

***Agbleha* Dance-Drumming: Status and Socio-Cultural Impact on Northern Ewes of Ghana**

Martin Q. Amlor

Centre for African and International Studies, University of Cape Coast, Cape Coast. Ghana.

***Corresponding Author:**

Martin Q. Amlor

Email: fmqamlor@yahoo.com

Abstract: Indigenous music, as a functional socio-cultural tool, is believed to satisfy specific needs and purposes in the daily life's activities of traditional societies in Africa and thus, is never performed out of context. An indigenous music genre associated with the economic activities of northern Ewe subsistence farmers in the Volta Region of Ghana is *agblehawo*. Despite the fact that social change, precipitated by foreign cultural forces such as Westernisation, Islamisation and modernisation, has compelled northern Ewesto incorporate diverse musical traditions into their socio-musical behaviour, the *shewo* (youth), who constitute the bulk of the farming work force, still perform *agblehawo*. The major concern of this paper is to investigate and explain the persistent efforts to still retain the performance of an ethnic music in its pure form by the *shewo*, in spite of their exposure to all kinds of music today in northern Eweland.

Keywords: indigenous music, *agblehawo*, foreign culture, *shewo*.

INTRODUCTION

The geographical location of Northern Eweland has been described by Agbodeka[1] as an area that shares a common border to the east with the Republic of Togo, to the West by the Volta Lake to the north by Jasikan and Krachi Districts and to the south by Añlɔ, North and South Tɔŋu, Akatsi, Avenɔ and Ketu Districts. These seven districts occupy a total area of 4,900.4 square kilometres, representing about 20% of the size of the entire region which has a total area of 20,344 kilometres and about 1.72% of Ghana's total land size. The people are currently located in seven administrative districts of Agortime-Ziɔfe, Adaklu, Ho, Hohoe, Kpeve, North and South Dayi.

Origin of northern Ewes

Historically, northern Ewes, according to Daketsey[2], were part of a major block of Ewes believed to have migrated from *Dɔtsie* (sometimes spelt Nuatja, Nuatia or Nouatche), a settlement area that lies about 6° 30' N and 15° E on the Lome-Atakpame road and about 112km from Lome, the capital of Togo. On their migration from *Dɔtsie*, by the end of the 17th century Amenumey[3], states that they journeyed in small or extended family groups and totemic clans that were led by hunters and farmers towards the Volta River in the north. "They occasionally stopped to establish temporary camps, villages and farms whenever they found rivers and arable land and finally got to their present areas of settlement in Ghana in

relatively peaceful and small autonomous communities". Younge[4]

Obianim[5] identifies these northern Ewe autonomous communities as the *Abutiawo*, *Adakluawo*, *Alavanyoawo*, *Anfoegawo*, *Asɔgliawo*, *Awudomeawo*, *Danyiawo*, *Dzoloawo*, *Dzobiawo*, *Gbiawo*, *Kpalimeawo*, *Kpedzeawo*, *Kpanduawo*, *Leklebiawo*, *Sasaduawo*, *Vakpawo*, *Veawo* and *Wliawo*.

Language Patterns

Apart from Ewe which is the main language spoken, there are other varieties of dialects that are spoken in the *fiafiagbe* (non-Ewe speaking) areas which are occupied by pockets of *Guan*, *Buem* and *Akan* speaking ethnic groups referred to in Ewe as *fiafialawo*. Beside their own spoken dialects, they speak Ewe as a second language. Some Guan speaking settlements include *Akpafu*, *Avatime*, *Bowiri*, *Likpe*, *Logba*, *Lolobi*, *Nkonya*, *Nyangbo*, *Santrkofifi* and *Tafi*. The Buem speaking groups are located at *Jasikan* and its adjoining settlements like *Baglo*, *Teteman*, *Kute*, and *Okadjakrom*. Going further north, one can find pockets of Akan speaking groups of settlers at *Ahamansu*, *Apesokubi*, *Breweniase*, *Kadjebi*, *Papase*, *Tapa-Amanya* and *Worawora*.

In examining the economic activities of the people, Obianim[5], further states: "about 90% of northern Ewes engage in certain forms of agriculture such as subsistence farming and fishing. Among

foodstuff production which forms the hub of their economic activities, cassava, yam, plantain, cocoyam, maize and rice constitute their staple food. With the introduction of cash crops like cocoa and coffee, many male farmers have shifted into this sector of farming as against few women”.

METHODOLOGY

The author undertook an ethnographic study by employing three main approaches to gathering data: conducting personal interviews with subsistence farmers, engaging in focus group discussions with the elderly who have in-depth knowledge of this folk genre in the study area. This research tool was quite critical since ‘interviewing’, as put by Fontana and Frey [6], is a potent means of understanding fellow human beings. The adoption of the participant observation research approach; where observation as explained by Creswell [7] aims at gathering first-hand information by perceiving people and their intra-actions at the research sites as well as socializing and participating in their work activities, enabled the author to arrive at a definite and reliable conclusion drawn to represent a fair assessment of the topic and its main objective. In addition, other secondary sources of data were used to support the result of the research.

