

HIP LIFE MUSIC: RE-DEFINING GHANAIAN CULTURE (1990-2012)

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Abstract

African music is full of life . . . we have different ethnic groups, different languages and cultures, moods, shades; it's so dynamic, and we have a message. (Diana Hopeson, p.c. 2006)

My research documents the hip life popular music story from 1990 to 2012, from pre-through post-inception, as driven by rapper and dancer Reggie Rockstone. The histories of European colonization in Ghana, and its shaping. By highlife and American hip hop (via globalization) into hip life music are explored through an insider's lens. This is evidenced by the traditional influencing of the popular culture of hip life. In this 22-year development period, I interconnect the domains of ethnomusicology, African/cultural studies, anthropology, popular music studies, and dance ethnography, drawing on relevant theories. The few studies dedicated solely to hip life in the ethnomusicology discipline at this time precipitate this study.

Artist apprenticeship, social impacts, formal education and peer transmission are explored against the backdrop of authenticity, reception, transculturation and mimetic models that shape the meanings of the discussions (traditional versus popular musics). The creativity, subgenres, and related agencies are treated here as well. Hip life has come to stay as Ghanaian popular music. It invokes the tradition's transformations into the modern: as evident in the works of artists from Obrafour, Obour, Tinny, King Ayisoba to Rockstone, the message of African storytelling through rap is deeply hinged on the anchors of the ancient court practice of libation ceremonies. Ghana's *Adaha* traditional music (of circa 1888) was a strong influence on highlife music through the 1920s, and later, on hip life,

and can be seen as an encapsulation of Ghana's history. Ghanaian airwaves currently play a broad spectrum of subgenres of hip life music across the country. I explore the connections and collaborations among rap, traditional hip life, hip dia, dancehall hip life, soca hip life, rag life, twi pop, D-style, accapela hip life, gospel hip life. The hip life celebration comes at a juncture where we also mark the homecoming of hip hop – as traditional music from Africa, to America, and back. Hip life thereby invokes the transplantation of millions of enslaved Africans (with their musics) to the Americas over the generations. On the other hand hip life is thriving in an industry previously dominated by highlife music. Hence a modern day generational shift and critical reception is experienced.

The lyrical content and the use of proverbs by hip life artists (including Kwaw Kese, King of the Street) speak loud and clear on contemporary social issues. This also is seen in the work of A Plus (in his *Letter to the West*), the Fela Kuti of hip life music political commentary. Hip life is popular beyond the ten regions of Ghana. It has established roots globally and is distributed around the world to reach the diaspora. This entry of hip life into the world music spectrum has significantly increased the presence of Ghanaian identity to the body of popular culture and music.

Dedication

I dedicate this work to

Seth, Matilda, Christina, and Mildred Akrong,
family and friends, and each artist in Ghana/the world.

“Your happiness is my mission.”

--Isaac Nii Akrong

www.afridance.com

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Thank you creator of nature, for guidance always. *Aye ayeee feee*, “eat and leave some for tomorrow” in Ga – signifying storytelling, that next episode can be visited the next day. There is still so much out there to explore, over generations of time and space. Hip life cultures, on the whole, have taken me through a useful learning experience in this study. My gratitude goes to everyone who helped in many ways. This includes my committee members: Professor Michael Coghlan and Professor Mary Jane Warner (my co-supervisors), Professor Trichy Sankaran, and Professor Sundar Viswanathan. Thanks also to Professors John Collins and J.H. Nketia (Emeritus), Robert Simms, Modesto Amegago and the late Mawre Opoku (Emeritus) for their input. Thanks also to Nii Kwei Sowah of the School of Performing Arts, University of Ghana. I appreciate the assistance of Christina Akrong, Ben Akrong, Joseph Akrong, Nii Laryea Odamtten, Samuel Yeboah, Christian Namoaley, Leonard Williams, Kristin Force, Vince Arthur, and Nina Soyfer, and also Sean Bellaviti and Chris Butcher for their assistance in music notation. Appreciation of help includes the late Willie Anku, Otu Lincoln and Faisal Helwani, all of blessed memory; Frankie Lane, K.K. Fosu, Korkoveli, Reggie Rockstone, Okyeame Kwame, Lord Kenya, Tic Tac, Emmanuel Samini “Batman,” Okra, MacTonto, Jay DuBlay Ambolley, Terry “Sir Robot” Ofosu, Ebow Taylor, King Ayisoba, Yacubu Addy, Kriptic, Mizbel, Manye Mercy, Tina “Elivava,” Emmanuel Arthur (DJ), DJ Amess, Yaro Kasambata, Greg Mingle, Panji Anoff, Jeff Quaye (a.k.a. Jay Q), Nathaniel (a.k.a. Natibongo), Ms Yaa Attafua, Mr. B. K. Bosumprah and many others I have not mentioned here, for their useful contributions in the fieldwork for this dissertation.

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A Word on Language

There are seventy-five plus languages currently spoken in Ghana, of which I speak six (Ga, Krobo, Twi, Ewe, Ada, and Fanti). I also speak the hybrid languages employed in hip life music. These are all tonal languages. As some of the characters for these languages are not available, I have used the nearest phonetic that conveys the necessary meaning to readers.

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INTRODUCTION

Origin and Focus

I was born and raised in La, Accra, Ghana, West Africa, where I developed my interest in the traditional and popular musics of that country (gome, highlife and hip life) and of other African nations. I immigrated to Canada in 2001. I hold a degree in Theatre Arts and Dance from the University of Ghana Legon and an MA from the Graduate Program in Dance, York University.

My research focuses on Ghanaian hip life, highlife and traditional musics, and emphasizes the relationship between popular and traditional music. The youth of Ghana are inspired with hip life fever and this has transformed the culture's soundscape. The tradition of oral transmission has adapted to new methods of music making, which often "borrow" western technologies such as synthesizers, drum machines, electronic beat making, and extended, electric guitar techniques. I employ an insider's perspective to review the cultural integration that melded highlife and hip hop into the hybrid known as hip life. My principal research method is participant-observation and ethnographic interviews (hereafter as POEI). Interviews with key individuals examine the origin, development, reception, authenticity, and gender balance in hip life music.

My work is interdisciplinary and draws on several scholarly traditions: ethnomusicology, musicology, African studies, anthropology, and dance ethnography. Ghanaian popular music and dance are studied through historical connections, musical

styles, and socio-cultural significance. I examine the effects of syncretism, acculturation, and the role of the media and technology in the development of hip life music.

Hip life music draws on highlife music, which transcends the physical geography of Ghana to its diaspora. Vernacular lyrics are popular with hip life music. These elements (lyrics, language, space, time) unfold in a different contextual framework of transmission through informal settings. Highlife popular music “combines musical elements from Ghanaian musical traditions, European church hymnody, and from West Indian, Latin American, and North American popular musics” (see David Coplan 1978: 96-114). Hip life popular music is a fusion of American hip hop and Ghanaian highlife music forms. The social, economic and political circumstances of African Americans, Latinos and the youth in the Bronx communities helped foster the expressive outlets of break dancing, B-Boying: “a form of hip hop dancing which is popularly known as breaking. It consists of top or up rock, footwork, spinning moves (power moves), and freeze.”¹ In hip hop, an evolved African musical and dance practice grew in popularity from the street to the stage. The key founder of hip life music was Reggie Rockstone (in the early 1990s) (see chapter 3). Hip life reflects Ghanaian nuances, proverbs and education. It also incorporates, to some extent, imported values and rhythms.² Hip life engages the creative talents of youth,

¹ See <<https://www.msu.edu/~okumurak/styles/breaking.html>>. n.d. n.p. Accessed 20 May 2011.

² That is, acoustically produced rhythms (currently programmed as beats and loops) that have been practiced in Ancient Africa, from interlocution through the pouring of libations, to the chants of hunters who mimic animals' vocals in order to trick and hunt them for food. Peoples of African descent have shared these traces over the years, keeping some of these unique values of music making that lend themselves, for example, to Jamaican Reggae or Trinidadian Steel Pan music. People may be displaced, but their sounds and cultures return home. Musically speaking, it is important to note with caution that the very complexity that academics seek to decipher in African music, lies in its very simple parts and language formation. For example, ethnic codes in a traditional music or its poetic application of rhythm (based on language) communicate specific social issues.

especially those at risk of involvement with the street, violence and drugs. A holistic understanding of hip life performative arts can be attained, as Blacking notes (1983:xi) when he says that “an anthropological approach to the study of *all* musical systems makes more sense of them than analyses of the patterns of sound as a thing in themselves” (emphasis in original). I also look at hip life from an inclusive approach that seeks to understand the art from the creators’ view as well as the circumstances that engendered it.

This project also examines interrelationships among various components (sub genres, contexts, languages, fashions, attitudes, etc.) of hip life music. I am qualified to conduct this research as an insider possessing knowledge of the fine arts (dance, instrumental music, vocal music, instrument making, poetry, drama, painting, sculpture, and costume design). I have performed as a dancer, choreographer and musician with the Ghana Dance Ensemble at the University of Ghana Legon. I speak and write a minimum of three major Ghanaian languages: Ga, Twi, and Ewe. The oral traditions are complex and my linguistic competence served as an invaluable tool. Hip life studies fits well into the broader Afropop discourses, but my focus here is mainly hip life music.

Dissertation Outline

My observations are naturally shaped by my African heritage. In most African traditions, an individual tells his or her story in a community setting. This “setting” often includes a diverse participant group (family members, friends, neighbours) who listen while sharing food and water. They also interject brief songs that comment on or emphasize salient themes in the narration. One specific example (chosen from many) is

the *Ananse* (spider) stories, which, although probably fictional, serve as a euphemistic way of conveying proverbs and statements related to social commentary.

This dissertation is also informed by over three decades of direct subject experience, such as a listener, dancer and musician, on a personal level. The entire document presents a “common sense” factor by offering examples of “local wisdom” in the hopes of clarifying the discourse.

Summary of the Chapters

Chapter 1 introduces hip life music and positions the author as a cultural insider. A literature review introduces the theoretical framework. Hip-life literature is reviewed and the art form is situated within historical and cultural contexts.³

Chapter 2 discusses the ways in which hip life is an extension of traditional performative modes of expression. Hip life music is a fused highlife music with original Ghanaian traditional music and fused hip hop music, a re-invention of a local sound (e.g., sub genres) in Ghana that speaks to the global pop culture. Topics include: the origins of Ghanaian music and dance; diasporic dissemination; colonialism; cross-cultural parallels as revealed by mimesis, acculturation, transculturation, syncretism, representation, and authenticity. This chapter provides the history and context for understanding the climate from which hip life emerged.

³ See Jeff Chang, 2005; Nate Ash-Morgan, 2008; John Collins, 2002; and Avanda V. Jackson, n.d. Additional works, such as Juju and highlife musics, that apply to popular music models include Christopher Waterman, 1990; John Chernorff, 1991; Frank Tenaille, 2000; Timothy Taylor, 2007; Matt J. Mason, 2008; Lee B. Cooper, 1991; Wolfgang Bender 1991; Ronnie Graham, 1988; Sonny Oti, 2009; Jesse W. Shipley, 2009; and Billy Bergman, 1985.

Chapter 3 examines Ghanaian traditional/popular music forms. It further explores some relationships among adaha, kpanlogo, jama, and adowa musics. Moving from hip hop to hip life, the transformations and global soundings of Ghanaian music are traced over time and space. Highlife (a pillar of hip life) and its sub genres are explored and illustrates the musical pillars upon which hip life rests. Highlife and hip hop are discussed to show their influences on, and appearances in, contemporary hip life.

Chapter 4 deals with musicians – their musical education and the development and extension of their careers. A discussion of the social impact of/on hip life music and the relationship between popular music and larger social issues is presented. This chapter examines: changes in traditional modes of knowledge transmission, the effect of economic and political climates on artists, and the impact of technology.

Chapter 5 summarizes findings, and the impact of hip life. The opportunities and viability of hip life business are revealed. Reception and transformation amongst the generations are explored. Celebration (e.g., popularity across Ghana) of hip life concludes the dissertation, and recommendations for further studies are offered.

Scope of the Research Project

My research includes the reception of hip life with Ghanaian and world audiences. My approach privileges the insider's view, promoting a scholarly concept and method that is beneficial (e.g., for research) to scholars as well as research participants and the general readership. I explore the historical chronology of events that shaped hip life music, including its social roots, and British Colonial and Western influences: orchestras, guitar

highlife bands, dance bands and the hybrids that make up the various hip life genres. I consider some influential artists to help in the construction of an ethnography of hip life. A look at the reactions of the consumers of hip life music is also useful in understanding the larger performing arts scene. I worked with a local research team (as mentioned in the acknowledgement section) to access my sources and to maintain the customs and protocols, such as applicable and appropriate ethics of the people studied.

Background on the Research Project

My research occurred at various times: July 31 to September 6, 2006; August 2007; August 2008; August 2009; and January 11 to 19, 2010. The locations visited include the Greater Accra Region, Kumasi, Tamale, and Cape Coast. The study is supported by my over three decades experience in Ghana.

I have come to realize that teamwork extends beyond the typical concept common to sports. It is very important in research that requires extensive consultations with many geographically dispersed people. Many musicians, scholars and important stakeholders shared time with our group of volunteers (see acknowledgements). My network of relationships has created a depth of social capital that played a unique role in connecting me with artists and other stakeholders. I established various networks of resource people and research assistants to accrue a critical mass of social capital within various layers, thus strata or taxonomy, of Ghanaian society.

My team of insiders was grounded in human as well as community resources and proved a wonderful experience in collaborative research. I believe that the success of my

research is due in part to the research team's network which assisted with audio and video recordings etc. Bourdieu defines social capital as

the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition – in other words, to membership in a group – which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectivity-owned capital, a “credential” which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word. (1977: 248-49)

Durkheim notes that “[w]here high consensus and a strong sense of obligation to the collectivity exist, individuals feel a sense of integration, belonging, and commitment to the larger society” (qtd. in Furstenberg, 2005: 810). James Coleman (1988) describes social capital as a “particular kind of resource available to an actor. Social capital is defined by its function . . . Like other forms of capital, social capital is productive, making possible the achievement of certain ends that in its absence would not be possible” (98). In my case, this term is useful in the context of field research and the processing of data across locations and time. Specific people such as key interviewees and resource persons are paramount to a successful search for information in the field.

The group of friends who supported my research consisted of Nii Laryea Odamtten (assistant), Samuel Yeboah Ocquaye (video, driver), Okra (resource, performer), Kevin Adisi (editor of www.ghanamusic.com), Christian Namoaley (audio), Samuel Adjei (video), Christina Akrong (communications), and Benjamin Akrong (audio, driver). These are people who helped in the fieldwork, and I am very grateful to them for their time.

This research includes consultations with leading artists, scholars, and institutions, such as representatives of the International Centre for African Music and Dance, Institute

of African Studies, University of Ghana, Goethe Institute (Accra), Ghanaian Daily Graphic, and the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation. My resource network includes Alhaji Sidi Kubuari and Mrs. Diana Hopeson (former and current presidents of the Ghana Musicians Union), Twum Barima (Copyright Office of Ghana), musicians Ebo Taylor, Reggie Rockstone, Samini/Batman, Mac Tonto, Nana Kyeremanteng, Gyadu Blay Ambolley, Sony Achiba, Dela Botri, Panji Anoff, Henry Agyei Gyamerah (a.k.a. OD4, Odeefo), King Ayisoba, Tic Tac, Mzbel, J.Q., and Koo Nimo; as well as scholars Kwabena Nketia, Willie Anku, and John Collins. DJs include Amess, Gomez, and Greg Mingle. I had the chance to perform, for example on a lamelophone called *prebensua* and vocals, with John Collins and Aaron Bebe in the Local Dimension Palm Wine Music Group, based in Ghana, during the period 1997-2001, before traveling to Canada for graduate studies. Through this exposure, I became interested in musical fusions involving the use of *prebensua* (a three-keyed box bass lamellophone) harmonica, acoustic guitar, *apentema* drum (like a small conga), and diverse multi-linguistic lyrics.

I interviewed informants in four phases: a) by participant observation and ethnographic interviews (POEI) of performers before, during, and after stage performances; b) by documenting the studio practices of recording engineers, producers, DJs, and MCs; c) by one-on-one POEI with scholars; and d) through seminars and media (e.g., Joy FM, Radio Gold, Adom FM, Obonu FM, Metro TV, and TV3).

Sources of Research Data

The primary data of this study focuses on personal interviews, while the secondary data refers to relevant documented materials including archival. Information beyond these will be tertiary. Mary Alice Brennan underscores that “the investigator seeks as many additional resources as possible for information . . . and its context” (qtd. in Fraleigh and Hanstein 1999:297). Eric Tanenbaum, in treating the topic “research strategies in the new environment” assures researchers that,

The world of social science research has never been so open to new possibilities. Where our predecessors were unable to tread for fear of exceeding the limits of the available data, data access and data transfer, analytic routines, or computing power, today’s social scientists can advance with confidence. (qtd. in Scarborough, 1998:11)

Given that the field always presents unforeseen circumstances, a great deal of discretion and care regarding analytic modes is necessary to inquire with an insider’s approach.

Keeping an open mind is crucial.

Primary Research Data

My research has given me a firsthand understanding of the experiences of music makers, fans, recording engineers, promoters, and presenters. I made numerous inter-city or village travels within the suburbs of Accra and Kumasi, Cape Coast, Dwarfoakwa (near Asamankese, Eastern Region), and others. Primary data is paramount to this research study, so in the quest for “keeping it real,” I followed useful leads and events.

Secondary Research Data or Related Genres

This brings us to the African value of “keeping it real” in publications of all possible formats. This is the key to unlocking useful data for posterity. In this unique context, there is no published book on hip life music of which I am aware. However, I have come across something very revealing in terms of commonalities between hip life music, highlife, hip hop and traditional Ghanaian music practices, in the form of online articles, newspapers, references, etc. The roots, such as the history of African-descended music such as jazz, blues, funk, calypso, salsa, etc., resonate with the current information in my study on hip life culture. The elemental traces embedded in these forms indicate to me that hip life languages in Ghana are evident and relevant. I consulted works on related traditions, such as Waterman’s *Juju* music of Nigeria, Chernoff’s Ghanaian experience as an outsider ethnomusicologist of traditional repertoire, and Ghanaian Kofi Agawu’s insider/outsider take on representation. Tricia Rose’s discussions of hip hop relate to the similar structural form of hip life – from the streets to the stage/media.

Tertiary Research Data

Archival materials, tabloids and internet resources have been useful as have data on or by Ghanaian immigrants in London, New York, Chicago, Toronto, and Montreal. I found common as well as different views of people who have influenced hip life music and culture.

