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A PROFILE ON MUSIC AND MOVEMENT IN

THE VOLTA REGION

Part I

Observations on the Volta Region of Ghana, primarily on Ewe speaking territory, may be discussed in terms of its musical and dance forms.

People of the Volta Region, broadly known as Ewes, may be divided into two district groups: Anlos of the South, who formerly resented the classification of Ewe; and Upper Dome or bush interior people of the North. Variants of Ewe are Anlo, Peki, Ho, Hohoe and Kpandu. Every village has a district dialect, and ones speech may be placed by it; such was the lack of integration. Therefore, the term Ewe, though limited to the interior, covers all these dialects. Furthermore, linguistically, not all the people of the area are even Ewes. Some Ashantis and Fantis, both Akan, who long ago went to fight in Eweland, never returned; 1 people of Boem, Boso and Anum speak another language quite dissimilar to Ewe. 2

Ewes are known for their love of the dance, and are said to dance more than other groups in Ghana. Informants refer to oncoming songs as "dances" even if none is to occur. The most characteristic feature of Ewe dance is the contraction-release of the shoulder blades, in which the bent elbows require the outstretched hands to move in harmony with the shoulders; arms more forward as shoulders contract, backward as they release. Specifically, this movement known as "Agbadza" belongs to Anlos of the

1. Akan also has been introduced by Ewe of past generations who worked on cocoa farms in Ashanti, and learned perfect Twi. They also incorporated some aspects of Ashanti culture, e.g. Twi drumming.

2. This is similar to Nyonyoma; but isolated bodies within the group speak Kyerepon (Guan); which is from the area of Larteh, or some dialect of it. Kyerepon is related to Effutu, from Winneba, but is non-Fanti.
Southern Volta Region, but is commonly thought to be characteristic of the Ewe, for it is so distinct and contrasts sharply with movement in all other areas in Ghana.

Musical activity in the region is largely institutionalized and clubs are formed which regulate their members according to definite rules of behavior and performance. One dance that clubs perform in Keta is entitled "kpatsa". "Kpatsa" is from the Ada area which borders on the Gas. It is danced with shoulder contraction, but instead of a soft pat and strong lift of the feet which is characteristic of Ewe, the feet are stamped; a definite feature of the Gas. Therefore, "kpatsa" is a coalescent.

The Ada and Keta "kpatsa" is an occasional dance for youth which, musically, consists of the gongs ("atoke and gankongi"), rattle ("axatse") and drums (4 in Keta; small, medium, large and master drum), and choral singing in homophony.

Choreographically, it is formed in a circle moving counter-clockwise. Drummers are to the left side, which functions as front stage. Men congregate near the drummers so that their voices may carry better. Performers face spectators to sing and gesture to them, then turn perpendicularly, one behind the other to dance on; male (moving from the drum) behind female, almost in a partner relationship. Dancers tend to circle on the spot and spectators may see every aspect of the movement.

The Ada "Kpatsa" thrust or stamps the left foot on the first and third beats, while the right foot steps on the ball (bended knee), for two and four. The left foot basically moves from side to side, to and fro; the right supports, serves as a pivot, and covers less distance. Hands move out parallel to the participating foot; left moving out on the high bell tone, in one the low, and vice versa. This one basic step has alternating patterns and much improvisation. Most of the movement is in closed position with the torso bent 15 to 45 degrees. Women bend the upper

3. A charted explanation is inserted.
torso forward more than do men, between 30 and 45 degrees, and use legato movement on the "agbadza" or contraction-release of the shoulders. Men bend forward less, 15 to 30 degrees, and pause minutely on the release of the upward motion of the arms; their movement more restrained and stiffer than of the women. White cowtail switches or improvised white sticks are held by dancers, and are put on a table in the center of the circle when not in use.

As one travels progressively North in the Volta Region, one finds both subtle and marked alteration in the contraction-release pattern; until a new pattern emerges. The change in form almost consistently corresponds to the change in dialect. Northerness generally do not contract. The exception proves in border villages such as Kpew, which lies on the far side of a hill, which so separates North from South that southern villagers claim not to understand the speech of those from the northern area. Otherwise, those in the North dance in a style which, in hand and footwork, is closer to the Akan movement.

An illustration of the Northern style is from the village of Kpandu, where an elderly cult priestess from Jeve, who traditionally must have trained for the dance, and the cantor of a men’s ensemble in town performed. The priestess danced to Agoblanka cult music, and moved in clockwise direction, not counter-clockwise, as is said to be typical of West Africa.

4. Ashanti: contrary motion of the body to the limbs; hands lifted or lowered according to the pitch of the drums, centered palms often turning in opposite directions, as in the "adowa"; feet alternating to the basic pulse; all the body in legato movement; with a very characteristic, serene facial expression.

One may observe three broadly distinct types of dancing in Ghana:
(1) Northern (stamping, leaping, expanded, vivacious movement)
(2) Akan (3) Anlo.
### LEFT ARM

- **Starting position:** Elbow L90°
- Rotation 45° of arm = moving out and down from elbow/hurt out on J + 7, // to L F.
- **Leg straight, or bent L50°**
- **Flat foot, strong placement**
- **Stomp = march**
- (a) moves for at least 1 ft., or (b) to L.
- **sm others on J + 7, moves B. so that (a) instead is at R., toe, or (b) heel is at R. toe.

