely of proverbs:

“Good things are so sweet but difficult to come by,” meaning: nothing good comes easily.

“Those who dislike you will always look for your downfall,” meaning, in this context: mosquitoes and lack of hygiene will cause troubles for people.

“Tell me where my enemy would have had me if not through my friends?” meaning: Those who know your secrets are responsible for your troubles; in this context these are mosquitoes and dirt, enemies that live with humans and cause disease.
The teachers continued to support us by providing their junior high school as a location for training (Figure 10), and finally as the site of the group’s inauguration in a public performance that took place in July 2015. Furthermore, they arranged for on-going rehearsal space on the school grounds, and provided a room where drums and costumes could be safely stored when not in use.

An unexpected benefit of this “technology transfer” emerged with the roles enthusiastically assumed by students’ parents. Accompanying their children to rehearsals, these parents – listening, watching, and remembering the dances from their youth – spontaneously assumed an active supportive role in the training process, and even staged an informal performance of their own (Zukpeni, 2015c). The enthusiasm with which parents willingly and freely participated as both trainers and performers – due to their perception of traditional music as a means to sustain cultural values – underscores the potential of this music and associated community strategy to strengthen social bonds as well as cultural continuity, providing a secure path for its own transmission into the future.

![Figure 10: Training the Tolon group; a rehearsal on the school grounds.](image)

The group was formally inaugurated at the school grounds in July 2015 with great fanfare (Figure 11), including speeches from elders and teachers and a spectacular public performance, witnessed by all the students (Zukpeni, 2015b). Thus, the group officially assumed a respected place within the village’s social space. Since then regular rehearsals have continued; in November 2015,
the group staged a major music-health performance at the palace of the chief, who offered stirring remarks on the importance of maintaining traditional music culture, indicating that while such music – being repurposed to carry health messages – is in some respects an innovation, it is nevertheless cherished as a revival of tradition (Ewenson, 2016).

Figure 11: Inauguration day

Next steps involve qualitative monitoring and evaluation, including a longitudinal study design approach similar to that of Phase I. We plan to conduct several rounds of KAP surveys, completed by respondents selected at random from a variety of locations, including markets, community centers, and schools, at different times of the day, in order to assess improvements in health knowledge, attitude, and practice. We will also conduct focus groups with group members to record their reactions to the program, discover what they have learned, and gather feedback on the new groups, assess motivation and transmission, and gauge how their effectiveness and sustainability could be enhanced.

Concluding Remarks

Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime. Not only do dance dramas convey information sensitizing attendees to health issues, they do so in an atmosphere charged with emotion and social solidarity. The co-presence of a large fraction of the community reinforces health messaging, implicitly affirmed through attendance, while simultaneously supporting a social cohesion infused with health issues at its core.
While some social health progress may require more expensive, material interventions, it seems clear that where progress in global health depends primarily on behavioral change, music and dance offer a powerful force to achieve it. By including communities, PAR methods provide a strategy for guiding interventions so as to maximize their impact.

However, it was equally clear that one-off performances by community outsiders, while impactful in conveying health information and stirring local interest, are insufficient. This is because they are unsustainable without a continual inflow of resources, and – even then – they are somewhat disconnected from the village community itself. Rather, they served to establish a launching pad for local, amateur “singing and dancing for health” groups, sustainably supported by the community, integrated within (and strengthening) its social fabric.

Socially, culturally, and performatively, such groups sustain and are sustained by local oral tradition. We hope they will become new traditions, cherished institutions for self-care, passed down through the generations, for the sake of better health, and for the revival of cultural continuity as a means of affirming a shared identity and thereby increasing social cohesion. Integral to the community, rather than outside agents, they will require few on-going financial resources; furthermore, as an integral social component, they adapt naturally to social changes as required.

Playing the role of initializer, our team has thus far established two such groups, which should now be able to operate autonomously without significant inputs, material or informational, for some years to come. We will continue to monitor them from time to time, and to offer advice and assistance where needed. But our hope is that we have now planted the seeds of a new, robust tradition combining performance and health promotion that is self-sustaining, at least in the near term. While there is always a risk that the seed may not sprout, or that the resulting tree may wither, the opposite may also occur: like a banyan, these implanted groups may thrive and spread, inspiring new ones in neighboring villages. Whether our hopes will be realized remains to be verified through longitudinal research, but this experiment in the revival and modification of local oral tradition towards better health, if successful, should have tremendous implications for health promotion. Furthermore, we believe that these methods can be transposed to other rural societies likewise characterized by participatory musical traditions, leading to improved community health whenever behavior is a primary determinant, as is so often the case (WHO, 2002). Further research is required to document the processes involved, their strengths and weaknesses, and to suggest strategies for overcoming the latter. But we are optimistic, and we are looking forward to more success.
References


“Ahorita estamos en lo nuestro” (“Now We Are Ourselves”): 
Afro-Venezuelan Music Rituals for Health and Community Wellbeing

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Abstract: In Venezuela, people of West African descent developed rituals for wellbeing within Catholic contexts. This study analyses performances directed at fulfilling health-related desires. The first is ritual street performance staged as part of Corpus Christi, under the name of the Devils of Corpus Christi. It includes instrumental music, dance, special clothing, theatricality and high symbolism. The second performance is the Feast of Saint John, celebrated with drums, songs, dances and rituals. These ritual music festivities also present communal benefits like solidarity, pleasure and unity, since people can express their unique identities through them and use them as acts of resistance.

Keywords: Venezuela, Afro-Catholic rituals, music and dance, health and wellbeing, identity

Celebrated for centuries, the rituals of Saint John and Corpus Christi in Venezuela connect faith, music and dance with healing and wellbeing. Historical and social structures of these rituals reflect, on the one hand, the human and non-human interactions that deal with health problems, and the process of fortifying group cohesion on the other hand. The rituals are practiced among people of African descent who typically belong to the lower classes and they are partly gender-dependent, but not age-dependent. Historically, the rituals’ structure is based on the introduction of West African labor, through slavery, the Catholic Church, and a deficient public health system. But it is also based on the compatibility of several religious practices and symbols in West African, Christian, and indigenous religiosity. An example is the concept of a supernatural cause of illness or the idea of a mediator who acts between earth and cosmos. Owing to

1 For the language review of the English version of this article I would like to thank Elaine Sandoval Chang.
these similarities, a symbiosis emerged in which Afro-Venezuelans were able to reinterpret their faith as they took refuge in the new religion, which provides psychological, medical, social, as well as, recreational functions.

Methods of participatory observations, interviews, and experiences in the field, as well as, the analysis of historical, anthropological, and musical studies reveal the relations of health, music, and ritual as a part of social and cultural identity in each town where the festivals of Saint John and Corpus Christi are celebrated. Within the context of religion, community music, dance, illness, and social health, Saint John and Corpus Christi are two examples of complex and effective rites that show a perfect balance between necessity, activities, and results, where individuals attempt to solve health-related problems that are thought to be beyond the curative expertise of orthodox medical personnel. In these contexts, a very personal relationship between humans and the supernatural being is established based on devotion and confidence. For that reason, the divinities have a very human demeanor and form part of the human group. When the problem is solved, the public thanksgiving goes on, characterized by music, dance, and singing. The activities of the thanksgiving require a close coordination between participants and public authorities. These extensive rituals produce unity among members of the community, as well as, between the community and the saint. The collective unity is strengthened by efforts towards creating harmony, relaxation, as well, as the sharing of cultural and musical values, which lasts for several days.

Today, these rituals continue to be a space for resistance to hegemonic domination by sustaining dynamics and processes of self-determination that confirm local identity and stabilize the community. They provide a useful model for mutuality, solidarity, and optimism in times of crisis. Also, they demonstrate how to maintain identity, group-feeling, and collective power.

**History of Venezuela: Discovery and Slavery**

When the Spanish colonizers arrived in Venezuela in 1498 looking for gold mines, they instead found extensive amounts of natural pearls on the coast. This was their first great “discovery” and they capitalized on it through slave exploitation. The natural pearls were soon completely exploited, and cocoa exportation became the biggest business after 1615. Cocoa was produced on big plantations based on slave labor. From the beginning of the sixteenth century to 1800, an estimated 100,000 slaves were imported (Pollak-Eltz, 2000, p. 39). They came from different kingdoms in West Africa, often not directly, but via detours. Venezuela has a 2800 km long coastline along the Caribbean Sea and the Caribbean region is historically a system of interconnection and exchange. In colonial times, the main ports of direct negotiation with Europe and Africa
were Havana in Cuba, Veracruz in Mexico, and Portobelo and Cartagena in Colombia. These routes operated based on both wind and water streams. Thus, other places such as Venezuela were involved predominantly through indirect trade. As such, many African slaves brought to Venezuela first lived in the Antilles and were not selected by nationality, but by physical condition. Enslaved Africans of various origins were traded together and only in very few cases did groups of the same origin move together. This accelerated the transculturation process between and with European and indigenous influences.

It is difficult to determine precisely where descendants of slaves have their origins, or what historical and cultural heritage they brought along, because they arrived first in other Latin American and Caribbean places before coming to Venezuela. Pollak-Eltz (1972) analyzed different historical documents and concluded that descendants of Africans in the Americas can trace their backgrounds primarily to the following three groups: a) the West African coast (Ghana/Gold Coast, Togo and Benin/Slave Coast, Nigeria), e.g. Fanti, Ashanti, Ewe, Fon, Yoruba, Tari, Carabalí, etc.; b) the Bantu culture from the region of Congo and Angola; and c) the culture of the Islamized Malinke (Mandinga).

It is likely that slaves arriving in Venezuela were brought mainly from West and Central Africa. Researchers such as Suárez (2003) and Acosta Saignes (1984) confirm that among the ethnic groups who ended up in Venezuela are: Ewe, Fon, Ashanti, Efik, Efok, Mina, Bakongo, Loango, and others. Pollak-Eltz (2000, p. 80) mentions ethno-linguistic studies which have found evidence of 115 words used today in Venezuelan Spanish that are of Bantu origin, possibly from the present-day Democratic Republic of Congo and Angola, although these studies do not necessarily account for the similarities of root words in other Bantu languages such as Kimbundu, Kikongo, or Shona. Afro-Venezuelan music cultures can be delineated into more homogeneous and more heterogeneous areas. Suárez (2003) found that this is due to geographic conditions. More homogeneous cultural areas are found in plain regions where communication between groups is easier. But in mountainous situations with poor infrastructure, heterogeneous cultural phenomena develop, due to limitations on exchange and influence.

This study focuses on the central northern part of Venezuela, near the Caribbean. The Spanish have intensively settled here since the beginning of the seventeenth century and established big plantations cultivating cocoa, sugar, and coffee. To attend to and extend such agricultural production, slaves of African origin were bought and exploited. Within these heterogeneous Afro-Venezuelan territories exists only one homogeneous area: the plains of Barlovento, not far from the current capital Caracas. García (1989, pp. 18, 27 & 33) reports that Barlovento was colonized at the end of the seventeenth century. Since 1700,
Spaniards, Creoles, and some free descendants of Africans have acquired large lands for 186 cocoa plantations along the route connecting the towns of Araguaita, Caucagua, and Capaya. By 1750, the number of farms had already grown to 555. Although the African slaves came to this region from different cultural areas, Brandt (1987, p. 20) concludes that most originated in Congo, Guinea, and Angola. The resulting culture is quite homogeneous due to the geographical conditions of the region.

About 100,000 slaves came to Venezuela between 1525 and 1800. While quantitatively this does not appear to be much, by 1600 Black inhabitants proportionally comprised the majority of the population as compared to Whites. In the seventeenth century, according to Pollak-Eltz (2000, p. 42), slave importation increased due to the intensification of the establishment of plantations along the coast. The conditions for both free and enslaved descendants of Africans were brutal; they were extremely exploited in the plantations and mines and faced punishments of lashing or incarceration. They had only a few free days a year. In 1585 the Provincial Council of Mexico, which was then the centre of religious power in Latin America, fixed specific holidays for slaves to attend mass and be free of work. García (2006, p. 65) found that these included the Feast of Saint John on the 24th of June and the Feast of Corpus Christi, held on a different date each year.

Thus, enslaved Africans faced a trinity of conditions: Cross, lash and cocoa. The law dictated that Black slaves had to be baptized upon reaching American soil. The Catholic Church’s strategy was based on the goal to depersonalize Africans and their descendants. García (1989, pp. 40, 42 & 50) emphasizes that the Catholic Church required payment for the permanent indoctrination of slaves, but landowners did not consider productivity compatible with humanity and so in most cases religious life was minimal among slaves. But religion came to represent an extraordinary refuge in which to construct identities.

An important mechanism of cultural and social action was the formal constitution of brotherhoods (Span.: cabildos/cofradías). At first, these organizations did not differentiate between social class or skin color, but beginning in 1646 they founded separate guilds for free or enslaved Black and mixed-race people. The brotherhoods’ function was to prepare religious festivities, but it also provided mutual aid such as burials or caring for the sick or orphaned. Due to the existence of similar institutions in Africa, these associations were very successful among displaced Africans (Pollak-Eltz, 2000). In addition, these structures allowed the development of festive practices within the local legal framework throughout colonial times (García, 2006).
Health Systems

Today health is defined not only as the absence of illness, but also in terms of conditions of nutrition, living circumstances, education, environmental factors, work, transport, personal security, employment, recreation, liberty and access to services. In these terms, health is equivalent to wellbeing. Thus, health levels are evaluated based on policies, socioeconomic conditions, service availability, and health status indicators such as mortality and birth rates. Indicators of health in Venezuela demonstrate the strength of the current health system. Venezuela’s health system is comparable to the best in the global North, with two doctors per 1000 inhabitants (similar to Canada) and a life expectancy of 76 years (Welt in Zahlen, 2016). More than 96% of the population have three balanced meals every day (Agencia Venezolana de Noticias, 2012). One can find sufficient hospitals, private clinics, medical consulting centers, outpatient centers and pharmacies across the country.

A formal health system has existed in Venezuela since 1936. Previously, it was not common to have access to formal medicine. As recently as 1926, the life expectancy was only 34 years due to several health risks, such as, the prevalence of malaria, which afflicted one million of the three million inhabitants yearly (Cámara de Comercio de Maracaibo, 2011). In colonial times, White, Black and mixed-race people frequently died young because of epidemics, wars, malaria or accidents. Child mortality was very high, with the main causes being stillbirths and snakebites (Pollak-Eltz, 2000).

These general health conditions encouraged people to seek alternative treatments to sicknesses. Today, a distinction is generally made between scientific medicine and folk medicine. Many people believe that the official scientific medication is for the treatment of external symptoms while other forms of medicine deal with the real causes, namely the spiritual. Therefore, people often use both forms in order to get to the root causes of any degenerative health condition (Clarac, 2010). It is important to keep in mind that people in both Sub-Saharan Africa and Venezuela believe in the supernatural causes of many diseases, especially if the symptoms are hard to define and the disease is chronic. Slaves brought alternative traditional healing practices with them from Africa. Once in Latin America, these merged with Indian and European practices. Both White and Black people are said to have visited Black medical practitioners, because they often had more success and experience than the White surgeons in the treatment of diseases. Healers accompanied their practice with religious rites, such as making offerings to the gods or expelling evil spirits through “sucking them”. Spaniards also had similar traditional religious practices, which included praying and making promises or offerings to their God, the Virgin Mary, or saints (Clarac, 2010). This continues to today. Due to the background of such
beliefs, contemporary Venezuelans in general still look for alternatives to conventional medicine. This is one of the reasons behind the great success of religions such as evangelical Christianity and Catholicism, but also Cuban santería and spiritualism.

Popular religiosity is practised in contexts of hierarchical religious institutionalization that allows only limited participation for the majority. This was the case in Catholicism. Gurjewitsch (1986, p. 121) emphasizes, for example, that early Christianity had no veneration of saints, but in the Middle Ages this practice began to spread because of the increasing abstractness of the figure of God. Collective memory moved toward taking events of the saint-hero’s story and adapting them to everyday needs. In Venezuela, saint worship found fertile ground because, according to Pollak-Eltz (1975, p. 125), the African deities and religious structures were similar in their essence to that of Catholics. She highlights that the interpretation of cultural elements created an alteration of the content but retained psychological value. African descendants were able to reinterpret their beliefs within a Catholic frame due to these similarities. For example, the idea that a supreme being created the world and then retired and delegated his power to the divinities (nature, ancestors, saints, spirits). In both religions, pacts or promises are made with the divine in order to achieve or attain something. When receiving the favor, it has to be reciprocated accurately. Each deity has a well-defined role. Clarac (2000, p. 399) points out that the Catholic Church selected its saints during colonial times due to their relationship with water, sun, agriculture, health and illness, although some saints later came to represent varying characteristics. So, the rites in popular Catholicism have not only religious functions, but also psychological, medical, economic, social, and recreational value, when seeking aid for problems that do not always seem to have official solutions. And for a long time, there has been an abyss between Church doctrines and popular practices.