Authenticity of Information

Charles B. Guignon states: “this conceptual scaffolding, the concept of authenticity is defined by privileging the inner over the outer” (2004:185). Touching on some of the core issues of authenticity, Carol E. B. Choksy notes that “authenticity is an intellectual[ly] troubling Western tradition, as a property of an artifact, authenticity carries with it the burden of defining what is really real. Only the rulers, not the ruled; the purchasers, not the creators; the colonists, not the colonized determine what is authentic” (2006:57). This relates to contemporary research practice to the extent that the collection of data has to do with selection, based on the judgment of the researcher.

Research Method and Qualifications

My methodological leaning follows Christopher Waterman’s (1990) historical and postcolonial approach to *Juju*, a popular music form from Nigeria, detailing processes of the local music industry. I draw from Herskovits’s (1964:43) treatment of cultural orientation; Kartomi’s (1981) views on fusions; Bender’s (1985, 1991:75-104) historical linking of highlife to *Ga* music forms and European influences; and Charry’s (2000:338) challenges of fieldwork in the Mande communities and his explorations of Kora music with Guineans. As well, I draw on fusion music of Collins’s (1985, 1994, 1996, 2002, 2004, see chapter 1) lifetime of experience in Ghana with guitar band highlife groups, concert parties and their ethnographic musicking; and Agawu’s (2003: 199-220) ethics of appropriate representation of African music and explanation of tonal languages in Ghana.

Concerning aspects of dance, I employ the models used in Rose's (1994) detailed accounts of hip hop culture which are useful in comparative study analysis, as is Nestor Capoeira's (2002) discussion of capoeira, which, like hip hop, is a complex artform that can be traced to African influences of music and dance practices. Spradley's (1979: 21) language and ethnographic description, and the conceptual framework of researching dance developed by Fraleigh and Hanstein (1999) will be employed in the course of this research project.

CHAPTER I: EXPERIENCE IN FIELDWORK AND LITERATURE

1.1. Field Experience

My field experience involved daily life in community, school, social groupings, and work as an active musician and dancer such that my experience enables me to understand ethnography and ethnomusicology as lived experience.

In an attempt to participate as well as observe in field study, I realized that ethnographic study started with my daily life. The scholar's observations and reflections on their life experiences prior to engaging in academic study are quite useful. Edward Bruner posits that, "Our most in-depth and intimate field experiences, ethnographers and the people among whom we learn[,] come to share the same narratives the deeper our commitment in the field. . . . [T]he more our life stories intersect with our 'subject's,' until Self-Other boundaries are blurred" (1986: 148; see also Geertz 1988). True to this observation, I myself have experienced the self-other boundaries in some settings, such as in my home town, La, as well as Tamale, a place unfamiliar to me.

Memories of growing up in the *field* (Ghana) bring to mind days when we gathered in front of my grandparents' house, making music and dancing as a form of entertainment. I would sit on the side of the white plastic paint bucket and press my heel against the base part as in the playing of gome drum. Others played kpanlogo rhythms on Milo tins, and used milk tins as bells and claves. All together we produced an interlocking Gome rhythm as Bee, our lead singer, sang in front of the percussion, to the admiration of those passing by. It was children playing, performing music and dance that their ancestors had passed

on, a fluid kinship that has shaped the survival of art, history, life and humanity. The Ga songs that we sang then included *Ja Otin Kala* (“Severely Hot *Kenkey*”),⁴ *Akwele Suma*, a tribute to Ga female twins or triplets, and many others. These were moments of innocence, free mind and spirit, without technology or the consciousness of “authenticity,” creativity or critical analysis. We just performed from our hearts and souls, to the amusement of everyone present. We would be deeply absorbed in what we were doing, performing at sunset and in the evening, primarily for our inner satisfaction. The endless joy that emanated to the community in which we performed pointed to the same satisfaction. The musics could be soothing or energetic at various times, while the dances in this context were movements that reflected the feelings of the performers. We took turns and showed our “coolest” dance moves – “*Ake shwa shi*” in Ga, or “Show me some dance moves!” (or “play a drum phrase” or “sing a song”) – with a sense of graciousness, a fluid textured movement with a real smile for yourself. These moments would become a shared art as people looked on and the performers journeyed through their own worlds of personal experiences.

I often travelled with my father (he worked with the Ghana Electricity Corporation) and I recollect places like Kpando, Ho, Atimpoku (noted for tasty shrimp/*Son*, *adode*, *abolo*) and Keta “school boys or one-man thousand” – Keta fish (similar to lake smelt), all in the Volta Region; and Nsawam (noted for freshly baked

⁴ *Kenkey*, a staple food of the Ga people, is made of fermented corn dough. This particular food is eaten at different stages of its preparation; from half boiled, fully cooked to when it has grown mould over days/weeks; it contains natural alcohol as a part of the fermentation process, hence, informed consumption of the food helps enjoy its taste to the fullest. A person’s experience with *kenkey* shapes how the person uses it. *Kenkey* also has medical functions including the treatment of chicken pox and rashes when *otinshinu* (its liquid form) is carefully applied to the skin.

bread), Akwatia, and Oda in the Eastern Region. Through my participation in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award youth development program, dubbed the Head of State Award Scheme in Ghana, I had the opportunity to join various expeditions. Travelling over natural terrains of forest, farms and settlements, learning firsthand about the rural countryside as well as its villages, suburban towns, and cities enriched my experience.

One school that stands out in my recollection is Keta E. P. School, close to Keta lagoon, and about a six-minute walk from my home. It provided a wonderful musical education for me. After school hours, the entire community could hear Ewe live music in the shrine house. My friends and I would stroll past the walls to listen to the music, although we were not allowed in, because it was a sacred place for the initiated persons.

Music making, with corresponding dance movements, is an integral part of life among many fishing communities in Ghana, especially in the town of Keta. We would fashion crab traps from tomato tins, car tire inner tubes (as elastic), wires (as bait trigger), and flat wood carved as a strong trap door. I had one trap, and then developed to two, three, and more, which we would set close to the lagoon in the marshy areas covered by tall savannah grass. We would then leave to fish in the lagoon and I remember learning a song, while fishing, with the whistling of "*Ole kuku—ode kura agbo yame / Amega meka wor er, ode kura agboyaeme.*" This song has many contexts, and it talks about situations where a senior person or an elder should not do something. We used to sing this short phrase repeatedly. Every once in a while we would hear, across the lagoon, the shouts of fishermen or traders on commercial canoes. The idea is that we would sing after we caught a tilapia fish. We used nylon threads on strong sticks as fishing rods, with metal

hooks and earthworms. Learning various methods of fishing was quite an experience. This description illustrates how fishing with basic tools to feed the community was also a musical practice.

In 2002, I began fieldwork in Accra, a cosmopolitan city with urban and semi-urban buildings. The nature of the architecture and the multi-ethnicity absorbs and accommodates anyone from anywhere. This hybrid urban landscape features a mix of local and foreign languages with newer forms emerging constantly.

1.2. Participant-Observation and Ethnographic Interviews (POEI)

The boundaries Bruner describes may be blurred, as discussed earlier. When these boundaries⁵ – “emic and etic integration”⁶ – are fully blurred and blended with the field, our chances of gathering invaluable information that incorporates the authentic moment and generational interpretations are better. For instance if I blend well with the people I am studying, I have a better chance for an honest, in-depth exchange of ideas (see the *Flicka*⁷ narrative). In my learning process, I seek deeper understandings, to clarify myths and stereotypes.

⁵ My understanding and education from field exploration touches on insider/outsider integration. Informed use of knowledge gained therein is quite a useful blurring of the boundaries of researcher-subject relationship – you might say that the researcher “gels” with the people studied.

⁶ Emic and etic: cultural insider and cultural outsider perspectives.

⁷ *Flicka* (2006) is the story of Kathy, a girl with a passion for working on her family’s Wyoming ranch. Her father insists she go to college, where, during one of her exams, she writes nothing on the answer sheet. When the instructor later asks her about this, she replies that she has written it – in her head. It turns out that she had been thinking of the ranch, the horses and the beauty of her home. The complexity of Kathy’s way of conceptualizing ideas, stories and memories is understood after a series of events, which, as they unfold, unearth meanings. In terms of academic writing, many African traditions are based on oral transmission. An integration of both written and oral modes, that can bring the best out of a person, should be encouraged. If her teachers had engaged in discussion with her, Kathy’s position would have been recognized earlier.

1.3. Quantitative Approach

The quantitative model is usefully employed by many social scientists for concrete measurement. One might consider how many people view a certain movie or listen to a specific song on the radio. However, this method fails to tell us, for example, how many people slept through the movie, saw two movies with a single ticket, or how people derive meaning from the movie. Faulty notions exist, that “only quantitative measurements and descriptions are of use to science, [however,] many non-quantifiable things . . . can be given precise objective descriptions . . . that can play valid role[s] in . . . theories and explanations” (Bulluck and Trombley, 1999: 714). A scientific theory may be useful when applied to justify the efficacy of quantitative methods. An example of a useful application of quantitative research in ethnomusicology is the recording of data for copyright offices, for regulatory royalties to be processed accurately. For example, tracking the numbers of times a song by a specific artist is played over a given period of time.

In many discourses there are debates about which is the better method – quantitative or qualitative. “[T]he labelling of qualitative research as a poor alternative to ‘real,’ rigorous, ‘scientific,’ quantitative studies has been questioned over the past 25 years in many social science disciplines” (Phillimore and Goodson, 2004: 4). Many thinkers follow Silverman’s observation that “[t]hose who viewed qualitative research merely as a set of methods have been accused of having an oversimplified view that fails to

Obviously, written modes are part of life. Scholars must be willing to offer “Kathy” a chance and an audience as to whether she has something that can be tapped later for analysis. We need to be prepared to go in-depth in order to get specific facts. Agawu remarks on researchers’ length of fieldwork and the ascription of “expertise” (2003). One may complete a few weeks (over several summers in certain cases) of fieldwork and boast of oneself as an expert, while another, for example a researcher who has lived in the field for years, may not even define the period of time.

acknowledge the multiplicity of forms and functions of qualitative research” (4), (see also Silverman, 2000). Both approaches have their benefits and challenges. Indications from Wolcott (1994: 17) “suggest that ‘qualitative researchers need to be storytellers’ if they are to do justice to descriptive research” (qtd. in Phillimore and Goodson, 2004: 227). Thus elucidating the non quantifiable field data, such as stories, in their unique contexts. My work acknowledges that a deconstruction of data to arrive at meaning making is important to the analytical stage of research.

1.4. Qualitative Approach

“Quality” is: “[T]he relative nature or kind or character of a thing . . . a distinctive attribute or faculty; characteristic trait . . . the distinctive timbre of a voice or sound,” according to *The Oxford Encyclopedic English Dictionary, Second Edition* (1995: 1179). The *qualitative* is “concerned with or depending on quality.” *Qualitative analysis* seeks the “detection of the constituents, as elements, functional groups, present” (1179). This mode suits the analysis of an ethnic group or people making music and dance in specific social contexts, so as to unpack the fluid understandings of human behaviour in the arts.

The qualitative approach is a debated enquiry method that some ethnomusicologists, anthropologists and other scientists have used with various perspectives. Many academics have become aligned with qualitative analysis over time. “Qualitative research values context sensitivity, that is, understanding a phenomena in all its complexity and within a particular situation and environment” (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994:13). Comparatively,

qualitative research has been viewed . . . simplistically as a set of different research methods that have certain features in common. In this respect, qualitative methods are employed to collect data about activities, events, occurrences and behaviours and to seek an understanding of actions, problems and processes in their social context. (Phillimore and Goodson, 2004:3)

Qualitative research practice has contributed an essential understanding of human behavioral patterns, including in music making. The very elements of sound and movement in this context employ unique, innovative ways of observation through use of qualitative inquiry. This has proven efficient in my previous fieldwork on kpanlogo dance and music. A qualitative approach that shares traces with other methods is useful to this study. The complementary nature of quantitative and qualitative modes symbiotically shapes some of the outcomes of an inquiry. Heather Haas (2008:335), in her discussion of proverb familiarity, offers that,

No doubt many different methods will have to be employed together to answer these questions, but the statistical study of proverb familiarity – especially across groups and across time – is one step toward addressing questions about how folklore text spreads, changes, thrives, or dies; these are concerns that confront those who study any folklore genre. Nomothetic and quantitative research is not incompatible with the more traditional qualitative and idiographic emphasis on fieldwork and performance; the approaches are not only compatible but also complementary, with each offering unique insights into folkloric traditions.

It may be true that a research study can utilize varied methods but still yield similar outcomes at the end of the day. The important approach is to keep an open mind; as Haas puts it, they are both “compatible” and “complementary.”

1.5. Ethnography, Ethnology, and Ethnomethodology (The 3Es)

Ethnography, ethnology, and ethnomethodology are approaches that have been useful to many researchers, focusing on the in-depth study of a person or group of people. Invaluable data are generated in the form of field notes, other forms of recordings, photographs, drawings, and sculptures. Barry Hindess (1973:43), in *The Use of Official Statistics in Sociology: A Critique of Positivism and Ethnomethodology*, reminds us that,

[i]n fact, they derive largely from a more general critique of theoretical abstraction in the social sciences advanced by contemporary forms of social phenomenology and ethnomethodology. The latter seek to establish human experience, preferably undistorted by background expectancies, tacit knowledge, and the like, as the foundation of knowledge as against concepts and rationalist forms of proof and demonstration. Where the preferred forms of undistorted experience are thought to be unavailable we are told that objectivity is a mirage.

Human experience here is a gateway to understanding salient, micro-event analysis.

Hindess's notions of human experience resonate with my approach. I shall employ a predominantly insider-guided emic mode of enquiry. The fluid nature of fieldwork study as an insider in Ghana has shaped my use of participant observation with an emphasis on the "rhythm" of active participation. I faced issues such as when to ask the right questions and at what point to re-question statements that needed elaboration. There are also certain terminologies of which the ethics of the land approve, as well as the human respect factor, which plays out daily. All of these informed me in each moment of my study.

1.6. Literature Review: Textual Gymnastics⁸

Nature (imagine trees, sand, oceans, planets, stars, sky, wind, animals, etc.) moves with a particular rhythm and so do African traditions move with unique rhythms. “Music is essential to life in Africa because Africans use music to mediate their involvement within a community” shares Chernoff (1975:154). He points out that “[a]s a style of human conduct, [musical participation] characterizes a sensibility with which Africans relate to the world and commit themselves to its affairs.” It is evident that within “the midst of change . . . [some musical values in hip life] characterize a culture’s continuity from generation to generation, suggesting the underlying strengths which vitalize the efforts of individuals and communities as they meet the realities of new situations” (154). I will look at changes in Ghanaian popular musics among others since the 1920s.

The discussion here chronicles a chain of events that has shaped the popular musics of Ghana and the West African sub region, and extends it through regions in Africa as positioned on the popular music soundscape of the world. Like elsewhere, there is always something new from Africa – today it is *hip life* in Ghana, yesterday it was *kwaito* in South Africa. The newness in music is the aesthetics and the current historiography. Feeling the culture’s sensitivity, such as in-depth grasp with sensibility—proverbs, nuances, codes, is the pathway to understanding its ancient connectedness to the present.

⁸ There is an art to using text to inform and to employ theories on a themed discourse. I call this “textual gymnastics.” One could refer to it as a deep engagement with the written scholarly tradition. It is one of the hallmarks of academia – the documentation and transmission of knowledge. Here, I employ these gymnastics to analyze available materials on the cultural production of hip life music. I will reference some popular musics in Ghana and beyond that are relevant to the hip life cultural revolution. The “textual gymnastics” expression addresses the ever-changing cultural performance scene.

Current studies and critical reviews of afropop (which includes highlife, juju, benga, etc.) in ethnomusicology, anthropology and cultural studies have shaped scholarship in divergent ways. In this literature review I shall explore the sounds of Africa as they relate to hip life. This will include a journey through slavery and colonialism, modernization and the music industry, traditional and popular music (highlife music and dance, palm wine music, politics of/in popular musics), regional connections, hybridity/authenticity, identity, emic and etic views, marketing, and their implications on hip life music.

Works that enter perspectives on hip life music, or refer to it (e.g., developments in hip life), include Steven J. Salm and Toyin Falola (2002); and John Collins (in Mai Palmberg and Annemette Kirkegaard, 2002). Tiyanbe Zeleza and Cassandra Rachel Veney (2003) survey Ghanaian musics including highlife, Burgher highlife, hip life and hip hop relationships in *Leisure in Urban Africa*. In *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana* (issues 7-9, 2003), the generational shift from live bands and the impact of hip life digital technology are discussed, including implied notions of outspoken hip life lyrics. These themes are very popular in Collins's (2002) discussion of generational musics. In a different context, Simon Alex Akoto (2004) touches on where people can enjoy contemporary hip life music at multiple venues such as theatres, church services, concerts, dance halls, parks, and popular beaches.

Greg Thomas (2009) touches on Pan-African elements, activism, and hip life formation in Ghana, while the Lonely Planet Publications (2004, 2009 and 2010) showcase snapshots. Ian Utley (2009) gives an account of Reggie Rockstone's hip life

initiative and its development (109). Laurent Fourchard, Odile Goerg, Muriel Gomez-Perez (2009) note the “mime or lip-synched on-stage pre-recorded music” (245). Grant Barrett (2006) presents Elena Oumano’s views on fusions of hip life music (Billboard Mar. 6, 1999), Bertie Charles Forbes (2007) shares hip life’s “blend of hip hop and bouncy African highlife music” (10). Jesse W. Shipley’s (2009) Afro-cosmopolitan rap treatment in Ghana reveals useful perspectives (see discussions on *Living the Hip Life* movie). The following writers’ works link the roots and contemporary elements in Ghanaian musics. Simon Broughton, Mark Ellingham and Jon Lusk (2006) observe traditional influences in hip life music, similar to Nate Ash-Morgan (2008) who analyzes Ga traditional rhythms in contemporary hip life music. On a closer look, Robert Wuthnow (2009) presents Paul Gifford’s views on musical “syncretism” in Ghana (78), as Anthony Ham (2009 and 2010) writes on the 1990s musical hybridity in local lyrics and American beats (340). Emmanuel K. Boon and Luc Hens (2007) write about “indigenous knowledge systems” within highlife and hip life musics “dispersed” in Ghana. Sam Bleakley (2010) discusses Ghanaian’s musical creativity with “cross rhythms” (180), with Eric Ayisi Akrofi, Maria Smit and Stig-Magnus Thorsén (2007) observing the similarities between Kwaito and hip life music (147). Michael Drewett and Martin Cloonan (2006) look at gender balance and lyrics within highlife and hip life musics, in line with Tara Aminah (Ama Sika) Jabbaar-Gyambrah’s (2007) gender balance observation in hip life music in Ghana, which raises moral and power concerns. The Theatre Communications Group (2008) writes on the performance of a “hiplife theatre piece based on the 50th anniversary of Ghana’s independence in 2007,” helping spread the message of hip life in many forms.