### LEFT LEG

- **Leg moves by force of L. F.**
- **Head faces (a) F. St. or (b) down on L. foot.**
- **Body moves, rotates B. to L.**
- **W. L. foot **
- **Swings with dominant foot.**
- **Leg bent L90° on ball of F.**
- **Moves softly, barely moves from place, or at most, 2 inches to each side.**
- **L90° rotating same as L. arm, they alternate.**

### BODY

- Most obvious improvisation on L. more pronounced motions, e.g., more bend on either side, however, when L bends, R bends even more; further extension, either to front, side, or diagonal of L. F., maximum in side body, as thrust forward or backward.
- **L. foot or L. knee is struck.**
- **R. hand or R. knee is struck.**
- **R. hand or L. knee is struck.**
- **L. hand or L. knee is struck.**
- **L. hand or R. knee is struck.**
- **R. hand or R. knee is struck.**

### RIGHT ARM

- **All movement facing front, unless noted.**
- **Both feet in place.**
- **Left foot dominant.**
- **Right foot supporting.**
- Important movement in feet and rotating arms.

### RIGHT LEG

- **Leg bent L90° on ball of F.**
- **Moves softly, barely moves from place, or at most, 2 inches to each side.**
- **L90° rotating same as L. arm, they alternate.**

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### ELBOWS BEND L35°

- **Breath level**
- **Extend in front of body about 30°**
- **Bounce out-in**
- **Hold both with thumbs and forefingers, other fingers cupped.**

### AGADZA

- **Contract - release**
- (Forward - backward)
- **Continuous legato movement in elbows, as compared to L., who use especially on J + 7.**
- **Same arm gives more of a winged motion, i.e., out-in than contraction-release. Elbows are bent B90°-120°**

### V. hands are balled into fists

- **Both hands move out front, closing to form a circle,** whichorraine and are downwarded on 2, they at waist level, H. to side.

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**Symbols:**
- A = Move
- F = Forward
- R = Right
- L = Left
- S = Sideways
- U = Up
- D = Down
- O = Out
- I = In
- Ft. = Foot
- A = Arm
- L = Angle of hand
- S = Straight
- R = Back to normal
- S = Stable, keep foot on same spot, or return foot to same
- = Simultaneous
- P = Parallel
- C = Connect clockwise
- C = Connect clockwise
- P = Clockwise
- D = Down
- F = Forward
- O = Out

*Note difference between on 0° and a band.*

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**Dance notation is written either in 3 or 6, because occasionally the flow is such that 3 cannot be maintained.
Footwork was very rapid, in close position, left and right feet frequently marking the same spot, in succession, the left moving back - center - forward when the right moved forward - center - back in a straight line; in doing this, the feet marked the rhythm \[ \text{J}j_j. \] Her body bent forward an angle of 45 degrees. The two clenched fists would center in front of the chest, or move out past the shoulders, directed out-in, out-in, as the feet moved forward - back, forward-back, in any alternating directions. The fists always inclined to the right and left or forward - backward, in parallel motion; i.e., one alternating over the other, semi-circular, right on top - left on bottom, and vice versa. At times, the fists would swing freely in rhythm-high center face, low chest left; high center face, low chest right.  

The cantor danced the same style as the priestess, and in closed position, which the rapid footwork implied, although his space also was limited. He sang and danced simultaneously while executing a number of counter-clockwise turns. The feet were lifted, in succession, between 12 and 18 inches; there was much side-stepping, one foot following the other. Footwork often became quite intricate, with a maze of contrasting steps. Dancing possibly could have become more expanded, but there was no feeling of restraint; he covered approximately five square feet. The body was alternately straight, and in a 45 degree bend from the waist. Hand movement was executed forward, chest-front three quarters the length of the arm, with elbow bent one quarter; performing alternating hand patterns as the priestess, which are characteristic of the area.

The area of Baika presents still another technique in motor control; the rolled shoulders. Rolling of the shoulders is not so far removed from contraction - release, for elements of the "agbadza" may be seen in the rolling, and vice versa; i.e., the contraction could carry though to complete itself in a rotation, instead of releasing the movement. As the contraction patterns gives us firm arms or forearms that seem to be controlled

5. The priestess became possessed while singing, and danced in this state.
by shoulder action, though actually they move parallel to it, the rolled shoulder allows the arms to be looser or disengaged. As a result of this, forearms generally are positioned lower on the body, on the hip level; movement of the forearms runs from the waist to the lower hip. To this movement, feet often side-step, together and legs bend when together. The rolled shoulder was used when a group sang Ewe songs, but when singing in their own Lapana language, the technique was most pronounced in the hands; alternating right and left hand forward - backward in contrary motion, comparable to movement in Kpandu.

Pairs of people frequently were seen to stand face to face clapping right hands in the air, raised high above the head, which would enable them to turn out slightly immediately as they had slapped. They often would approach each other from a distance, then separate.

In the village of Anloga-Lashibi, interesting movement was made by a woman during songs entitled "Fem Dem Mezu Hadzito" (it's because of suffering that I'm a singer) and "Dufiaga be Yeagba Dua" (The Chief wants to bring confusion to the town). She was seated and her hands would alternately raise and lower, taking a minute break in each direction to the rhythm of \( \uparrow \uparrow \downarrow \downarrow \) (right-right, left-left). Simultaneously, the shoulder would roll back and up, down and forward to the same rhythm; at the final cadence both hands were raised.

(To be continued as part II, on music)

Miss Sylvia Kinney.