**Religious Music Practices**

Many manifestations of popular religiosity respond by reciprocating a granted favor, often related to health problems. From the rituals with major Afro-Venezuelan emphasis, I selected two specific ones which are practiced in the same geographic area in north-central Venezuela. These are the festivals of Saint John and Corpus Christi. Both events are of a high priority in the liturgical schedule and were imposed through colonization by the Catholic Church. In Latin America, they were then adjusted to the concrete conditions of each country and region. This explains why there is a manifestation of great diversity in the way these festivals are celebrated throughout the continent. Due to the same religious origin of both rituals, they have a lot of general elements in common.
However, they are also different in relation to their specific content and especially in their popular expression.

The practices are similar in structure (eve, principal day, *octavita*), symbolism, aim, collective participation and motifs. Many villages that have Devils that dance for the Blessed Sacrament of Corpus Christi also celebrate Saint John.² Although Saint John is called upon for various needs and the Blessed Sacrament is used mostly for the curing of diseases, both are employed in health matters depending on the preference of the affected person, the family, or local tradition. The choice may be determined by an individual, can be based on a family member’s promise, and it can even be inherited. There are many testimonies attesting to the success of these methods, for example to heal injuries from accidents, peritonitis, asthma, or pregnancy problems. Asthma is a chronic disease, so it fits well with the pattern that underlines the major belief in traditional medicine and divinities in remedying chronic and apparently ineradicable problems. But unexpected circumstances such as accidents are also included when seeking the assistance of divinities, as are other conditions like pregnancy.

**Testimony³**

Eight years ago my daughter Camila was born. But her mother had problems during the pregnancy. When I found out I would become father, the first person I talked to was Him [Saint John]. As one usually does, I told Him: “She is yours, I entrust her to You. You have the commanding voice.” I promised: “If You can save my baby, I will give You a dress and a silver bracelet.” Every time I went to the village, I visited Him and spoke to Him. We talked, I made requests and made offerings to Him .... We say: Saint John has everything, Saint John gives everything if he wants, but you have to pray. So we do it out of devotion and with love, because it is love that we feel for him. Saint John is the people, he does not belong to anyone, but to the common people. Saint John is always present in me. I wouldn’t have made a promise to another saint. I most identify with him.

Because the mother of my daughter had trouble with blood pressure, she could have lost the baby. She went to the doctor and had regular medical exams from the first to the last day of her pregnancy. She trusted the doctor. And so did I, but I clung more to the saint. The mother didn’t know what happened from this side. She was involved with her doctor and I with my devotional saint.

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² These are Patanemo, San Millán, Cata, Cuyagua, Ocumare de la Costa, Naiguatá, and Chuao.
³ The following section is based on an interview on March 9, 2016, by the author with Johan Aguilar, a devotee of Saint John in Curiepe, Miranda.
Look, my daughter was born with the umbilical cord around her neck. Thankfully the doctor didn’t approve a natural birth, he proposed a Caesarean operation. He didn’t know about the umbilical cord. If it was a different doctor, they might have proceeded with a normal birth. And in that case it could have played out differently .... When he took the baby in his hands he said: “Fortunately we did it this way”. And I thought: ... well... the saint...  He complied with me.

Today Camila goes crazy when she hears the drums dedicated to Saint John. When she was two years old I took her to the saint’s festival. I put her on my shoulders and went next to the drums in the middle of the crowd. It was midday and unbearably hot. Everybody was dancing and jumping. Suddenly I felt her moving to the rhythm. After a while I wanted to leave, but the girl started weeping. I returned and she calmed down. When I walked out again, she cried. Her mother said: “What are you doing with her for such a long time in this crowd?” And I answered: “But the girl wants to stay there.” “How does she want to be there?” “Come and see it ....” I went into the throng and when I stepped out, she began to cry. Other children get tired and want to leave. She doesn’t. She does not complain about anything, she is attentive to all. And she knew how to dance since she was two years old (J. Aguilar, personal communication, March 9, 2016).

Feast of Corpus Christi

The “dancing Devils” are an expression of popular religiosity linked to the Feast of Corpus Christi in Venezuela (see Figure 1 & 2). The first reference to the celebration of Corpus Christi dates back to 1582, when the festival included a mix of sacred and secular elements such as dances, comedies, tarasca (dragon), giants and little Devils. The dances were organized by people from the same social group, generally by indigenous and Black people. Capelán (2014/2015, pp. 7-8) reports that in 1619 the authorities decided that brotherhoods of Blacks and of mulattos held their own separate dances. In 1765, a royal law prohibited the sacred comedies that had been a part of the celebration of Corpus Christi, and in 1780, other presentations, including those of the tarasca, giants and Devils, were also banned. The Devils were always represented by Blacks in regions with predominantly Afro-Venezuelan populations. Far away from the urban centres, the prohibition was ignored and the celebration was reduced to the activities of dancing Devils, as an expression of Black identity and faith (M. Capelán, personal communication, April 15, 2016).
Figure 1: Devil dancing, Cata, 2014 (photo: K. Lengwinat)

Figure 2: Dancing Devils, Tinaquillo, 2012 (photo: K. Lengwinat)
Even today, the Devils are a devotional expression in about 11 villages in the northern part of the country where there are old Afro-Venezuelan and slave settlements that were once engaged in fishing and agriculture. In the different villages, the Devils share the organization into brotherhoods and protective elements as well as the combination of devotion, masks, clothing, dance, and music. This comprises a complex magico-religious ritual, symbolically indicating the submission of heresy to Christian doctrine, and reaffirming the power of divine forces over the forces of evil.

The Confraternity of the Blessed Sacrament has a hierarchical organization with specific responsibilities. Considering the role of the foreman, one does not just assume this position because of knowledge and experience, but also due to the one’s personality. A foreman has to be wise and listen, give advice, and intervene in interpersonal conflicts. In many cases foremen also heal. An example is Roberto Izaguirre in the village of Naiguatá, who is said to have cured the evil eye and shingles and who was able to banish evil spirits. As he related in an interview, he did this out of faith, not for money, stressing that whoever practises this for money cannot cure (R. Izaguirre, personal communication, October 7, 2011). In general, women do not participate in this manifestation, although some cases of limited participation have begun recently.

Figure 3: Surrender, Turiamo, 2007 (photo: K. Lengwinat)
The ritual is comprised of a minimum of three moments: The *víspera* (eve), the Thursday of Corpus Christi, and the *octavita* (octave, i.e. one week later). In all places where it is celebrated, these three parts of the ritual are based on faith and music. The eve lasts nine hours, the Corpus festivity takes eight to ten hours, and the *octavita* lasts about five hours. Apart from the eve in some villages, the celebration is centered on instrumental music and dance. The instrument used is a single *cuatro* (a small four-stringed guitar) or a single drum. The musical pieces are quite similar in harmonic sequences, but they are different in rhythmic patterns depending on their function. As such, we can distinguish four or five airs. The most devotional one is at the moment of surrender. But there are also special tunes for calling, for walking, or for entertainment. All performances are usually based on duple meter, except for few diverting themes that are in triple meter. The following examples (Figures 3, 4, & 5) are from the moment of compensating for the received favor.\(^4\)

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{Fig4.png}
\caption{Drum surrender pattern in Yare, adapted from Ortiz et al. (1982, p. 180)}
\end{figure}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{Fig5.png}
\caption{*Cuatro* surrender pattern of Devils from Patanemo, adapted from Lengwinat (2012, p. 36)}
\end{figure}

\(^4\) See and hear these recordings at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2fe4PzAtrWg&nohtml5=False, http://mimp3.me/escuchar/3KClaqKdo6Rq/10-diablos-de-yare-escobillao-corto, and https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Nmo6OKIOeU.
Feast of Saint John

At the beginning of the colonial era in Latin America, the feast of Saint John was one of the most popular celebrations in Spain and elsewhere in Europe. Originally associated with the solstices, the festival was significantly impregnated with African roots after its arrival in Venezuela. Until today Saint John is one of the most adored saints in Venezuela. There are about 100 localities in which Saint John is the official patron saint, especially in the north-central part of the country (Miranda, Aragua, Carabobo, Yaracuy and Guárico States). Here, the saint is worshipped every 24th of June with rituals, festivals, chants, dance, music, and different Afro-Venezuelan percussion ensembles (see Figure 6). According to several scholars, those festivities were directed initially toward ancient African deities, but camouflaged behind the Catholic saint figure (Liscano, 1973; Pollak-Eltz, 2000). Thus, the commemoration of the saint, implemented by the church and supported by the slave holders, took on a deep re-signification, transforming it into a symbol of resistance.

Figure 6: Playing for Saint John, Naiguatá, 2010 (Photo: Patricia Martínez)

Today, the ritual is composed of two main moments: The víspera (eve) and the principal day, which falls on the 24th of June. There are other dates that
are marked by commemorative performances, such as the 1\textsuperscript{st} of June (the welcome party for Saint John’s month), in some places the 25\textsuperscript{th} of June (when the saint departs \textit{encierro}), and in others the 29\textsuperscript{th} of June (a meeting with St. Peter) or the 16\textsuperscript{th} of July (the day of the Virgin of Carmen). The ritual on the eve takes about 9 hours and the main celebration about 12 hours or more. Drums are played throughout and there is singing and dancing for the saint. One can distinguish three basic musical forms: The \textit{sirenas} (sirens, an invocational a capella song), the \textit{sangueo} (solemn processional song with drums, see Figures 7 & 8) and the \textit{golpe} (fervent song with drums and dance). In the celebrations, women are very active as organizers, singers, and dancers.

Figure 7: \textit{Sangueo} of Saint John, Patanemo, 2011 (photo: K. Lengwinat)

Figure 8: \textit{Sangueo} of Saint John, Lezama, 2008 (photo: K. Lengwinat)
The basic musical components in the celebrations are the homophonic singing and the percussion instruments, normally grouped into different registers that portray different levels of Africanness and rhythmic functions, combining drums with fixed patterns of sustenance, escapement and functions of improvisation (Lengwinat, 2009). The *sirena* is characterized by free meter, *sangueo* by double meter and *golpe* by triple meter. The triple meter is typically used for ritual in West African music. The songs are performed in responsorial manner (call-and-response), alternating between an improvising soloist and a fixed chorus. The frequent usage of vocables such as *lelolé, lelolá, and loloé* is derived, according to musicologist Rolando Pérez (personal communication, October 11, 2008), from the Bantu ideophone “le, le, le” used to attract attention. Figures 9, 10 and 11 show examples of the rhythm of the *golpe*.

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<Figure 9: Golpe, drums from Borburata, Carabobo State. Transcription by Darmi Romero>

<Figure 10: Golpe, cul’e puya drums from Barlovento, Miranda State. Transcription adapted from Brandt (1987, p. 167-175)>

<Figure 11: Jinca, drums from Tarmas, Vargas State Transcription adapted from Alexander Livinalli>

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5 The transcriptions use TUBS notation developed in the 1960s at UCLA for African percussion by James Koetting.
Figure 12: Graphical transcription of Saint John’s festival in Tarmas (by Iris Rojas)

The graphical transcription in Figure 12 shows the events taking place in the Saint John’s festival in Tarmas, including the principal musical and dance elements of the three forms mentioned above: sirena, sangueo, golpe. In the case of Tarmas these are named llamado, lejio, and jinca.6

Rituals for Health and Community Wellbeing

With respect to health, music, and wellbeing in the African diaspora in Venezuela, we have to distinguish two phases: first, an individual problem of health and the personal alliance with divine forces; and second, the ritual for the divinity with continuous music and dance that generates wellbeing for the community. Testimonies are the best way to sustain both parts. Those who have the deepest commitments are of course people who reach out to divinities because of an alarming or worrying personal problem. They are the principal reasons for undertaking the public ritual (Tables 1 & 2).

6 For a video documentary of the Saint John’s festival in Tarmas see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dxy6mNF8LbM
Table 1: Devils From Corpus Christi

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Moment and significance of ritual</th>
<th>Activities and musical elements</th>
<th>Testimonies of psychic implication</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>surrender</td>
<td>Individual dances in front of the altar with the Blessed Sacrament and other artefacts promised by devotees</td>
<td>Tengo que darle gracia al Santísimo por el favor recibido. Me curé mi enfermedad, me operé, me salí bien, se me quitó mi asma, mi taquicardia, el embarazo o los hijos pa’ que salgan normal. (Izaguirre, 2011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in front of the church and house altars</td>
<td>Only devotees active</td>
<td>[I have to thank the Blessed for the received favor. I healed my illness, I had an operation, I became well, I overcame the asthma and the tachycardia, the pregnancy finished well, and everything with the children went normally. (Izaguirre, 2011, my own translation)]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thanksgiving ceremony</td>
<td>Solemn tune (rinde) binary rhythm</td>
<td>Nos disfrazamos de Diablos y entonces vamos humillados ante el Cuerpo de Cristo que es la Santa Custodia, vamos humillados a pagar una promesa, pagamos y salimos humillados. (Félix Mijares, Turiamo)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submission, tribute</td>
<td>cuatro or drum rattles bells</td>
<td>[We dress as devils and come humbled before the Body of Christ which is the Holy Custody. We are going humbly to fulfil the promise, we pay and leave humbly. (Félix Mijares, Turiamo, my own translation)]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On the tour</td>
<td>Translation from one place to another Group dances Only devotees active</td>
<td>Es una bendición para todo aquel que los diablos lo visiten, aleja las enfermedades. (Lobo, W. 2011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Streets of the village</td>
<td>Different binary rhythms and dances cuatro or drum rattles bells</td>
<td>[It is a blessing for all who are visited by devils, because this keeps away diseases. (Lobo, W. 2011, my own translation)]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bringing faith and miracle elsewhere</td>
<td></td>
<td>Es posible que el demonio ande entre uno. Por eso cargamos campanas. El ruido de las campanas auyenta ese espíritu. Mientras más campanas bailo, para entrarle le cuesta. (Izaguirre, 2011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happiness of sharing with the community this glorious day</td>
<td></td>
<td>[It’s possible that the demon walks among us. That’s why we bear bells. The noise of the bells banishes this spirit. When I dance with more bells, it is more difficult for him to enter me (Izaguirre, 2011, my own translation)]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The major Devil in Naiguatá, Roberto “Robin” Izaguirre (see Figure 13) was 74 years old when he told us:

Yo siempre hablo con el Sanísimo y le digo las cosas… está pasando esto, quiero que usted lo corrija… ayer mataron a un malandro, dice la gente que van a matar a un Diablo… Y le hago comprensiones así. Mi mujer me parió tres hijos e hice promesas por ellos durante el embarazo. Salieron correctos. (R. Izaguirre, personal communication, October 7, 2011)

I always speak with the Blessed and I tell him things that are happening, that I want Him to correct this … yesterday they killed a criminal, or the people say: tomorrow they will kill a Devil. So I let him know it. My wife gave me three children and I made promises for them during her pregnancies. And everything went right (all translations by K. Lengwinat).
Table 2: Saint John’s Feast

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Moment and significance of ritual</th>
<th>Activities and musical elements</th>
<th>Testimonies of psychic implication</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Procession of the saint in the streets</td>
<td>Tour Devotees and community Moderate <em>sangueo</em> Drums Responsorial singing Binary rhythm</td>
<td>Es inexplicable, la sangre de negro llama, cuando suena el tambor… te mueve ese negro que llevas por dentro, esa raíz que uno tiene. (Eugenio Méndez, 2013) [It is inexplicable. The blood of blackness calls when you hear the drums… This touches the blackness you carry inside, the roots one has. (Eugenio Méndez, 2013, my own translation)]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walking together, the group acquires consistency. community is powered in its song unit honour of the saint</td>
<td>Stop at a place or house where there is an altar Thanksgiving to the saint for received favours</td>
<td>Sensual couple dancing Devotees and community Quick <em>Golpe</em> (<em>jinca</em>) Drums Responsorial singing Ternary rhythm Todos los años siento gran alegría porque puedo tocar a mi santo y expresar ahí todo el inmenso cariño que siento hacia él y lo transmito tocando. (Blanco, C. 2016) [Every year I feel very happy because I can play for my saint and express all my immense love to him, and this is what I transmit in my playing. (Blanco, C. 2016, my own translation)]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 13: Roberto Izaguirre, Major Devil, Naiguatá, 2011, (photo: Belén Ojeda)
Milinson Vegas, better known as “Macambo”, who has been dancing with the Devils for 26 years, made various promises to the Blessed.