Discussions of key works in this literature will be integrated below, along the narrative of events that affect Ghanaian musics. To understand hip life discourse, one needs to look at traditional musical influences besides highlife and hip hop.

As the ethnomusicologist Thomas Solomon puts it, “the site of home [is] a place that embodied years of accumulated experiences” (2006:323), which invites broad interpretation of the field. I have found a variety of brief discussions on hip life music from music reviews, CD launches, tours, music industry news, and corporate events. Published internet music, CDs, and a smaller number of DVDs of hip life and highlife music have been very useful. I was able to follow their contents to dig out the philosophy behind the music and the nature of the artists’ compositional styles. Cross referencing various musical instrumentation and samples (see chapter three) and in some cases liner notes has also led to a broader understanding of the networks of collaborators in this creative musical work. Unlike the core Ghanaian traditional musics, which are easily identifiable with specific ethnic groups, hip life and highlife music cut across ethnic lines in a bid to integrate fans from many backgrounds.

Certain sub genres of hip life link to specific ethnicities based on which traditional repertoire is sampled.⁹ The hip life platform is rooted deeper than one ethnicity due to the multiple samplings of global sounds. I find interpreting these songs and mnemonics interesting and challenging, and in some instances depend on informants to translate or clarify the languages and proverbs for accuracy.

⁹ *Jama-Ga*, *adowa-Akan*, or *Agbadza-Ewe*, and so on.

1.6.1. Perspectives on Ghanaian Sounds

Manu Dibango states: “The [Ghanaian/African] sound carries the rhythm and movement creates the images. The way an African moves [as] compared with the [ir] environment is different from the Western conception” of movement (1991:6). This denotes traditional spontaneity. “The bulk of Africanist urban ethnography from the late 1930s through the 1960s was carried out by British anthropologists, most notably by members of the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute in Northern Rhodesia, now the Institute for Social Research of the University of Zambia” (Kuper, 1975:182-90; Hannerz, 1980:119-62 qtd. in Waterman, 1990:4). Waterman’s groundbreaking scholarship draws attention to significant omissions in some British practice. “Although the ‘Manchester School’ produced what is arguably the most cohesive body of monographs in urban anthropology, their concentration on social institutions and networks relegated expressive culture to an ancillary role” (Waterman, 1990:4). A scholarly work has its own mission and hence it is not surprising that the expressive sounds of Africa were omitted. J.H. Nketia (2005:241) shares Alan Lomax’s (1971:xvi) observations on Africa being “the best recorded continent,” with an assurance inspired by Alan P. Merriam’s (1970) penning that the lack of scores and documentations is now accessible in recordings. Graham points out that the “recording and reproduction of Africa music[s] really started towards the end of the 1920s when a number of European trading companies recognize[d] the potential profits to be made from local releases” (1988:1). Nketia advises that “music history in Africa must begin with a sensitive study of the historic present, since the present, to a large extent,

encapsulates the past, which continues to have a contemporary relevance” (2005:244). In a similar vein, for example, mutual connections exist between the musics of hip life (contemporary) and, say, *Adaha* (earlier). They can be linked via acoustic highlife music (see chapter three’s discussion on hip life music). Thus the saying *wogbe jεke*: “we’ve come afar” or “our distant journey” in *Ga*, speaks to life experience.

Jazz interests outside Africa connect well with Ghanaian musics through many levels of polyrhythm. “Jazz people, as usual, had been the first to respond positively to the potential inspiration of African music, much in the same way as their previous generation had responded to Latin American music: a few expatriate African musicians, usually percussionists, found their way onto records in the 1960s and 1970s” (Chernoff, 1991:ix).

Drums, flutes, horns, gongs and rattles appear to be the most common musical instruments used in traditional music all over Ghana. These instruments can be played alone or in combination with other instruments [which have room for much hybridization], with the appropriate vocal accompaniment to put across the required rhythm and verbal message during traditional festivals. (qtd. in Sony Oti, 2009:45)

Nketia’s (2005:348-9) discussion of Henry Cowell’s (1961:113) view that, “the musical cultures of the world form a part of the musical heritage of the contemporary musician and should be accessible to him,” appropriately connects the efforts of Cowell’s position¹⁰ with that of Ephraim Amu’s compositional works in Ghana that draw on Amu’s own Akan traditional music in the late 1920s. This and other similar workings of creativity in the contemporary are geographically defined and positioned according to the intonation of the people. So for Reggie Rockstone (below) to employ the adowa timeline (*bo ma yen sa*

¹⁰ Similar to E.T. Mensah’s “platform” discussion above.

- _ *-, meaning “play or drum and let’s dance” in *Twi*) in the *Makaa Maka* interlude in 1996, only serves as a continuum in the broader sense of hybridity. Feeding off Sanpong’s (1974; see also Oti, 2009:45) earlier points on musical “combinations,” the sky becomes part of the perimeter and not the limit in the hybridization process.



Figure 1. Reggie Rockstone at his Labone residence, 2007. Photo by Author.

How did the contemporary music spread over the world today? Where did music start in the world we live in? (see Waterman, 1990). The “mnemonic metaphors” discussed by Waterman in *juju* music (1990:18) similarly resonate in hip life and highlife performances, and are deeply embedded in the hip life songs of Obrafuor, Tinny, and Nana Ampofu, A. Adjei (aka. Mr. A.A.A.), among those of many other Ghanaian musicians. To use a North American example to illustrate the same line of postcolonial

thought and cultural production, “contemporary Native American music is rich and diverse, incorporating . . . derived traditions, as well as popular and commercial forms and styles including polkas, country music, folk, rock and roll, blues, jazz, rap, tap, and reggae” (Ullestad in Post, 2006:331). Ullestad’s discussion of North American Aboriginal rap and reggae music and dancing sheds light on the chronology of the “innovative Native American music that exists today” (331). African music, from its traditional practice through popular culture, has manifested in many contexts, from North American Aboriginal communities to Japanese rap.

The *Popular Music Theory: Introduction*, by Keith Negus (1997) synthesizes positions and provides various discussions on popular music, the recording industry, identity, gender, and historiography, among other useful themes across the sound scape literature on popular music. Negus discusses Adorno and Horkheimer’s (1979:163) position on the factory-like term of “assembly line” and “synthetic” or “commercial gain and social manipulation” mode of production with a corporate take on the culture industry (see Negus, 1997:37), highlighting its embedded “formulaic” standards. Arguments for and against the industry’s meddling in the lines of recordings for the marketing over creation sound genuine, but the question I must ask is when do artists want the creative and not the marketing? (See Harker, 1980:111.)

1.6.1.1. Traditional Music

Many people have written extensively about traditional African musics but this dissertation focuses (specifically) on Ghanaian traditional musics. Notable scholars include J.H. Nketia (2005), Waterman (1990), Agawu (2003), and Taylor (2007). Nketia has focused on Ghana's *Akan* dirges and the linguistic interpretations to musiking, offering a substantial contribution to the field by comparing the *Twi* adaptations in the songs with northern influences. He has connected many dots to clarify West African regional musics' influence in the *Akan* court music of the present day. Agawu looks at the modes of representation in African musics. He offers emic perspectives on approaches that are appreciative of Ghanaian music practice based on language. Taylor's views remind us of colonialism's effect on music making. He shares insights on digital technology's effect (with social media) on music-fieldwork.

The literature on traditional musics relates to hip life in many ways. There is a deep embodiment of Ghanaian history in hip life. As the Ghanaian scholar Nketia notes, "for my own [*Akan*] society, people are more concerned with the meaning or interpretation [that touches on the history] of music than with its description" (2005:187). Meaningful dialogue is vital to communication in lyric-centred music. Chanting, call and response, and proverbs are present in local idioms in hip life, highlife and traditional Ghanaian musics. For example, among other factors of inter-ethnic trade the "gourd drum in the reign of [*Akan*] Boa Amponsem and *kwadwuom* . . . dirges of minstrels, suggests that northern influence represented by Mande traders was strong for a new stylistic feature in singing to be adopted for restricted use at the courts of the Chiefs" (272). In a similar

vein, Waterman observed in *Juju* music that “cultural creativity and economic adaptation are intimately linked as migrants make a place for themselves in the city” (1990:9).

Human contact among diverse communities continues to shape music making. Though changes occur in transformation patterns, popular Ghanaian music is like any form that is deeply rooted in distinct traditions. When looking at the ways in which Ghanaian music is being created, Nketia notes:

While traditional music is cultivated in community contexts as an integral part of social, recreational and ceremonial life, art music and popular music are cultivated in contemporary contexts by musicians from different ethnic backgrounds, who belong to new social formations in which *linkages beyond ethnicity* form the basis of social and cultural life – social formations that not only cope with the aftermath of colonialism, since colonial legacies do not disappear overnight, but also respond individually and collectively to the pressures and challenges of global trends. (2004:32, emphasis in original)

The cultural contact between Ghanaians, Europeans and Americans in this context has engendered most of the initial hybrid musics and their derivatives. Changes in the culture are truncated by global trends and flow with multimedia (radio; TV; video, audio; internet – Facebook, Twitter, YouTube; the information flow across the globe). This process is nurtured and sustained by modern ideas.

Highlife music is a symbol of the Ghanaian melting pot that tells its own story. Highlife was influenced by the British, who, in their contact with Ghana (formerly the Gold Coast) left a legacy of brass band music, ballroom, and other elements of British life. “In the 1920s, most forts on the Gold Coast had garrison bands that added some local melodies to their military march repertoires. . . . [a]coustic guitars . . . [were] brought by Kru sailors from Liberia who worked on boats that shuttled between England, the United

States, the Caribbean, and African ports” (Tenaille, 2000:13). Highlife (as well as hip life since the late 1990s) spread to Nigeria as artists travelled around the region for gigs and fame. This brings us to Graham (1988), who credits Collins’s (1977, 1985 and 1996) work on highlife music. Having played highlife myself with Collins in the *Local Dimension* band at Legon, I can guarantee that he is an expert on highlife. He also founded Borkoor Studios, a research archive as well as recording studio. He could narrate the highlife story including the concert parties anytime. Collins is such an expert that he is constantly cited in works about African popular music. Graham perfectly synthesized Collins’s views.

Early “proto-highlife” styles included Osibisaba, Ashiko and Dagomba but by 1920 they had become collectively known as highlife. During that decade three distinct styles of highlife emerged – the ballroom dance band variety for the coastal urban elite, the village brass band variety and finally the “low-class” rural guitar bands, playing a less Westernised highlife for less-Westernised audiences. (Graham, 1988:76)

Highlife music, as the name implies, has somewhat classified those who practise it (as well as its audience) into three groupings based on their political leaning, economical scale and location. Location groupings can be further broken down into rural, suburban, and urban elite. Highlife writers include John Collins (1985, 1994), whose *Highlife Explosion* and *Highlife Time* firsthand accounts are similar to Christopher Waterman’s (1990) accounts on highlife and *juju* musics in Ghana and Nigeria. David Coplan’s (1978) global connection accounts about highlife are similar to Paul A. Barton (2005) who links rap/poetry within the Cushite African roots and Indian practice, hence a global connection. Bender’s (1991) proto-highlife: the Fanti style of Osibisaba, as Sam Bleakley (2010) discusses hip life fusion (including highlife) and musical creativity in Ghana. Frank

Tenaille (2000) reviews the political use of music as a tool by Kwame Nkrumah in Ghana, as well as rap's connection in the West African sub region, which is similar to Kofi Agawu (2003) and Sony Oti's (2009) discussions of highlife music, its influences and the political underpinnings. Oti states that "[h]ighlife is one of the emblems of African cultural and political identity. Highlife, kola nuts and palm-wine are 'nostalgic forces' in the West, particularly in the United States of America," and believed that it is "probably as a result of the popularity of novels by writers like Chinua Achebe and Amos Tutuola as well as the works of playwright such as Wole Soyinka and scholars like Professor H. Nketia of Ghana" (Oti, 2009:173). The search for a new popular culture ensued as the West looked for more music different from their mainstream pop culture. One of the key players in highlife music is E.T. Mensah of Ghana, alumni of teacher Lamprey's School (see Bender, 1991:79, on E.T. Mensah's upbringing). Bobby Benson from Nigeria is also credited with popularizing Nigeria's highlife music, though "E. T. Mensah and other Ghanaians had to some extent, directly influenced the aesthetics of highlife in Nigeria" (Oti, 2009:179). In the 1960s the first president of Ghana, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, utilized the influence of highlife music (including E.T. Mensah's fame) to increase the popular Ghanaian identity:

Kwame Nkrumah . . . [was] a man who used music as a tool for the affirmation of national culture. Highlife also owed its popularity among the youth to its lyrics, often tied to current events. Whether sung in English, Fante, Twi, Ewe, Efik, or Hausa, its joking themes essentially dealt with day-to-day life and questions about the greater good. (Tenaille, 2000:15)

“[B]y the late 1970s Ga folk bands could be found performing in most of Accra’s major nightspots. Amongst those who followed [the band] Wulomei (fetish priests)¹¹ are Dzadzelo, Adzo, Bokoor, Blemabii, Suku Troupe and Agbafoi” (Graham, 1988:94). These local groups also helped promote highlife, providing indigenous input. It must be remembered that highlife embodies cross-Atlantic elements of the Gome music of the Ga people via the Moroons of Jamaica and back to West Africa by Sierra Leone (see my discussions on Kumina and Gome in Sloat, 2010:149-61). Traditional Gome (or Gombe/Goombe) re-fertilized with highlife (as in Wulomei’s music above), which in turn shares a platform with hip hop within hip life music. It can be argued that hip life music traces another triangle of Ghana-Jamaica-Sierra Leone-Ghana with their descendants or neighbourhood countries as exemplified in chapter three. “Gombe, like the Osibisaba – a Fanti style – is one of the roots of Highlife music and may be called a proto-Highlife” (Bender, 1991:77). The works of the sound engineer and producer Jeff Quaye are crucial to Ga music: gome, kpanlogo, jama, kolomashi, and waka rhythms in the hip-lifing process with local rap (again, see hip hop connections in chapter three).

The creation and sustenance of the popular music in Ghana (see Appendix B Table A) is rich from its indigenous influences as well as external fusions. This observation is shared by Bergman. “The provocative variety of African rhythms and melodic styles is, of course, a mine that can provide infinite richness to future African sounds” (1985:31).

¹¹ According to oral accounts that I have received in Ghana, there lived, in a place called *Fete*, a traditional priest. The Europeans had no idea what to call the priest, so upon knowing that he came from *Fete*, they named the priest as *Fete-ish* or *Fetish*. Later, any similar-looking person wearing related paraphernalia attracted the same label – *Fetish*, a corrupted name. Though the word “fetish” existed as a word already, coincidentally it played a function that served the interpretation of the Europeans. But traditionally a religious priest is not to be labeled.

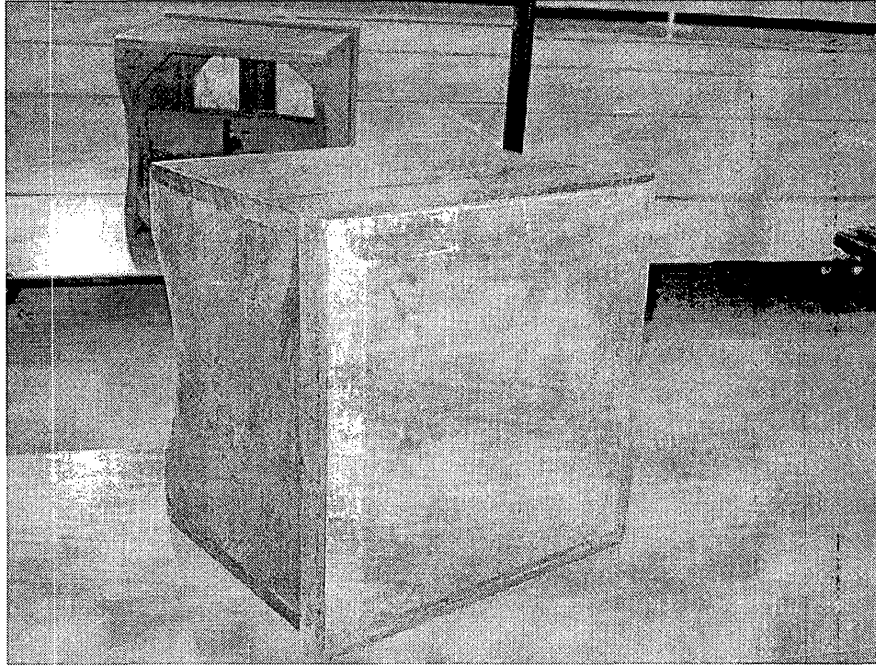


Figure 2. Gome Drum, Toronto. Photo by Author 2007.

Although there is the view that, “[t]here is need for highlife music countries of West Africa to hold symposia for ‘standardizing’ highlife music in order to universalize it as a dance rhythm which could be read and played even by Western musicologists and musicians” (Oti, 2009:182), it is not that simple. Local languages adapt the sound with different takes, incorporating different local traditions across West Africa and beyond.

You have a sound that arrives in the town and returns to the village, changed. The echo which comes back is not the same as the original. When a note arrives in town from the village, the town returns it with electronic delay, with reverb, limiter and all the studio technology, but it is the same note that came from the village. When the village takes a sound from the town, there is a chemistry they add which transforms the sound again. (Dibango, 1991:7)

Dynamics of culture and the ever-changing trends in popular culture render such standardization problematic. Culture is not static or like a national restaurant chain. We

are dealing with sensitive culture, such as the Ghanaian way of life including music and dance expressions, as the first platform upon which all the melting pots of highlife or hip life take place. The highlife music of E.T. Mensah in the pioneering stages is quite different from that of say Ben Brako, Ofori Amponsah, Daddy Lumba, or Nana Tufuor. The steady clave or “the ‘mainline’ highlife feel, with prototypes such as the song ‘Yaa Amponsah’ establishing the characteristics of offbeat bass lines and picking in the traditional style used for Akan stringed instruments such as the *seprewa*” (Bergman, 1985:35), in effect signify a trademark within the bigger picture of highlife or hip life popular culture.

Connecting highlife to hip hop to coin hip life, Paul A. Barton’s analysis (Reggie Rockstone’s hip life definition) registers an interesting performance connection of local “rap, drumming, stringed instruments . . . poetry to praise kings, emperors and queens are of the same Cushite African roots in both Africa and India” (2005:22). Barton connects rap globally as he observes similarities across India, Japan, Korea, Jamaica, U.S.A. (the Bronx), and the continent of Africa, in the recent spread of hip hop. I mention this in reference to the underlying rap element existing in highlife music, which was formalized into the Ghanaian hip life scene. Frank Tenaille’s observations of Senegalese rap can also be said of hip life music.

