
A TRADITIONAL GHANAIAAN PERSPECTIVE ON WOMEN AS COMPOSERS AND PERFORMERS OF ADZEWA AND ADZEBA MUSIC AND DANCE.

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ABSTRACT: *Adzewa and adzeba are occasional traditional musical types of the Fanti and Guan people along the Fanti Coast of Ghana. Through qualitative research approach, the study examined the impact of women as performers and composers of adzewa and adzeba music and dance. The research, which is part of a bigger work on a Corpus of traditional Ghanaian music, involved two traditional adzeba ensembles at Winneba and Mankoadze and a contemporary dance ensemble at Cape Coast, the Central Folkloric Dance Company, which performs a variety of traditional musical types including adzewa. The study showed that women express their collective and individual sentiments through compositions and performances of adzewa and adzeba. These musical types were seen as concepts within the framework of the sociological and anthropological theories of structural functionalism in explaining norms, customs, traditions and institutions of a society.*

KEYWORDS: *Adzewa, Adzeba, Women, Composers, Performers, Music and Dance*

INTRODUCTION

Adzewa and adzeba are mainly performed during traditional festivals and funerals of the Fanti and Guan people. They are among the predominantly female traditional musical types in Ghana (Ampene, 2005; Edumadze, 1992; Nketia, 1973). The ensembles are not limited to predominantly female groups. All-female *adzewa* and *adzeba* groups also exist. Some of the *adzewa* and *adzeba* groups are accompanied by a single drum while others do not use any drum in the ensemble. Predominantly female traditional Ghanaian musical types in Ghana include *adowa*, *nnwonkorɔ* and *sikiyi* among the Twi-Akan people; *adenkum*, *apatampa* and *ebibindwom* among the Fanti-Akan people. Others are *gbolo* among the Ewe, *pogne* among the Frafra and *bamaya* among the Dagomba. Sutherland-Addy compares and contrasts *adenkum*, *ebibindwom* and *adzewa* as three traditional lyrical forms among the Fanti people of Elmina and Cape Coast which are dominated by women. The comparison is to establish the contribution of women as performers and composers of traditional Ghanaian literary arts (Sutherland-Addy, 1998).

Unlike the comparative study of Sutherland-Addy's work, which emphasizes the use of literary devices for self-expression, this study examines the contribution of women as performers and composers of *adzewa* and *adzeba* traditional music and dance from a musical rather than a literary perspective. The paper examines the use of *adzewa* and *adzeba* to express collective and individual

sentiments of women It also incorporates transcription and interpretation of excerpts from the text of two *adzeba* and one *adzewa* songs and the musical analyses of two *adzeba* and one *adzewa* songs as illustrations of the impact of women as performers and composers of traditional Ghanaian music and dance.

METHODOLOGY

In approaching the study, *adzewa* and *adzeba* traditional music and dance in Ghana were seen as concepts within the framework of sociological and anthropological theories of and structural functionalism in explaining norms, customs, traditions and institutions of a society (Trueman, n.d.; Goldschmidt, 1996; Cliff'sNotes, 2013; Din, 2013; Crossman, n.d.; Structural Functionalism, n.d.).

Fieldwork performances in *adzewa* and *adzeba* music

At Mankoadze, listening and observation of performances, took place on August 5, 2012, February 3, 2013 and August 11, 2013. At Winneba, the afore-mentioned events took place on January 27, 2013, February 3, 2013 and February 10, 2013 and January 22, 2014. The Central Folkloric Dance ensemble performed on December 12, 2013 at the auditorium of the Centre for National Culture in Cape Coast.

Observation and interviews

The groups were observed between August 2012 and January 2014. They demonstrated the *adzeba* dance movements and the songs that go with them. They also showed further how a dancer exhibits movement patterns while leaving the dancing arena after three rounds of moving and turning, before another dancer takes over or the song is changed.