What are *agblehawo*?

As indicated earlier, an important folk music that is incorporated into the economic activities of subsistence farmers is *agblehawo*. The term *agblehawo* (singular-*agbleha*) which is a short form of *agbledehawo*, literally means ‘farming songs’, and it is derived from two Ewe words, *agbledede* (farming) and *hawo* (songs). By definition, *agblehawo* are a type of work songs sung by farmers as accompaniment to their farming activities to motivate and stimulate them to boost productivity in order to sustain their welfare and survival; when performed at home, they serve other specific purposes.

Impact of Westernisation/Islamisation on northern Ewe culture

Social change which has been precipitated by forces of Westernisation, Islamisation and modernization in Northern Ewe land through Christian and Moslem missionary activities, education, colonialism and the mass media, has impacted both positively and negatively on the people’s cultural patterns, including music. Foreign musical types that are played in the mass media like radio, films and television, have compelled the *shewo* to adopt and practise them. In the light of the above, Idolor [8] states: “Africa has had pressures from foreign administrative invasions, education, alien religion, emerging technologies and mass media, leading to changes in the lives of individuals and the entire society. Music as a living corporate part of African societies, cannot, but adapt to some of these changes almost to the detriment

of the native genres”. However, it is worthy of note that, despite the fact that social change, impacted largely on the socio-musical behaviour of the *shewo* in northern Ewe land, to date, they still cling to the performance of *agblehawo*. The question worth answering, therefore, is; ‘how do we account for the continuous performance of an ethnic music in an environment which is now inundated with foreign musical genres that have now been incorporated into the socio-cultural practices of the people?’”

Background to subsistence farming in northern Ewe land

Activities of subsistence farmers over the years in the northern sector of the Volta Region in Ghana include clearing of land, bush or forests, planting of crops and harvest/storage of food items. The objectives and resource endowment of northern Ewe peasant farmers strongly influence their choice of farming activities. These objectives, among others, are to:

- i. Satisfy their household’s subsistence requirements by cultivating main staples like maize, cassava, yam, cocoyam, plantain, beans and rice.
- ii. Provide their household cash needs through the sale of surplus food crops and livestock.
- iii. Keep livestock (sheep, goats and birds) as insurance against crop failure and also for ritual performances in their religious activities.

The types of farming activities of the people are dependent on prevailing natural geographical conditions in terms of weather and rainfall patterns, soil texture/nutrients that support food production, availability of working tools and cheap labour. Deep loamy soil which abounds in the area, favours the growth of root crops like yam, cassava, cocoyam, and sweet potatoes. The basic work tools used for food production include cutlasses, hoes and mattocks. Of late, the use of tractors has enabled farmers to either plough their own farm lands or hire them to fellow farmers for paid services. Added to this, lack of technological knowledge and skills, poor roads and transport systems largely hinder prospects of industrialisation. Subsistence farming, therefore, still remains the most common economic activity undertaken by the people.

In comparing farming activities of northern and southern Ewes, Kovey [9] opines:

Northern Ewes are more involved in subsistence agriculture than their Southern counterparts. This is due to the fact that most of the lands in the south are occupied by sea water, and for this reason, the people rather engage in fishing.

“Family labour, is the main source of energy employed in subsistence farming in rural communities of Ghana and this usually determines the size of the farm. Beside the nuclear and extended family units, there is also the age-long cultural practice of hired labour contracted by private individuals who pay cash to individuals or co-operative groups of workers whose services are engaged” Owusu-Baah [10].

Agblehawo in the activities of the people

Various farming activities into which *agblehawo* are incorporated in northern Eweland include weeding, tree-felling, bush burning, planting/harvesting of crops during the major farming and harvest seasons between March and August and the minor season which is between August/September and November. At the farm, short prayerful songs are sung in a declamatory style to accompany ritual procedures as a way of committing every worker into the hands of the spirit powers for their divine intervention and protection during work. On the importance of prayers and rituals in agricultural practices of Africans, Mbiti[11] posits:

In making new fields, rituals are performed when people clear forests or bushes. The rituals serve as a way of removing danger and blessing from the use of the new fields....people believe that there are innumerable spirits some of which occupy trees and forests. Where that belief exists, it is thought necessary to perform rituals which, among other things, will send away these spirits from the bushes and trees to make a new field. If such rituals are not performed, it is feared that the people who work on that field may be molested by spirits or may be met with mysterious misfortunes. The performances of rituals remove fear and danger, and help the people to find harmony with their new fields.