Rap, it is true, has several reasons to thrive on Senegalese soil. The oral tradition remains important there. Between the griot, master of speech, and the rap MC, master of ceremonies, there is only a difference in surroundings. The art of discussion, of social communication, is a constant in African life, and the rapper speaks to this collective need. Africa has always been fond of “commentators” who take up and speak what is socially unspoken, who on their own level are rappers. And then of course there’s the protomusical character of rap, founded on

rhythm and tone, which suits the sensitivity of African tastes precisely with those two elements. (2000:122-23)

From my own experience I concur that “the youth of Ghana have developed their own form of hip-hop, fusing highlife and rap. Give Ghanaians a topic and they will turn it into music that will ripple through your body and back, as cross-rhythms,” relays Sam Bleakley (2010:180). Anthony Ham states that “Ghana has been dancing to it ever since, and you won’t be able to get through a few days here . . . without letting the sweet sounds of hip-life into your world. It’s more than just a music genre; it’s an insight” (2009:331).

One of the early notes about hip life appeared in *Billboard Magazine* on 22nd February 1997. This was penned by Kwaku¹² and edited by David Sinclair on the theme “Global Music Pulse: The Latest Music News from Around the Planet.” In the Ghanaian notes, Kwaku portrayed the popular rap music scene in the city of Accra with earlier accounts of “local acts like *Talking Drums*, who coined the word *funklife* . . . to describe its mixture of Ghanaian and American music styles. Dancehall artists *Attenteben* [based on the bamboo flute in Ghana] toast and rap, using a pronounced percussive style that [some] call *drumlife*” (39). *Funklife* and *drumlife* no doubt also influenced the rap scene in the youth communities. “But the artist who is really rocking the local joint is rapper Reggie Osei better known to B-boys and girls as Reggie Rockstone, of former London- and New York-based rap group PLZ” (39). Reggie is a former dancer who is fluent in the B-boy flow as well as a gifted rapper with international exposure. He re-echoed his hip

¹² Kwaku is the name given to a Wednesday-born male among the *Akan*, *Ga*, *Ewe*, and other ethnic groups. The article does not give his last name.

hop trajectory to create hip life – gaining a momentum that paved the way for later hip life artists.

Two years later (1999), the December 25 edition of *Billboard* recounts, in its “1999 in Review: Words and Deeds” column (prepared by Marci Kenon in Los Angeles and Kwaku in London), that the spread of the hip hop genre proves it is not a passing fad (31). The piece samples hip hop’s American and international spread and adaptations. It maintains that rap/hip hop came of age in 1999, proving that “it is no longer the ‘fad’ industry sceptics predicted 20 years ago. The genre continue[s] to pave mainstream inroads on both the domestic and international fronts. . .” (31). The globe-trotting nature of hip hop has adapted to many places, including Ghana. Hip life is positioned as “Rockstone’s definition with hip hop, highlife and other local sensibilities” (75). The piece cites some early works like the Native Funk Lords’ *Africa 2000* debut album on Kays Frequency and radio promo tracks taken from *Kawanotomu*,¹³ the *Bos Entertainment* album recorded by the Los Angeles-based Ghanaian duo Soulatidoe, and other samples (hip hop adaptations) from elsewhere.¹⁴

The *Billboard* article concludes with the emphasis that “[i]n the 20 years since rap music went above-ground in America, the genre has definitely become a global phenomenon” (75). The organisation of global events that gather enthusiasts and agencies

¹³ Meaning to silence a person, “zip it,” or “shut up,” in Twi.

¹⁴ These adaptations include works such as Kenya’s (Minneapolis-based) Simba Nation, with their release of *Operation Anvil--Simba Nation Invasion* with Swahili- and English-rapped *Africa Rising*; Germany’s (Hamburg-based) KC Da Rookee’s *Rook-eetizza* with influences from American rap style, and with Jamaican roots of Rookee’s “reinterpretation” of Bob Marley’s *Buffalo Soldier*; France’s Iam rap group’s song “Taxi” with S.M.A.L.L./Sony group; Norway’s Tommy Tee’s T.P. Allstars with *Norske Byggeklosser* (Tee Productions/Virgin); Britain’s Roots Manuva’s *Brand New Second Hand* album on Big Dada/Ninja Tune; and Urban Species’ release *Blanket* (Talking Loud/Mercury) (see *Billboard* 25 Ed. n.v. (1999) 31,75.

interested in (the global flow of) hip hop has been one important step in whipping up interest in it. “[In] 2000¹⁵: Hip-hop cements its global impact with news that the annual How Can I Be Down? Music convention [will be] . . . held for the first time in London May 11-14, 2000” (75).

A further contributing factor to the spread of pop culture in Africa and elsewhere is the launch of the MTV Base in South Africa on February 22, 2005 at Johannesburg (see Diane Coetzers’ discussion of “Biz Welcomes MTV’s African Expedition,” *Billboard Magazine* March 5, 2005, pp. 53 and 57). This “new 24hr. English language Pan-Africa channel . . . MTV base” operates via “DStv service of pay-TV digital satellite platform Multichoice Africa,” which has an initial reach from “1.3 million houses in sub Saharan Africa” (53), including Ghana. Bill Roedy (the president of MTV) shared that their intention is to have “. . . 30% African content and gradually build that as the channel develops” (53). He emphasised MTV base channel operations – to “combine 2 Face of Nigeria, Lebo Mathosa from South Africa, plus genres like “*kwaito*, hip-life, *mbalax* and *zouk* alongside hip hop, R & B and neo soul” (53+). Though concerns regarding the video quality of the local acts were raised, there was the assurance of helping film some of the local acts with MTV’s camera crews and equipment, to be included in their content. This can be a challenge. If the content is 30% local and 70% foreign, then it is unbalanced. But the initial concept of improvement can be a good starting point for participants – labels, agencies, and many stakeholders across Africa can learn the ropes in the media industry –

¹⁵ This logically reminds us of some landmark events that show the hip hop labyrinth from the Bronx, and subsequently leading to the global phenomenon.

not forgetting that West Africa has a great record of recordings in the 1920s (see Gronow, 1981:252-53¹⁶ and Waterman, 1990:8). Gallo Record Company, founded by Eric Gallo in 1926 in Johannesburg, South Africa, is one of the earliest in Africa¹⁷ (see Collins, 1985:151). That given, a better MTV base could be built in Africa with balanced programming of 50% local and 50% foreign content. As it stands hip life is featured in the initial screenings across Africa so hip hop (hip life inclusive) has made inroads on MTV since its launch in 2005.

In a 2009 article, Joseph Oduro-Frimpong examines the global wave of hip hop and its influence on Ghanaian hip life music. While he also observes hip life as an “understudied genre,” he challenges scholars in communications¹⁸ to research it, because hip life “music provides a particularly clear and analytically relevant example of glocalization¹⁹ (1086). The article clearly sums up the global influx and the wave of hip life sub genres. Thus it reveals reflections of steep stylistic departures within the initial hip life musics.

In explaining the rationale for the schism, some interviewed participants revealed that the old school hiplife music for a time became very “one-way” (a Ghanaian English term meaning *redundant* or *monotonous*), and people began not to patronize the music. Here, I surmise that the potentially gloomy situation propelled some hiplife musicians to tap into indigenous Ghanaian rhythms to revive the genre, as well as their careers. In view of the historical trajectory of hiplife, as well as that of highlife, one notes that the ongoing changes on the Ghanaian music landscape point to a crucial feature of glocalization processes. Such processes are

¹⁶ Pekka Gronow. “The Record Industry Comes to the Orient.” *Ethnomusicology* 25(1981): 251.

¹⁷ Gallo Record Company: < http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gallo_Record_Company> and <<http://www.gallo.co.za/>>. Accessed 22 July 2011.

¹⁸ Oduro-Frimpong (2009): “Glocalization Trends: The Case of Hiplife Music in Contemporary Ghana.” *International Journal of Communication* 3(2009). <<http://ijoc.org/ojs/index.php/ijoc/article/view/File/230/383>>. Accessed 8 Jan. 2010.

¹⁹ Glocalization means global-local communication.

neatly summed up in the Akan proverb about creative adaptation that says, “*emere dane a, na woadane wo ho bi,*” – When time changes, you change with it. (17)

John Collins (2002:71) compares two Ghanaian dance-music forms, hip life and local gospel, in relation to gender. His main points about hip life and gender are that young men experiment with techno pop and young women gravitate toward gospel music in the churches. He further examines generational factors as well as policies that shaped changes in popular musics in Ghana (e.g., conservative highlife and contemporary hip life leanings). An example of a policy is the “import duty of 160% on band instruments,” which was too high for musicians and led to their departure to other countries (Collins, 2001:6).

Tara Jabbaar-Gyambrah’s²⁰ groundbreaking study on African women’s representation in hip life music within the bigger framework of the music industry in Ghana offers many insights. Regarding gender and sexuality in hip life music, she observed that the Triple M,²¹ an all-female hip life group, “wanted to create space for women in the hip life industry by breaking down the walls of exclusion” constructed by men (2008: 91). This effort helps women to be actively involved in the male-dominated genre. Jabbaar-Gyambrah compared Triple M’s song “Girls, Girls” (from the album *Koti*, a Pidgin term for “Police”) as a response to Okomfo Kwaadee’s song “Boyz, Boyz.” This response through song seeks to “reposition African women in the ‘gender dynamics’ in the Ghanaian community” (96). It “challenge[d] the British colonial ideology that African women’s sexuality is vulgar, taboo and should be subdued” (91). Though the song

²⁰ Tara A. Jabbaar-Gyambrah. “Triple M, Representin’, Reconstructin’ and Resistin’: Ideologies of Gender and Sexuality in Hip-Life Music in Ghana.” *The Journal of Race and Policy* 4:1 (Spring 2008) p.86-99.

²¹ The group members are Mildred Mark-Hanson, Mercy Quarshie and Monica Tawia.

challenges men's infidelity, Jabbaar-Gyambrah acknowledges the complexity in the lyrics – which in itself speaks for (as it projects women as strong) and against (with its inappropriate objectification of women) her position on sexuality. She went on to position her assertions, which are somewhat accusatory toward men on power issues and infidelity. In my opinion she has done this in an unbalanced way, making her arguments a little shaky. For example, referring to “Girls, Girls”:

. . . the song is quite complex and contradictory because they are saying the reason men commit adultery is because they cannot resist the “power of the booty.” It becomes complicated when Yaa, the girlfriend, is given money in exchange for her company with a married man, which is a representation of the commodification of women's bodies. (95)

The fact is many Ghanaian men would have a somewhat problematic response when addressing notions of sexuality within musiking, in Ghana and elsewhere. Generally the gender power-balance/equal opportunity position²² theoretically sits well with those in the West, but raises eyebrows among Ghanaian conservatives (which also includes some women who support their male counterparts on this issue). As we say in Ga, *onyemi gbonyo hi fe shia flo*, “a bad sibling is better than an empty house” (while not condoning the inappropriate action of anyone). This saying, though debatable, speaks to the concept of contentment from the African perspective. It translates to the notion that ethnic connections among people can make it challenging to enforce certain Western ideals. There will always be men in the music industry, but there do need to be more opportunities for women. There is a long history of battles for artists' rights, including

²² “. . . [T]his could be an example of the economic struggles that women face in the community because of the lack of job opportunities. Essentially, Triple M is positing the idea that girlfriends are not ‘wild’ but they are using what they have to survive in Ghanaian society” (95).

those championed by the late Faisal Helwani, Carlos Sakyi, Sidi Kubuari. Female artists' issues within the industry also have to be taken up and discussed openly.

Shiple, an anthropologist who documented Reggie Rockstone in the film *Living the Hiplife* (FESPACO 2007), offers a brilliant window into the lives of hip lifers (men and women). The work is reflective of the state of the hip life genre in 2007, which is still relevant today. It has permeated ethnicity, gender, religion, tradition, media, technology, politics, to settle on entertainment, no *brouhaha*, or “no problem” in Pidgin English. Shiple portrayed the challenges and successes of hip lifers, creativity, their support systems, and circumstances that have shaped the artists to create specific songs (e.g., commercialism).

In the book *Culture and Customs of Ghana*, Salm and Falola suggested that among a section of Ghanaian conservatives, there is “a great deal of concern about the development of hiplife music. Hiplife remains a somewhat isolated Ghanaian musical form at this time, due in part to the language barrier and its ‘borrowed’ beats” (2002:187). In places across Ghana and elsewhere that have adopted hip hop beats, the trend in the initial stages has been to begin by copying something and later making variations. In the same vein Chang confirms, in his words, “[w]hen I look at hip hop abroad [hip life], it takes a while for it to really come into itself. I think at first it almost starts out as an imitation” (2006:258). This is the implied framework of the hip hop structure: with time more variations and transformations set in. The conservative concern about hip life changing the soundscape of Ghana is addressed through an observation of the global trend in hip hop. According to Salm et al, “. . . globalization has not driven out indigenous

cultural elements. It has blended into music and dance, and incorporated into traditional celebrations. American hip hop music, for example, has evolved into Ghanaian hiplife music, drawing on the influence of . . . highlife and . . . hip-hop” (2002:31). The fluidity in the transformations in hip life music is leaning towards the traditional domain of musical influence. Such influences with a global transmission occur mainly through social media.²³ This is a feat propagated by digital technology.

To experience hip life, visit Osu, a small town in Accra, where you will find a popular restaurant/pub called Container. On any Thursday through Sunday night, 6:00 pm to about 6:00 am, the hip life dose will keep your head pounding with the heavy rhythmic music. It is also possible to see the gospel aspect of hip life in a number of church, student, or family groups at religious events. This popularity affirms the observation that “[h]ip-life is an industry now in Ghana” (Chang, 2006:260). The populace are dancing and enjoying the music, which allows it to thrive locally. In terms of the identity of hip life in relation to hip hop, Eli Jacobs-Fantauzzi responded to Chang’s interview questions on how hip hop has changed in Ghana. Jacobs-Fantauzzi noted that, “[i]n Ghana they call it ‘hip-life’ because they take highlife, a more traditional music, and mix it with hip hop. Academics call it transculturalization. They’ve taken inspiration from their culture and our culture and said this is something new that we’re bringing into the world” (258). Myriad articles with hip life sub-genres can be found on the Ghana Music website (<<http://www.ghana music.com>>).

²³ Current hip life, with its outspoken lyrics, electronic instrumentation, solo artists and video clip format has become an identity symbol for the present generation of Ghanaian city youth (see “Historical Society of Ghana, Gold Coast & Togoland Historical Society.” *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana: Issues 7-9*, 2003).

Nate Ash-Morgan's (2008) "The New Hip-life Beat: Rooted in Ga Drumming"²⁴ looks at the works of the sound engineer and producer Jeff Quaye (JQ) and his incorporation of Ga musics (waka or oge, jama and kpanlogo) in hip life. Ash-Morgan also touches on samples of 6/8 agbadza support rhythms (bell and drums) found in Ei Alhaji's hip life song by the artist Jeff Bogologo, when he observed that "the singer even speaks a rhythm with percussive syllables that seem to emulate the syllables played on a Ghanaian lead drum" (8). His observation offers useful hints on mnemonic connections in the "percussive syllable" here. This can be seen in similar discourses of hybrids like highlife, juju, mbalax, or kwaito. Identifying the basic connection of hip life to hip hop as well as Ga music or Ghanaian musics in general, confirms many claims of hip life as a Ghanaian popular music of recent times (11).²⁵ In chapter three, I treat the sub genres of hip life extensively to offer a portrait of hip life music.

Shipley's (2009) article "Aesthetic of the Entrepreneur: Afro-Cosmopolitan Rap and Moral Circulation in Accra, Ghana,"²⁶ defined hip life music from an anthropological perspective. "Hiplife music in Accra, Ghana combines hip hop sampling, scratching, and rap lyricism with older forms of highlife popular music, traditional storytelling, and formal proverbial oratory" (631). His article points to meaning making within the sphere of African music making (specifically Ghana). He observed hip life's spread when he

²⁴ B.A. thesis in music, Wesleyan University, CT, 2008.

²⁵ Ghanaian musics were added to hip life beats in the early stages, but it wasn't until producers like JQ (Q-Lex studios) and artists like Obour pumped beats that emulated *Ga* drumming and dance music that hip-life became noticeably different from American hip-hop. Until the beat changed from the classic "boom bap" of American rap to the *Ga*-style, jama inspired beat, Reggie Rockstone's pure American-style hip-hop beat was king (see Ash-Morgan, 2008: 11).

²⁶ *Anthropological Quarterly* Vol. 82, No. 3, (2009): 631-668

noted that “hiplife and its mass mediated circulation provides a decentralized set of signs, practices, and performances through which Ghanaian publics reconfigure their relationship to dispersed modes of production, consumption and speaking characteristic of Ghana’s privatizing state” (631). Shipley examined three areas of hip life music: political-moral parody; Black popular culture and Pan-Africanism in relation to hip life’s emergence; and the studio production of the Mobile Boys. There are implied meanings in all three areas he addressed, which I will explore further in the following section. The multiplicity of messaging (including story telling) and use of technology as part of the global flow (influences of music media with modern technology across the world) only decentralizes the process of music making. For example, the ease with which one can record music using only a laptop and microphone. Hip life’s development empowered youth in creative paths, to bring the ancient past remixed (re-freshed) for current contemporary culture to relive in a modernized (sampled) form.

1.6.2. Three Positions in Hip Life Music

First, Shipley discusses “political-moral parody,” conveying imagery of hip life’s Africanity. He discusses the artist Sydney’s controversial songs, including *Scent No*, as metaphors to address deep political corruption (e.g., the metaphor of smell and body hygiene), the parlance (commentary) of the market, as well as communication amongst parliamentarians. He depicts the hip life “democratic” and the media-mediated

phenomenon against the backdrop of function. For example, everyone can make music²⁷ and share it on YouTube, Facebook and other social media. He notes that “hiplife artists play roles as social commentators; both tricksters and community moral advisors” (638). This plays in to Sydney’s commentary on political parties’ struggle for power for the seat of government. “In public discussions of the song the assumption was that it was a more or less indirect critique of political corruption” (638).

Shipley connects and compares West African commonalities in politics and music. “. . . Hip hop-inspired music and national politics is not unique to Ghana. In Senegal, hip hop inspired youth to link African American bravado with traditions of Griot speaking, public Islamic moral discourse, and Wolof language performance” (664). This is a recurring element in many parts of Africa. He further specified that “[i]n the 2000 national elections hip hop artists were seen as playing a role in swaying young voters to bring Abdoulaye Wade to power with a referendum tied to generational change” in Senegal (664). This resonates with E.T. Mensah’s experiences and song texts where in “the late fifties, song-texts have begun to underline patriotism and nationalism so effectively that the establishment could not underrate its political impact” (Oti, 2009:181). This was during Dr. Kwame Nkrumah’s political campaign in Ghana.