Siempre le pido que me ayude, porque creo mucho en él. Le pedí ayuda para mi hijo cuando mi esposa tuvo un problema en el embarazo. Después por pocos años que no pudo bailar por mi trabajo. Pero cuando tuve un accidente que me cayó un techo de 8 metros y me redujo el pulmón con el golpe, estaba a punto de un paro respiratorio, así que le pedí al Santísimo, que si saliera bien, iba a bailarle este año. (M. Vegas, personal communication, July 16, 2011)

I am always requesting Him to help me, because I have great confidence in Him. I asked Him to assist my son, when my wife had problems in pregnancy. Later there were a few years that I couldn't dance, because of a work engagement. But then I had an accident, when a ceiling collapsed on me from eight metres high. The impact reduced my lung and I almost had a respiratory failure. So I pleaded once more with the Blessed, that if I overcame this, I promised to dance for him the next year.

Marjorie Josefina Blanco (51 years) had a car accident, which impacted her ability to walk and she was bedridden for two years. The doctors did not believe in her recovery. As a devotee of Saint John, she says “realicé una petición a mi santo, pidiéndole mi recuperación y sanación, a cambio yo le veneraría y bailaría durante el resto de vida” – “I requested my recovery and healing from my Saint and in exchange I promised that I would worship him and dance for him the rest of my life” (M. Blanco, personal communication, 2016). Today, she has recuperated more than 90% of her mobility.

For Elisabeth López doctors diagnosed complications and the possible loss of her unborn baby.

Me encomendé a mi santo con mucha fe. Le doy gracias a dios y a mi San Juan que metieron las manos en mi parto y mi hijo está bien sano y sin complicaciones. Y en la actualidad participo en la festividad, ahora con mi hijo, donde pagamos nuestra promesa bailando y cantando en honor a Él. (E. López, personal communication, 2016)

So I entrusted this problem, with a lot of faith, to my saint. I give thanks to God and to my Saint John, who had a hand in the birth, so
my child is healthy and was born without complications. And today I participate in the festival, now along with my son, where we pay for our promises by dancing and singing in his honour.

Even in only these few statements, the special relationship between people (supplicants) and the divine becomes evident. These individuals have established a very personal communication based on faith and confidence. But the central point is that of reciprocity and exchange: I need something and if you can it give me, I promise to pay you back. The feast day becomes a time of payment, within a public group event, where all has to be coordinated between the participants of the locality. Despite the fact that the ritual of Corpus Christi is limited to the active participation of only the Devils, whereas anyone can participate in the festivity of Saint John, both festivals are collective celebrations of a specific community. But what is the meaning, the significance, the importance of these prolonged music rituals for the community? I turn again to some statements of participants.

Edwar Palacios from Barlovento has not made any promise to Saint John, but he considers himself a devotee. “Heredé la devoción desde hace muchos años por mis mayores. Directamente de mis antepasados seguimos la costumbre manteniendo así la idiosincracia cultural de nuestro pueblo” – “I inherited the devotion from my elders. Directly from my ancestors we continue this practice and thus maintain the cultural specificity of our village” (E. Palacios, personal communication, 2016).

Norberta Romero communicates frequently with Saint John. “Dicen: viene Norberta para hablar con su marido. Aquí en Naiguatá no hay quien no quiera a ese santo, desde el más chiquito hasta el más grande. Él tiene que tener poder porque está al lado de Dios” – “The people say: here comes Norberta to speak with her husband. Here in Naiguatá there is nobody who does not love this saint, from the youngest to the oldest. He must have power because he is next to God” (N. Romero, personal communication, 2011).

Rosanna Benítez, a young woman, always participates in the Saint John’s festival in her native village of Tarmas. “Lo disfruto que no haya exclusión de nadie y en nada. Siento además una libertad spiritual, pero también mis raíces, de donde vengo, la negritud” – “I enjoy it because no one and nothing is excluded. I also feel a sense of spiritual freedom, as well as, my roots, where I come from, Blackness” (R. Benítez, personal communication, 2013).

There can be a very interesting musical and psychological element in the middle of the celebration. In Curiepe, Barlovento, some of the participants mention the word la capilla (the chapel) and all of them get entranced and achieve a perfect union without paying attention to the surroundings.
Es el momento que se cambia el chip y dentro de su mente se ponen en ese sitio (la capilla). Es algo automático, no sé por qué, pero uno se conecta perfectamente, entre uno mismo, en la música y con el universo. Uno está elevado. (J. Aguilar, personal communication, 2016)

In this moment, things shift, and internally we move to this place (the chapel). It’s something automatic, I don’t know why, but it creates a perfect connection between us, the music, and the cosmos. We are elevated.

This is a group phenomenon, but it also occurs individually. These are moments of a very intimate personal or group union with the Saint.

A veces me siento a tocar el tambor 2, 3, 4, 5 horas hasta que me lo quiten. Pero pasa que ves al tamborero y no parece ser él. Y uno piensa: déjalo quieto hasta que él diga: ya toque o ya canté. (J. Aguilar, personal communication, 2016).

Sometimes I’m playing the drum for two, three, four, or five hours until it’s taken over. But occasionally you see a drummer and it doesn’t seem to be him. So you let him keep drumming until he says: ‘Ok, I already played’, or, ‘I already sung’.

Franklin Espinoza, Claret Ramírez, and Norma Corro from the same village are delighted with the celebrations of the 24th of June.

Emociona ver la gente bailando y tocando sin tener discordia con nadie. Se divierten y comparten con personas que vienen de fuera. Ese día nos sentimos una gran familia con unión espiritual. Nosotros sentimos el goce y ese sonido de tambor llega dentro, se mete en la sangre (cited from Lengwinat et al., 2014).

To see people dancing and playing without discord with anyone is fantastic. They have fun and also share with people who come from outside. This day we are a great family in spiritual union. We feel the pleasure and this sound of the drums comes in, gets into the blood.
Willam Díaz, one of the best singers and devotees, states that “es un momento que une a las distintas generaciones no sólo por el espacio físico sino por mantener “una disciplina ancestral y respeto por la tradición” – “this is a unifying moment, because it joins together different generations not only in a physical space, but maintains an ancestral discipline and respect of a tradition” (W. Díaz, personal communication, 2013).

Among the devotees of the Blessed Sacrament we can find different mechanisms of protection from bad influences.

Bailar diablo tiene sus riesgos. Por eso nos protegemos. Como diablo mayor tengo que estar pendiente que no haya una malignidad. Si hay algo raro, una confusión, un enredo, los diablos discuten, debo ordenar que se toque la danza cruzada. (A. Lugo, personal communication, 2011)

To dance with the outfit of a Devil is risky. So we have to protect ourselves. As the major Devil, I have to be aware of the infiltration of malignant elements. When I note something strange, like a confusion, a tangle, or discussion among Devils, at that moment, I must give the instruction to perform the danza cruzada (cross dance).

This is the most played tune, the danza del camino (road dance), but in a higher tonality and with crossed fingers, a symbol for protection. Only with this action the group will be fortified.

Another case that brings fraternity to the community is the Devil’s dance, the galerón. It is a profane dance within the religious ritual but somewhat special, because “se le toca a una persona creyente de los diablos y colaboradora. Es como un premio y no se le toca a cualquiera” – “it is dedicated to a distinctive person who believes in the Corpus’ Devils and collaborates with them. It is like a prize and is not played for everybody” (A. Lugo, personal communication, 2011). The galerón is the only music with a triple meter and the only individual dance. One Devil after another dances in a circle and shows his extraordinary skills according to the cuatro rhythm as a tribute and acknowledgment to somebody.

In effect, these festivities start from individual cases and for intimate reasons, but eventually become public to involve major groups and communities. This creates new relationships with the divine as well as interpersonal human bonding. These are spaces of social harmony, of love, protection, interaction, pleasure, of idiosyncrasy, identity in Blackness and unifying tradition, and
above all, spaces of wellbeing, a living place with personal security, recreation, and liberty (see Figure 14).

Figure 14: Singing to Saint John, Borburata, 2009 (photo: Emiliano Montes)

Conclusion

Devils dancing in Corpus Christi and the Saint John’s festival are two domains of popular religiosity within a Catholic context, where descendants of Africans once brought from West Africa as slaves to Venezuela construct and re-construct their identity. Both are rituals based on faith, characterized by long hours of music-making, dancing, and singing. These activities are coordinated by hierarchical brotherhoods, which, since colonial times, have also been organizations for solidarity and hiding places for identity construction involving Blackness. Historically, the public health system was insufficient and therefore complemented by alternative methods such as traditional medicine and spiritual aid in the form of entrusting the solution to problems to divinities.

The Corpus Christi celebration has survived 450 years in Venezuela in the form of a brotherhood of Devils, who organize to dance with masks, special clothing, and instrumental music, to signify the submission of heresy to the Christian doctrine. The Feast of Saint John, the most popular festivity of the Spaniards arriving in Venezuela, was used by Black slaves to invoke their ancient deities and give the feast a deep re-signification through the inclusion of
drumming, singing, and dancing. Both celebrations have similar formal structures, consisting of the eve and the principal day. They start from an individual necessity and end in a collective public thanksgiving. In both rituals the main motive focuses on addressing a specific health problem and when it is solved, the gratitude is shared with the local community. This final moment generates wellbeing, happiness, and identity in the local groups. The main differences lie in how they are performed (Corpus Christi by only men; Saint John by both men and women), the instrumentation (Corpus Christi uses one cuatro or drum; in the Feast of Saint John three drums with different timbres are assigned rhythmic patterns), and active participation (only devotees partake in Corpus Christi; the whole community in the Feast of Saint John). Music is part of the social practices and, in the ritual context, contributes to the stability of the social group.

The Devils’ dancing and the Feast of Saint John’s are an expression of liberty, fertility, life, magic, love, success, and hope. The Devils are not just mediators between the salvation of the community and the glorification of Jesus. They also represent the docility and submission of the Devil to the Blessed Corpus Christi (Alemán, 1997). Saint John gives the opportunity to feel, express and live love. Both celebrations are part of a culture designed to overcome obstacles and to praise life. They are ways to liberate vital energy and thereby to revitalise and unite people. It is a culture of resistance, not only in religiosity and musical elements, but also to globalization by creating or protecting their own space. As such, Afro-Venezuelans identify themselves with these rituals, expressing ‘that’s mine’, “aquí me siento libre y puedo expresarme y hacer lo que quiero para el santo: tocando, bailando, cantando como lo siento. Ahorita estamos en lo nuestro’” – “here I feel free and I can express myself and do what I like for the divinity: I play, dance or sing how I feel it. Now we are ourselves” (J. Aguilar, personal communication, 2016).
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**Non-Published Personal Interviews**

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Benítez, Rosanna (2013). Participant of Saint John’s festival in Tarmas, Vargas. Interview by Mirca Blanco


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Palacios, Edwar (2016). Devotee of Saint John in Curiepe, Miranda. Interview by Johan Aguilar


Vegas, Milinson (2011, July 16). Devil dancer in Patanemo, Carabobo. Interview by Katrin Lengwinat
Twin Ritual (*Kamta Bulikur*): The Significance of Traditional Music in the Health and Wellbeing of Twins among the Bura of North-east Nigeria

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**Abstract:** Similar to many African communities, the Bura of northeast Nigeria believe that twins are born with supernatural powers. Among such powers are the ability to die and be reborn by another woman, the use of scorpions to harm people at will and the ability to feign sickness. To counteract such powers, a special twin ritual, *kamta bulikur*, must be performed for the health and wellbeing of every twin. Bura traditional music is an integral part of this twin ritual. This paper examines Bura notions of twinship and the significance of traditional music in the *kamta bulikur* ritual.

**Keywords:** Bura, twins, music, health and wellbeing, ritual

Twins in most African communities were, and are, to some extent, still considered to be extraordinary beings. Diverse customs and beliefs pertaining to twins, therefore, exist among many communities; especially in West African communities, where there is the highest rate of twin births (Pison, van Beek, Sala-Diakanda, 1999, Pison, van Beek, Sala-Diakanda, et al., 1989; Oruene, 1983; Stewart, 2000). In western Nigeria, Benin and Togo, the rate is over 2.5 twin births per 1000 (Pison et al., 1989, p. 259). The Mega-Chad area, of which Burraland is part, has an average of 1.5-2 twin births per 1000 (van Beek, 2002, p. 121; Pison et al., 1989, p. 260). The African continent undoubtedly, therefore, could be said to have a very high rate of twin births.

Many of the customs and beliefs pertaining to twin births in West Africa are geared towards the health and wellbeing of twins. As stated earlier, twins are considered extraordinary beings, possessing extraordinary powers that can be used to harm their siblings, an individual or a society as a whole. The extraordinary powers believed to be possessed by them can also be detrimental to their
health and wellbeing. Due to the possession of such extraordinary powers, it is said, twins cannot live a normal life like other members of society. The general belief is that twins are not of “this world”

(van Beek, 2002, p. 131), and in order to reduce to the minimum or completely avert the dangers posed by them, efforts are geared towards incorporating or appeasing them to be part of or at least be tolerant of the society into which they are born. According to Leroy, Olaleye-Orune, Koeppen-Schomerus and Bryan (2002):

In traditional African societies, twins are considered of preternatural origin and raise emotional reactions oscillating from fear and repugnance to hope and joy… Twins can bring about disaster, disease and death … As a result [they are] treated with all due respect, loving and care. (p. 134)

Thus, “it is not so much identical twins that fascinate Africa; that particular fascination is for the scientific North with its deep curiosity regarding the balance between nature and nurture, genetics and education” (van Beek, 2002, p. 121). In West Africa, instead, it is the concern to contain the emotional reactions created by the beliefs in the preternatural origin of twins that matters (Zazzo, 1960 & 1993). In most African communities, therefore, twins were and are, to some extent, not viewed with favour. Many of these communities have, therefore, come up with appropriate rituals to take care of the concerns pertaining to twins. In their study of Yoruba customs and beliefs pertaining to twins, Leroy et al. (2002) observe that:

Mainly for genetic reasons, the Yoruba happen to present the highest dizygotic twinning rate in the world (4.4% of all maternities). The high rate associated with such pregnancies has contributed to the integration of special belief system in the African traditional religion of this tribe. (p. 132)

In Nigeria it is not only the Yoruba that have integrated a special belief system pertaining to twins in their traditional religion. Many other groups, including the Bura – though with a very small twining rate compared to the Yoruba – perform twin-related rituals considered necessary for the health and well-being of twins. This article considers Bura twin rituals performed to counteract the commonly held beliefs or notions relating to twins. For the health and wellbeing of twins, the Bura consider the rituals necessary during the life time of each twin. This study focuses mainly on the significance of music in the rituals. There
is a growing body of research investigating the relationship between music, health and wellbeing. Much of this research, though, focuses more on the curative and therapeutic functions of music in clinical settings (MacDonald, Kreutz & Mitchell, 2012; Knox, Beveridge, Mitchell, & MacDonald, 2011; Bechtold, Puli, Othman, Bartalos, Marshall & Roy, 2009; Enwall & Duppils, 2009). This paper, however, seeks to consider how music provides a curative and therapeutic function but in a different setting – Bura twin rituals; a traditional procedure believed to ‘cure’ twins from all, or lessen, the dangers that they pose to the society. For a proper understanding of the significance of music in the rituals, the belief system of the people concerning twins is explored as well.

The data for this paper was primarily derived from fieldwork. Interviews were conducted with several knowledgeable Bura elders who, due to the ongoing Boko Haram insurgency in the region, wish to remain anonymous. Also, very little evidence of the music is presented in this paper. This is because dozens of traditional musicians in the northeast of Nigeria were targeted and murdered by Boko Haram simply for their artistry. The Boko Haram sect is totally against music. As a result, those musicians who managed to escape the terror of the group are very reluctant to perform.

The Bura

The Bura people live in Borno State in the northeast of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (Figure 1). Borno State is characterized by a remarkable degree of ethno-linguistic and cultural diversity. Apart from the Kanuri and Shuwa, who populate the central and northern areas of Borno State, the south is occupied by a large number of ethnic groups who speak languages belonging to the Chadic language family. Among them, the Bura are the most populous as well as the economically and politically most influential people. They settled predominantly on the Biu Plateau, a rugged volcanic area that rises up to 762 meters above sea level. A small population of the Bura lives in the states of Adamawa and Yobe, both bordering Borno State.

There are two hypotheses about the origin of the Bura people. According to those accounts, they may have either migrated from Asante in the west (present-day Ghana) or from the Cameroon Mountain range in the east (Davies, 1954; Meek, 1931). In the fifteenth century, Bura-speaking groups, the Pabir, formed some kind of a state with their capital close to Biu. Having embraced Islam early, the Pabir had good economic and political contacts in the Borno Emirate, under whose influence they are still partially living today. Ever since those days, tension has persisted between the Pabir and Bura people, a situation

1 Boko Haram is a terrorist group fighting to create an Islamic State in Northern Nigeria since 2009.
which could neither be erased under colonial rule in the twentieth century nor within the political context of present-day Nigeria.