Organisation of work at the farm

Farmers, who often constitute themselves into *fidohabɔɔwo* (co-operative groups) start the day's work by standing in linear or circular forms to weed specific portions of land assigned each member of the group within a specified time span stipulated in their rules and regulations. As a form of motivation, the workers sing songs which defy laziness and warn slow workers about forfeiting privileges due them. An example is reducing the number of calabashes of palm wine or glasses of *akpeteshie* that they are entitled to drink during the period of recess.

The second approach to work involves a large number of farmers who form co-operative associations and clear vast acres of land by closely following one another in a circular pattern and clear large acres of land within a short period of time. According to the workers,

this work formation fosters strong team spirit that makes them to work faster and eschew laziness.

Agbleha performance at home

This folk music performance at home, is incorporated into post-harvest activities and labour intensive household chores that are undertaken such as construction of new barns for the storage of harvested food crops like yam, maize, rice and beans, building, repairing, and roofing of new and old houses as well as grinding, pounding, threshing and drying of cereals harvested.

In preserving their food crops for example, the farmers claim that building a barn is a communal activity which begins with digging the ground and collecting clay which is later mixed with water to produce a texture suitable for building traditional silos. Pick axes, hoes and shovels are used in digging clay which is collected into buckets or containers that are tied to ropes and drawn out from a pit by the rest of the workers standing by the pit. While they wait for their turn to dig, workers who are not busy sing, clap, and strike their shovels, mattocks and hoe blades to charge the atmosphere and sustain the team spirit, energy and work tempo of their colleagues at work. In a similar case in Nigeria, Alluede and Braimah[12] explain the essence of joint music-making in Edo society during manual labour; the music eases tension and inspires workers to gather courage and strength to put up a collapsed neighbour's barn, roof a neighbour's thatched house or clear a community road to the farm.

Other social activities which incorporate *agbleha* dance-drumming at home include the *teḍuḍuza* (yam harvest festival celebration), *kukplekunuwawa* (death and funeral rites) of deceased farmers and honouring invitations from individuals and government dignitaries to perform at outdoor ceremonies of farmers' newly-born babies, or partake in regional or district Farmers' Day Celebration that takes place in the second week of every December.

From my field investigation conducted, the stages of work into which *agblehawo* are incorporated is often on individual, family, small or large co-operative basis and, as well, based on different types of farming activities that the farmers engage in. Nketia[13] buttresses the point above that music performance in African societies, to a large extent depends on well-defined situations: in individual or community life, on basis of occasions on which ceremonies are performed, for recreation or some forms of manual labour.

During periods of recess which last for about thirty to forty minutes, the workers take rest, eat, drink and sharpen their tools and flex their muscles in readiness for the next round of work. A strong perception shared is that singing and dancing during

periods of recess, serve as essential stimulant that refreshes, energises and puts workers in their right frames of mind to tackle the remaining work of the day with diligence.

Vocal organization/performance

The performance of *agblehawo*, is in two phases: *gbemefofo*, and *vufofo*. *Gbemefofo* is a vocal warming up exercise in which short introductory pieces

often in free rhythm, are sung in a declamatory style; where singing lies between speech and lyricism. These short and repetitive pieces are accompanied with old farm implements and handclaps and are sung in the form of solos, duets and choruses. This session charges the atmosphere, creates emotional satisfaction and readiness in the workers to commence work. Illustrated below are the different vocal diagrams employed in singing *agblehawo*.

- i. ++++++ (Solo/Cantor section).
- ii. * * * * * (Chorus section)
- iii. ~~~~~~ (Newly introduced material added to the Solo/Cantor section)
- iv. 0000000000000000 (Part of a Solo section intoned by a 2nd or 3rd soloist/cantor).

Fig-1: Vocal diagrams employed in *agbleha* dance-drumming.

The simplest vocal form that is used in *agblehawo* is the Call and Response form which consists of a phrase of two sections. “This is the simplest song form comprising two sections(AB),and sung alternately by a soloist/cantor and chorus and repeated over and over again. The origin of this song form according to him was associated with the

following: children’s game activities, songs of exhilaration or incitement sung by women in procession or songs sung by members of *asafo* (traditional warrior associations) as they march in haste to perform traditionally assigned duties” Nketia [14]. The diagram below illustrates the AB form.