In hip life lyrics, Shipley’s reference to storytelling is good (oral) but less encompassing, what I call “messaging like drum code” – making statements that can be story, poetry, speech, chant, ululation, and so on. Hip life is pregnant (lineage/DNA) with

²⁷ He further observes the cultural critic Esi Sutherland-Addy’s notion that “hiplife gives youth swagger” making them believe that “they have the right to speak in public, whereas traditionally youth are supposed to sit down and show respect to their elders” (635).

the past and present, and projects into the future through the myriad lenses of the youth's experience as led by the Godfather of hip life, Reggie Rockstone. Rockstone "drew on the new ethos of free expression, revolutionizing Ghanaian popular music. His command of multiple symbolic registers (hip hop, highlife idioms) turned hiplife from an underground youth movement into an authoritative public speech genre and legitimized rap in the Akan language" (648). Shipley recounted a scenario where he faced some challenges of Western power and African exploitation via appropriations and perpetuations. In the context of, 50 Cent or Snoop Dog's image in the U.S. and, Sydney's in Ghana, the media influx and the rest of the baggage and joy that comes with hip hop global culture is just a reality of contemporary cultural production, more or less a localized franchise of the hip hop way of life.

As Sidney's relationship to political campaigning and his concerts across West Africa under the rubric of UNESCO's anti-child soldier initiatives demonstrate, popular culture has again gained the attention of state and non-state organizations in struggles over public opinion for the growing masses of urban youth across African cities. Institutional appropriations of hip hop idioms have influenced policy and re-shaped local and global understandings of Africanity. (643)

Hip life if anything invokes global connections and highlights blind spots, such as contemporal making of traditional music, within global practice that musically relates to Ghana or Africa. It is prudent to find a middle ground, when reviewing, to position the hip life trajectory of messaging and implications, so as to promote it for a good reason (like helping to save children in war zones).

Secondly, the talk about freedom from Dr. Kwame Nkrumah's²⁸ (1957) Pan-African total unification agenda resonates well with hip life in the contemporary artform. Connecting the Zulu nation of Afrika Bambaata and colleagues, through Rockstone's homecoming (to Ghana) to revolutionize the popular culture of Ghana ostensibly helps the idea of Nkrumah's initiative of the unity of Africa. "Hiplife reconfigures Pan-Africanism as an entrepreneurial project epitomized by the rap artist, invoking established structures of racialization in which a Black aesthetic speaks of both moral criticism and personal aspiration" (634). Shipley attends to popular culture as "the guise of a neoliberal business practice promoting individual stardom, consumption, and success over ethnic, familial, and national affiliations and older political hopes of a socialist or Pan-Africanist state" (644).

On the third note, Shipley also treated "the studio production of a remixed London hit by a group of aspiring hip lifers, the Mobile Boys" (646). He listed some Africans' interests in American/European goods, especially those from New York. These include fashion, music videos and most of the things the West is known for marketing to the world (646). The global fever for the Other's items is a worldwide fever in part drives curiosity – it is human nature. Technology, as many notable scholars have documented, including Negus (1997), Taylor (2007), and Collins (2002), has a mass-mediated role in the spread

²⁸ Nkrumah's famous statement of 6 March 1957 that the "Independence of Ghana is meaningless unless linked up with the total liberation of the African continent" re-echoes the importance of the new state's existence for Pan-African imaginaries. . . Diasporic communities" (see Shipley 2009:644-5). Shipley further touched on the fact that

Hiplife's emergence from hip hop reflects older patterns of cultural appropriation within Ghana's historical engagement with transnational discourses of Black politics and expression. African American popular culture has had a particular resonance with Ghanaian nationhood because of Ghana's historical connections to global Pan-Africanism fostered by first President Dr. Kwame Nkrumah's focus on Black economic and political unity. (Pierre 2002 in Shipley 2009:644)

of popular culture. Shipley observes of the Mobile Boys (whom I had the opportunity to meet during an interview with Rockstone) that “Urban cultural styles authorize especially male youths’ performative competence as they struggle to become socially mobile” (Ferguson 1999: 83, 95-6). Hiplife provides performative styles that give youth what Hart (1973) describes as entrepreneurial employment in Ghana’s informal economy (Shipley 2009:662). Such independent youth efforts have given ample room to utilize local traditional musics. Less ethnomusicological analysis, Shipley’s work synthesized Sydney’s music through an anthropological lens. He linked tradition and modernity that factor in the transformations of hip life genre. Shipley’s is a needed perspective in a vacuum of hip life scholarship.

Hence the full circle phenomenon (Ghanaian culture travelling to the Americas and back to Africa) is ever transforming the sounds of Ghana on many levels (e.g., hip life and highlife). Collins, Shipley, Ash-Morgan, and Falola, all shed useful light on hip life music. The hip life culture is on a steep growth trajectory. New sub genres keep the hip life discourse invigorating to readers and are useful as observations of trends in hip hop that are translated into local genres and discourses. I apply them in the weave of the oral culture, experiences from the field, and various underpinnings to elucidate the hip life message.

CHAPTER 2: LOCAL WISDOM AND THEORIES

2.1. Traditional Expressive Performative Forms

Hip life is an extension of traditional modes of cultural expression. These include libations, rituals, chants, specific clothes used by the priests, kpushimo (stomping and vocals), nyomkro (hand claps, proverbial vocals and light percussion popular with the Akans), drumming and dance groups known as “cultural groups.” Other forms of expression include festivals, choirs, jama songs, and storytelling with its interlude songs. Given the nature of the music, hundreds of people can be involved in this patriotic (e.g., sports, community, politics, and festival contexts) music making. Utilizing the call and response format, the lead singer calls out a phrase, for example (jama song):

Call:

Ka foe dan kafoe kafoedan kafoedan Don't mind, don't mind, don't mind that person

Response:

Kafoee dan Kafoee dan Don't mind, don't mind, don't mind that person
Kafoee dan sisa ntaode suonine When the ghost extends a handshake, do hide
your hand

Some jama songs are shared by the kolomashie (another version of jama, using square flat drums) in the Ga music repertoire. The rich atmosphere of the proverbial use of language, gesture and the structure of performance communication in Ghana is enshrined in the natural nuance of Ghanaian linguistics. In simple terms, a 19-year-old has a cultural expectation to present a tone that appears humble to the 40-year-olds, and not be aggressive in the dirge singing, but must be aggressive with the war song chants, whereas adults over 40 years keep a prominent lead in roles of annual festivals (*Homowo*,

Aboakyere, Ohum, Hogbetsotso), defence, love, family, and social commentary in songs. *jama* is very important to the understanding of hip life songs, timelines and singing styles.

Ghanaians cultivate a close-knit community where the age of a person determines the choice of words or scope of meaning in songs and conversation. Gender and age are factors that determine the gesture and pitch level of communication. A sharp, high, or loud voice is linked to disrespect or aggression, whereas a soft or regular voice of slow-paced conversation denotes humility or respect by traditional standards. Clear facial expressions serve as basic indicators that guide in the understanding of the intention of the communicator. Tradition does value “blunt” speech but supports diplomatic communication. For instance, a Ghanaian would not say that someone has “died,” but that the person has “visited the ancestors.”²⁹ Different manners of speech, which are also embedded in the singing style, are all played out in *jama*. General speech mode, rap mode, linguistics, libation, ritual, are all interlaced with the way and manner a cultural context is played out in both the hip life music making and traditional music making.

2.1.1. Cross Cultural Parallels to Hip Life

Hip life music exhibits ample elements of fusion, mimesis, acculturation, transculturation, and local experimentation, among other useful ways of cultural expression. It fuses regional musical styles with computer loops or programming and it

²⁹ This euphemistic way of speaking is appropriate to and used in certain contexts, for example, in announcing a person’s passing, where to be blunt could cause shock to an unexpected audience. However, in general, Ghanaians will “call a spade a spade.”

shares many stylistic and historical features with *Bhangra*, a South Asian popular music and dance form.

Fusion in popular musics and artforms has ushered in many templates of creativity, a journey pregnant with performative and cross cultural surprises. Hip life shares the same trend, through its star performer Reggie Rockstone who left England for Ghana in 1994 (discussed in chapter 3) to start his vernacular rap with hip hop beats.

Herman notes that, “amidst the world music explosion of the 1980s performers from the non-Western world were repeatedly heralded as being both exotic and accessible.” (Qtd. in Connell and Gibson 2003:151). Furthermore:

While simultaneously representing national and regional traditions, non-Western performers had invariably absorbed a range of stylistic influences from the West. There was no necessary close relationship between identity, ethnicity, place and music, even though particular genres were usually strongly tied to regions (and time periods), but a particular spatial origin was seen to imbue a degree of authenticity. (151)

Artists’ interpretations and ways of applying theory are reflected in their works and globalization influences hip life musical creation. The Ghanaian artist Obrafour maintains a proverbial courtyard language, and it takes an intelligent Akan to understand the lyrics, which are based on carefully created rhythms with a kind of R&B fused with a hip hop flavour. This resonates with our discussion on the application of local and international influences in musics. Allan F. Moore’s book *Analyzing Popular Music* (2003: 223) touches on Straw’s perspective on people, community and their musical influences. Straw expresses anxiety in an oft-quoted distinction between popular musical “community” and “scene,” and is struck by the prominence of “notions of cultural totality” and “claims

concerning the expressive unity of musical practices” in ethnomusicological writing (1991: 369). He links this to a certain tendency, particularly in subcultural theory, to posit relatively stable populations, connected organically to particular musical idioms. This is contrasted with the musical “scene,” which he defines as “that cultural space within which a range of musical practices co-exist, interacting with each other within a variety of processes of differentiation and according to the widely varying trajectories of change and cross-fertilization” (1991: 373). But Allan Moore (2003: 223) reflects that “underpinning Straw’s unease with the anthropological notion of culture is an old sense of the term, of ‘culture’ repairing the rift in communal life wrought by the ravages of ‘civilization’ (in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries) and ‘modernity’ (in the twentieth century).” This ongoing discussion on culture thus compliments my study in ethnomusicology.

2.2. Theories of Acculturation

The theory of acculturation describes interaction between diverse groups. Nourished by globalization, it is not surprising that many facets of music making, creation of dances, for example, jama, gome, adowa, azonto, have seen transformations. Graves shares this perspective: “from a psychology standpoint, acculturation has long been conceptualized as the process by which individual’s experience changes in their cultural values, behaviors, and cognitions when they come into continuous, firsthand contact with another cultural group, typically the dominant host culture” (Vol. 23:337). In the past, these changes were believed to be only one-way. Acculturation implied that individuals replaced the characteristics of their native culture with the characteristics of the dominant

host culture. Gordon (1964) described this replacement process as a form of cultural assimilation that helped immigrants more readily adapt to and fit into their new host environments. (See also Lee, Yoon and Liu-Tom, 2006)

2.2.1. Transculturation and Syncretism

The multiple events leading to cultural formations and the subsequent emergence of hybrid performative forms suggest a review of the meaning of “transculturation.” The term was first used by Fernando Ortiz in his historical treatment “On the Social Phenomenon of ‘Transculturation’ and its Importance in Cuba” in the book *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar* (1947). Ortiz compared acculturation with transculturation (98). “*Acculturation* is used to describe the process of transition from one culture to another, and its manifold social repercussions. But *transculturation* is a more fitting term.” Ortiz elaborated on this concept stating that

[T]he transculturation of . . . steady stream . . . of African[s] . . . from all the coastal regions of Africa[:] Senegal, Guinea, the Congo, and Angola [etc.] . . . snatched from their original social groups, their own cultures, destroyed . . . [by the] weight of cultures here [in Cuba]. People move with their identifiable cultures, their way of life though transformed under the above circumstances, it affects the “economic or . . . the institutional, legal, ethical, religious, artistic, linguistic, psychological, sexual, or other aspects [of] . . . life.” (98)

Concurring with Ortiz, Margaret Kartomi maintains that the “creative transformation, which may be termed syncretism, synthesis or transculturation, normally occurs as a result of convergence between cultures over prolonged period of contact” (1994: ix). Other contributions to this line of thought measure processes of popular music and factors that tend to shape music, and include Manuel’s postulate on syncretism.

Popular music, however much it may sound to the naive ear as a crude imitation of other forms, may serve as a metaphor for the creation of a distinctive world of common meanings and shared cultural ideologies on the part of the new urban classes. For the city dwellers of the developing world, neither traditional “folk” forms nor imported Western styles may fully express social identity. (1988:16-17)

This is partly evident in Accra, Kumasi, Takoradi, and Cape Coast. Ortiz states: “Rather, new musics are generated which syncretize and reinterpret old and new elements in a distinctive metaphorical expression” (16-17). This idea is shared by Barz (1995). In current artistic and cultural practice in Ghana and the sub-region, there are many traditional pieces of music that are strongly reflected in the popular forms.

2.2.2. Mimesis and Traditional Transformations in the Ghanaian Performing Arts Scene

Mimicking, covering,³⁰ and re-presenting elements of human behaviour within music are characteristic of Ghanaians. Mimetic acts are central in lifestyles and transmission modes. Children copy their parents’ habits and the same occurs in musical practices. Highlife musicians pass their knowledge from the old to the young, whereas hip life musicians pass it among the young.

This discussion of mimesis and traditional transformations seeks to explore and examine how various Ghanaian performing artists have applied mimesis, and how mimesis, whether intentional or systemic, has surfaced in their works, from the traditional music and dance scene through to the popular music scene. In Ghanaian popular culture, mimesis has taken various forms, such as sampling (the artist Tinny) and fusion (Wuta).

³⁰ Bands that play another’s music.

Exhibiting traces of hybrid music is common in local studio practices (see technology and music). This is however more evident in hip life and highlife musics.

In our daily lives, individuals mimic thoughts and emotions through conscious and unconscious actions and through various modes of expression. Steven B. Jan offers the following insight:

Richard Dawkins's 1976 classic "The selfish gene" introduced the idea that human culture is composed of units passed, by imitation, between members of a community in a manner analogous to the genes of biological forms. These fundamental units of cultural transmission, which Dawkins termed "memes," both to parallel "genes" and to suggest mimesis or imitation, exist fundamentally as patterns of neuronal interconnection in the human brain, although they are manifested in the form of patterns in the visual and aural realms, a distinction which mirrors the one between the genotype (genetic complement) and phenotype (the morphological and behavioral manifestation of the genotype) of living forms. Based on the nascent science of memetics, the meme concept is applied to music in order to outline a new theoretical perspective; potentially the basis of a new discipline one might term the evolutionary memetics of music. (1999:9)

Hence, hip life potentially embodies a meme of highlife. Though there are salient areas like aural and visual, among many other ways of biological imitation, Aristotle's *Poetics* offers a deeper insight into three different modes of imitation: "The medium, the objects, the manner or mode of imitation, being in each case distinct. . . . Dancing imitates character, emotion, and action, by rhythmical movement" (qtd. in Butcher 2007:1). The context here is epic poetry and tragedy, comedy, and dithyrambic poetry. Aristotle believed that humans have strong genetic links, as "the instinct of imitation is implanted in man from childhood" (1). I can see my childhood imitation mode in this discussion. Initially it seems there is no specific instruction on how children should imitate. It has its natural course of assimilating the events of the immediate environ. Repetition becomes a

key element for knowledge transmission in oral cultures. Mimesis is “the continuous dynamic relationship between a work of art and whatever stands over against it in the actual moral universe or could conceivably stand over against it” (Whalley 1973: 28). The existence of knowledge via mimesis applied in some Ghanaian performance practices (e.g., kpanlogo, adowa, jama, highlife and hip life) exemplifies the fact that mimesis or artistic reproduction in this context exhibits a catalytic process.

2.2.3. Mimesis and Gender in the Performing Arts

Traditionally, gender roles are delineated in music production. Women are associated with singing and dancing, while men are generally associated with playing instruments. In many instances, in most West African countries such as Ghana, women do play some musical instruments, such as drums, but not necessarily at bigger functions, although this is changing. Sometimes women play shakers or smaller instruments to support the male musicians. Women also sing and compose some of the songs, while the men sing with their deep tones to support the women’s higher voices. Today however, we also have all-women groups that perform with special attention to songs. The following case study offers specific insights on gender issues in Ghanaian performance.

The festival dance of *Bamaya*, according to some, is based on a story in which a villager abused his wife. The gods were angry and the village was plagued with famine, there was drought, the valleys were desiccated and the people were sick and starving. The spiritualists prayed to the gods and implored, “What is happening?” The gods said that the man had wronged them by what he had done to the woman. The spiritualists pleaded with

the gods, asking what they should do to reverse the trend of sickness and starvation in the community. The gods said, “You men are going to wear skirts, and when you wear skirts, you will understand what women go through, and you are going to dance and make music of *Bamaya*, a dance and music form for the women.” The skirt is such that there is an effect like colourful pompoms around the waist, to look like bouquets of flowers. The dance features shaking or wriggling to the left and to the right, panning to the left and right, and has a 5/8 timing, sounding like “Ba-Baa BIT BIT BIT”

[♪ ♪ ♪ ♪].

So the men shook and sang and imitated the flexibility of the women’s performance. The women greatly enjoyed the men’s dancing. Although it may have been a taboo at the time for men to dance, in that context, the gods demanded it. And since then, the gods gave the village plentiful food and a bumper harvest. Another version of the story ends with: “it rained and the valleys were wet.” Men have since been performing *Bamaya* at harvest time, and at other events as deemed fit.