Figure 1: Map of Nigeria showing Buraland shaded grey in the northeast (source: http://www.reocities.com/Athens/6060/buralandmap.htm)

Spirits (shatan) are believed to inhabit the Bura world and people’s lives are overshadowed by the fear of offending the spirits.² Before the advent of Christianity, each adult possessed a personal god, the hyelkir, or “god head” (one of the haptu spirit types), represented as a statuette and usually kept in the owner's bedroom. Each compound had a household haptu shrine, an important center for worship through which protection from danger was sought. In each village, there was a haptu shrine, where inhabitants publicly worshipped.

Apart from the possession of haptu, there existed – and to some extent still exists – the belief in an impersonal power which is in a special way possessed by certain humans and animals and, at times, concentrated in objects like

² The Bura have many spirits that are known by different names but are collectively spoken about as shatan. Thus, for example, the spirit connected to rivers would be referred to as shatan kuta Hawul while that of the hills would be referred to as shatan Gar. Jang is also one of the spirit types. Different characters are attributed to the spirits. Some are of good character (e.g. the haptu) while some (e.g. jang) are malevolent.
mispar (charms and amulets), shafa (a kind of tree), milim and jisku (both stone gods). The Bura believe, too, that humans and all animate beings possess shangur, the life principle or soul life. In many cases, the shangur of a wild animal is associated with a person. A person whose shangur is associated with a wild animal, it is said, “can have the animal steal, kill or maim for him without any effort on his part. Of course if the bush animal becomes sick or tired, he too is sick or tired and if it is killed, he likewise dies” (Bittinger, 1939, p. 3). This practice in particular is more common among the Kilba people living to the east of Bura land, but it is also found among the Bura people sharing borders with them.

Above all is the belief in the supreme, all-powerful deity of the Bura people, recognized under the title of hyel. According to Bura folklore, hyel lived near human beings until man's disobedience forced him to withdraw into a new universe. He then became too distant to be directly influenced by human agencies, but in every act of traditional worship the name of hyel is mentioned to seek help in all matters.

A significant shift in Bura history was brought about by the commencement of missionary work of the Church of the Brethren Mission in 1922. Many people turned to Christianity, partially attracted by the educational and health care system that, all of a sudden, offered a new way of life to them. At the same time, some Bura also turned to Islam as the religion gradually made inroads into the area. Despite the conversion of many Bura people to Christianity and Islam, some still adhere to their traditional religion. Even among those that embraced the new religions, certain traditional practices are still evident, especially the kamta bulikur rites. Many of the converts to the new religions still turn to the twin ritual, especially when it is evident that the health and wellbeing of twins within a family are at “risk”. Such risks are noticed when twins begin to exhibit the attributes associated with them – for example, frequent illness and failure to get married early.

Bura Kamta Bulikur Ritual

The Bura term for twin is buli. When one speaks of twins, it is generally understood as people born of the same mother at the same time. In the Bura worldview, though, this might not necessarily be the case. A single child could be considered to be a twin depending on the circumstances surrounding the birth and the character of the child as he/she matures into adulthood. A child could be born single but if suspected to be a reincarnation, attention is paid to see whether he/she would exhibit the traits related to twins. If such traits are noticed, the child is labelled as a twin and treated as one. This is so because the people believe in the ability of certain children who were “meant to be born as twins” to die and be reborn by another woman, a process of reincarnation which only
twin are thought to be capable of actualizing. Such a child is referred to as *bzir sisi* (reincarnated child), and in Bura worldview is believed to have the same traits as those actually born as twins. A child thought to be a reincarnation is feared and receives the same treatment as a twin in Bura society.

Generally speaking, Bura beliefs concerning twins are similar to those of some communities neighboring them (Leroy et al., 2002; van Beek, 2002; Chappel, 1974). According to such Bura beliefs, twins possess powers that non-twin children do not have. As a result of this, twins are looked after carefully lest they be annoyed and cause danger to their immediate family members or to the society as a whole. The dangers posed by infuriated twins could come in several ways. It could be by sending a scorpion to sting anyone who offends him/her, or dying and being born by another woman, or refusing to grow physically. In short, any calamity that befalls a family that has twins in its membership could easily be linked with the manner the twin is treated. It is sometimes believed that twins use ill health as a means of getting the attention of the other family members, thereby, distracting them from engaging in any activity that sustains the means of their livelihood (e.g. farming). When a twin is constantly sick, all the people of the household would be worried and suspend all other activities so as to look after him/her. Sometimes, ill health feigned by twins goes beyond being merely physically sick in the body; it could be psychological problems, which in most cases are interpreted as “madness”. Such problems are noticed through the behavior of a twin.

When a twin begins to behave beyond the conventional practices of the society, it is believed that the spirits of the “other world” are responsible. A mental state of this nature, in the Bura worldview, is detrimental to the health and wellbeing of twins. Equally, when the life cycle of a twin is interrupted, it is as well associated with the belief that twins belong to “another world”. The life cycle of a person according to Bura worldview is that he/she is born, grows up and is initiated into adulthood, marries and raises a family and subsequently dies, only to be reintegrated with the ancestral world. Of crucial importance to the Bura is the stage of being initiated into adulthood and marrying in order to raise a family. When marriage is, therefore, delayed in the life of a twin, it is as well associated with him/her being part of “another world”. The “other world”, according to Bura worldview, consists of spirits, some of whom are thought to be directly responsible for the behavior of twins. A twin’s inability to marry early in life is thought not to be unconnected with the fact that he/she has a “wife” or “husband” in the spirit world. This is considered by the Bura to be detrimental to the twin’s wellbeing. The belief is that such a spiritual wife or husband would never allow a twin to marry until the relationship is severed. There-
fore, for a twin to marry early, as expected by society, he/she must be separated from the wife or husband he/she is believed to have in the spiritual realm.

As a result of all the above beliefs about twins, the Bura perform some rituals at different stages in the lifetime of each twin in order to ensure his/her good health and wellbeing. The first is performed to name the child, vah thlim, while the second, kamta bulikur, is performed when some of the beliefs mentioned earlier begin to be noticed in the life of a twin. Concerning the first ritual, the Bura have no special naming rites for children except for twins. A traditional medicine man, deaha, and a traditional musician play key roles at the naming ritual of twins. When a woman gives birth to twins, the deaha is invited to perform the naming ritual. The parents of the twin brew mbal (sorghum beer) for the ceremony. On the day of the naming, a zibil (special Bura mat for rituals) is laid out on the floor of the hut of the mother of the twin on which she is required to sit while holding the babies. A white-feathered chicken is killed and used to prepare soup. Divar (mush made of guinea corn flour) is also prepared and served (with the soup) to the people gathered for the ceremony. The mbal is sieved and offered to the people as well. A traditional music performer plays gulum (long spiked-neck lute) music until the deaha names the child.

It is not any gulum player that is invited to perform at a naming ritual. The parents of the twin must consult the kwatika oracle who would determine which gulum player to invite for the ritual. Usually, the gulum musician performs tunes selected from a repertoire of praise songs. He praises the twin that is to be named. As the music proceeds, women take turns in the grinding of sorghum grains into flour on a quern-stone set in front of the musician. The procedure for naming, requires the deaha to select a name from a list—Thlama, Mwada, Bata, Awa, Pindar, Tagwi or Bala—reserved for only twins in Bura culture. It is believed that if the appropriate name among the culturally accepted names for twins is not given, it might as well affect his/her health and wellbeing. The parents too will be distracted. A twin must be healthy for the parents to focus on other things that could sustain the livelihood of the family. This is why the parents must consult the kwatika oracle to ensure that the right deaha and gulum player are selected for the ritual. In Bura worldview, it is not any deaha or gulum player that has the capacity to create a desired ritual atmosphere for the appropriate name given to a twin, but it is only the one specially selected by the

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3 An oracle in which the priest or priestess employs dancing as a medium through which answers to questions posed to it are determined.
4 Quern-stones are stone tools for hand-grinding a wide variety of materials. They are used in pairs. The lower, stationary, stone is called a quern, while the upper mobile stone is called a hand stone. It is used by young Bura girls to showcase their grinding skills as a form of dance to the rhythm of gulum music.
kwatika oracle who may. The name given is, therefore, not chosen randomly from those dedicated to twins, as mentioned earlier. It is believed that the deaha is inspired by the gulum music to select the appropriate name. It is through the music that communication between him and some supernatural forces is established. Such supernatural forces communicate to him the name to give the child.

After the naming rituals, the health and wellbeing of twins are continuously monitored as they grow into adulthood. The parents are careful to monitor the maturity process and if at any time events similar to the ones discussed earlier are noticed, kamta bulikur, the second ritual must be performed immediately. This ritual is considered quite important because it determines whether or not twins will live a meaningful life. Indeed it is believed that if the ritual is not performed during the lifetime of a twin, such a twin could experience many difficulties. Thus, it is mandatory for every twin to experience the kamta bulikur ritual, especially before marriage. The ritual is deemed necessary so as to neutralize the powers twins are believed to possess, owing to their preternatural origin.

Again, as in the case of the naming ritual, traditional gulum music is of crucial significance in the kamta bulikur ritual. The kwatika oracle must equally determine all the key players in the ritual, i.e. the gulum player, the woman whose responsibility it is to place the ritual mat zibil and stands guard at the entrance to the hut, as well as the ritual friends. The ritual follows a similar pattern to that of the naming ceremony. In this case, however, it is the twin that sits on the zibil ritual mat, together with a ritual husband or wife, who is also carefully determined by the kwatika. If it is a male twin, a female youth is selected to act as his ritual wife and if she is female, a male youth is selected to act as her ritual husband. Another male and female are also appointed to act as their ritual friends. The selection is usually within the peer group of the twin for whom the ritual is being performed. In each case, both the twin and his/her friend wear traditionally woven clothes (danciki for male and japta for female) for the ritual. Also, as part of the regalia for the ceremony, there are special brass bracelets and a ring (lia bulikur) worn by the twin and his/her friends. Cotton wool, roasted peanuts, and sesame (Sesamum orientale) are freely sprinkled on and around the ritual mat, the zibil, and some of it placed in a calabash as an offering. Other items placed around the zibil for the ritual include: divar tiksha (mush made out of the flour of a reddish sorghum), shifa (beer dregs) and shafa (tree whose leaves are used as taboo marks to protect property). A white-feathered chicken is slaughtered and the blood sprinkled over the shafa leaves. The same woman that lays the zibil stands guard at the entrance to the hut of the mother of the twin, where the ritual takes place, holding a knife (indla) and kutiku (narrow necked gourd for pouring oil). Her responsibility is to scare away the spirits that are thought to be associated with twins from having access to the twin that is under-
going the ritual process. She handles this task because as the one selected by the *kwatika* oracle to lay the ritual mat, it is believed that she is endowed with an extraordinary ability to recognize the unwanted spirits, who are being exorcized from a twin, and therefore drive them away with the *indla* and *kutiku*.

The *gulum* player sits right in front of the twin and his/her friends (but not on the ritual mat) and performs praise songs for the twin.

**Figure 2: A gulum player**

The praise songs continue until such a time that it becomes evident to the musician that the twin has been praised enough to “lure” him/her out of the preternatural world and reincorporated into the normal corporal world. As the musician performs and praises a twin, he observes the manner of his/her reaction to the music and it is through this that he determines when a twin has successfully been lured out of the preternatural world. The whole ritual process takes about an hour and it is normally held during the morning hours, preferably from 10 a.m. to 11 a.m. No specific reason is given for the choice of this time other than the people considering it the most convenient time of the day to perform the ritual.

*Gulum* music, according to Bura worldview, is key to appeasing a twin. It is a music that is understood in the “twin world” and, therefore, capable of at-
tracting a twin to accompany the musician “home”. There are no fixed songs for the ritual. Any musician selected by the kwatika for a specific kamta bulikur ritual is believed to come under the control of certain supernatural beings who instantaneously give the right songs to perform in each case. Song lyrics for various kamta bulikur rituals, therefore, differ. It appears the musicians use more of the physical, bodily, appearance of twins in composing the lyrics for the praise songs. One of the lyrics of such songs goes thus:

_Ayee... ya_
Oh...

_Godita... (2x)_
Grateful...

_Iya godita ala giri (2x)_
I am grateful to you

_Bzir mingil... mamza kuchir_
A dark…fair-nosed child

_Kita kanadi mwa liha kwan (3x)_
Be patient so that we can go home

The above song may be repeated extensively with the musician repeating many of the phrases used in praising the twin. From the song, it is evident that the gulum player addresses the twin with carefully selected words. He starts by expressing his gratitude and goes on to request that the twin be patient and accompany him home. “Home”, as used in the song, implies that the gulum player and the twin live in separate worlds. However, through his music the gulum player is believed to have the ability to enter the supernatural realm and easily communicate with a twin and persuade him/her to leave the preternatural world. For the twin to accompany him home, he must, however, plead with him/her in a subtle way bearing in mind the fact that twins are believed to possess extraordinary powers and can choose to do things in their own way, if not treated appropriately. A musician’s task, and the manner in which he executes it, are therefore very crucial in the ritual process. This perhaps shows why it is not any gulum player that can perform at a kamta bulikur ritual. For each kamta bulikur, the kwatika oracle, as earlier discussed, carefully decides on a specific gulum player for the ritual.
At the end of the ritual, all the items offered—sesame seeds, roasted peanuts, cotton wool, *diva tiksha*, *shifa*, and *shafa*—are collected and dumped at a fork of a road. Having gone through the ritual, the twin, for whom it was performed, is expected to live a normal life along with other members of the community. Through the ritual, “healing” takes place and all the negative things associated with twins are overcome and nothing again can hinder the health and wellbeing of a twin who undergoes it.

Conclusion

Bura notions of twinship connote negativity with regard to the health and wellbeing of twins in the society. The negativity ranges from the use of the powers believed to be possessed by twins (i.e. to die and be born by another woman, use of scorpions to harm people at will or feigning sickness at all times) to inability of twins to marry at the right age or even being unable to live a regular life. Such negatives, according to Bura worldview, are detrimental to the health and wellbeing of twins, as well as, the community at large. To counter the negatives, the people have developed an appropriate twin ritual thought to be necessary in guaranteeing the good health and wellbeing of a twin. Bura traditional *gulum* music is of great significance in the ritual as indicated above.

Traditional music is associated with the supernatural in many societies (Nettl, 1983, p. 40) and it is used to communicate with powerful beings (Basso, 1985, p. 253; Drewal & Drewal, 1983, p. 105). This appears to be the case in the Bura rituals as well. Communication with a twin is considered only possible through *gulum* music. The music and its musician are, therefore, significant in achieving the desired end for which the rituals are performed—dispossessing a twin of the extraordinary powers he/she is believed to possess. It is important that the musician plays a key role in the rituals. He serves not only as one who plays a musical instrument but also as a kind of a priest. This is so because, as indicated earlier, he is the one who determines when a twin for whom the ritual is being performed has been sufficiently praised, resulting in him/her agreeing to leave the preternatural world and follow him (the musician) home. While it is true that there are other aspects of the ritual (e.g. the things offered as sacrifice, a woman who stands guard to chase away the spirits, etc.), it is important to note that the end result of the ritual cannot be achieved without *gulum* traditional music.

It is also pertinent to observe that this same music is necessary in naming twins as discussed earlier. Even though the naming ritual and *kamta bulikur* are two separate rituals, *gulum* music plays a key role in both. A *gulum* player names a twin after sufficiently praising him/her. Similarly, a twin is dispossessed of his/her extraordinary powers after sufficiently being praised by a *gu-
lum player. In each case though, the musician must be careful in the selection of the praise words in order to give the right name or severe a twin from the preternatural world. Both rituals, in Bura worldview, are significant to the health and wellbeing of a twin, as well as, that of the society as a whole. For, if twins do not undergo the rituals, they do not live a normal life and could also constitute danger to the society as a whole. Traditionally, the Bura live in a collectivistic society, that is to say there is no recognition of individuality. What affects one family then affects directly or indirectly other members of the society. Owing then to the importance attached to the health and wellbeing of twins and the society as a whole, great attention is given to the rituals and gulum music plays a central role in them.
References


Affective Wellbeing and the Teaching of Music in Ghanaian Basic Schools: A Reflection

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Abstract: Any healthy education aims to develop the individual holistically. To help achieve and assess this goal, educational objectives have been categorized under three domains: cognitive, psychomotor and affective. The arts (music particularly), have been identified as being best suited for the training of the affective domain. Using a number of instruments and triangulation methods, we examined this claim. We observed that music teaching in Ghanaian basic schools has, to a large extent, not fulfilled this mandate. We recommend the need to re-think the music program in two main ways: a) reviewing curricula materials and b) providing requisite training for music teachers.