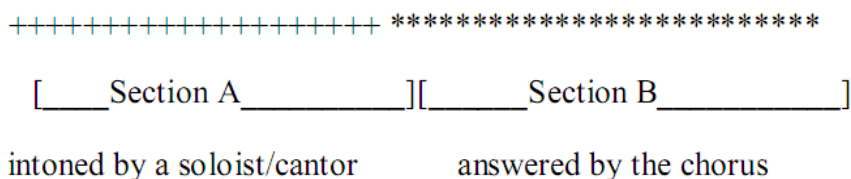


Fig-2: A diagram of a call and response form of singing in *agbleha* dance-drumming

Two ways in which this vocal form can be used are the Solo/Chorus and Cantor/Chorus forms. In the solo/chorus form, the soloist sings the entire song from the beginning to the end and this is exactly repeated by the chorus group of singers. The cantor/chorus form, on the other hand, slightly differs from the solo/chorus form. In the cantor/chorus form, a part of a song is only intoned by the cantor and the chorus joins in to sing the rest of the song to the end. Various elaborations of this form also include variations

in text, melody or both in the solo section while the chorus section remains or changes as well.

In another development, there is a dialogue between a group of soloists and the chorus. A first soloist begins a phrase of a song but at different points in time, a 2nd and 3rd soloists take individual turns to sing in order to end up the entire solo section before the chorus enters with its answer. The diagram below illustrates this feature.

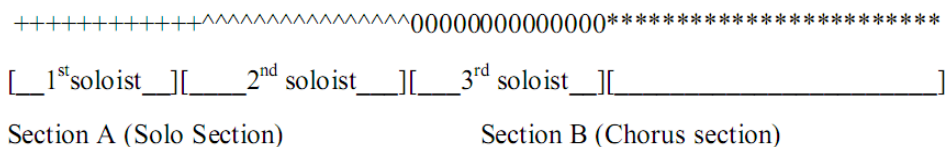


Fig-3: Solo section alternately sung by 1st, 2nd and 3rd soloists before Chorus entry.

These vocal forms in some cases, produce overlapping effects between the solo and chorus sections and thus, creating polyphony as a result of the

soloist not ending completely, the phrase he intones before the chorus group of singers enter to sing and vice versa. Though this occupational music is performed by

both male and female workers, the men usually dominate the performance because of their physique and ability to do strong and energy-sapping jobs. As future custodians and practitioners, children acquire the knowledge and practice of this folk music through participant observation: seeing, hearing and imitating the elderly during performances.

Texts of *agblehawo*

Northern Ewe songs are not solely considered important on grounds of their absolute elements like melody, harmony, intervals and rhythm that constitute them. Song texts and poetry called *hakpanyawo* also play vital roles because a combination of poetry and musical expression in effect, convey messages that are both sacred and secular to the listener. The sacred themes relate to the praise and adoration of the Supreme

Being, the gods of the land and the ancestral spirits. Petition, which forms the core of most of the religious songs largely focus on:

- i. protection at work (from sicknesses, wild animals, natural disasters, evil spirits)
- ii. personal problems and difficulties faced during farming activities.
- iii. physical and spiritual support from the gods to face sad and difficult moments.

The text of an *agbleha* below depicts how a farmer consoles himself instead of brooding over loneliness and a sad psychological state of mind created by the absence of his divorced wife: **Nyɔnugbema, neyi** (Let the woman who has divorced me, go).

Example 1: An *agbleha* inspiring divorced male farmers to take heart and work hard.

<i>Nyɔnugbema neyia, neyia</i>	Let the woman who has divorced me go.
<i>Akpatsaɲumadodzido hee!</i>	My hope lies in the power of the cutlass
<i>Akpatsaɲumadodzido</i>	The cutlass is my hope
<i>Nyɔnugbema neyia, neyia</i>	Let the woman who has divorced me go
<i>Akpatsaɲumadodzido loo!</i>	The cutlass is my hope
Yoo!	Yes!

While some of the themes of *agblehawo* deal with the specifics of farming activities, the social, philosophical and topical themes deal with emotions like love, happiness, hatred, stealing, murder and death. Topical songs praise, warn and also uncover social vices by ridiculing lazy workers and social deviants in

order to bring sanity into the social fabric of the society. Illustrated below is a text of *agbleha* that scorns young and energetic men and women who shun farming and steal foodstuffs from people's farms: **Mikpɛɛɛ** (Look at him).

Example 2: An *agbleha* ridiculing lazy youngsters.

<i>Mikpɔɛɔaa, mikpɔɛɔaa</i>	Look at him/her, look at him/her
//:Duxe kaka da tome tsra loo!//:	You execute whirling dance steps,
<i>Agblemel'asiwo loo!://</i>	But you don't own a farm://
<i>Migblɔna Kwadzo¹nebɔɔ</i>	Tell <i>Kwadzo</i> to bend down and work
<i>Migblɔna Yawa²nebɔɔ</i>	Tell <i>Yawa</i> to bend down and work
//:Duxe kaka da tome tsra loo!//:	You execute whirling dance steps
<i>Agblemel'asiwo loo!://</i>	But you don't own a farm://

^{1.} *Kwadzo* is an Ewe local name for a Monday-born male.

^{2.} *Yawa* is an Ewe local name for a Thursday-born female.