The focus group interview which is one of the major research tools in understanding people's thoughts and feelings (Research Methodology-IHM Gwalior, n.d.) was used in interviewing the *Dentsefo Adzeba* group of Winneba, the Folkloric Dance ensemble in Cape Coast and Mankoadze group soon after their performances. The group clarified issues on the pre-performance ceremony and why they poured a libation of gin on the gourd rattles. Follow-up interviews on performances were made with the leaders of the *adzeba* ensembles at Winneba and Mankoadze. Even though *adzeba* songs were sung in the Fante dialect, it was difficult for me to hear and understand the words clearly. It was at the interview sessions that meanings of the songs were expounded. There were also interviews with informants from Mankoadze and Winneba on *adzeba*, Apam on *adzewa* and Senya Breku on *adoba*. There was also a telephone conversation with the programmes coordinator of the National Commission on Culture at Cape Coast to seek clarification on the repertoire of the Folkloric Dance ensemble.

Audio-video recording and storage of information

The taking of pictures and audio-video recording of events took place during the performances. The information gathered from the performances and interviews was stored on the computer. The words and music were then transcribed, codified and analyzed using textual analytical methods.

The contexts within which *adzewa* and *adzeba* performances took place were also analyzed using the contextual analysis method

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHODS AND DATA ANALYSIS

The study used the qualitative research approach. The research was intended to go into the understanding of meanings, look at, describe and understand experience, ideas, beliefs and values. It sought to understand the underlying concepts from the perspective of the local population who were involved in the study. (Qualitative Research Design-Developing a Healthcare, n.d).

RESULTS

Adzewa and *adzeba* are performed within the traditional Ghanaian as well as contemporary Ghanaian contexts. Within the traditional Ghanaian context are pre-performance and post-performance ceremonies, performances at traditional festivals, performances in the style of *asafo* warriors' music, performances at funerals, integration of music and dance in *adzewa* and *adzeba*, and occasions of ritual importance and conflict. Within the contemporary context are performances on stage and performances at Ghana national state functions. Within all these contexts it is women who are at the centre stage of *adzewa* and *adzeba* performances.

The most important finding of the study is the socio-cultural impact *adzewa* and *adzeba* women make in their roles as composers and performers in traditional institutions. By far and away, it is women who are in control of *adzewa* and *adzeba* music and dance ensembles. There are two types of *adzewa* and *adzeba* musical ensembles. One is a predominantly female group while the other is an all-female group. Apart from the Mankoadze ensemble which has a few male members who join the chorus, the role of men in the ensemble is limited to the playing of a single drum in predominantly female ensembles. Even in the Mankoadze ensemble, the leader of the group, the cantors and most of the dancers and members of the chorus are females.

Transcriptions, analyses and interpretation of *adzewa* and *adzeba* songs

The transcription, analyses and interpretation of excerpts from *adzewa* and *adzeba* songs illustrating the theme on the plight of women in society are now examined.

Example 1: *Kwaansa ɔkɔ* (*Kwaansa* is gone)

Many *adzeba* songs bring into focus the plight of women. An excerpt of the text of a song by the Mankoadze *Adzeba* group enlightens us about the marriage of a woman by name *Kwaansa* as shown below:

	Fante Text	English Translation
SOLO:	<i>Kwaansa ɔkɔ oo, Kwansa ɔkɔ oo</i> <i>ɔyer Kwaansa ɔkɔ oo, ɔbrempon</i> <i>Kwaansa ɔkɔ oo</i>	<i>Kwaansa</i> is gone! <i>Kwaansa</i> is gone! Wife <i>Kwaansa</i> is gone, respectable <i>Kwaansa</i> is gone
CHORUS	<i>Kwaansa ɔkɔ oo! yon, yon,</i> <i>Yon, yon, yon, yon, yon</i>	<i>Kwaansa</i> is gone forever!

SOLO: *ɔbrempon Kwaansa awar a,* Respectable *Kwaansa's* marriage,
 ponpon gyan a nine days' wonder
 CHORUS: *Fanyim akowaa a w'awar no* Worth nothing less than a slave's marriage

a) Interpretation

The text of the *adzeba* song above emphasizes the experience that many women go through in marriage. Like *Kwaansa's* marriage, many marriages look very good from the onset. *Kwaansa's* marriage was comparable to a princess' marriage, a very respectable one and the envy of all. After years of happiness, frustrations set in and the otherwise lovely marriage ends up worth nothing less than a slave's marriage—a nine days' wonder! The marriage is ended.