In the Western world, some people see dancing as effeminate. Western societies tend not to encourage men to dance but rather to watch women dance. Dancing is seen to infringe on male gender identity. Some men therefore refrain from participating actively on the stage. An example is the traditional Ghanaian dance *Sekyi*, popular among the Akan, which is a flirtatious dance that plays men and women off against each other through courtship and youthful interaction. Because in the West there is often a lack of men willing to actively participate, women have played men’s roles. As much as they are skilled in mimicking the other gender, the act still loses much of its effect, because an

imitated gender role is different from the real person. The semiotic functions underlying the voices, body gestures, and aesthetic language are very important in understanding the gender world of African performance practice. Who should dance? In Ghana almost everyone dances. When *Sekyi* is performed you can even read the storyline in the facial expressions of the men and women in how they react to each other on the stage. The audience is taken on an emotionally thrilling journey as the story unfolds. This is not to underestimate women's ability to play men's roles in this context. Patience Kwakwa, a dance lecturer³¹ at the University of Ghana, offers in her description of a dancing woman that,

The poise of a woman, the slanting gaze, the elegant tilting of the neck, the rhythmic buffeting of the breasts, the subtle movements of the torso, the relaxed and beautiful sweep of the arms, the natural swing of the buttocks and gentle tread of the feet – all these give a dignified and majestic character to female dances. (1994)

In this context, the role of women in dance is elaborately defined and the female body employs all the natural characteristics that it has in the performing arts. Unpacking the constructs of the male body on the stage in the West, society can improve the ideals of male expression on the theatre/community stage as complementary to the female body on the stage. Numerous excellent works exist on this topic (see Young 2005; Bartlett 1995; Travitsky and Prescott 2000), all of which are excellent in this area. In Ghanaian dance these factors are to an extent baseless, since, while someone may participate in one form of “approved dance practice,” someone else may only participate through what could be considered “observation” to the untrained eye on the traditional level. African men dance

³¹ Patience Kwakwa taught me the intricacies of *adowa* dance, among many other traditional art forms.

in many contexts. The positioning of the discussion, in postmodern constructs of the gaze, tends to portray the gaze with multiple meanings. Hence it opens an array of different meanings for each observer.

Because of the unique (extended) family system, dance and music are an important part of the Ghanaian culture. Through events ranging from birth, celebrations, rituals, festivals, and funerals, music and dance are integral to the life of the Ghanaian. Music and dance in Ghanaian communities heal and keep the Ghanaian from experiencing what the West calls “stress.” “Stress” is a word that is not popular, or common, in Ghanaian communities. Symbolism, meaning and imitation manifest in many forms in the Ghanaian performing arts scene. There are masks that depict histories, trees that heal, sounds that relieve the soul, and chants that bring images of the supernatural close to the human heart. Art is functional of and for an indigenous people. When one imitates, enacts, or reproduces an episode of a traditional performance in a theatrical, “fourth wall”³² setting, it becomes dry, transplanted from its origin like a fish displaced from the ocean and placed on a table. In some cases the mimicking of sexuality unfolds in such a way that drumheads or the membranes come to signify the female whilst the drumsticks represent the male. Their physical interaction as a union produces specific sounds through lingual-virtuosity and is manipulated in the embedded mnemonic memory of an ethnic people in Ghana. For instance, the Akan *Atumpan* pair of talking drums has both membranes imitating/representing the male and female voices – low and high tones.

³² African performance on stage in the West uses the fourth wall – which is generally for realistic theatre where you are “looking in” to a world on stage – as if you (the audience) are observing real life.

2.2.4. The Origins and Function of Complex Music and Dance

The Ghanaian tradition can be traced to the remote human existence in Africa, and oral tradition has it fresh in our minds that we live the tradition as Ghanaians, and the tradition transforms around our daily lives. Hence hip life is symbolic of the past, present and future events of Ghanaians.

Ghanaian music reflects the daily life of the people, so, mimetically, the various elements that it imitates relate to the meanings of their songs. For instance, in the kpanlogo and gome dances, people sing about the fish that they catch during fishing expeditions. Farm products complement the fish to make a staple food. An example of such a staple is *Kenkey*, fish and hot pepper in the traditional setting of the Ga people of the coastal belt of La, Accra. This is in preparation for oshweboo lalai, or chants/songs that are sung. In such gatherings the songs exhibit colloquial call and response – social commentary about life. Imitating lived experience with music is a natural phenomenon in Africa.³³ Another form of music is the nyomkro by nyomkro groups of Akan ethnicity.

³³ Ghanaian music and dance are naturally complex-structured polyrhythmic musical forms. Katherine Dunham, an African-American choreographer, describes African dance as isolated body parts. Thus, relating to the independent movements of the torso, for example, may be different to the micro movements of the feet and hips against the backdrop of specific facial expressions. The coordination of the “isolated” by Dunham may be a Western concept, but the inner understanding of African dance movements is centrally connected and coordinated with a unique and specific feeling (spiritual, emotional, physical and musical). As a holistic African performer, I am speaking from lived experience and observation. The ethics of the tradition shape the dynamics of the dance. For example, the local ethnic group defines the boundaries of the dance movements, rhythm, language, and the eligibility of performers. (con’t on next page)

Using a cultural lens to examine a specific dance like Bawa of the Northern Region of Ghana, it is clear that African music and dance are inseparable phenomena. The speed of the dancer and the tempo of the drum language (a unique medium of communication well understood by the people involved) are electrifying. In 1990 Mustafa Tetteh Addy, a renowned Ghanaian master drummer, recorded kpanlogo music with the group World Beat and introduced it to North America. Irrespective of ethnicity, religion or gender, today many performing groups perform these dances and songs and play the drum rhythms. Ghanaian traditional dances have really come far, in the sense that they are taught in many schools and universities across the world. Community African performing groups dot these continents.

Nyomkro music reflects some of the weaving methods of the Kente fabric, which is a royal fabric in the Ashanti kingdom. That takes us into symbolism, and this symbolism touches on semiotic functions as the making of the fabric creates a 5/4 musical sound like “kro, kro, kro-hee-kro [♪ ♪ ♫ ♫].” The process of weaving generates this music naturally from the loom that the craftspeople use. These movements, which are also borrowed from some of the movements of the Ashanti people in singing songs of their daily lives, mimic the process of making the fabric, which in turn generates some of the lyrics in their musical repertoire (as in the nyomkro song). Carvings on the various s also mimic some of the symbols of the great leaders and paraphernalia associated with the Ashanti court practices (frontonfron, adowa, kete music and dance). When one travels a little up north in Ghana, into the Dagbon area, one comes across carvings depicting the bamaya traditional dance that is based on the story told earlier in this chapter, as well as the hills and valleys receiving rains or the meandering river that keeps the vegetation wet. The aforementioned basis has served as rich background to highlife music, and more recently, hip life music.

2.2.5. Pre- and Post-Colonialism and the Performing Arts

In Ghana, life is characterized by intimacy with nature.³⁴ A natural dialogue between humans and nature inspires creativity in which the wind, water, flying birds, etc., are imitated as complementary partners in the animal kingdom. It is a kingdom that is constantly and metaphysically in tune with a dynamic musical reality. The Chieftaincy

³⁴ Though cities are just a fraction of the African places in this context, the majority of Africans share some intimate socially connected lifestyle.

institution in Ghana is older than the democratic incumbency (practiced from the late 1950s) and shows how the ancestors kept order in various ethnic communities. With the intrusion of Europeans on Ghanaian soil, namely the Portuguese, Dutch and British, came colonization and infamous aspects of Ghanaian history; but these countries also brought with them their various ballroom dances and Western instruments, such as brass instruments, which also surfaced during the highlife period, with E. T. Mensah. The 1960s marked a special moment in the life of music where many genres and forms melded in the various Ghanaian cities such as Accra, Kumasi, Takoradi, Cape Coast, and Elmina.

Today many schools and colleges have brass band ensembles in which music written for symphony orchestra is taught. Currently most of the traditional harmonies imitate church hymns. Theorist Kofi Agawu calls this “tonal colonization” in his book *Representing African Music* (2003). Composers such as Ephraim Amu have composed most of their songs, including the Ghana National Anthem, *Yen Ara Asaseni*, in western-style harmony. This is a clear indication of tonal colonization or “borrowing” in the 1960s. However, the youth have their own frequency within which they operate in the music world.

In the pop music world the youth of Ghana blend rap against the backdrop of hip-hop’s heavy beats. Many youth are caught up in this modern world of trying new exotic music or trying the Other, such as youth of Asian descent in South Hall, London who find themselves in the new genre of music, which is blending hip-hop and Punjabi music into *Bhangra*. I draw on this instance to confirm the fact that today’s generation of artists has revolutionized music (both of Ghanaian and Western origin). With similar happenings in

the ever-changing musical world in every culture, the aesthetic ornaments of the music do change, as there are, most of the time, various layers of imitation, thus with fusion and reproduction in an artwork.

2.2.6. Music and Dance for Film and Video

In the 1980s, a very active Ghanaian music scene got a boost from the film industry, resulting in increased consumption. Local films like *Love Brew in African Pot* (1981) by Kwao Ansah received a great deal of attention from the public. In this film the sound effects imitate Hollywood-style effects, and the soundtrack of the movie also resonates with the same idea of imitation in Ghanaian musics. Music videos of highlife musicians such as Ben Brako employ western-style harmonies. The stage used at Ghana Film Studios contains a setting with blue drapes and multicolored lighting. These are two examples of the influence of European and American styles in the performing arts industry.

Technological advancements from developed countries have surfaced in Ghanaian communities inside and outside of Ghana. Some filmmakers (including Kwao Ansah) and their collaborators have exhibited a high sense of creativity in employing music and dance in many modes to mimic the plots, lifestyles, locations, moods, loves, and social commentaries of the day. Ghanaian television programs such as the drama *Akan* offer storylines on family and social issues and comment on the daily lives of Ghanaians.

Living in one's identity, close to one's original state, or one's self, without masking one's self, is a general platform for mimetic production. It is quite normal to

imitate what one is exposed to, be it smiles, cries, language, music making or eating habits, etc., within one’s immediate environment. However modes of mimetic production may include reproduction of fashion, dramaturgy, singing, acting, and dancing. The fashions of the early 1960s have resurfaced in current times, such as pants with “A” shape designs. Styles such as this have been enhanced as they are linked to old-time highlife in the Ghanaian and Nigerian popular music scenes. In contemporary Ghana, most popular artists have a video or two of their singles or collaborations. A quick sample on March 19, 2010 of the top ten music videos (posted on Ghanamusic.com) of Ghanaian artists includes:

1. <i>Leave Me Alone</i> by Mimi, featuring 4x4
2. <i>W’Awhie Mogya</i> by Juliana Acheampong
3. <i>The Game</i> by Obour, featuring Okyeame Kwame & Richie
4. <i>Nyornuviade</i> by Edem, featuring Kwabena Kwabena
5. <i>Daa Ke Daa</i> by Becca
6. <i>When I Get U</i> by Richie, featuring Asem
7. <i>Babe</i> by Sarkodie featuring Mugeez
8. <i>Like Father Like Son</i> by Konfi
9. <i>ABC (Ghana Reads campaign)</i> by Obour
10. <i>Pigaro (Club version)</i> by Asem

Table 1. Top Ten Music Videos (Ghanamusic.com Mar. 19, 2010)

The above list, which features hip life artists, shows the popularity that this music has attained. The numerous listings in the Ghanaian tabloids and radio shows, and the TV versions of the videos strike a departure from the past – where musicians had only cassettes on the market. With the spread of inexpensive imported camcorders and other

digital equipment, artists are now able to rent a camera for about 20-30 dollars a day, and can shoot their music videos more easily and economically.

Depending on the creative level of the artist, the new ones apprentice with the established ones in the hope of learning the path to stardom. The level of enthusiasm that these artists share on and off camera demonstrates improved artist-media relationships where they exhibit a good sense of performance without direction as to how to pose, project vocals, dress to suit the genre as well as convey confident-artistry without any synthesizers behind the stage. On-the-spot a cappella demonstration of their song-excerpts offered me a glimpse into their world of musiking.

2.2.6.1. Life Style: Mimic Plots

In this section I will look at the plots that are mimicked. The average lifestyle of the Ghanaian is simple, as the culture encourages cleanliness or healthy practice in all spheres. Whatever people's situations may be, they share commonalities. Ghanaians love music and dance. I have visited social gatherings of Ghanaians of all profiles and all faiths across the Western diaspora and have found that the joy in the eyes of people participating in entertainment, be it hip life, highlife or traditional music, is quite remarkable.

Observing children learn dance steps from the people who are singing along with the dance moves reminds us of the roots of academic knowledge from life. It portrayed to me the mutual essences, by youth and adults, of having a socially-knitted community that fosters kinship in an effortless (no bureaucracy) fashion. That said, the adults also intern and tend to learn some of the singing styles of the youth, since they also want to feel

young sometimes. So the interplay-mimicking here is a fascinating performative discourse of life experience.

The popular folktales of *Ananse* (spider) are imbued with plots that mimic lifestyles as well as social experiences. One story tells of *Ananse* and his brother *Ntikuma*, who each met an old woman in the woods on separate occasions. She gave them the same very specific instructions. *Ntikuma* obeyed the instructions very well, and upon completing the task he found a gold piece worth millions of Ghana Cedis. At home he called his brother and offered to share a portion of the wealth. *Ananse* agreed but insisted that he would get his own piece of gold. When *Ananse* met the same old woman, he was given the same instructions, but took shortcuts. In completing the task, he found a glittering object. He kept quiet over the find, did not share it with his brother, who then gave him half of his own gold. *Ananse's* lie caught up with him when the old woman returned, the glittering object turned out not to be gold, and he was punished.

Though the story speaks to many issues, the attempt of *Ananse* to repeat, if not copy, his brother with a different motive relates to issues of mimicking, trying something done by another person. While he did some of the tasks, his greed gave him away and the repercussions that ensued (social control) point out that the rules that govern a practice must be obeyed. Yet we know from musical practice of the freedom of trying new things as well as mimic plots (such as the main plot of a movie) of events. However that is true,

good intentions in the creative process may have longevity in the bigger scheme of things.³⁵

To cite another example of social experiences that use stories, Nana Ampofu Adjei and Amekye Dede, among others, are known in Ghana for incorporating stories that project the values of the Ghanaian culture and, at times, food for thought, into their highlife music. Some of the themes are love and life, jealousy in relationships, greed among people, hunting tales of adventure, and history of ethnic origins. Just as life may be full of drama, the same is reflected in the musical and thematic mimicking of the plots to shape current issues in the community. Since lifestyle (hip life) includes fashion, it would be useful to explore how fashion is incorporated in performance and beyond.

2.2.6.2. Fashion, Singing and Acting Reproduction

Hip life and hip fashion are features of today's cultural fabric in Ghana. The highlife trend has helped, in its way, to shape hip life fashion. These (hip life and highlife) include fashion jeans, Ghanaian-themed tops for women, bracelets that incorporate contemporary Ghanaian designs as well as pan-African sensibilities and styles, earrings, braided hair, and piercing (though some are ancient practices in different contexts) of the nose, eye brow, navel, and other body parts. The reproduction of this modern fashion in the cities and towns of Ghana, as well as in some villages, opens the doors for questions such as: How, and why have the fashion trends changed?

³⁵ A capitalist mode of music making may differ from the above because, depending on the producer's capability to promote a particular music to a broader audience, the creative process may not guarantee the popularity of the artists.

Major media outlets such as Metro TV, TV3 and Ghana Television have also fostered the global mix of cultural trends. For instance, the influence of TV and the exposure of designers to local and foreign designs factor in their creativity or mimetic trends. St. Osei fashions, Okujetor fashions, and other designers have supported Miss Ghana pageants with breathtaking imagery.

When we look at the way Mzbel of hip life-fame dresses, one may say she is the “Madonna of hip life.” Travels to Europe and elsewhere also influence artists’ understanding and representation, based on their exposure and spaces of engagement. Artists then return to Ghana wearing new styles that they have picked up in other countries, which initiates new trends among their fans and peers. In a place with tropical temperatures, shorts, mini-skirts and the rest of the attire that come with it have come to dominate hip life culture. The artist Obuor is noted for using traditional fabrics, royal paraphernalia, as well as traditional adowa drumming as part of his grand entrance, and singing in *Twi* as well as having the proverbial appellations played on the *atumpan* talking drums. In this way we see that artists in many forms play a major role in creating works based on specific exposures.

2.2.6.3. Inventing Music and Dance

Inventing music or dance is a daily practice in most parts of Ghana. As I grew up, any morning that I jogged to the La beach I would find groups of boys and girls training on the sand. Some would be trying out vocals, others dancing, others playing soccer and others training partners in acrobatics. This gym comes with a life membership. When I

reflect over these encounters now, sitting in my Toronto home, I smile, missing all those great times and observations. In short, the spaces of creative expression are everywhere in Ghana. I was once chatting about the creative process with Reggie Rockstone. He told me that he has been training young people to take over the mantle of hip life music, and that when they were ready they would be sharing their unique take on it (p.c. 2007). In another conversation, the instrumentalist Dela Botri reported that he is using only Ghanaian traditional instruments to make hip life music (p.c. 2001, see sub genres in Chapter 3). Botri's creative process employs local instruments for the drums, percussion and flute melodies that back the vocals. His efforts have reinvented music making in a way, and yet others might argue that Botri is mimicking Western instruments (some of which mimicked Ghanaian instruments earlier, e.g., traditional to synth and back). However, the debates are endless in the sense that creative processes in Ghana are canonized with Ghanaian standards. That they might borrow from each other occasionally through fusions is obvious. To understand, one needs to figure out how the dynamics work in the creative mimicking process in music and dance, a cultural perspective in Ghana.

The Ghana Showtime Boys performance group (led by Alex Otu), (and recent azonto popular dance) has consistently utilized traditional music and dance repertoire and contemporary music and dance elements to create their works, by crafting a fusion of different ethnic dances and musics. The dances bawa, fume fume, kpanlogo, gome, kanja, and others (from Dagbon, Ga-Dangme ethnic groups) are carefully blended with hip hop movements to shape a pan-African hybrid dance form. The song tracks that these dances use are, in some instances, mixed tracks by DJs involving highlife, hip life, funk, drums or

the traditional horns, mension, and so on. We see that mimesis occurs in dance forms, music, fashion, and other creative processes in Ghana.

You can't do without technology so far as mimesis is concerned (e.g., mass/social media music duplication and downloads). The residue of colonization and post modernism, saturated in advanced mass media technology, has taken the performing arts scene to many levels ranging from traditional music during festivals and other ceremonial occasions, to the popular music scenes of highlife, hip life, and hip hop. Modernism invisibly permeates and invades indigenous cultural practices, to some extent. Mass media embodies traces of the above-stated phenomena constructed on imported Western television advertisements and free foreign channels that promote foreign values and interests. It is imperative to recognize that Ghana has become hooked on mass media and its contents. Foreign sponsored channels on Ghanaian television networks and similar commercials on many radio stations highlight products from outside. For instance, Nike or Reebok labels are well known in many rural villages, though the village may not even have a television set. The mode of presentation of some of these advertisements, using an atmosphere of Hollywood musical performance, makes some Ghanaian youth think their consumption of such items psychologically takes them to such places (a mirage). One can say that, all Americans are not necessarily living the American dream like a few in Hollywood etc., so understanding the systemic Hollywood marketing can be helpful in strategic music decisions. This is similar to hip-hop music and world cultures.