Agbleha dance-drumming

Agbleha dance-drumming, which does not only satisfy recreational purposes, but also forms part of activities of national celebrations, festival and funeral celebrations in northern Eweland, involves four categories of performers: *vufolawo* (instrumentalists), *dzenɔ/henɔ* (soloist), *haxelawo/hatsɔlawo* (chorus singers) and *yedulawo* (dancers).

Instrumental ensemble

Two classes of instruments that constitute the ensemble of this folk occupational music are idiophones and membranophones. The idiophones include *gakogui* (double bell), *fritsiwɔe* (castanet) and *atukpa* (bottle) and the membranophones consist of two *vufowɔ* (drums); the *asivui* and *asivuga* (master drum). The *gakogui* which serves as a time line instrument provides patterns which serve as the frame of reference to other performers. The *gakouifola* (bell player) is someone who does not have 'sweet ears'. In other words, the group sees the bell player as one who is not easily distracted from the instrumental role assigned him. Lots of improvisation is done on the *asivuga* by the master drummer; and at the climax of performance sessions, he introduces

vugbewo (rhythmic and drum languages) to embellish the tone colour and, as well, enrich the entire rhythmic colour of the supporting instruments.

Dance performance

In the African context, dance is readily seen as a running commentary on the social life of Africans. Radcliffe Brown [15] describes dance as the state of elation in which the feeling of increased self importance in the dancer engenders in him a feeling of geniality and goodwill towards his companions. *Yedudu* (dance) in northern Eweland serves diversity of social purposes and during performance, the *azagunɔ* (master drummer), plays lots of rhythmic improvisations on the *asivuga* in concert with the supporting instruments. He calls various *vugbewo* (rhythmic patterns) associated with different stages of work undertaken. Most of the drum patterns consist of burden texts, nonsense syllables, vocables or mnemonics. To a large extent, the roles of these two drums augment the complexity of the rhythmic foundation of the entire ensemble during performance. Illustrated below, is the basic rhythmic pattern of the *asivuga*.

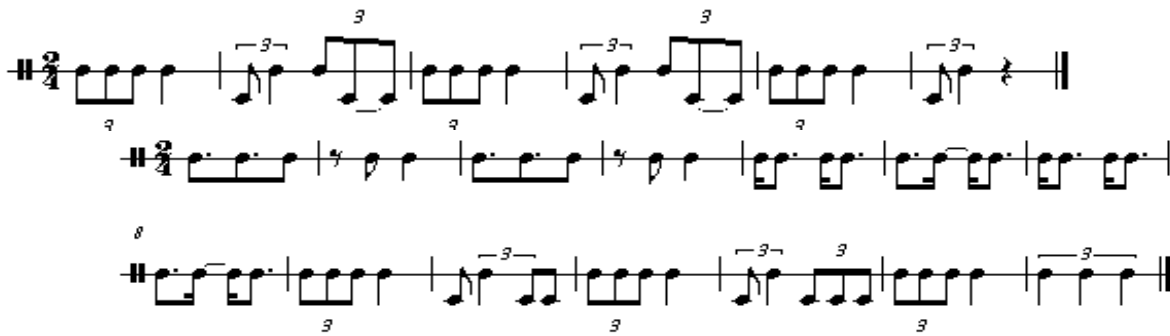


Fig-4: Basic rhythmic patterns of the *asivuga*

The instruments collectively provide emotional satisfaction that impacts deeply on the performers and enhance two vital and natural aspects of life; speaking and body movements. *Yedudu*, therefore, as a dramatic aspect of the people's farming experiences, is never considered as mere movement at random or as an emotional response to the rhythm of the musical instruments. The dance forms may be linear, circular, serpentine, or columns of two or more rows. The style of the dance movements involves the use of the hips in addition to intricate and gliding foot works that move and alternate from side to side with the arms swinging in the direction of the alternating footsteps.

Agblehwo in the socio-cultural life of northern Ewes

Among reasons believed to account for the continuous performance of *agblehwo* to date in northern Eweland is that they are collectively regarded by the practitioners as a cultural tool that stimulates and goads them on to boost productivity in terms of weeding, tree-felling, bush burning, planting/harvesting of crops, construction of new barns for crop storage, building, repairing and roofing of new and old houses.