The next marriage that comes to the limelight in the song involves *ɔbe*. With the benefit of hindsight, it was thought that this was going to be the marriage of marriages. *ɔbe* also had her good old days but alas! Her marriage also comes to an abrupt end. This brings *Kwaansa's* marriage into remembrance and makes people ask the question: is someone looking at what is happening to *ɔbe*? It is far worse than what happened to *Kwaansa*. There is reference to security in other cantor versions of the same song. For them, the ones who have men on their side are secured because she can have sleep soundly. This may be interpreted to mean the ones who have men to defend them in or outside marriage are secured. In traditional parlance both assertions could be true but within the context of the song, I am inclined to believe that the latter has more appropriate relevance to the music than the former. The use of the plural (men) rather than the singular (man) seems to suggest that the men are from the woman's matrilineal family or her own male children. The men from the woman's matrilineal family give her protection when the marriage breaks down. Unfortunately, I did not come across a song depicting the positive side of marriage during my collections. That would have been very interesting to compare with the experience of *Kwaansa* and *4be* and would have shown what traditional women deem to be a successful marriage.

In the song the expression “*ɔkɔ oo*”, which means “is gone” in Fante, is sung as “*ɔkɔroo!*” in spoken Gomoa dialect. The interjection “oo” is a mark of emphasis and a show of surprise. The non-lexical expression “*Yon, yon, yon, yon, yon, yon, yon*” emphasizes the shocking nature and certainty of *Kwaansa's* nine-day marriage adventure!

Some of the songs by the Mankoadze *Adzeba* group also praised women for displaying exemplary female qualities. A woman by name *ɔbo Mansa* was remembered in her death for taking special care of other women's children. In the song, the group and the community gave her the last respect through praise singing before she was finally laid to rest.

Another woman by name *Kwansima* had so many children. The group through song requested the playing of *asɔ-nda* (hoe blade musical instrument) and by implication the performance of *adzeba* to crown her funeral rites for being the quintessence of a mother with so many daughters who would be a blessing to her by giving birth to many, many granddaughters to continue the act of procreation, an achievement, which makes women proud.

Example 2: *Wɔfa bogu m'awar* (Uncle, come and dissolve my marriage)

	Fante Text	English Translation
SOLO:	<i>Wɔfa, ee ee Bogu m'awar mam' o</i>	Uncle Come and dissolve my marriage for me
CHORUS:	<i>Ayee, Me wɔfa ee bogu m'awar mam' o, ayee Wɔfa, awo nye yi a?</i>	Yes, my Uncle come and dissolve my marriage for me Uncle, is that you?
SOLO:	<i>Wɔfa, ee ee Bogu m'awar mam' o,</i>	Uncle Come and dissolve my marriage for me,
CHORUS:	<i>Ayee, Wɔfa, ee bogu m'awar mam' o, ayee Hwe m'abasa! hwe m'anantu! hwe m'afon aa! W'abor m' abor m' abor m' abor m'a mo wɔfa, ee ee bogu m'awar mam', oo aye</i>	Yes, uncle, come and dissolve my marriage for me, Look at my arms! Look at the calves of my legs! Look at my cheeks! I have been beaten mercilessly times without number My Uncle, come and dissolve my marriage for me

a) Interpretation

In the song above, a married woman is calling on her uncle to come and dissolve her marriage. The maternal uncle is implied here because the Fanti, like all Akan people, inherit matrilineally. The song speaks for millions of women who are in a similar predicament. The rhetorical question 'Uncle is that you'? by the married woman in the song presupposes that she has been frantically looking for the uncle. Now that she has found him, she puts her request before him as the uncle had a very big say in her marriage. In fact, the marriage would not have been possible without consultations with him. The language of the song is simple. The expression '*wabor m' abor m' abor m' abor m'aa*' emphasizes the countless number of times she has been beaten and that is the reason why she is calling for the dissolution. During the customary marriage among the Akan, the families of the bride and the bridegroom sit down to counsel the couple. One of the pieces of advice given to the bridegroom by the bride's family is to warn him that the very day they hear their daughter has been beaten will be the end the marriage.