Very often the dress code of the Ghanaian hip-hop music scene has nothing to do with typical Ghanaian traditional value, but is an imitation and assimilation by the

younger generation seeking foreign cultural values. It is good to learn and share the arts of every nation but where power is imbalanced, the influence of heavy capitalism and the embedded brain drain are at play, and the consciousness of retrieving endangered traditional values must be rescued and promoted. Thus because people's preserved culture shapes a living destiny for of their next generation. Among the latest trends, a few of the hip life artists are tending to show increased elements of the Ghanaian culture in their musics; for example, Obrafuor and his poetic lyrics, and King David with the jama feel (see section 2.1. for a description of jama). In the broader scheme of things, traditional performing arts practice is the real life upon which the chain of imitated forms rest. It is interesting how Sony Achiba, a Ghanaian hip-life artist, imitated the *tabla* beats of Punjabi music, and also reproduced hip-hop beats in his song *Agwen pa* (Akan, meaning "positive mind"). The act of imitation by choice is a useful tool without boundaries of creativity, because it brings the world much closer together.

People from different cultures can easily relate to one generic hip-hop beat as they assimilate and innovate additional styles and ornaments. However, the onus is on the creator of the hybrid music form to understand and explain the perspective in emphasizing the components and historical values that shaped the strands of the woven basket – the music (e.g., synopsis or liner notes can be used in that direction).

Musicians in Ghana and abroad have in the course of their trade used (or created) patterns mimetically. Whether we are speaking of an intern, a trainee, or an understudy who uses hands-on experience or takes a class – all employ a level of mimicking in their music making. This helps to assimilate specific nuances of Ghanaian music from their

mentor and teacher. Tourism in Africa in general and Ghana in particular has also played a role in music making. In a chat with Guy Warren, or “Ghanaba,” he said he performs his music when he feels like playing his divine rhythms. Though he has toured the world performing, he still insists on traditional instruments, although he also borrows certain techniques from the West (p.c. 1999; see also Veal 2000: 48). Kwao Mensah, E.T. Mensah and Koo Nimo, T.O Jazz, Mr. A.A.A. (Akwesi Ampofu Adjei), E.K Nyame and Western Diamonds Band are some of the well-known and respected Ghanaian artists that have used guitar, saxophones and other imported musical instruments in their works. Though their music is popular among Ghanaian societies they have shifted gradually toward ballroom music from Europe.

Palm wine music takes its name from the beverage, which is naturally brewed fresh from the palm tree. It has a special quality for listening pleasure. The basis of palm wine music’s influence on highlife music is evident in current Ghanaian popular music forms. The bell, clave and *Yaa Amponsah* melodies points to this commonality over time. On another note but similar thread, this study observed that, pretending to live the high life style has some Ghanaians mimicking European expatriates in their suits, ties, shoes, and hairdos, in local settings. In the midst of the cultural transformations happening in Ghana, mass media projects foreign values with local traditions. The mimesis of this Western connection and Ghanaian palm wine music is an example of the crossroads of change: technology, media, (re-)presentation, etc., in the twentieth century.

2.3. Applied Theories of Representation

The learning, observation and practice of an activity, skill, style, or an event in the field is followed, in most cases, by the presentation or re-presentation, in an array of ways, of the original study. Peirce (1966: 155) defines representation as follows: “Represent: to stand for, that is, to be in such a relation to another that for certain purposes it is treated by some mind as if it were that other.” Given that the discussions on representation here are mainly positioned in the performing arts, I follow Born and Hesmondhalgh’s (2000:40) view that,

[p]erhaps the most theoretically challenging mode of musical representation is the kind of concrete quotation or “objectification” of another music found in forms such as musical montage, juxtaposition, pastiche, and parody. Here, representation of the other music is set within the bounded “identity” of the encompassing style; this is always a knowing (and in this sense self-reflective) allusion, a purely musical representation of another, distinct musical style or culture.

The level of musical objectification speaks to the ways in which music can be replayed in another space, hoping to achieve the same nuances and reception. The authors also acknowledge other works in the representation discourse on music, noting that,

primitivisms and exoticisms are augmented by the visual iconography, marketing, and lyrics of world and fusion music acts; the prime place accorded by Pasler, Bohlman, Stokes, Hesmondhalgh, and Feld to technologies of sound reproduction (early recordings, print media, cassettes, samplers) in appropriative and representational strategies: all of these speak to the methodological necessity of attending to music’s mediations and their complex juxtapositions and disjunctures [T]his is more than a dry analytical proposal and can inflect an urgent politics. (38)

Though digital representation may be a partial factor in the process of representation, these mediations have transformed the face of representation on many levels. Ted Solís (2004) acknowledges the challenges of representation as he looks at the

gamelan practice, in and out of its locale in the book *Opportunity and Interaction: The Gamelan from Java to Wesleyan*. He notes that, “We will never really make our gamelan performances ‘Yogyanese,’ or our marimba events ‘Chiapanecan.’ Apology is futile . . . for not being what one can never be? We profit more from accepting and examining our inevitably shaping roles” (11). In the case of hip life music, the representations, mediations, and attempts to play music that traces and represents highlife, hip hop, reggae, dancehall, R&B, etc., can be just playing a typical hip life music form. The traces found in some of hip life’s musical representations are broad. Sydney Ofori’s (and Morris Babyface’s) “Africa Money” track from the 2007 *Barima bi ba* (“A certain man is coming”) album employs Yoruba juju music, stylistic features of Kanda Bongoman’s sukous music, *Twi*, French, and Pidgin English.

“Africa Money” encompasses and represents sociopolitical underpinnings in lyrics that comment on corrupt practices on the African continent and beyond. (See Appendix A 2 for the complete lyrics to this song.) The song describes workplace scenes where the floor workers work for nothing while some executives give themselves raises and bonuses. The inappropriate actions in terms of leadership or governance will be accounted for when the sheriff (supposedly the genuine person that protects society) will come to check the books. He calls for a revolt, to weed out the tricksters in society. When Sydney (with Babyface) addresses such political issues through music, he calls attention to and seeks a change in leadership practices. He does this as a Ghanaian insider advocating for transparency and democracy. However, a similar attempt from outside of Africa may face a different interpretation and issues of representation.

When the musical representations of an identity come to be reinterpreted and debated discursively, as well as “reinserted” as representations into another changing social-cultural formation (as Stokes 1992 shows for *Arabesk*, and Brown 2007 for Bartók’s reading of gypsy musics), then a careful explanation is useful in presenting the work. This form also sums up the primary macrohistorical, transformative dynamic to which all musics are subject: that is, how musics become subject to inevitable historical processes of reinterpretation and then reinsertion into the changing sociocultural formation – a kind of discursive and practical reflexivity around music (Born and Hesmondhalgh 2000:36). Along the same line, the hip life artist A Plus (Kwame Obeng Asare Baffour 2008) produced his *Letter to the West* album/song, which addresses broader political issues as well as those similar to Sydney’s message. Baffour attempts to represent a section, e.g., the anti corruption, of society (just as Fela Kuti did) with his piece (see Appendix A 7).

The element of advocacy in *Letter to the West* speaks to humanitarian as well as environmental discourses that seek to protect Africa. Touching on internal Ghanaian politics and external influences that feed off each other, Baffour is concerned as to when there will be genuine resolution to Ghanaian and global problems. Dictatorship, oppression, malnutrition, and war have plagued Africa. The voice of the musician addressing these important issues through the medium of hip life promotes social responsibility. Baffour and Sydney give a voice to the voiceless (representation on deeper issues) as well as question the insincerity, power abuse, selfishness, in and out of Africa. It is evident that informed, sustainable solutions are needed in Africa’s complex political

situations. They argue these resolutions can be achieved through partnerships rather than “parachuting” in aid.

2.3.1. Representation: Ghanaian Music and Dance in Fusion and Practice

Many artists and other people incorporate elements and components of African music, dance, songs, costume, and storylines into their works. One could say that they take what they want and use it as they wish or practice cultural appropriation. It is excellent to try new things and to push new barriers in this day and age, but also to understand what they are doing, so that they do not mix oil and water, so to speak. Should they attempt mixing, the synopsis (thus a brief information, text or verbal, in the concert brochure if possible for their audience) of their work must highlight which borrowed components they are using and justify why, to those interested in knowing such information.

Fusion music, in the case of hip life and highlife, could utilize a deconstruction analysis that renders the genre as a well-defined and represented art form. Fusion music draws on the tradition of a people. One (e.g., anyone) cannot just look at aesthetics and assume that they are the same across the continent. There is the need to understand, and fortunately there is some scholarly research around the world today that speaks to changes to tradition in fusion music. Today, the world is smaller. Through the internet, including a few people in the villages that have cell phones that can access the internet, one can easily ask questions and cross-check with researchers and others institutions so that appropriate credit is given for music by performers or researchers.

In the twenty-first century, representation has taken on many dimensions and shades, such that the nature of musical composition or fusion, and choreographic elements may be a puzzle to unlock in view of representation against the backdrop of validity. Ethnomusicologist David Locke's discussion on "The African Ensemble in America: Contradictions and Possibilities" (see also Solis 2004:181) posits that,

Directors of world music ensembles face distinctive issues of interpretation and reception. Verisimilitude in musical detail does not ensure that a performance works as an authentic representation of African music-culture. We are performing works that are honed over many generations by a community of taste rather than unique products of one sensibility. Style has authority. Should resemblance to the original be compromised so that the concert is entertaining? What do I want students to achieve? I want their musical personalities to become Africanized. An Africanized musician values repetition, hears polyrhythmically, and plays interactively.

The above position requires some commentary from informed African. In this context I would suggest the language-journey as a crucial step, without formulating templates of understanding but rather learning the little nuances that make up the personality of a performer whose work we are performing within the local cultural context. Such context opens cultural music and dance discussions within the bigger structure of the lifestyle of Africans. Simply put, the puzzle of better analysis of "trying to be" an African performer in a specific context can take on a meaningful role. After the elements such as that make the music complete are placed in a specific Ghanaian context of temperature, humidity, dust, the ululation and drinks that come with the performance. Hence the time frame for changes in the music, and accepting repetitions serve as a journey to understanding improvisation (because each breath you take is never repeated and are all different). A command of the language that coordinates the various parts of the music, links it to

specific dancers who know this language. The representation is painted as a re-emergence of the reality so far as there is good listening in the performance to correct these inner qualities. This is part of myriad ways of representing Ghanaian music outside Africa.

In a melting-pot of music or fusion, Indian rhythms such as *Bhangra* emerged as incorporated through the creative composition of a piece by Achiba, a Ghanaian artist, where the heavy beats are hip hop-based with the lyrics in the *Twi* language of the Ashanti people. The rhythm is more of hip hop music, sharing world flavors of *Twi* traditional language with the English rhymed in and structured in poetry. Achiba also infuses Indian-influenced melodies and drones in the background of his music.

The tone of the lyrics is mostly aggressive with expressions reflecting on many subjects: politics, economy, and social commentary. The underlining representative element is the culture of hip hop as Ghanaian-derived form of practice that morphs well with modernity to produce an ever-creative performative expression in music, dance, and fashion, among others – thus re-copying and fusing what emerged earlier from Africa to America back to Africa over time. African music has transformed across generations to surface in a variety of modes around the world, as can be seen in a Grove Music Online *Acid Jazz (ii)* posting.

Acid jazz, [is] a musical subculture of the late 1980s and 90s. Acid jazz is largely a fusion of black American musical styles such as funk, soul and hip-hop combined with a visual aesthetic which borrows extensively from both British popular culture of the 1960s and black American street style of the 70s. (n.d. n.p.)

The combination and the time period of acid music transformations have reflected black American music in a variety of forms. This development, in part, shared its representation

across the world through any others playing acid jazz. The very element in acid jazz that evokes the African-ness speaks to history.

2.3.2. Modes and Theories of Representation

To a certain degree, there is always freedom of creation in the arts. Reviewing the subject of language, which is a key factor in representation, I examine some documentation that sheds light on how a tradition is represented. Changes in perspectives of representation can alter formats. Identity, language, social context, and the influence of playing with text, all factor into the process of documentation. In the collaborative work done by Obo Addy and Timothy Taylor in the book *Global Pop: World Music, World Markets* (1997), Taylor admits to the nuances omitted in his transcription of their piece *Wawshishijay*, meaning “our beginning” in Ga. I found their article good but it happened that the spelling was incorrect (see the Ga letters below: *wawshishijay* which should read: *Wɔ̃ ʃi ʃi j ee* in Ga).

Character in Ga alphabet	Phonetic Pronunciation
j [dʒ]	[zay]
Y [j]	[Y'jay]
gb [gb]	Bee
gw [g ^w]	Gua
Hw [h ^w]	Hwe
Jw [dʒ ^w]	Je
Kp [kp]	Pe
Kw [k ^w]	Que
Ny [n]	Inye
Dw [ɲ ^w]	Inn
Sh [ʃ]	Shish

ɔm [ɲm]	Imm
ts [tʃ]	Tsetse
shw [ʃ ^w]	Schwe
tsw [tʃ ^w]	Chew

Table 2. Digraphs and Trigraphs: The Ga Language at a Glance (source: Wikipedia, 2009. emphasis added)

There are some letters that represent sounds that do not correspond with the same letter as in the International Phonetic Alphabet. For instance, in Ga, the letter “b” represents the sound “berh.” The emphasis that I’ve added with the bolded letters (in the above table is my attempt to represent the pronunciation of the Ga alphabet in the English language. Given this brief tutorial on the Ga language³⁶ to elucidate meaning on my comments, *waw* or *wa* in Ga means “finger,” “our,” and a place – *Wa* in the Northern Region of Ghana. *Shishi-jay* means “beginning,” “starting point,” or “from scratch.” So the local Ga people, or anyone who reads Ga, may interpret *wawshihijay* as “finger beginning.” In effect there is no sense in this statement to convey meaning to readers. But an anthropologist from the West may view it from a Western phonological paradigm, which might allow written pronunciations as heard from a Western perspective. On one hand, who is the audience here, and why? Indicators point to the West but in this forum I seek to include the traditional locale from which an age-old practice has existed for today’s “plug-ins” or experiments.

This speaks to the issue of editing by the author. With an insider Ga (Addy, native) collaborating with an American (Taylor, author), I would assume that Addy would have

³⁶ This discussion of Ga language translation is to foster a better interpretation of my point. A Ghanaian reader or Western scholar may demand a reason for learning the basic alphabet at this forum. The answer is to share information the way the tradition demands.

had some influence in correcting such a mistake. There are many Ga speakers in both Ghana and America that can clarify Ga words when consulted. Currently wikipedia.com offers some Ga fonts, so a crosscheck with another Ga person might have prevented this error. Who is supposed to be responsible for any Ga language misrepresentation here? It could be one or both, depending on how the error is viewed. The initial concept of creating awareness is good. I regard all the participants above highly and focus on the issues tabled, not the personalities involved. Since knowledge is a process, we learn from our and others' mistakes in order to correct or prevent them. In my opinion, issues of authority may be at play in the premises example, or just an oversight. The one who has a part in the finalization of the material published has to take responsibility ultimately for misrepresentation in the work, and its effects on those represented. Although a researcher may not be a native speaker and may use native speakers as a source, the fact remains that it is the writer's work, which lives on in text forever, becoming "truth" about a subject. Although such errors can be corrected in the form of book reviews, articles, dissertations, which provide "checks and balances" to a certain degree, those secondary publications may never be seen by a reader who accesses the original work and takes it as "truth."

My research seeks to address and infuse efficient models that can correct or prevent things that are misleading: "lest they now be accepted as historical fact, a few corrections on the record should be made" as cautioned by Conyers (XXVI: 6). In the wake of advanced developments and extra care taken in most scientific research, ethnomusicologists and user agencies might seize the opportunity to revise various methodologies of representation for the attainment of harmony and respect of different

perspectives. Even though “we are then free to choose whether to reflect on that concept [of what we see as original representation], or to direct ourselves toward some other part of the same representation” (Lagerlund, qtd. in Bakker and Thijssen, 2007:75), it is all hinged on honest representation.

It is necessary to keep a balance between the subject’s (e.g., Addy, or the hip life musicians) opinions as well as academic views. Just to *keep it real*. The accounts of Seyan (in Downing and Bazargan, 1991:237) reveal the perspective that in the “essence of truth in representation, Benjamin valorizes representational form as the actual realm of ideas.” Thus the general view, or its form, is obviously different from a detailed analysis – of Ghanaian hip life musics’ content, or position for instance.

Globalization threatens indigenous languages, the very nutrients of and conduit for the musician’s lyrics. With time, traditional melodies, certain drum beats, ululations or chants become part of the popular culture and create their own folkloric fabric. When someone in the culture hears a melody, they understand all the stories that come with it. Though music itself speaks, the “communicative element” (see Nketia, 2005:272) of language in hip life music shares this popular/folkloric fabric with that of highlife as well as traditional music.

2.4. Authenticity in Hip Life

The topic of authenticity has sparked heated debate on the airwaves in the urban centers of Accra, Kumasi, and Tamale, where artistic work is critically assessed. This might be due to the fact that Ghana is a nation with abundant music making skills. Many

scholars have discussed authenticity in relation to music, including Victor Kofi Agawu's (2003:195) queries on the "violation" of authenticity through ethnographic knowledge production in Willie Anku's works. Similarly, Paul Gilroy (1993:199) touches on the "crude" position of Africa's "purity" and authenticity to the Americas, as Ian D. Biddle and Vanessa Knights (2007:41-44) treat authenticity and mediation in African music in and out of Africa. This brings to the fore Francis Bebey's (1999:1, 33) advice on safeguarding the authenticity of traditional music from modern inroads. René T. A. Lysloff and Leslie C. Gay (2003:101) look at competition performance outside the village and within the village, while Tejumola Olaniyan (2004:48, 215) reviews Fela Kuti's music as representational of the grass roots, hence a boost (to his music). Rehan Hyder (2004:67) notes the Western desire to consume "world music," hence fostering demand for newer hybrids and thus a shift from authenticity. On the other hand, Ronald Michael Radano and Philip Vilas Bohlman (2000:29-30) discuss the diasporic authenticity in American performance and the construction of the neomythology of rescuing musics.

Leach maintains that, "[t]he notion of authenticity has been a source of moral and artistic value attributed to the commercial underdog at every point in history of popular music" (2001: 143-167). A person's morality is expected in Ghanaian society to be reflected in the acknowledgements of the borrowed elements that make a "new" version, rather than claiming authenticity of the level of the original source of the borrowed element. These issues play out in all art forms. "The term 'authenticity' can also be applied, as in the popular art world, to works that are proved to be genuine, demonstrated by the work of a particular composer" (see *Authenticity*, Grove Music online, n.p.). Ghana

is a country full of music, song and dance, so whatever an artist stages has to be (re)viewed through many lenses, ranging from cultural, social status, gender, religion, educational and geographical location, and upbringing (whether exposed to broad musics or traditional music only). For instance, Thomas Solomon offered in 2005 that “Turkish hip-hoppers use the globally circulating music genre of rap and the associated arts of hip-hop to construct a specifically local identity, re-emplacing rap and hip-hop within the landscape of Istanbul” (1). Questions of authenticity may not receive a deserving answer because re-emplacing rap in a Turkish popular music becomes a Turkish take on hip hop, which builds a better reception over time and space. This, however, might not sound authentic to hip hoppers in the Bronx.