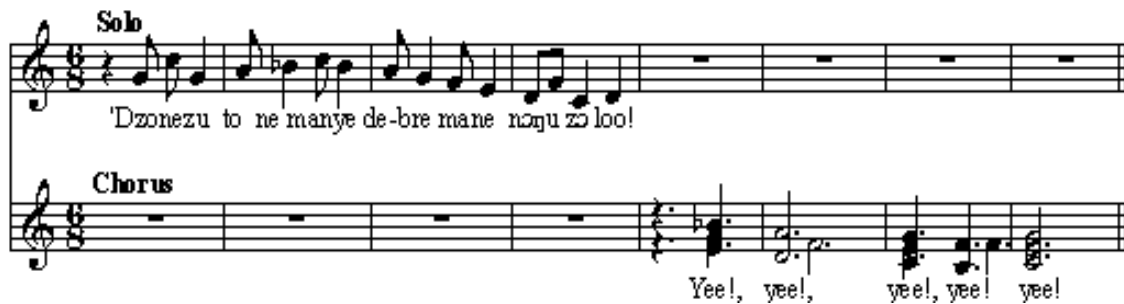
In addition, a critical examination of ideas expressed in the texts of these work songs reveal their socio-cultural functions that centre on love and unity, philosophical, topical and psychological issues. As a cultural legacy, it is didactic, recreational, a repository of historical data, a tool for social cohesion, and a component of their festival, death and funeral celebrations.

Themes of love and unity in *agblehwo*

Though this folk genre is principally associated with manual activities at both the farm and at home, the essence of communal spirit in agricultural

activities in northern Eweland is never ruled out, hence, the importance of songs which engender unity and love during periods of work. Songs under this category cut across different types of love, ranging from social love, communal love, filial love, parental love to erotic love. Numerous as the aspects of love may be, the basic objective of these songs is the concern for the well being of the object of one's love which can refer to one's blood brother or sister, spouse, friend, society, country and humanity on the whole. Places where songs of love abound in Ewe communal activities, peace, unity and solidarity welds the citizens as one people with a common destiny. The themes also strengthen ties and eventually create peace, unity and understanding in the homes of married couples.

Related to lack of literacy, is the function of *agblehwo* in courting. Unable to write love letters or love poems, some young peasants, both men and women, accompany their daily activities, with love themes in *agblehwo* to express their feelings towards one another. Similar to what obtains in the texts of songs of courtship in *Bewaa*, social dance music of the Dagaaba youth in northern Ghana, Saighoe[16]states: "more experienced young men instruct the uninitiated in the art of courtship. In such songs, they emphasize that some girls or young women, for that matter, are difficult to woo and, therefore, men who really admire them must combine aggressive persistence with admiration and loving attention". The opening phrase of *anagleha* below, titled, *Dzonezu to* (I wish my love were a mountain), is couched in a figure of speech that portrays a farmer who likens his beautiful and dutiful wife to the geographical scenery of a mountain range at his farm, and becomes inspired to work harder anytime he sees her bringing food to him at the farm.



Example 3: An agbleha with a theme of love.

<i>'Dzonezu to, manyedebrɛ</i>	I wish my love were a mountain, so that
<i>Manɛ nɔ 'ɲuzɔ loo!</i>	I cover her as a thick fog.
<i>Yee! yee!, yee!, yee! yee!</i>	Yes!, yes!, yes! yes!
<i>Adzobaɔo loo!</i>	There comes my love

Philosophical functions of agblehawo

Philosophical songs are based on the life and vocational experience of northern Ewe farmers. Wiredu [17] defines philosophy as a guide to life. According to him, Ghanaian philosophy which is rich and profound, finds expressions in authentic sources of language (be it ordinary discourse or music), literature, traditional beliefs, practices and social norms, unwritten code of morals of ethics, and in indigenous arts and crafts. In examining philosophical songs in the cultures of societies in and outside Africa, Firth [18] further states that the language of the text is difficult and is of a different character from that used in everyday conversation, and contains a number of words which are said by the natives in an archaic or a deep-seated form.

A northern Ewe religious philosophy expressed through *agblehawo* about belief in Mawu (God), is that, He is the creator, greatest ancestor, central head, caretaker and a protector of the society and therefore, deserves to be worshipped and honoured. For this reason, every citizen is expected to live a

<i>Dewonyɛ 'nuxoxowofaɔua</i>	If dependence on used stock of food
<i>Enuxoxowofaɔua</i>	Dependence on used stock of food
<i>Enuxoxowofaɔua, nyatefe,</i>	Dependence on used stock of food, is real,
<i>Anyedɔmatoa 'vawum o.</i>	Hunger wouldn't have made any attempt to kill me

The meaning of the above *agbleha* does not refer to food as the text depicts; but rather, it is pointing to us, as humans, that it is worthless boasting or living on past glories or achievements.

Topical texts of agblehawo

In the African context, a song is one of the avenues through which societies have freedom to express their thoughts, ideas and pass comments which cannot be stated plainly in normal language discourse. The use of the texts of *agblehawo* allows the down trodden who are denied basic human attention to express their grievances and feelings via a medium that

dignified life to warrant the attention and blessing of *Mawu*. Failure to uphold this virtue is considered as falling below the dignity of God. One of the oldest 'storehouses' of philosophical teaching among the people, is the vast unwritten archive of texts that are played on *atopani* (talking drum), down the centuries to emphasize justice to the people.