Example 3: *Awomawu* (Continuous child deaths of a mother)

	Fante text	English Translation
SOLO:	<i>Awomawu menye den oo Efua, wɔma me due due a</i>	What must I do to prevent the continuous deaths of my children?
CHORUS:	<i>Awomawu menye den oo?</i>	What must I do to avert my children dying soon after birth?
SOLO:	<i>Ekor a maka wɔma me due due</i>	The only one left have our condolences

CHORUS: *Awomawu menyɛ den oo?*

What must I do to avert my children dying soon after birth?

a) Interpretation

Under the name of *Efua* this song, by the Winneba *Dentsefo Adzeba* group speaks for millions of women who go through the painful experience of continuously losing their children soon after birth. It pays tribute to them with condolences. In another song by the group concerning death, a woman laments on giving birth and not being able to take care of them. According to the song, the woman gives birth for Mother Earth. The Almighty, Great Friend (Supreme Being) gives her such a wonderful gift only for female Friday born Mother Earth to snatch them away from her. The songs highlight the bond that exists between women and their children and the extreme pain they undergo when they lose their children particularly in their infancy. Together with other funeral *Adzeba* songs, they tell us about the reverence that traditional Akan and Guan people of Ghana have for their ancestors. They go all lengths to perform elaborate funerals to ensure that the transition from the present life to the next world is smooth and successful.

The Winneba *adzeba* ensemble, in one of its songs, emphasizes the fact that the birth of a child precedes the toddler stage. This song goes a long way to show the importance society attaches to the act of bringing forth children. Another song by the Mankoadze ensemble pays tribute to a woman during her funeral for bringing forth so many children.

b) Musical Analysis

REPETITION

Repetition was used as a tool for placing emphasis on certain parts of songs. Melody, rhythm and sequence were used as repetitive devices to emphasize various aspects of *adzeba* and *adzewa* songs. There were no modulations in any of the recorded songs.

Examples of exact repetition in the same part for emphasis were illustrated with excerpts from *Egya 'Esi Manko* by the Mankoadze *adzeba* ensemble as shown in the Excerpt below:

Excerpt 1



In the above example, the melodic repetitions are indicated by phrase marks.

SEQUENCES AND ORNAMENTATION

Real sequences were not found in the collection of songs but examples of tonal sequences by way of showing emphasis was to be found in *Kwaansa* (Excerpt 2) by the Mankoadze Ensemble and *Bogu m'awar* (Excerpt 3) by the Folkloric Dance Company.

Excerpt 2



In the example above, *Kwan-saɔ-koo* in the first bar was sequentially treated as *Kwan-saɔ-koo* in the second bar. In the second example below, *hwe m'anantu*, *hwe m'abasa* and *hwe m'afona* are sequentially treated. In Excerpt 3, *hwe m'anantu*, *hwe m'abasa*, *hwe m'afona* are sequentially treated in bar 1, bar 3 and bar 5 respectively.

Excerpt 3



In the song *Kwaansa* (Excerpt 2) by the Mankoadze ensemble the word *Kwaansa* sounded like *Koansah* hence the use of acciacatura grace note.

PHRASING

Long soloist parts were broken down into phrases as shown in the two examples from *Kwaansa* (Excerpts 2 and 3) by the Mankoadze *adzeba* ensemble below:

Excerpt 4



Excerpt 5



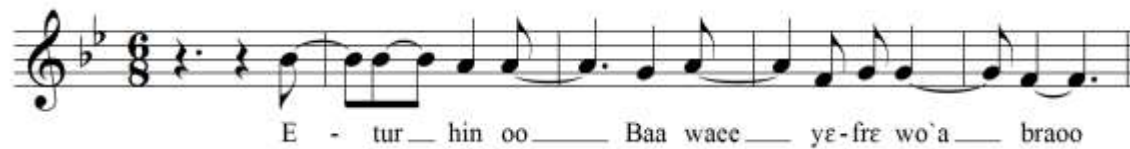
RHYTHM

The *adzewa* and *adzeba* songs have been transcribed into music notation in compound duple time. The rhythmic instruments in the *adzewa* and *adzeba* ensembles are the *mfoba* (gourd rattles), *nsambɔ* (rhythmic hand clapping), *dawur* (bell) for keeping the timeline as well as the drum (either an *apentsima* or *dondo*). Women handle the gourd rattles, bell and handclapping rhythmic instruments. The bell and rhythmic handclapping generally play ostinati rhythmic patterns but there is more room for ingenuity with the gourd rattles. According to the Folkloric Dance

ensemble, in the *Bentsir Adzewa* ensemble of Cape Coast, a man plays the *apentsima*. My observation of the Mankoadze *adzeba* ensemble showed that a man or woman could play the *dondo*. The *tempi* of the songs without musical accompaniment are more relaxed but become livelier as the performance gets to the level of songs involving the full ensemble with instrumental accompaniment.