Keywords: affective wellbeing, cognitive, education, music, psychomotor

The taxonomization of educational objectives into different domains (Simpson, 1966; Krathwohl, Bloom & Masia, 1964; Bloom, 1956) is predicated on the need to offer adequate training to the different facets that cumulatively contribute to the total development of the individual who can be justly labelled as “well-educated”. In any formal educational system, there is a perennial chal-
lengte of many subjects competing for attention on the time table (Murphy & Fautley, 2015). Apparently, each of these subjects essentially has unique values which it offers towards the development of the students. It is the convincing articulation of this unique value(s) that underpins the advocacy for the inclusion of the subject on the time table. The acceptance of many different subjects with their corresponding individualistic values, is a firm testament to the claim that different aspects of humans need developing. This idea is, in fact, nothing new as it goes back into history. In Aristotle’s Politics for example, he unequivocally expresses the futility in an education that trains only the mind and not the heart. It is evident in Aristotle’s concern that any education worth its salt should extend beyond the development of cognitive abilities to encompass other areas of importance. Rainbow (1989) sheds some considerable light on the foregoing through his description of ancient Greek educational practice. Among other things, he identifies three basic components of humans that the ancient Greeks endeavored to train: the head, the hands and the heart (the 3H) – which corresponded respectively to the mind, the body and the soul. Some of the earliest subjects that were believed to help train the 3H were: arithmetic (for the mind), gymnastics (for the body) and music (for the soul). Thus, Platonian and Aristotelian discourse, as well as, writings of other philosophers of the time, is replete with references to the inextricable connection between music and moral behaviour – since the heart was believed to be the seat of morality and music was meant to educate it.

In a number of ways, it is reasonable to state that modern educational structure has borrowed extensively from the ancient Greeks. The training of the 3H (head, hand and heart) undoubtedly was later became captured by modern terminology as ‘the three domains’: cognitive (mind), psychomotor (hands) and affective (heart). Best practices in education require that each of these domains is catered for in the teaching of every lesson, irrespective of the subject (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001; Chauhan, 1991). However, the fact that certain subjects are more suited for developing particular domains has also been firmly established ipso facto (Otchere, 2014; Otchere, 2013a; Flolu, 2000; Abeles, Hoffer & Klotman, 1995; Horley & Brian, 1985). On the whole, it appears that while subjects within the hard sciences are more oriented towards the cognitive domain, Physical and Vocational education subjects rank high in the training of the psychomotor domain. The Arts and Social Sciences (encompassing subjects that fall under the general tag of “Humanities”) have been argued several times to be more suited for the development of the affective domain (Otchere, 2013b; Jager, 2009; Anamuah-Mensah, Asabere-Ameyaw & Dennis, 2007; Reimer, 2003; Goodhart, Verdi, & Kennedy, 1991; Akrofi, 1982).
Regarding the quality of education required to develop a healthy affect, scholars in the field of aesthetic education and transformative emotional intelligence have concluded that arts education is critical to the education of human subjectivity, feeling, or affect (Reimer, 2009; Reimer, 2003; Meyer, 1956). Within the Arts and Humanities however, the Performing Arts (including Music, Dance and Drama) have often been identified as subjects that are very effective in the development of the affective domain. From philosophical observations by ancient Greek thought leaders to empirically (scientifically) based findings of contemporary researchers, convincing arguments have been produced in support of the strong relationships among music/dance, affective health, and physical wellbeing (Otchere, 2015; Valentine, Jayne, & Gould, 2014; Bilderback & Woelfel, 2012; Braun, 2008; Miles, 2005; Barlow, 1977). This forms the aegis under which we proceed in our current study. We define a healthy education as one that makes provision for the equitable development of these three domains. We focus specifically, however, on the affective domain and explore the extent to which the teaching of Music in Ghanaian basic schools fulfils one of its greatest mandates of consciously aiming for the development of this domain.

According to Abeles, Hoffer and Klotman (1995), “the affective outcomes of instruction clearly do not receive the same priority as do the cognitive results of instruction in today’s schools” (p. 237). They further note that, “this is as true in music as in other disciplines, and yet the music education profession has tended to cite goals that seem to include the affective domain as a primary support for including music in the schools” (p. 237). To exemplify the point about citing affective goals as the basis for including music in education, the following general aims and general objectives are legibly spelled out for the teaching of the Creative Arts (the subject within which music is encapsulated in Ghanaian basic schools) in the preliminary pages of the Creative Arts syllabus for Ghanaian Basic Schools (levels 1 – 3 and 4 – 6).

General aims – develop human and moral values such as tolerance, sharing, helping, concentration, discipline, self-confidence, cooperation, honesty, self-awareness, self-expression teamwork and sense of judgment (p. iii).

General Objectives – pupils will:
1. acquire basic knowledge, skills and values through Performance, Composition and Two-Dimensional Art Activities such as picture making, print and pattern-making.
2. develop skills in critical, independent thinking, reasoning and imagination.
3. acquire skills in self-expression.
4. appreciate products of artists/artistes and beauty in the environment.
5. recognize the importance of appreciating beauty in the environment and works of artists/artistes (pp. iii – iv).

It emerges quite clearly from the general aims and objectives that the utmost essence of the Creative Arts in Ghanaian basic schools dwells in its perceived and proven ability to develop aspects of the individual which largely fall within the affective domain such as, the development of value systems (tolerance, self-expression, value judgment, honesty, team-work, etc.), vivid imagination, appreciation and the like. Otchere (2013) argues that “the important point in education is the inculcation of desirable values and the achievement of positive outcomes” (p. 22). Taking necessary steps to achieve the goals spelled out above will therefore mean that the general goals for education in general, can be achieved through the teaching of the Creative Arts. In the words of Reimer (1989), “every field in education is obligated to explain its values to itself and to others and to have a plan for how those values can be gained through schooling” (p. 214). The values that have often been advanced for the field of the Creative Arts, as exemplified above, are those that principally revolve around the nurturing of the affective domain. The Creative Arts syllabus for Ghanaian basic schools, however, is made up of different components: performing arts (music, storytelling, drama, dance) and the visual/fine art (painting, picture making, sewing). In this study, our emphasis is on the music component of the Creative Arts syllabus and the extent to which its teaching and learning contribute to the achievement of the affective goals spelled out in the syllabus.

**Affective Wellbeing and the Affective Domain**

In this study, we use “Affective Wellbeing” as a variable of interest to imply the result of the extent to which the affective domain is consciously isolated and systematically addressed through the teaching and learning of Music/Dance in Ghanaian basic schools. It is significant to note that in practical terms, such isolation does not actually happen. As Piaget points out (in Derry and Murphy 1986, p. 29), “at no level, at no state, even in the adult, can we find a behaviour or a state which is purely cognitive without affect nor a purely affective state without a cognitive element involved”. The implication of this statement is illuminated by McLeod (1987) who asserts that “while we might examine cognition and affect separately, we should think about these processes
holistically, since that is how they operate” (p. 427)\(^1\) Being fully aware of the futility in separating the domains, we deviate from a cussed stance and adopt a theoretical model that supports the conceptualization of the domains as a unitary entity. Therefore, the isolation of the affective domain in this study is only for analytical and discussion purposes. What we are looking out for, are multiple indicators that show that the affective domain is a major area of attention as far as the teaching and learning of Music are concerned.

Our use of the term “affective” is in line with that of McLeod (1986) who equates it to the domain of emotions and feelings that can vary in intensity from “cold” (preferences, moods, attitudes, where the organism is not highly aroused) to “hot” (emotional states characterized by activation of the autonomic nervous system-tense muscles, increased heartbeat, sweaty palms). They also can vary in direction, from positive to negative. This stance on the affective domain finds corroboration in Krathwohl et al. (1964) who add a few more qualities such as interests, appreciations, attitudes and values of the individual. The available literature shows a panoply of research findings that confirm the educability of affect and for that matter human feeling. It also establishes the correlation between a healthy affect/human subjectivity and quality education. In a number of ways, it is the domain that makes us essentially human – leading us beyond just thinking beings to making us feeling beings as well. The importance of this domain, particularly in education, has been adequately stressed by many scholars, a few being Farmer (1986), Brand (1986), and Norman (1981). In the subsequent paragraphs under this sub-topic however, it is our intention to spend a little more time to focus on the indicators and categories of the affective domain.

Krathwohl et al. (1964) have expended enormous energies to create a comprehensive typology of the affective domain. This typology runs from receiving through responding, valuing and organization to characterization by a value or value complex, with subcategories in all categories except the last. Table 1 is an adaptation Krathwohl et al.’s taxonomy of the affective domain as cited in Abeles, Hoffer and Klotman (1995). The categories as specified in the table are hierarchical with receiving being the lowest affective category and characterization by a value or value complex being the highest affective category. To be able to monitor and examine these affective categories within educational practice, a number of verbs (mostly behavioral) have been suggested that indicate the emphasis on each of these categories in the statement of lesson objectives, teaching activities and evaluative sentences. These verbs constitute the basis of analysis in the curriculum materials assembled for this study.

\(^1\) For a further discussion of this inseparability claim between the domains, see Wellington (2010) and Vygotsky (1962).
Table 1: Krathwohl et al.’s taxonomy of affective domain

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Receiving</td>
<td>This involves behaviours such as being aware of phenomena or stimuli and being willing to take notice of them. “Capturing” a student’s attention illustrates this level. It is a prerequisite behaviour for the other levels.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Responding</td>
<td>Here, the student is not only aware of stimuli, but is interacting with them. This may take the form of complying with a set of rules, seeking out additional information on a topic, or finding pleasure in participating in an activity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Valuing</td>
<td>A student who demonstrates valuing behaviour is one who has attached worth or value to an object, phenomenon, or behaviour. Although this is an internalized process, it must be sufficiently consistent to produce observable behaviour.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Organization</td>
<td>Interrelating values and the beginning of an organized value system are behaviours that characterize this level. It includes consideration of the consistency and stability of values and beliefs that evolve into a value complex.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Characterization by a value or value complex</td>
<td>At this level of the domain the student’s behaviour reflects a consistency. This characteristic behaviour or life style is due to the internalization of a value or value system to the extent that it is readily observable.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Table 2, some of the verbs are listed against their corresponding categories. It must also be noted that because learning objectives are further defined by modifiers and the objects that follow the verbs, some of the verbs may be found as belonging to more than one level of the affective categories. Pacansky-Brock (2012) provides other traits that students may exhibit at each of the levels. At the level of receiving, he notes that students may listen to the comments of peers and attend to other details within their immediate environment. The learner is sensitized to the existence of certain phenomena. It includes awareness, willingness to receive, and controlled or selected attention. At the level of responding, students may leave unique comments that contribute to the development of a conversation. There is active participation on the part of the learner as s/he reacts and attends to a particular phenomenon. Learning outcomes may emphasize compliance with responding, willingness to respond, or satisfaction in responding (motivation). Then, at the level of valuing, they may share perspectives while respecting the diverse opinions of the group. It reflects the worth or value a person attaches to a particular object, phenomenon, or behaviour. It ranges from simple acceptance to a more complex state of commitment. Valuing is based strongly on the internalization of a set of specified values, while clues to these standards are expressed in the learner’s overt behavior and are often
identifiable. At the organizing level, students may accept different viewpoints; build upon them to develop new perspectives and understanding of ideas. Values are sorted into priorities by contrasting different values, resolving conflicts between them, and creating unique value systems. The emphasis is on comparing, relating, and synthesizing values. At the highest level (internalizing values) or characterization, the student already has a value system that controls behavior. The behavior is pervasive, consistent, predictable, and most importantly, characteristic of the learner. Instructional objectives are concerned with the student’s general patterns of adjustment (personal, social, emotional). Students cooperatively collaborate with group members towards the achievement of positive outcomes.

**Table 2: Sample affective verbs**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of affective domain</th>
<th>Sample verbs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Receiving</td>
<td>ask, choose, describe, follow, give, hold, identify, locate, name, point to, select, use, erect, reply, accept, attend, develop, realize</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responding</td>
<td>answer, assist, aid, comply, conform, discuss, greet, help, label, perform, practice, present, read, recite, report, select, tell, write, behave, complete, obey, observe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valuing</td>
<td>complete, demonstrate, differentiate, explain, form, follow, initiate, invite, propose, join, justify, report, share, work, select, balance, believe, influence, prefer, pursue, value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>codify, sort, discriminate, display, favor, judge, organize, relate, systematize, order, weigh, adhere, generalize, alter, arrange, modify, synthesize, formulate, combine, integrate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internalizing values (characterization)</td>
<td>act, listen, propose, serve, question, influence, solve, practice, modify, discriminate, display, internalize, verify (least addressed through formal education)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The model below (Figure 1) is an adaptation from Goodhart, Verdi, and Kennedy (1991) which summarizes and simplifies the information given in Table 2. It provides a pictorial reference to the affective hierarchy, as well as, sampled verbs under each of them.
Figure 1: Affective hierarchy with sample verbs

Theoretical framework

Compared to the availability of theories for the other instructional domains (cognitive and psychomotor), theories that specifically focus on the affective domain are rather exiguous. The few that exist too seem quite cryptic and convoluted in terms of their systemization for practical applications. In this study, we adopt one such affective theory which, though dense, has extensive explanatory depth and cogent interpretive propensity for our present discussion, i.e. Mandler’s (1972) theory of affect. It is a build-up on and refinement of extant constructivist views. The theory is potent to the extent that the affective domain is conceptualized as emotions-based and dwells on the proviso that the affective domain is principally inseparable from the other domains in practical terms (as showed earlier). It is useful therefore to evoke Wellington’s (2010) definition of this domain as “the component of Bloom’s taxonomy of educational objectives that involves the feeling and emotional side of learning and teaching; that is, enjoyment, motivation, drive, passion enthusiasm, inspiration” (pp. 135-136). According to Mandler, emotional experience consists of two factors, one physiological, the other cognitive. When an emotion occurs, the autonomic nervous system (ANS) is activated (the familiar “gut” response: a knot in the stomach, a quickened pulse, a heightened awareness of external stimuli). There is also a cognitive interpretation of this visceral arousal according to past experience or current situation. This interpretation makes sense of the physical agita-
tion, evaluating the physiological evidence either positively or negatively. But, if this is what defines emotion, then what triggers the physiological reaction/cognitive interpretation in the first place? Mandler says that a major source of emotion is the interruption of an individual’s schedule of activities or anticipated behavior. When our plans are interrupted, our ANS are activated and the physiological evidence is interpreted as emotional-excitement or frustration. In spite of the interruption, the individual will often persist in trying to complete the original plan. Completing an interrupted sequence is a positive, even a joyful experience.

Those are the main tenets of Mandler’s theory of affect. With regard to this study, the theory helps to explain some key issues. Two of these key issues are highlighted. First of all, it explains the nature of many of the verbs that are itemized under the various affective categories in table two and in figure one. On the surface of it, verbs like “accept”, “behave”, “value”, “discriminate”, and so on may also seem like cognitive tasks. In light of this theory however, and in line with the inseparability claim among the domains discussed earlier, it is understandable that the cognitive tags are reappraisals of physiological responses triggered by the ANS. These verbs contain latent undercurrents of judgment which are informed by a person’s subjective feelings. The theory thus offers a good lens through which the verbs in the lesson notes collected as field materials for this study are analyzed.

Secondly, the theory helps to explain how some of the affective objectives for the teaching of music are achieved. For example, one of the key values of teaching music, as evident in the general aims listed at the beginning of this paper, is to enhance critical thinking and imagination. In terms of recognizing beauty in music, imagination begins from internalizing certain musical structures (often culturally defined). According to Meyer (1956), these internalized structures help to create expectations when one listens to a new piece of music. The emotions experienced, or the level of enjoyment derived from the music comes when the expected tendencies are temporarily suspended or permanently blocked. In this respect, Meyer highlights what Mandler’s theory opines in terms of emotions being the product of interrupted plans or intentions. A comparably recent support to this is what Juslin and Västfjäll (2008a, 2008b) describe as ‘musical expectancy’ (a process whereby an emotion is induced in a listener because a specific feature of the music violates, delays, or confirms the listener’s expectations about the continuation of the music). Under the composition section of the music syllabus for example, pupils learn about the interplay between various musical elements and how they come together to form meaningful musical phrases which are further developed into musical forms. This, among other things, creates structures for musical expectancy which heightens the creative
imaginations of pupils and influences their emotional reactions and hence tells significantly on their affective development. Further examples can be cited from the other sections of the music syllabus. The important point here therefore, is that Mandler’s theory of affect provides a strong framework for interpreting the affective goals which are meant to be achieved through the teaching of music.

**Method**

**Participants**

Thirty-two (32) basic schools in the Central Region of Ghana were involved in this study. Our study participants were the head-teachers in these schools, as well as, the Creative Arts teachers (with emphasis on music teachers in four schools where we found more than one Creative Arts teacher). In total therefore, 69 human subjects were involved in this study whose ages ranged from 22 to 58. As many as 29 (90.6%) of the head-teachers and 31 (83.8%) of the teachers were Christians, belonging to various orthodox and charismatic churches. Further demographic details of our study participants are provided in Table 3. It is verifiable from the table that gender imbalance clearly exists; fewer females are involved in the teaching of music and the Creative Arts.