Similar to what obtains among the Akans of Ghana, the *vugafola* (court drummer) who projects the philosophy of the people, usually plays *atopani* intermittently when cases are tried at the traditional court. For example, in adjudication of land disputes among farmers, the *vugafola* advises the panel of judges on his drums: "*drɔnyanyuie, natsiafowɔ*" (uphold the policy of honesty and fairness in the execution of justice, and be rewarded with long life). *Agblehawo* also employ metaphorical features that are full of nuances and subtle turns of expression which are distinctly obscure and laconic, full of deep-seated words of wisdom which explain volumes of thoughts of northern Ewe societies. The text of *anagbleha* below elucidates the point above.

not only offers them a common platform to share views about their problems but also grants them the opportunity of a gregarious life that enables them to collectively seek redress for their concerns without fear of intimidation. The texts of *agblehawo* also provide useful information on techniques of local agricultural practices of the people which are not otherwise easily accessible.

A close study of the essence of song texts in African musical culture points to the fact that, they focus on events or matters of common interest and concern to the members of the communities. Merriam

comments on the function of texts of indigenous African topical songs that they help put society members on their toes and thus contribute to solving problems which plague the communities. While some of song texts take the form of ridicule, warning, insult or a sanctioned legal action, others on the other hand provide psychological relief to the people” Merriam [19]. In such northern Ewe peasant communities, the subject matter of *agblehawo* may be gay, sad, or purely documentary, and are themes that perform highly social and cathartic functions as a result of lack of daily press, publications and public theatres other than open markets or durbar grounds where people congregate to express their sentiments or grievances.

The *hakpalawo* (composers), create song texts that enforce social control of the people and as a means of bringing sanity to the society, the songs insult, warn

or ridicule social deviants. The themes of *agblehawo* expose and frown on crimes like sex offences, murder, stealing and other vices committed on daily basis. The songs on the other hand, praise good deeds of individuals and entreat every member of the society to emulate the gleaming examples of such individuals. The themes also centre on class status and decry the attitude of the public which never pays attention to the views of the poor during societal meetings/gatherings. Conversely, the rich who command public respect are most often considered as intelligent, regardless of the merit of their views. Since the lazy or the idle are publicly humiliated, they are advised and sensitized through texts of *agblehawo* to work to earn a living. The text of the *agbleha* below, *D’agblenadu loo!* (Make a farm to earn a living) insinuates lazy and idle people in the society.

The musical score is written in 2/4 time. The Solo section (measures 1-4) has the lyrics "Dagble na - du loo!-----". The Chorus section (measures 5-8) has the lyrics "Da gble na du loo! miata - gble delawpe d'agble nanyi dokuiwo - -". The lyrics are written below the notes, with some words underlined. There are musical notations like 'a', 'b', 'c', and '3' (triplets) throughout the score.

Example 4: An *agbleha* urging lazy citizens to farm and earn a living

//:Dagblenadu loo!:// //:

Kpɔda! wokuiatɔ
Dagble, nanyidokuiwo,
Nanyidokuiwo, dɔdekemawɔla
Nɔvi, d’agble, naɖu loo!

Make a farm to earn a living://
 Look! You, the lazy one
 Make a farm to sustain your life
 To sustain your life, you, the idle one
 My brother/sister, make a farm to earn a living

Psychological functions of *agblehawo*

Agblehawo, to the people, are avenues through which farmers express either positively or negatively, sentiments about their jobs and conditions of work. Psychologically, the songs, to the people, mean more than energy and entertainment it provides farmers during work sessions.

The youth also claim that during periods of horrid working conditions like flood and fire outbreak which destroy their food crop farms, the texts of *agblehawo* serve as pillars of hope and comfort that soothes their pain and also provide solutions to their

intrinsic psychological and emotional problems by raising hopes, clearing doubts about mysteries that centre on cosmology, the purpose of existence, unity, hard work, fortunes/misfortunes, death and life here after.

***Agblehawo* as northern Ewe cultural legacy**

As an inherited cultural legacy that provides solutions to their daily physical and spiritual needs, the people see no need or reason to ever abandon *agbleha* performance because of their strong belief that their day to day joy and self-satisfaction as well as economic livelihood as citizens, largely depend on the use of

agblehawo in their farming activities. They therefore have a strong self-confidence that their personal strength, energy, fertility of the land, favourable farming conditions and good crop harvests are favours granted them by the Supreme Being, the spirits of the gods and the ancestors who are easily reached through petition texts of *agblehawo*.