Syncopation and rhythmic repetition were the characteristic features of some of the songs. For example, in the song *Egya 'Esi Manko* the section the cantor sang *Etur him oo Baawa ee yefre wo'a braoo* is syncopated rhythm as shown in Excerpt 6 below:

Excerpt 6



The song *Bogu m'awar* by the Folkloric Dance ensemble has syncopation in the entries *m'a mo aye* as shown in the Excerpt below:



FORM

The instrumental resources of *Adzeba* or *Adzewa* are the *mfoba* (gourd rattles), the *dawur* (bell), *nsambɔ* (rhythmic hand clapping), either an *apentsima* drum or *dondo*, *dwomtufɔ* (solo) and *ngyedo* (chorus). The form and structure of the *adzeba* and *adzewa* music was in cantor and chorus form. The *dwomtufɔ* (solo) and *ngyedo* (chorus parts), songs without instrumental as well as those with instrumental accompaniment give structure and meaning to *adzewa* and *adzeba* songs. Both words and music determine the structure of songs.

Composition of *adzeba* songs

It was established from the interviews and performances that the composition of *adzeba* songs are women-dominated. In one such composition by the Mankoadze *Adzeba* group, an old woman composed a song under the sobriquet of *Ananka Efua* (Friday, female born puff adder). She was anticipating what would happen to her in death. Being childless and lonely, she compared herself to the lonely cobra, which could meet its premature death while sleeping at night. In another instance by the same group, *Adwowa Etsaaba*, was proud of her heritage and ancestry and composed a song in which she portrayed her *Ananse* family origins from *Akumpoano* in Ekumfi land. She came to settle in Mankoadze and had shown keen interest in joining the Mankoadze *Adzeba* group.

The creativity of individual women performers and their rendition of songs were also measured. Different women were observed performing the same song during the same performance or at different performances. Marked differences were observed in the interpretation of the music. Apart from the voice quality, which was not expected to be the same, details in the rendition of the songs differed from one performer to another.

Many of the *adzeba* and *adzewa* songs have been received by the modern generation from antiquity. However, there are contemporary compositions based on modern concepts. An example is *Ofie yewura* (Filth in the home) on health hazards. The performance incorporates the dramatization of residents being summoned by the Town Council because they did not keep their homes and surrounding environment clean.

Integration of dance and music in *adzewa* and *adzeba*

The *adzewa* dance is integrated into the *adzeba* performance. In the repertoire of songs of the Winneba *Dentsefo adzeba* ensemble, groups of songs of about thirty or forty go with particular styles of dancing. Among the Mankoadze *adzeba* group, dancing begins by the dancer taking some steps (*ntutui*) which culminate in the dancer turning round (*adane*). There are three turns to a dance before a new dancer stepped into the dancing ring or a current song is changed. The audience is free to join in the singing, clapping and dancing. The leader of the Mankoadze *adzeba* group is shown in the picture below performing the *adzeba* dancing style for the song *Mo mo y'Egya Edu* (Well done our Father Edu) during the *Iyi so oye* (This is also good) traditional festival of the people of Mankoadze in August, 2012.



Plate 3: The leader of the Mankoadze Adzeba group dancing in a performance at Iyi So Oye Festival

Sutherland-Addy described the *adzewa* dance of the *Bentsir* group of Cape Coast as involving elegant body movements as the dancer made short but quick foot movements. The dance, which was in two or three parts changed into a robust dance with leaping and distinct footwork and brisk swinging of arms. This was borne out by the Folkloric Dance ensemble's performance at the

auditorium of the Centre for National Culture at Cape Coast, which appeared to be much more elaborate and elegant than what I witnessed in Winneba and Mankoadze (Sutherland-Addy, 1998).