**Table 3: Demographic characteristics of study participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Head-teachers</th>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>32</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below 30</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 – 40</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41 – 50</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51 – 60</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>32</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Years of service</strong></td>
<td>(as head-teacher)</td>
<td>(overall teaching experience)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below 10</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 – 20</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 – 30</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>32</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Procedure**

In all, our study merged the strengths of different research designs. However, in terms of its main dominant purpose, it was largely descriptive as we sought to present the current status of the phenomenon in question (to describe the extent to which the affective domain is catered for through the teaching of music and dance in Ghanaian basic schools). We employed three main triangu-
lation types (Neuman, 2003) to ensure authenticity and replicability. Firstly, *triangulation of measures* informed our use of multiple instruments for the collection of data. We used semi-structured interviews, observation, and collected pertinent materials as well for Qualitative Content Analysis (Schreier, 2013). The materials collected included copies of the Creative Arts teaching syllabus for Ghanaian Basic Schools (1-3, 4-6), lesson notes of Creative arts teachers and some recommended Creative Arts textbooks. Head-teachers in each of the 32 basic schools involved in this study were interviewed. The Creative Arts teachers in these schools gave us copies of their lesson notes which we photocopied and returned to them. We got up to 212 lesson notes in all. We also sat through selected Creative Arts lessons and observed the sequence of events; the nature of teacher-pupil interaction, the goals that were stressed in each lesson, the kind of evaluation that was done in each class, among others. Secondly, we consciously practiced *triangulation of observers* by undertaking our interviews and observation of lessons individually from a common pre-defined interview schedule and observation guide respectively. We later met as co-authors to compare notes and identify critical nexus points of convergence and divergence. The strength of this triangulation type, as Neuman (2003, p. 138) notes is that, “multiple observers or researchers add alternative perspectives, backgrounds, and social characteristics and will reduce the limitations”. Thirdly, we covered the dictates demanded by *triangulation of theory* by employing two different theoretical models: one (Mandler’s theory of affect) as the theoretical framework and the other (Krathwohl, Bloom and Massia’s model of the affective domain) as the conceptual framework. Our selection of the 32 basic schools was done through the multi-stage cluster sampling approach (Sarantakos, 2005).

**Results and Discussion**

Considering the nature of data we sought for analysis and the research instruments we used (interviews and observation), it goes without saying that the feedback/response rate was very high. Our major observations are summarized in three main findings which we first enumerate, and then expatiate through the discussion.

1) Mismatch between curriculum goals/objectives, content, teaching activities and assessment procedures.
2) Inadequate number of teachers who are adequately trained to teach music at the basic schools.
3) Development of the affective domain is largely not emphasized through the teaching of music.
To begin with, we found a number of inconsistencies within the curricula materials that we analyzed. Appropriately, the predominantly affective general aims and objectives in the syllabus as stated in the introduction of this paper were supposed to have corresponding activities and content which would help achieve those goals. Unfortunately, that was often not the case. On page vii of the Creative Arts syllabus (1-3 & 4-6), just a few pages after the general aims and objectives for the subject are stated, the following is written in bold typeface:

Note: “Practical Skills” must be given 80 per cent of the teaching and learning time to emphasise the point that Creative Arts is more toward the acquisition of practical skills at the school level. The remaining 20 per cent can be used for the theoretical aspects of Creative Arts such as, observing, listening, responding, talking, reporting, describing, brainstorming and discussion.

Out of the six general aims that are listed for the teaching of the subject, only one focuses on performance. This is because teaching music, for example, in the basic school is not necessarily to turn the pupils into performers (Dzansi-McPalm, 2004; Reimer, 1989/2003). It is to help them to develop the building blocks with which they can derive the most from the music that is experienced in their everyday activities. Urging teachers to devote up to 80% of teaching and learning time for practical skills is in direct contradistinction to the stated general aims. The emphasis on practical skills again shifts the focus of music teaching from achieving affective goals and enhancing affective wellbeing towards a more psychomotor-oriented subject. Furthermore, the music component of the Creative Arts syllabus has three main subdivisions: Performance, Composition, and Listening and Observing. Of these three sections, it is only the Performance section that is meant to focus specifically on purely practical skills. These swings in the intentions stated in the syllabus (which is the main document for the teaching of the subject) are befuddling for the teachers who are supposed to handle the subject. For instance, our interviews showed that they clearly did not know what exactly to focus on and what to aim for in their teaching. A look at the objectives, content, activities and assessment procedures in the lesson notes we examined proved this point; out of the 212 lesson notes we examined, only 18 (8.5%) were consistent from lesson objectives through to evaluation. The remaining 91.5% had various inconsistencies described in Table 4. Because the exact cases are many and varied, we have presented only one instance to exemplify each of the points made for each of the three music aspects in the syllabus.
Table 4: Examples of observed inconsistencies in lesson notes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>Nature of objectives (By the end of the lesson, the pupil will be able to:)</th>
<th>Nature of evaluation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Performance</strong> (class 2, 30 mins)</td>
<td>a) demonstrate how to dance <em>kpanlogo</em></td>
<td>Pupils draw the <em>djembe</em> drum and colour it in the exercise book</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b) perform basic kpanlogo movement in an ensemble setting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Composition</strong> (class 1, 1 hr)</td>
<td>a) imitate some familiar sounds around him/her eg. Bleat of goats</td>
<td>Pupils describe the sound made by the following animals/birds in their exercise books</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b) describe the differences in sound made by birds/animals</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c) create their own sound patterns with variety of objects</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Listening and observing</strong> (class 3, 1 hr)</td>
<td>a) play the gong pattern in <em>apatampa</em></td>
<td>Pupils present <em>apatampa</em> in an ensemble setting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b) play the <em>apetia</em> drum in <em>apatampa</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c) play the master drum in <em>apatampa</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the first example, the objectives for the lesson, in line with the aspect (performance) require pupils to be able to carry out a performance by the end of the lesson. By the end of the lesson however, the pupils are rather expected to be able to “draw and colour a *djembe* drum”. In the second example, three objectives are set in a composition lesson that require pupils in basic one to “imitate”, “describe”, and “create” various sound patterns. In the end however, these pupils are required to write a description of specified animal sounds in their exercise books. As if that was not problematic enough, the other two objectives are clearly left unexamined. In example three, there are three objectives which all require basic three pupils to play various instruments in an *apatampa* ensemble, although the aspect being treated is not “Performance” but “Listening and Observing”. For the evaluation, pupils are expected to present *apatampa* in an ensemble setting (whatever that means). It is exactly these inconsistencies that give the impression that the teachers are not very competent in what they are doing (see Boyle & Radocy, 1987). Justifiably so, some of the lessons we observed were very stultifying and were a pointer to teacher incompetence in the teaching of music at the basic level. This prompted us to enquire more about the caliber of the teachers.

Our interviews with the heads of the schools showed that many of the teachers (82%) had not received adequate training in the Creative Arts (particularly in music) to be able to efficiently handle the subject. In four of the schools,
the music teachers there were teachers of other subjects before the whole new Creative Arts program was introduced in 2007 and no in-service training was organized to get these teachers equipped for their new task. The head-teachers in the schools relied on teachers who showed some form of talent in the arts or singing to teach this course. Therefore, the teachers in question were only able to do what their abilities would allow them to perform. In the case where a teacher was more visual arts inclined, s/he would teach those aspects of the syllabus and ignore anything else. As one head-teacher admitted in our interview with her, “it is a problem, but we are not too worried about it [...] because, you know, because it is not examined [...] I mean externally”. The interview showed that although the head-teachers are aware of the problem, they are not too bothered about it for the express reason that the students do not have to account for it in any standardized external examination. In four of the schools, we found two different teachers for the Creative Arts; one for music in each case and one for the other aspects of the subject. The remaining 18% of the teachers who had some training received this training in their respective Colleges of Education. However, they admitted that the content of the basic school music was quite different from what they had been trained in college to teach. The music lessons we observed were mostly theoretical and involved abstract concepts taught without the use of appropriate pedagogy or teaching learning materials. When asked, teachers complained much about the absence of resources such as graded music books and musical instruments in the schools. A few of the resourceful teachers played musical samples from their laptops and showed pictures of some instruments to illustrate some of the points discussed in class. This theoretical, and rather abstract, presentation of musical concepts to pupils stresses the cognitive domain where recall of memorized facts dominates the learning process. It depicts the kind of pedagogical delivery regarded by Kwami (1994) as a contributory factor to the decline of music education in Ghana and Nigeria.

The analysis of the verbs used in the lesson notes also showed a different finding than what we expected. From the general aims and objectives listed in the Creative Arts syllabus, we had expected to find verbs that were more inclined towards the affective domain as exemplified in Table 2 and in Figure 1. In all, 536 verbs were present in the 212 lesson notes collected. Many of the verbs were repeated. In fact, the teachers used a small repertoire of behavioral verbs that kept recurring (a visual display of the verbs is given in the word-cloud in Figure 2).
Figure 2: A visual display of behavioural verbs used in lesson notes

The size of the writing in Figure 2 is commensurate with the frequency of occurrence; the bigger the size, the more that particular verb was repeated. Some of the lessons had only one objective while others had as many as four objectives. In all, we found that majority of the verbs (58%) were within the psychomotor domain. 33% were within the cognitive domain and only 9% of the verbs specified affective outcomes. A pictorial representation of the distribution of verbs with their corresponding percentages within the three domains is shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Distribution of verbs within the three domains

This outcome, with the lower emphasis on the affective domain is indicative of poor affective wellbeing. The results provide further justification to the claim of Wellington (2010) that, “the affective domain has often been neglected by many teachers” (p, 136). A probable explanation that Wellington offers for this observation is that, as behaviorism became more dominant in educational
psychology, affect was ruled out by some educators. Equally, other developments in psychology led to humans being viewed through a model of ‘input-process-output’, with thinking processes likened to that of a computer. Through the lens of our theoretical framework, it can be argued that these percentages are not in themselves, any issues of concern considering the practical inseparability in the domains. However, it is when closer attention is given to the evaluation of these objectives that it becomes apparent that affective goals are not the primary concern in the teaching of music in the schools investigated.

In our case, a form of explanation for this distribution (with the emphasis on performance) was also found in the interviews. For most of the headteachers, music meant singing, playing an instrument, clapping, tapping or dancing. In one of the schools for example, the weekly “worship” session that the pupils did together every Wednesday morning, sufficed for the music lessons. There was also very little or no consistency at all in terms of uniformity in content or timeline between the different schools. In other words, each school seemed to have its own pace and discretion when it came to the teaching of music. This situation is similar to what Flolu and Amuah (2003) report to be the nature of music education in Ghanaian basic schools before the first music syllabus for the basic schools was introduced in 1959. It is regrettable that after all these years, the situation has only ebbed. This lack of uniformity in purpose, focus or structure might just be due to the fact that, there is no overriding and defining philosophy for the practice of music education in Ghanaian basic schools.

Conclusion

Abeles et. al. (1995) enthusiastically make two profound arguments about the importance of teaching music:

a) “every child should have a general, broad musical experience before embarking on his or her choice of specialized activities. Without it, most students would not be able to make intelligent choices” (p. 278).

b) “Music and the arts are one of the most significant manifestations of the ability of human beings to think and to aspire restlessly for something more than survival. Music has much to do with what makes us different from the animals and marks us as human” (p. 66).

The basis of their arguments is entrenched in the conviction that through the teaching of music, cherished values (mostly affective such as the imperative to make value judgments) which are hardly attainable through the teaching of other subjects are carefully nurtured and developed. In that sense, music education adds to the health and wellbeing of the individual as they go through the
educational system by filling the gap which the other subjects so often ignore—the affective domain. As Reimer (2009) stresses, a justification for the teaching of music must be based on the nature and true value of the subject. This paper has shown that music has a lot to offer, particularly with respect to developing the affective domain. The literature that we parsed and our theoretical framework clearly point to the fact that the development of the affective domain is the overarching mandate of music teaching and learning. The achievement of this educational goal, however, does not come easily or automatically. It is an arduous task that must be consciously planned and systematically implemented. The data we collected and analyzed unambiguously point to the fact that the role of music in enhancing the affective wellbeing of students is far from being achieved. Granted that quality education is one which makes equitable provision for the development of all the domains, it is reasonable to conclude that the Ghanaian basic educational system needs reforms. There is too much emphasis on cognitive and psychomotor domains to the detriment of the affective aspect. Such an educational system produces people who know and understand (theoretically) when something needs to be done to improve a situation. But, most often, they show the lack of moral zeal or obligatory urgency to act. We recommend, based on the findings that educational planners in Ghana should have a critical re-assessment of the music program in basic schools in terms of clearly defining its mandate through a sound philosophy, reviewing curricula materials, and providing the requisite training for music teachers.
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‘Dance Your Sorrow Away!’: Spirituality, Community and Wellbeing in Christ Apostolic Church, Dublin

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Abstract: Christ Apostolic Church (CAC) is a Pentecostal and African Initiated Church that emerged from the Yoruba Aládürà movement of early twentieth-century Nigeria. In this article I unpack the concept of ‘dancing away sorrow’, one of the distinctive rituals that members of CAC Dublin have brought with them from Nigeria. I explore members’ beliefs about wellbeing and its links with spirituality and community, and examine how music and dance help to facilitate connections with God and fellow worshippers. While the practice offers positive benefits to first generation migrants, it highlights the dissonance perceived by the second generation between Yoruba and Irish culture.

Keywords: dance, wellbeing, migration, Yoruba, Christ Apostolic Church (CAC)

Christ Apostolic Church (CAC) is a Pentecostal and African Initiated Church (AIC) that emerged from the Yoruba Aládürà (meaning ‘people who pray’) movement of early twentieth-century Nigeria. In an age of increased migration, many AICs are being established in Europe and North America. Although an aspiration for ‘reverse mission’ (to evangelise indigenes of the host culture) is often articulated by members of such churches, patterns of worship utilised in the countries of origin tend to be replicated in order to meet the needs of African Christian migrants (Adedibu, 2013; Ukah, 2009; Asaju, 2008;

1 I would like to thank Dr Adewale Kuyebi and all the members of Christ Apostolic Church Vineyard of Comfort (Dublin Assembly) for welcoming me so warmly, and for allowing me to undertake extensive fieldwork within their community. I am also grateful for the invaluable guidance and support provided by Professor Thérèse Smith. The PhD research on which this article is based was funded by a Government of Ireland Postgraduate Scholarship from the Irish Research Council.
The first CAC congregation was established in Ireland approximately sixteen years ago, and the Vineyard of Comfort zone now has six assemblies (Dublin, Cavan, Drogheda, Dundalk, Midleton and Galway). The Dublin headquarters, the congregation which forms the case study for this article, is constituted by a majority (approximately 95%) Yoruba membership and has an average weekly attendance of about 150-200. I carried out ethnographic fieldwork there over a four-month period in 2012 and returned at the end of 2013 to complete a year-long study. I conducted fieldwork through participant-observation (as a member of the congregation) and interviews with church leaders, congregants, musicians, singers, adults and youth. I had not attended this church prior to commencing fieldwork, and as a British Caucasian I was a cultural outsider. My identity as a Pentecostal Christian, however, aided my acceptance within the community, helping to establish trust and elicit openness from interview participants.

Dance is a central feature of worship in CAC Dublin and accompanies the praise and worship, peace offerings, thanksgiving and testimonies, tithes and offerings, monthly thanksgivings, and periodic special thanksgivings. The monthly thanksgivings in particular, as illustrated in Figure 1, provide an extended time for processional singing and dancing. These special times of thanksgiving are usually introduced with the phrase, ‘Dance your sorrow away!’ This same exhortation, or a close variant of it, was used by the majority of interview participants in response to questions about the role of dancing in CAC. In this article I will explore the practice of ‘dancing away sorrow’ in CAC Dublin, drawing on interview responses and ethnographic observations. I will investigate members’ beliefs about wellbeing and its links with spirituality and community, as these inform the practice of ‘dancing away sorrow’. I will examine how music and dance help to facilitate connections with God and fellow worshippers, thereby aiding wellbeing. I will also consider ‘dancing away sorrow’ in relation to the migrant setting: while the practice offers positive benefits to first generation members, it highlights the dissonance perceived by the second generation be-

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2 A zone is part of the organisational structure of CAC. An assembly (or congregation) is the smallest unit in the structure. Up to 35 assemblies (usually in the same geographic location) form a district, and up to 20 districts form a district coordination council (DCC). A zone is a lower type of DCC, formed when there are not enough districts to warrant a DCC (see, http://www.cacworldwideonline.org/cac_structure.html). The Vineyard of Comfort zone is led by its founder, Prophet S.K Abiara, and has its international headquarters in Ibadan, Nigeria.