Didactic essence of *agblehawo*

Didacticism is an artistic philosophy that emphasizes instructional and informative qualities in literature and other types of art. The term has its origin in the ancient Greek word (*didaktikos*) that relates to education or teaching. *Agbleha* performance therefore as a didactic art, not only focuses on entertainment, but also instructs, informs and teaches knowledge through the song texts. In other words, the didactic essence of *agblehawo* is one of the effective means through which information, education, instruction and socialisation are disseminated to the people. Children are therefore taught through the text of this folk music, the need and values of farming, names of the farming seasons, names of the months for clearing the land for planting and harvesting of crops. In addition, the youth, through the study of *agblehawo*, are able to memorise and sing short and repetitive texts that specify in detail, methods of hoeing, digging, sowing and planting food crops. These values foster self-confidence in the children and prepare them towards performance roles as future farmers of this sector of the region.

The use of tongue-twisters to gain mastery of the names of some food crops occurs in recitative or declamatory style of singing during children's play games. This also fosters eloquence and mastery of the mother-tongue in which the texts of *agblehawo* are couched. Strunk [20] sums up the didactic essence of education of the child through music that: "education in music is well adapted to youthful nature, for the young cannot endure anything not sweetened by pleasure, and music is by nature, a thing that has a pleasant sweetness".

***Agblehawo* as repository of Ewe historical data**

Similar to what obtains in other Ghanaian societies, northern Ewe *agblehawo*, as vehicle of history, myth and legend, largely symbolise the continuity of the people's beliefs and values; and as a cultural tool, it facilitates the transmission and easy recall of facts on the importance of farming, farming periods and crops suitable for cultivation during those periods. This phenomenon can be likened to Cong-Huyen's observation of the use of songs in agricultural activities of indigenous Vietnamese societies when he states: "information on agricultural technology and related animal husbandry is spread through songs which act as historical agricultural almanac to reach peasants who cannot read or write". Cong-Huyen [21].

***Agblehawo* as a tool for social cohesion**

To the northern Ewes, *agblehawo* collectively serve as a tool for social integration; for, they provide a rallying point around which the *sɔhewo* gather to perform this folk music. To the people, the performance of this occupational music is a communal activity that unites and generates a 'we feeling' among them, strengthens and projects them as one people with a common cultural identity and goal. In the light of the above, Idolor [7] asserts: "in examining the numerous social factors that subject Africans to music making; desire for cultural identity, didactic function, entertainment, integrative and religious essence are given emphasis" Nketia's position on music as an integrating force in African societies that contributes to the achievement of the fullness of human existence, is further stressed when he opines: "a village that has no organized music or neglects community singing, drumming and dancing is said to be dead" [22].

Performance of *agblehawo* for recreational purposes

Musical types labelled as 'recreational' are what Nketia describes as all forms of music performed not only for amusement but are featured on other occasions of a festive or social nature. According to him, *agblehawo* may be performed at festival or funeral celebrations, between actual programme of events or as an additional form of musical entertainment to express gratitude to the Supreme Being, the gods and the ancestors of the land for granting the people bumper harvest, good health and success in the vocational activities. *Agblehawo* are also performed to honour invitations from individuals, groups or government dignitaries at birth, outdoor ceremonies, and district, regional and national agricultural celebrations.

Themes of death in *agblehawo*

A prominent social activity which makes use of sorrowful texts of *agblehawo* is *kukple kunuwawakɔnuwo* (death and funeral rites) for deceased farmers as well as farmers who were once active members of the *fidohabɔɔwo* (co-operative work groups). The incorporation of both sacred and secular themes of *agblehawo* into death, burial and funeral rites of *agblede-meyinugbeawo* (deceased farmers) helps to control emotions/group behaviour and to maintain a state of normalcy for the living. It can clearly be noted, that, in the cultures of Africa, "an ethnic music of a people according to Saighoe [15] will continue to exist if and when it continues to serve certain functions such as social, economic, religious etc. in the personal or group social interaction of its performers.

CONCLUSION

An important folk music genre that supports the economic activities of subsistence farmers in the northern sector of the Volta Region in Ghana to ensure their welfare and survival is *agblehawo*; a short form of the term, *agbledehawo* which literally means "farming

songs". This paper sought to explain why in the face of other varied forms of music to which the *sɔhewo*, (who constitute the bulk of the farming work force) are exposed, they still persist in performing *agblehawo*. This musical behaviour of the *sɔhewo* readily suggests that this folk music, to date, continues to serve certain specific needs and purposes in their day to day socio-musical behaviour and interaction. The natives believe that the music yields lots of energy and power in the workers, sedates boredom, tiredness and eliminates all forms of lazy attitude offarmers during weeding, tree-felling, bush burning, planting/harvesting of crops, repairing, roofing of new and old houses as well as constructing new barns for crop storage. The practitioners also regard *agblehawo* as a cultural legacy which is didactic, recreational, a repository of historical data, a tool for social cohesion, and a component of successful ritual performances in festival and funeral celebrations.

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