DISCUSSION

The two songs *Kwaansa ɔko* (*Kwaansa* is gone) by the Mankoadze *Adzeba* group and *Wɔfa bogu m'awar* (Uncle, come and dissolve my marriage) by the Folkloric Dance ensemble of Cape Coast showed possible causes for dissolution of marriages among the Akan and indeed other world cultures. In the case of *Kwaansa*, it was not exactly clear what brought about the dissolution. It may be inferred that *Kwaansa* was being pampered and others saw her marriage to be an ideal type when all of a sudden things went wrong. It was not very clear whether *Kwaansa* gave up the marriage because of disappointment or that the husband decided to dump her. In the case of *Bogu m'awar*, the reason for the woman calling for dissolution was very clear: She had been beaten countless number of times. The limitation of the song was that we were not told whether the uncle finally dissolved the marriage. That could be anyone's guess. From experience, some families would dissolve the marriage because of the humiliation of their daughter. Others would sit down with the man's family and settle issues. These two songs and others in the collection brought to the limelight some of the emotional expressions of women in marriage.

There were areas where my findings and that of Sutherland-Addy on *Adzewa* in Cape Coast were at variance. Her observation of the *OLA Bentsir Adzewa* performances showed male instrumentalists playing the *as4* (the hoe head percussive instrument) and *apentsima* drum. There were also young men from their *Asafo* counterpart who joined in the singing and clapping during performances (Sutherland 1998, p.8). In a focus group discussion, the Folkloric Dance ensemble told me a different story. According to them, the playing of the *apentsima* drum was the only role reserved for men in traditional *Adzewa* performances. Everything else was in the hands of women. This included the singing, clapping of hands and the playing of the bell. This was quite different from what Sutherland-Addy observed with the *Bentsir Adzewa* group in her study. The only explanation that one could give to this apparent contradiction between the Folkloric Dance ensemble's version of only women singing and clapping in the traditional *Adzewa* ensemble as against Sutherland-Addy's observation of men taking part in the singing and clapping was that the arrangement might have taken place later in the evolutionary process of the ensemble. This was because my observation of the performance of the Folkloric Dance ensemble at Cape Coast showed the involvement of men in the singing. At the performance of the Mankoadze *adzeba* ensemble, a few young men were involved in the *nsambɔ* (rhythmic hand clapping) and singing of the songs. They were, however, not members of the *Asafo* group but active members of the *Adzeba* group who had replaced their fathers or grandfathers.

In his study of "Adzewa" by the Effutu people of Winneba, Edumadze observes that there is no distinction between the *dwomtufɔ* (cantor) and the song composer since they perform the same role. Such a person should be eloquent, well-versed in *Effutu* traditions and customs and be talented in singing. When an incumbent cantor dies the *Abaa Panyin* (the group leader) performs a ritual by pouring libation to invoke the spirit of the deceased cantor to imbue one of her daughters with

all the qualities she possessed as a cantor of the group including the knowledge of all the “adzewa” songs (Edumadze, 1992).

There are two *adzeba* groups in Winneba and my study was limited to the *Dentsefo adzeba* group rather than the *Tuafo adzeba* group. The composition of *adzeba* songs by the *Dentsefo* group is however not limited to the cantor or soloist. According to them, they get their repertoire of songs for the group from the various families which constitute the ensemble. A composition by any of the members is credited to the family songs of the composer.

CONCLUSION

The study examined a traditional Ghanaian perspective on women as composers and performers of *adzewa* and *adzeba* music and dance. *Adzewa* and *adzeba* traditional music and dance in Ghana were studied as concepts within the framework of sociological and anthropological theories of structural functionalism in explaining norms, customs, traditions and institutions of a society. The most important finding of the study was the collective and individual sentiments of women as expressed in their compositions and performances of *adzewa* and *adzeba* music and dance. Transcription and interpretation of excerpts from the text of two *adzeba* and one *adzewa* songs and the musical analyses of two *adzeba* and one *adzewa* songs are illustrations of the impact of women as performers and composers of traditional Ghanaian music and dance. It was the thrust of this study that almost exclusively women were involved in the composition and performance of *adzewa* and *adzeba* albeit with the support of a few men.

FUTURE RESEARCH

Research work is required on *Adzewa* ensembles along the Fanti coastline such as those in Apam and Senya Breku as well as *Adzewa* groups in other Fante or Guan speaking areas not covered in the study on the Corpus of Traditional Ghanaian Music. The role of women as performers and composers should be studied in other female dominated ensembles such as *adowa* and *nnwonkor4* and comparisons made to give an overall picture of the heritage of women as composers and performers in traditional Ghanaian institutions.

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