3 CAC have another five assemblies in Ireland which come under the CAC Outreach zone, and there are a further six assemblies that broke away from CAC to form independent churches.
between their parents’ culture and that of the wider Irish society in which they are growing up.

**Figure 1:** Congregants dancing in the monthly thanksgiving procession (still from author’s fieldwork video, September 7, 2014).

### The Spiritual Element of Dance

Many interview participants contrasted dancing in church with dancing in social settings such as pubs and nightclubs. The latter was mostly associated with the consumption of alcohol as an attempt to feel happy, and was judged to be only temporarily effective – when the alcohol wears off, the problem remains. Dancing in church, on the other hand, is considered a more successful means of alleviating sorrow. Evangelist Stephen Olasupo expressed this distinction between the social and sacred settings when he told me that dancing outside church is ‘for fun’ and ‘not for dancing away the sorrow’ (Evangelist Stephen Olasupo, interview, 07/12/2014). The fact that ‘dancing away sorrow’ takes place exclusively within the sacred setting of the church suggests that it has spiritual connotations. In order to better understand this secular/sacred distinction, and the perceived variance in efficacy, we need to consider the beliefs that are held by participants about spirituality, mental health, and depression.

### Beliefs about Spirituality and Mental Health

Members of this community hold a holistic view of personhood, in which the spirit, soul, and body are interconnected. Dr Adewale Kuyebi, the senior pastor, told me that although he does not believe all illnesses have a spiritual
cause, he thinks that some do. He contrasted what he perceives to be African and Western perspectives, the former holistic in its approach to wellbeing and the latter tending to divide up and treat the various parts of the person separately.\(^4\) Practitioners working in the area of mental health among Africans in the diaspora have also noted this belief in the connection between mind, body and spirit (Ojelade, McCray, Meyers & Ashby, 2014, p. 493; Monteiro & Wall, 2011, p. 235).

Members of CAC Dublin believe that the spiritual and physical worlds can affect each other; the physical body can be affected by spiritual forces, and can in turn exert its influence over the spiritual realm. According to Evangelist Yetunde Olaseni, the female choir master:

> Even the Bible says we are contending with the things that we cannot see... It says we are fighting against principalities, rulers of darkness, and we have to take it by violence. That is what the Bible says... We want to deal with the enemy or the forces behind anyone. Not every problem is spiritual. Not every problem is. It might be not a problem. But we believe, that is how we were brought up culturally. That is what we believe. (Evangelist Yetunde Olaseni, interview, 13/09/2014)

The biblical passage referred to by Evangelist Olaseni is most likely:

> For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. (Ephesians 6:12, New International Version)

The means of dealing with evil spiritual forces, according to Evangelist Olaseni, is ‘by violence’, which implies the use of great force or strength. The main method in CAC of addressing spiritual forces is through prayer, which is expressed physically with loud voices, intense facial expressions, and vigorous gestures such as pacing the floor, punching the air, wagging one’s fingers, and rapidly shaking one’s head. The physicality of prayer in CAC Dublin reflects a belief in the interconnectivity of the material and spiritual realms.

Depression is considered by church members to be something external to the individual, which can be removed. Pastor Peter Ibiyemi, for instance, explained to me that as you are singing and dancing, ‘God can remove that body

\(^4\) For more on this, especially as it relates to the interconnectivity of music, religion, and medicine, see Friedson (1996).
that [...] pulls you down – God will remove it [claps hands]!’ (Pastor Peter Ibiyemi, interview, 20/09/2014). The use of the word ‘body’ to describe something that is ‘pulling you down’ ascribes physical form to it, and the idea that it can be removed implies that it is not a part of the psyche. This perspective helps to explain the belief that sorrow can be removed instantaneously, rather than needing to be addressed over time through, for example, counselling or psychotherapy.

In CAC Dublin, depression is often attributed to spiritual causes, of which there seem to be three potential sources: a poor relationship with God; Satan; and people practising witchcraft. In relation to the first, maintaining a good relationship with God is believed to positively influence one’s circumstances and outlook, whereas neglecting divine connection may lead to difficulties and sorrow. Pastor Ibiyemi noted during a sermon that when you are crying with problems, it is because you are not with your Heavenly Father; if something is wrong in your life, he said, you should check whether you have the right relationship with God. This view clearly reflects African beliefs. According to Monteiro and Wall (2011):

> [I]n traditional African societies, illness that manifests in psychological or mental symptoms is understood as a disruption in the natural order of humans’ interactions with the spirit world, or, depending on the specific religion, lack of appropriate connection with God or the Supreme Being. (p. 236)

The idea that relationship with the divine is expected to attain tangible results in the life of the worshipper is evident in numerous Yoruba proverbs, such as: *Bí alágbà-á bá jübà fÓlúwa, ọ̀nà á là*, translated, ‘If the elder pays homage to God, the path opens’ (Owomoyela, 2005, p. 297).

A second spiritual source of depression is Satan. Pastor Korede Aderounmu, visiting Dublin from Nigeria for the national CAC convention in August 2014, referred to the biblical story of Job during a sermon. Job experienced many difficulties including the death of his children. But, rather than attributing Job’s sorrow to his circumstances Pastor Aderounmu stated that ‘Satan stole his happiness’. While this point arises from the biblical story (as Satan is given permission to attack Job) it can also be related to traditional Yoruba religious belief. The Yoruba often attribute difficulties in their lives to the work of Èṣù, one of the divinities in traditional Yoruba religion. Although it is considered possible to placate Èṣù in order to attain some benevolence from him, he is generally considered to be a mischievous and wicked god who causes misfortune (Alana, 2004, p. 71).
A third source of difficulty is other people, who are thought able to influence one’s mental and physical wellbeing through supernatural means such as jùjù. As Evangelist Florence Kuyebi, the senior pastor’s wife, told me:

Coming from Africa, we believe that there are different people with different kinds of evil spirits, and it is very, very real, you know…People do jùjù … There are witches and wizards and they use their power to destroy people’s lives. (Evangelist Florence Kuyebi, interview, 28/11/2014)

The belief that such spiritual forces are a source of physical and mental illness is prevalent among Nigerians at home and abroad, as noted by other scholars (Adepoju, 2012, p. 42; Ola, Crabb, Krishnadas, Erinfolami, & Olagunju, 2010, p. 178).

Having considered beliefs about spirituality and wellbeing, I would like to examine the two main ways in which ‘dancing away sorrow’ addresses the spiritual realm. The first relates to the worshipper’s connection with God and involves expressing humility and appreciation, which in return secures His favour and blessing. The second addresses negative spiritual forces – such as Satan, or people practicing witchcraft or jùjù – and is intended to block any harm that has been directed towards the worshipper.

**Expressing Humility and Appreciation to Attract God’s Blessing**

It is important to emphasise that dance in CAC Dublin, although culturally infused, is framed by a biblical narrative. The story of King David dancing before God as the Ark of the Covenant is brought back to Jerusalem (found in 2 Samuel 6) was often referred to within worship services and interviews. David’s dance is understood as a means of expressing humility towards – and appreciation of – God, and is taken as a pattern to follow.

In the following transcription, taken from the preamble to a monthly thanksgiving, Pastor Ibiyemi drew directly on the story of David:

Forget about your sorrow;
Forget about your pain;
Appreciate God!
...
Please, put on your dancing shoes;
Dance your sorrow away;

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5 In this article I refer to God as masculine and employ capitalisation, in order to respect the views and practices of my informants.
And let God look down from heaven and shower blessing upon you!
For dancing before God, 
That is the area where David has been blessed, 
Always blessed! 
He danced before God, 
And God always blessed him. 
I want to see you dance like David this afternoon. 
God bless you as you dance before the Lord, 
In Jesus’ name! 
(Pastor Peter Ibiyemi, CAC Dublin, 02/02/2014)

Praising God through dance is seen to elicit divine favour, and this theme in the story of David is highlighted by Pastor Ibiyemi.

Figure 2: Evangelist Oladeru (centre) adopts the standard stooped posture (still from author’s fieldwork video, September 7, 2014).

David’s expression of humility towards God through dance is also emulated in CAC Dublin. As one member stated, ‘David was the king and he humbled himself before the Lord and danced in public with the heart of thanksgiving. CAC practise the way King David praised the Lord’ (2012 survey response). Certain movements employed in CAC express humility particularly well. Firstly, there is a standard posture, typical in West Africa, in which the upper torso is bent forwards, back straight, and the lower torso is flexed forward at the knees (see Figure 2); this creates a stooped posture directed towards the

Figure 3: A member of the choir rolls on the floor during the thanksgiving and testimony (still from author’s fieldwork video, October 19, 2014).

Secondly, members often prostrate themselves and roll on the floor, especially during thanksgiving and testimonies (see Figure 3). Individuals may roll side to side in one place or they may roll from one side of the building to the other and back again. Interview participants explained this practice as a way of expressing thanks and appreciation to God, often in response to a request that God has fulfilled. Pastor Ibiyemi described it as follows:

Rolling before God – this is Father whom you cannot even look at His face – is a humble way of appreciating God. ‘Ah, Lord I honour You! I glorify You for all things You have done for me! I am not worthy of somebody to stand before You and thank You, but for this reason I will roll myself. I give You all the honour, all the adoration!’ That is how that works. (Pastor Peter Ibiyemi, interview, 20/09/2014)

While rolling on the floor expresses humility and appreciation towards God, it is also expected to secure further blessings, as Pastor Ibiyemi continued:
Rolling before God makes God look down and even what you don’t expect, all the blessing you don’t expect, He will surely, ‘Ah! Ah! So you know how to appreciate me!’ (Pastor Peter Ibiyemi, interview, 20/09/2014)

Pastor Ibiyemi went on to relate the story of a woman attending a revival meeting who was unable to jump due to an illness. She still wanted to show God her appreciation so she decided to roll on the floor instead. While she rolled on the floor her sickness vanished and when she got back up she was able to jump like everyone else. “That is [a] miracle of God!” Pastor Ibiyemi exclaimed.

Rolling was also explained by a number of interview participants in cultural terms. One church member, who I will refer to as Grace, after explaining how rolling expresses appreciation and thanks to God, compared it to Yoruba cultural practice:

Like in Yoruba culture, when you give me something, like when you give me this thing, I really appreciate it. How do I show my appreciation? Next, in our culture, you have to lie down, lie down and say, ‘Oh, I thank you! Thank you so much for giving me this thing. I really appreciate it. Thank you so much!’ You show that appreciation. (Grace, interview, 18/11/2014)

Prostration and rolling on the floor are used in Yoruba culture as a means of expressing thanks and showing respect, particularly for one’s elders. In this case the practice is applied to help maintain a good relationship with God.

Repelling Evil Forces

Movement and dance are not only means of attracting God’s blessing, but are also considered effective in repelling evil forces. I witnessed a particularly striking example of this during the 2014 Annual Convention of CAC Ireland. During one meeting, Pastor Aderounmu led the congregation in a prayer time that featured declarative songs, one of which was ‘Satan, come out of the road’.

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6 This interview participant’s name has been changed, as she requested to remain anonymous.

7 A video recording of this performance, made by the author, is available to view at the following link: https://youtu.be/jMwv4g7YOJU. It is worth comparing the CAC Dublin performance with that of South African gospel singer Solomon Mahlangu, which is available at the following link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JDWB9w0MFSc (accessed 02/01/2016). Mahlangu sings a slightly different version than that used in CAC. The words he sings are: ‘Satan, comot for road o, I dey carry Holy Ghost, I no get break o, I go jam you, you go die.’ All four lines are sung as both the call and the response, and the last line is turned into a re-
This was a short song, consisting of a call (‘Satan, come out of the road’) and a response (‘I hit, you go die’), which were repeated many times. Everyone sang the song, waving their arms or punching their fists in front of them, as directed (see Figure 4). Pastor Aderounmu stopped the performance, however, saying ‘You are panicking; are you a coward?’ He told the congregation, ‘I want you to display’, encouraged everyone to accentuate their movements, and assured them that the ‘devil cannot possess you.’ After a second, apparently more successful, performance, he exclaimed, ‘I could see! I could see! The enemy of your families is dying. Look at him!’ He continued to encourage people, saying, ‘The more you pray, the more you will be moving him.’

Figure 4: The congregation perform ‘Satan, come out of the road’, led by Pastor Aderounmu (still from author’s fieldwork video, August 23, 2014).

The instructions and commentary provided by Pastor Aderounmu demonstrate a belief that the intensity of the dance moves positively correlate with the spiritual efficacy of the performance. This brings us back to the earlier comments of Evangelist Olaseni concerning the ‘violence’ with which spiritual forces need to be confronted.

The purpose of clearing Satan out of the way is to dispel evil spiritual influences that may be blocking the path ahead and hindering progress. As discussed earlier, depression and difficulties are often attributed to evil influences...
(whether Satan, or people practicing jùjù) and so addressing such forces is a critical requirement in the pursuit of happiness and wellbeing.

**The Communal Element of Dance**

**Ideas about Community and Wellbeing in African and Yoruba Thought**

In African cultures, the individual tends to be understood within the context of community. The concept of *ubuntu* in South Africa is perhaps the most cited example and emphasises collectiveness and interdependence. *Ubuntu* is reflected in the Northern Sotho and Zulu expressions translated, ‘I am, because we are; and since we are, I am’ (Mbiti, 1990, p. 106; Van Dyk & Nefale, 2005, p. 54). It is generally agreed that this same concept can be found across Africa, finding expression, for instance, in languages spoken in Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique, Democratic Republic of Congo and Angola (Dreyer, 2015, p. 195; Kamwangamalu, 1999, p. 25).

This same emphasis on community and interdependence is evident in Yoruba culture and is expressed in a great number of Yoruba proverbs. *A kì í nìkan jayé*, translated, ‘One does not enjoy life alone’ (Owomoyela, 2005, p. 275), expresses the idea that individual happiness is understood to be possible only within the context of community. The community is considered to provide security and protection for the individual, as articulated in the following proverb: *Àísí ènikèta ni èni mèjì-i fì ńja àjákù*, which translates, ‘It is the absence of a third person that makes it possible for two people to fight to the death’ (Owomoyela, 2005, p. 276). *Àjèjé ówó kan ọ gbégbá karí*, translated, ‘A single hand does not lift a calabash to the head’ (Owomoyela, 2005, p. 301), indicates that success is considered to be a benefit of communal, rather than of individual, pursuit. From such proverbs it seems that Yoruba worldview prioritises community over individuality. The individual is seen to benefit from community, through which they experience enjoyment, safety, and success.

In socio-centric African societies, individuals experience wellbeing within the context of community. For this reason, community is often regarded as a fundamental aspect of healing practices (Monteiro & Wall, 2011, p. 293) and its absence can lead to intra-psychic tension, conflicts and frustration (Van Dyk & Nefale, 2005, p. 55). Traditional African healing dances often involve the community and seek to address relational issues. In Senegal, for example, it is understood that strained social relations may disturb a particular spirit and lead to physical or emotional illness in an individual. Such illness is treated through the *Ndeup* ritual, which involves drumming, dancing and trance, and aims to restore harmonious relationships and heal the sick person (Conwill, 2010). The *Ju|’Hoan* healing dance, performed by the *Ju|’hoansi* people of Botswana, is a communal healing ritual (Katz, Biesele, & Denis, 1997, pp. 17-27), and Igbo
mourning dances in Nigeria draw members of the community around those who mourn loved ones (Akunna, 2015, p. 48).

Dance, Community, and Wellbeing in CAC Dublin

Community is emphasised in CAC Dublin as a context within which individual healing can take place. As Dr Kuyebi explained:

Some people come [to church] and will just be crying there. And for people who are downcast, somebody will go to them and say, ‘Are you OK?’ ‘No, I’m not OK.’ You can talk, and they can pray over it and reassure them that everything is a phase in life. ‘This is a phase you are going through. So, God will see you through. There’s nothing I can do, but I will pray for you.’ But for somebody to sit and pray for you, it brings healing. (Dr Adewale Kuyebi, interview, 18/12/2014)

Music and dance are thought to be especially powerful within the communal setting. In a group interview I carried out with the choir, Evangelist Joseph Oladeru, the male choir master, explained:

Evg. Oladeru: When you are down in spirit, when you are in the midst of people singing and dancing, your spirit will be…
Others: Lifted.
Evg. Oladeru: Will be lifted, and all the sorrow in you will just [claps hands]…
Others: Vanish
Evg. Oladeru: Will just [claps hands] vanish. So that is why we believe that when we come where people pray, where people dance… [claps hands]… you’ll receive what you want.
(Evangelist Joseph Oladeru and choir members, interview, 18/10/2014)

According to Evangelist Oladeru (and the other participants who interjected), being in the midst of people singing, dancing and praying brings relief from sorrow and an increase of joy. Music, dance and prayer seem to work in conjunction with community and it is the combination of these that is believed to be potent.

More than just taking place within community, though, music and dance actually help to create community. Pastor Adeeko Akinola explained to me his
perception that music plays a special role in facilitating connection, both with God and with fellow worshippers:

Worship connects the soul – appeals to the soul – faster, more efficiently, and better than ordinary talk. We get motivated, moved, and occasionally get carried away by music. It touches us. There is something that it touches in our emotions that gets us connected to God. Yah, I will say so. And it makes us to be in unity, because when music is sung and we all can flow with the music, it makes us to be in the same atmosphere and in the same spirit. (Pastor Adeeko Akinola, interview, 15/11/2014)

According to Pastor Akinola, the power of music lies, firstly, in its ability to touch our emotions more effectively than speech and, secondly, in the way that it enables people to ‘flow’ together. Pastor Akinola seems to be saying that music unites people by creating a shared physical, emotional, and spiritual experience. It is in the shared sensations of the musical performance that interpersonal connection can occur.

Dance also helps to build community by providing opportunity for interaction. When I asked Pastor Akinola about the role of processions he explained:

[Processions are] a way of meeting others that you have not met before, a way of socialising. We do that so that we know one another, and it’s an opportunity for us to really see one another again. As you might have known, we have three different rows. If we all come and sit down and go, occasionally we might not even know that the other party comes. But if we all dance and say, ‘Ah, I’ve seen you today’, then we might actually relate to one another as family. (Pastor Adeeko Akinola, interview, 15/11/2014)

Dancing in processions facilitates socialising among church members, leading to an increased sense of connection. Interaction takes place during dancing by greeting one another (as seen in Figure 5), watching each other and responding with facial expressions, movements (as seen in Figure 6), and sounds (such as whistling, verbal comments, clapping or laughing).
Communal dance in CAC Dublin also addresses sorrow by directing people’s attention away from their problems. As Grace explained:
When you see me dancing in front of you, even if you are having something going in your head, thinking something, sometimes when I dance it might make you forget what you are thinking. It will be, ‘Okay, this woman is dancing!’ Or maybe you even know my problem. You are my friend and you know my problem and you still see me the way I’m dancing. You are thinking something - you might forget it too! (Grace, interview, 18/11/2014)

In this way dance acts as a kind of distraction technique, helping to draw attention away from sorrow and redirect it towards the joy being expressed. I participated at times in the monthly thanksgiving processions but, as I am not much of a dancer, I tended to walk rather than dance. On one of these occasions, a woman who was dancing alongside me took my hand and made it dance in the air with hers. Looking at me with a large grin on her face, she said, ‘This is fun, isn’t it?’ The actions of this member were intended both to draw me into community through dance and to direct my attention to joy.

The idea of building community through music and dance can be related to theories of entrainment and flow. Entrainment is the synchronisation of two rhythmic processes through their interaction with each other. It can take place as an individual engages with music (such as tapping their foot to the beat), but it can also occur in the social interactions that take place through music and dance. Blacking described the way in which musical actors synchronise with each other’s physical movements, a phenomenon he referred to as ‘bodily resonance’ or ‘bodily empathy’. He described bodily resonance as both co-ordinated motion and emotional connection (1983, p. 57). Lomax (1982, pp. 149-150) noted that rhythm, as ‘a common framework of identification’, helps to connect and coordinate people and facilitate group activity. The interactional synchrony that can occur between individuals in the context of music and dance can help to build community. Furthermore, there is some correlation between entrainment in social interactions and positive affect (Clayton, Sager, & Will, 2004, p. 13), which confirms the assertion of CAC members that dancing together in church alleviates sorrow and increases joy.

‘Flow’ – a theory developed by Hungarian psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi – is a state of intense concentration in which an individual engaged in an activity becomes completely absorbed in the present moment. The individual experiences a suspension of all concepts of time, forgets his/her everyday life (including its problems), and thus feels a sense of freedom and relief. Particular activities – music, sport, and dance – seem especially suited to engendering a state of flow (Turino, 2008, pp. 4-5; Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). There are two aspects of flow that are of particular interest in relation to ‘dancing away
sorrow’. Firstly, experiencing flow has been proven to increase positive affect (Rogatko, 2009; Eisenberger, Jones, Stinglhamber, Shanock, & Randall, 2005; Bryce & Haworth, 2002; Clarke & Haworth, 1994; Haworth & Hill, 1992). Secondly, a shared experience of flow (social flow) may lead to the development of empathy (Hart & Blasi, 2015) and induce greater enjoyment than solitary flow (Walker, 2010). If dance in CAC Dublin is considered from the perspective of flow, these results support the claims that it can alleviate sorrow and increase feelings of happiness, and that dancing with others is more effective at achieving this than dancing alone.

Much of the literature on dance/movement therapy (D/MT) offers interesting insights that could aid our understanding of ‘dancing away sorrow’. Some of this literature ties in quite well with theories of entrainment, even if it is not specifically referred to. The pioneer D/MT therapist Trudi Schoop believed that mirroring psychiatric patients’ movements enabled her to embody their feelings and enter their world in a state of intersubjective communication, and Marian Chace believed that establishing a relationship with patients through empathic reflection enabled her to pick up the qualitative dynamics of their movements (Berrol, 2006, p. 309). This concept of empathic reflection, practised instinctively by D/MT therapists, has more recently been underpinned by discoveries in neuroscience. It has been reported that observing the actions of others can induce brain activity in the observer (Rizzolatti & Craihero, 2004), which may affect empathic behaviour (McGarry & Russo, 2011). An individual observing another person performing a movement can have identical sets of neurons (mirror neurons) activated as the one actually engaged in that movement (Berrol, 2006, p. 302). Horwitz et al. (2015) found out that dance seems to be involved in the body’s emotional interplay with others, such that there may be some clinical benefit in exposing those suffering with alexithymia (dysfunction in emotional awareness, social attachment, and interpersonal relating) to dance. Based on these findings, it is clear that emotional interaction and mirroring takes place between humans through movement and dance. These studies corroborate the assertion made by CAC members that merely watching someone else dance can lead to the observer experiencing the same emotion (in this case, joy). The CAC Dublin use of dance specifically to rid members of sorrow also finds support in the literature. Numerous studies show that participation in dance or dance/movement therapy helps to decrease depression and increase positive affect (Pylvänäinen, Muotka, & Lappalainen, 2015; Mavrovouniotis, Argiriadou, & Papaioannu, 2010; Koch, Morlinghaus, & Fuchs, 2007; Jeong & Hong, 2005; Stewart, McMullen, & Rubin, 1994). Interaction through movement draws individuals into intersubjective union (thereby contributing significantly to group
cohesion and the creation of community), and increases participants’ feelings of happiness.

**‘Dancing Away Sorrow’ in Migration**

**Positive Benefits**

As I have already established, Yoruba culture – like many other African cultures – understands the individual within the context of community, and views community as essential to wellbeing. For the Yoruba migrant residing in a more individually-oriented European nation, the creation of community is important. Dance in CAC Dublin contributes significantly to the building of community in a number of ways. Members are drawn together through the performance of shared cultural practices and the reaffirmation of common understandings and shared values. Dance also facilitates social interaction, through which a sense of connection is forged. As bodies move to the same rhythm, unity is physically enacted and community takes on tangible form within the performance. Movement and dance are considered to be an important part of efficacious ritual, able to aid divine connection and to address the spiritual forces believed at times to be behind physical and mental illnesses. Providing a context for dance within Christian ritual allows worshippers to experience a sense of power over their circumstances, which leads to an increased sense of peace. Dance also reconnects members with the homeland on a physical, mental and emotional level. As the body re-enacts familiar movements, memories of place and belonging may be triggered, restoring a sense of connection, normality and familiarity that help to heal the shock of cultural upheaval. Other scholars have similarly noted the role played by music and dance in building community and creating cohesion (Smith, 2015, p. 551; Turner, 201; Bohlman, 2011, p. 155; Turino, 2008, p. 2; Baily & Collyer, 2006, pp. 175-176), evoking memories and reconnecting migrants with their homelands (Russell, 2011; Shelemay, 2006, p. 306; Stokes, 1994, p. 3) and providing therapeutic benefits for migrants (Baily, 2005, p. 230).

**Church Attendance**

Some CAC Dublin members have tried attending Irish-led churches but have not felt satisfied by their styles of worship. When Mrs Pauline Afeni, a member of the choir, first came to Ireland she joined the Mormon Church but found it to be ‘too dull’ and ‘too quiet’. She told me, ‘The way we dance away our sorrows [in CAC] – they don’t do that thing.’ Instead, she said, ‘They sing as if you are in a funeral home, so I don’t feel anything’ (Mrs Pauline Afeni, interview, 16/11/2014). Evangelist Oladeru referred to the Catholic practice of making the sign of the cross and told me that it doesn’t ‘move’ him, whereas he
finds that singing, dance, and prayer in CAC ‘work’ (Evangelist Joseph Oladeru, interview, 18/10/2014). ‘Dancing away sorrow’ satisfies CAC Dublin members’ perception that physical action ensures the efficacy of religious ritual. Through it, members are able to attract God’s favour and dispel evil, thereby ensuring happiness and success in life. For this reason, members are drawn to CAC rather than those churches that lack dancing and, in their view, seem to practise less ‘powerful’ ritual.

The Second Generation

While dance in CAC Dublin provides positive benefits for first generation Yoruba migrants, such effects are not universal. The second generation (i.e. the youth who were born and raised in Ireland) do not tend to dance in the CAC worship services, much to the consternation of first generation members. Dr Kuyebi addressed this issue during his sermon one Sunday, voicing his concern that the youth’s lack of dancing will lead to their church becoming ‘lukewarm’ and ‘boring’ in the future. In his introductions to the monthly thanksgivings, Pastor Ibiyemi often makes appeals to the youth to join in with the dancing, and on one occasion he told them, ‘You are not a zombie – you dance!’

During my interview with four youth members (aged 13-15 years) I asked them how they feel about the dancing in church. They responded as follows:

Joy8: Uh… I dunno… it’s… just… so… out there. Like, they literally just move everything. Like, it’s such a free way of dancing… Yeah… it’s free. [Laughs]
David: Like, it makes you smile. [Stephen speaks at the same time: Awkward…] Like, it makes you wanna join in…
Sarah: Yeah.
David: [Laughter and cross talk]
Sarah: [To Stephen] You feel awkward?
Stephen: Yeah. For me it’s awkward… [Laughter]
RU: It’s awkward? Why is it awkward for you?
Stephen: ‘Cause they expect you to dance as well.
Joy: Yeah.
Sarah: That’s annoying at times.
Joy: Yeah.
RU: They expect you to dance?
Sarah: The way they’re dancing…

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8 Names of all youth participants have been changed in order to maintain anonymity.
Joy: Yeah. Like, I’d rather just… I wouldn’t do that… with them watching me…
Sarah: Like, the way they dance compared to the way we dance is like completely different!
Joy: Yeah.
Sarah: Like, we just move from side to side… But they’re like…
Joy: Exactly! [Laughter] You just see the difference between the middle [adult] section and the youth section – like we’re just standing still… and then they’re going crazy!
(CAC Dublin Youth, interview, 23/11/2014)

Joy’s description of those in the middle section of the church (the adults) dancing and the youth section ‘standing still’ is very accurate, and is something I consistently observed. A few of the youth do move, albeit very minimally, during the praise and worship, but the vast majority stand still. During processions most of them walk, though a few move their feet in time with the beat in a right-left-left-right pattern. One of the issues here is that when the youth do dance their movements are ‘completely different’ to the adults. Whereas the youth limit movement to their feet and a side-to-side motion, the adults move in multiple directions (forward and backward; up and down; left and right; and twisting motions) and utilise the whole body (head, shoulders, arms, hands, torso, hips, legs, knees, and feet).

A number of adult interview participants attributed the difference in dancing between the generations to migration. As Grace told me:

The youth that are coming from Nigeria that are used to that kind of music, those are the people that dance very well in the church if you notice, if you understand. But those children that were born here, the way they dance, the way they move, is really, really different from those people that are coming from Africa. (Grace, interview, 18/11/2014)

Although they are being brought up in Nigerian homes, and attend a predominantly Yoruba church, the youth in CAC Dublin do not dance in the same way as first generation members. They are not only influenced by the Yoruba culture of their families and church community, but are also exposed to the culture of the wider Irish society in which they live. Whereas the majority of interview participants over thirty described themselves as ‘Nigerian’, those in their teens and twenties self-identified as ‘Nigerian-Irish’. The adoption of a hybrid identity reflects the fact that the second generation have absorbed elements of
Irish culture. The awkwardness expressed by the youth I interviewed did not relate so much to the way the adults dance, but more to the adults’ expectation of them to dance in the same way. Although Sarah said she would ‘love to be able to dance like [the adults]’, all the youth interview participants agreed that they would look ‘weird’ whereas the adults just look ‘natural’. Sarah explained that the way the adults dance is ‘more cultural’, and David put the adults’ dancing down to ‘the way they were brought up’. While the dance moves of the first generation enable them to express their Yoruba identity those same moves do not allow the youth to articulate their affinity with Irish culture. The youths’ choice of vocabulary – ‘weird’ and ‘awkward’ – highlights the dissonance they perceive between the Yoruba values and aesthetics expressed in their parents’ dancing and those of the Irish culture in which they are growing up and developing their identities. As Blacking noted, social processes and music are inseparable: ‘[T]he function of music is to reinforce, or relate people more closely to, certain experiences which have come to have meaning in their social life’ (1973, p. 99).

The reluctance of the second generation to dance like their parents may also relate to a shift in emphasis from participatory to presentational performance. As Turino (2008, p. 46) points out, individuals growing up in societies where presentational music and dance are prominent may experience performance anxiety. The first generation in CAC Dublin focus on participatory dance and, for this reason, do not feel worried about making ‘mistakes’ or achieving a high standard. The youth, on the other hand, are reluctant to take part in it, especially ‘with them [the first generation] watching.’ As Sarah put it, ‘The way we dance is just trying not to look embarrassing in front of them. They’re not afraid of how they look.’ This fear of how they will look indicates that the youth view dance more as a presentational, rather than participatory, performance.

There seems to be a degree of cross-generational tension in the area of dance. The adults have grown up in Nigeria and have absorbed a particular style of dancing. The youth have grown up in a very different culture where, although they encounter their parents’ style of dancing in church, what they see around them among their peers, and in the country at large, is very different. Dancing in the style of their parents does not feel natural or easy. Due to the worldview with which the adult members have grown up – in which dance is greatly emphasised and even considered integral to ritual efficacy and the expression of worship – the youths’ reluctance to dance in church is a cause for concern among the adults. Out of this concern, the older generation place a degree of pressure on the youth to join in with the dancing. The youth feel the pressure and expectation to dance ‘in the same way’ as the adults, but are not able to fulfil this expectation. Both generations keenly feel this tension.
Conclusion

The ability of dance to remove sorrow and induce joy for members of CAC Dublin rests upon both its spiritual and communal nature. In Yoruba culture (and in Africa more generally) mental and physical states are often associated with spiritual matters. The physical and spiritual realms are thought to be connected and thus able to influence one another. Dance, as a physical activity taking place within religious ritual, is believed to influence the spiritual world, both repelling evil forces and attracting God’s blessing. Emotional wellbeing is also understood to be contingent upon community. Music and dance help to build community and facilitate communal interaction, raising levels of happiness and wellbeing. While such perspectives are clearly rooted in Yoruba worldview, in CAC Dublin they are placed within a biblical narrative, with the story of King David’s dance providing a pattern to follow.

‘Dancing away sorrow’ serves the needs of the first generation migrants as it reconnects them with familiar practices from the homeland and builds community around shared understandings. This enables them to deal with the challenges of migration, leading to a sense of empowerment. As dance – and movement more generally – is thought to positively correlate with spiritual potency, its practise draws Yoruba Christians to CAC rather than to Irish-led churches. While ‘dancing away sorrow’ offers positive benefits to first generation members, it highlights the dissonance perceived by the second generation between Yoruba culture and that of the wider Irish society in which they are growing up. While the dance moves of the first generation enable them to express their Yoruba identity, those same moves do not allow the second generation to articulate their hybrid identities and their affinity with Irish culture. The more restrained moves of the youth are a cause of concern for the older generation, who equate vigorous movement with spiritual efficacy. For the second generation, there seems to be a move away from participatory dance performance, which perhaps indicates a change of thought with regard to the relationship between individual and community. ‘Dancing away sorrow’ in CAC Dublin is rooted in Yoruba (and, more widely, African) beliefs concerning spirituality and community. Due to the shifting identity and worldview of the second generation as they adapt to Irish culture, it is unlikely that they will continue the practice of ‘dancing away sorrow’, at least in its current format.
References


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