It must however be pointed out that “one man’s meat is another man’s poison” (in Tic Tac’s self-titled album). A section of conservative Ghanaians who proclaimed highlife as authentic and condemned hip life have, over a period of about twelve years, found that hip life’s variety of sub genres have deep connections to Ghanaian traditional music at their roots, despite their “hip-hop-y” sound. For example, Obrafour, Kwaw Kese, Tinny, Samini, Lord Kenya, Reggie Rockstone, Castro, and Obuor all display authentic Ghanaian traditional elements in their music. These musicians employ in-depth knowledge of the Ghanaian languages they use. For instance, an elder may know a traditional proverb, whereas the youth on the street may speak certain slang but not understand all the ancient proverbs. These artists are able to integrate possible spheres of the Ghanaian language – putting an ancient proverb into contemporary slang for the youth to digest. It is not confirmation of theory that makes a Ghanaian believe that this sound is rooted or not

rooted in Ghanaian culture, but the experience of their music as part of a lifestyle allowing one to determine within seconds what that sound is to the ear, the heart and the mind – a holistic embodiment of realism. Any popular music has different hybrid forms, but the local components of the lyrics as well as the application of the synthesized backing, nuanced by traditional drumming, as well as the clave patterns, also defines the identity and authenticity of the music.

With a contrary view on the authenticity of hip life, Greg Mingle of the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation claims that hip life music is “not making any inroads, because the rhythm itself, the rhythm is not yours. And since the rhythm is not yours, my brother, how are you going to be accepted? You know the outside crowd wants to feel a music they haven’t heard before” (p.c. 2007). Mingle believes that hip life artists are copying hip hop rhythms (in the bigger historical context). On one hand he is correct, because he is taking up the thread from the point of hip hop emerging from the Bronx. He did not emphasize that hip hop rhythms have their roots in African traditional music.

Hip lifer Lord Kenya debunks Mingle’s assertion with his definitive view that he incorporates the African nuance with the mic, computer and so forth (p.c. 2007). Jay Q’s works, with their jama traditional rhythmic structures (that are indigenous to Ga) also challenge the position that hip life will not stand the test of time. I have been monitoring hip life over at least ten years, and am seeing growth and development. Recording engineer/producer Panji Anoff’s observations confirm this as well, when he comments on the hip life song “You May Kiss the Bride,” which “is a popular current song but the rhythm of the song is actually a traditional Ga song . . . it’s traditional music. So hip life

does draw very heavily upon traditional music, especially in terms of the rhythmic structures and the beats that they use” (p.c. 2007).

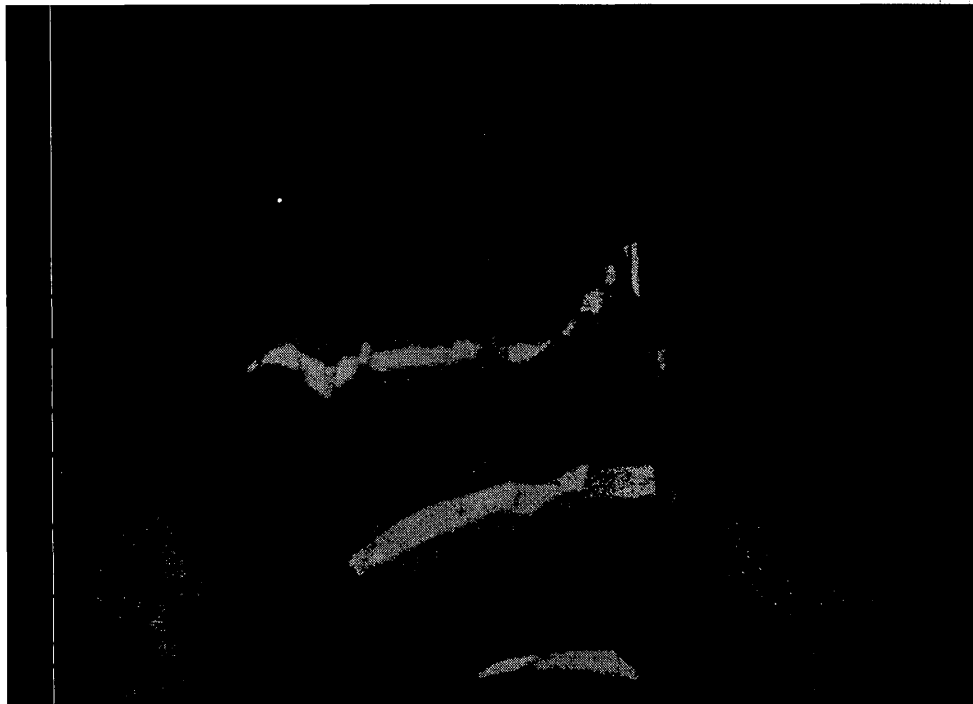


Figure 3. Panji Anoff at his residence, Accra 2007. Photo by Author.

Obuor, Obrafour, Tinny, and Samini all use many ethnic vibes and styles authentic to Ghanaian tradition. So the question is, what level of authenticity are we treating here?

This era accommodates a level of fusion that contains influences that are local, inter-continental, and international. Anoff shares that,

Initially some aspects of hip life were a little bit imitative of American music, but as the artists have become more confident . . . [as they] realized that in fact they are best at doing what only they know how to do best, the music’s identity has also become more indigenous. I definitely agree that hip life has become an indigenous music. Even in Cameroon and Gabon and Liberia as soon as they hear hip life they recognize it to be music from Ghana, and not music from America, or music from Europe. It means that hip life music has an identity . . . Everybody refers to it as hip life, they don’t call it Ghanaian hip hop. Those are great achievements for an art form of any sort, but for those whose main activities have

been not particularly experienced with Western music, or arrangements and melodies and so on, I think the achievement is good, and it shows that rhythm still, on its own, just rhythm and harmony, even without much harmony, is still very effective. (p.c. 2007)

Mingle's comment that an authentic music is like a wine that gets better with age (p.c. 2007), may hold some water in the "indigenous" discussion of hip life – with time it is increasing its authenticity with an increased focus on Ghanaian identity and what is regarded as authentic music. The feel of the clave, gome bass, and the horns and guitars used in the melody, all hinge on African sensibility. Though some hardcore highlife enthusiasts regard hip life as garbage, they may come around to review their position with time. Some answers to their position can be seen in Dela Botri's all-indigenous hip life music, in which he uses rhythm, melody, and mood of traditional instrumentation. Whether considered garbage or music – it is hip life.

Anoff indicates a few other Ghanaian elements of rhythm and harmony in hip life music. These elements exhibit Ghanaian performative traditions as well as singing styles that shape and inform these artists in their crafts. For instance, stringed instruments such as the *seprewa* or *gonje* are used in Ghanaian popular music. The *attenteben* flutes offer melodies. When put together, there is a unique traditional blend of African traditional and popular music. "When you look at the history of performance, as far back as you can go, you find Africans are there all the time. It is our gift from God, and nobody can take it away" (Anoff, p.c. 2007), hence the inherent musical culture and identity manifested in hip life music.

2.5. Language and Ethnicity in the Field: Pathways to Understanding Music Making

The languages of ethnic groups are integral to their music making. This section reviews aspects of language in Ghanaian popular culture. Have you ever been in a situation where you had to ask: “Can you repeat that again? What is s/he saying? Did you get it? Pardon me?” In such moments we might seek help from a third person to interpret, explain or contextualize what points were made in a conversation.

There are times when courtesies, ethics, and customs affect how one can question comments and positions within a traditional context. For example, Ghanaian adults and children each require different treatment. As well, we must not forget the tonal language, which is the crucial chip in the Ghanaian culture, in tracing the ways in which the culture functions in music making. Knowing the structure and function of the social class (as part of local custom) within a community offers the researcher a road map to cordial and harmonious relationships in the field.

The *Homowo* festival is a good example of how language and ethnicity intersect in the field. The various social classes merge on occasions like *Homowo*, where there is mutual benefit: the upper class shares the joy of lineage in festivities, with all present. The lower and middle offer open arms to the world to come and be part of an important reunion of families. This event also generates economic infusion as there is provision and patronage of food, drinks, hotels, transportation, as well as commissioning of projects (e.g., filming/documentation) and so on.

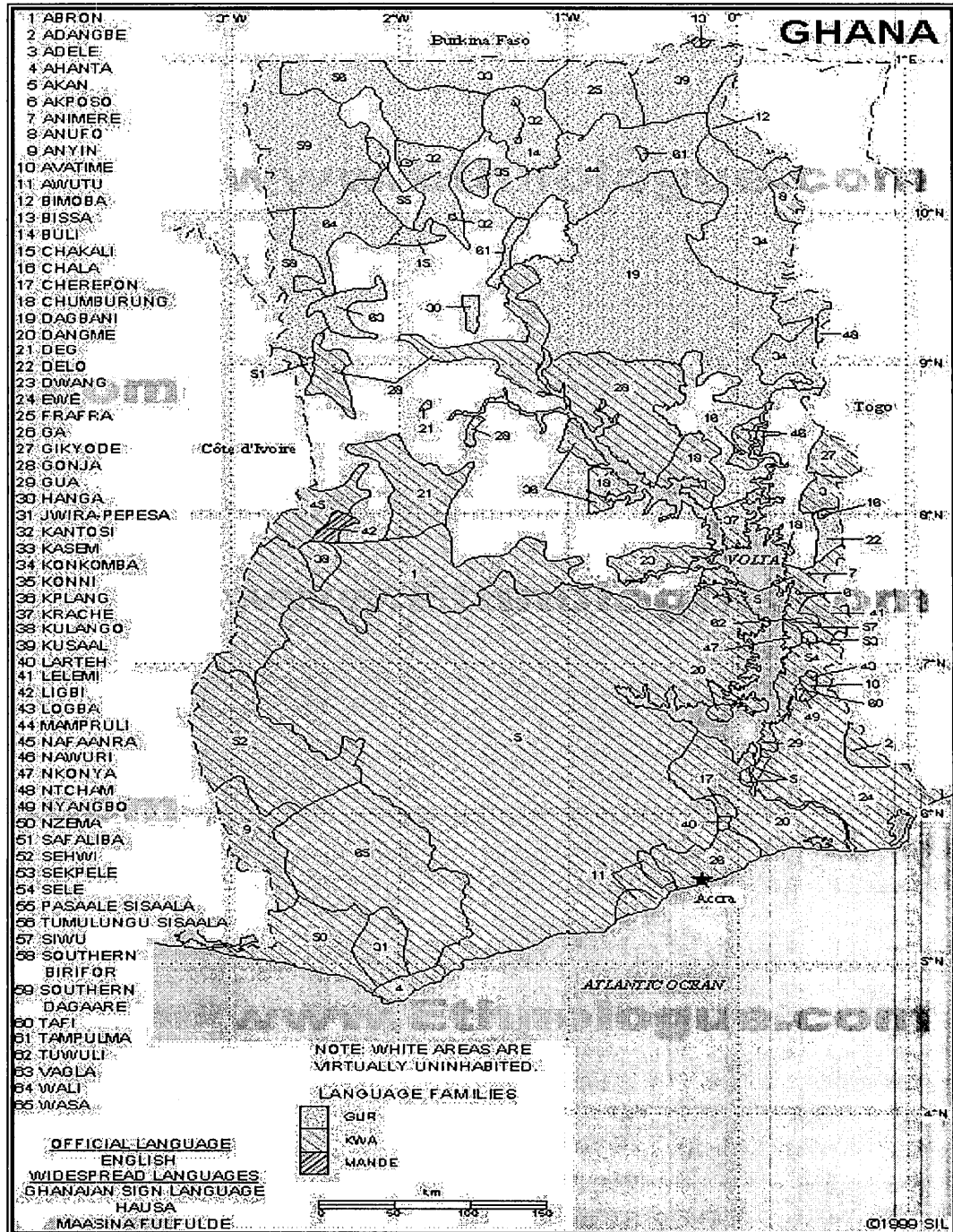


Figure 4. Ethnic Map of Ghana. (Source: Ethnologue. 6 July 2008. <http://www.ethnologue.com/show_map.asp?name=GH>)

The political hierarchy delegates a team to follow up on the festivities and to be in tune with the people. What do they need? How can the people be helped meaningfully in the short and long term, for national growth? Some Chiefs present artists (local and/or out of town) during the festival, where their creativity becomes a useful vehicle to propagate social, political, and visionary messages to the people. With the right language, the concerns of the people are also channeled through to the authorities for redress. At the centre of the concept of human harmony is the feeling of being accepted as part of the community studied. This pathway helps in accessing informed knowledge.

The roller coaster journey of linguistic exploration tends to factor into research. In my case of speaking six of the seventy-plus languages in Ghana, I still encounter scenarios where I don't understand a person's meaning and find that help from assistants and friends evens out the transmission and interpretation in the course of our fieldwork. At times I seek another interpretation of a particular meaning as said by a child, adult, man, woman, chief, warrior or a priest. In a discussion at *Ghanamusic.com*, Avana Jackson finds that,

Hip Life began as a counter-force to U.S. borne Hip Hop that had taken over Ghanaian airwave: Ghanaian youth were being bombarded with images and sounds from the west. . . . "You can play Jay-Z in a club and it's live, but you know, people don't understand it. But Hip Life everybody understands," says Nathaniel Jonah, owner of His Majesty's nightclub [in La, Accra]. (n.d. n.p.)

Music can be useful to its performers. When a song contains traces of a foreign sound, local lyrics and messages (that speak to its present listeners) remain paramount to its audience. Generally, every person can appreciate this or that genre, but may not fully understand the scope of the style as in rap elements, scratch, or basic jama incorporation

of the Ga beats – an aspect of ethnography that could be explained. This is because the peoples’ culture may need an interpretation for the outsider to decipher.

In Ghana, common historical knowledge shows that the Osu Klotey people, Anloga people or Twifo Praso people each have their unique traditional music and dance forms. In some instances, local groups fuse one or two languages in traditional songs and embed these in the performance code. Such codes relate to the meaning of local dance gestural forms. Some hip life practitioners employ up to four “local” languages in their lyrics in addition to English and/or French. This creates a healthy environment for fusion and creative work among an ethnically diverse group of artists who share a common ground of languages through their music.

My earlier childhood days in Accra influenced my knowledge of the field – the people, the music, and the lifestyle. In this case, the field is also my home. Travelling with my Dad through towns like Akwatia, Oda, Ho, Hohoe, Kpando, and Keta shaped my understanding of the diversity of Ghana. These understandings reflect the social dynamics that influence the terminology of languages with my generation, including how to seek the appropriate interpretation of past and newer terms in the arts scene. When a young person says “I’m aware,” it means, more or less, “Do not comment on my dress, since I realize that I am dressed in a way that is outside of the Ghanaian moral code.” Such mannerisms in Ghanaian circles speak to hip life culture, fashion, dance, gender via modernization and globalization. This culture is not static and its language reflects newer hybrid dialects which are also dynamic due to interactions among diverse groupings.

CHAPTER 3: TRADITIONAL AND POPULAR MUSIC, HIGHLIFE AND HIP LIFE MUSIC

3.1. Roots and Connections of Ghanaian Music

The life of a Ghanaian is imbued with music and dance, beginning with the practice of singing and tapping to the baby in a pregnant woman's belly. A popular Akan slogan, *Ye be wu nti yeda*, means "Though there is death, it will not deprive one from sleeping," inferring that if you fear death you may be unable to sleep. Whistling away one's worries with *Adenkum* or Palm Wine tunes, finding contentment in the therapy of the music, interjected with the brief pulse of dance and comedy within the family setting or with comrades at the street corner – all demonstrate resilience in the face of life's hardships. The practice of singing favourite tunes, or creating new tunes in the midst of challenge, has influenced the lyrics of many Ghanaian songs. The economic and political challenges that face people of "third world" nations find some bubble of protection in family life.

It is impossible to state exactly when Ghanaian music-making traditions began. Highlife music is believed to have begun in the 1920s³⁷ under the influence of European colonizers. Africa's oral traditions have left a rich treasure trove of archival information that has influenced musical forms such as highlife and hip hop which then morphed into hip life music. The hip life wave of the late 1990s offered youth an opportunity for

³⁷ See Waterman in Stone (1998: 447). For highlife guitar bands, see Ronnie Graham's *Stern's Guide to Contemporary African Music* (1988: 83).

musical expression that increased their ability to rap, sing, and play traditional repertoires with digital technology.

Hip life supports numerous sub-genres: gospel hip life, D (different) style, hip dia, reggae hip life (rag life), dance hall and soca hip life, Urban life, and a cappella hip life. Departing slightly from the basic bands that positioned much West African popular music (e.g., E.T. Mensah's highlife) hip life musics place emphasis on recent cultural trends and changes in society. A review of various musical bands, genres, traditional musics and dances, and influences in hip life and highlife (popular culture), including electronic innovations in West African popular music, will provide a broader regional context. This information can be better understood beginning with traditional music practice in Ghana.

3.2. Traditional Ghanaian Music

Ghana's adaha traditional music, which emerged circa the 1880s, had a major influence on highlife music through the 1920s, and later, on hip life. The latter, which employs highlife and hip hop beats alongside traditional repertoires such as adowa, kpanlogo and jama, can be said to encapsulate Ghana's history. Hip life came about with the assistance of new digital technologies and contributed to a redefinition of its predecessor, the adaha traditional practice. Hence there has been a melding of the old and the new generational Ghanaian musics into the popular hip life.

What does African music stand for, culturally? Nketia, in a discussion on its definitions, touches on two areas: creativity and way of life. He maintains that

the term African Music for any expression, [is a] creative expression originating from Africa which shows certain characteristics that are shared by the ethnic groups in Africa and by those who represent Africa elsewhere, because they have their roots in Africa. It means that one looks at African Music on various levels; for example in a village setting in Africa, when we are talking about African Music, it is the traditional expression of the village people who perform this music as part of their social life and who have a basis for making music. . . . [We use] the term music for what we do in Africa on the understanding that music is a complex thing in Africa, that we have the sounds, the instrumental sounds, the vocal sounds and of course we have the structures and so forth. (p.c. 2002)

Nketia, on the topic of musical creativity in Ghana, notes that “popular traditions always arrive in the Ga area because . . . the Ga people are very creative” as their geopolitical position and cultural integration influences “the way their culture have developed, their contact with the Akan people and so forth; they are always interested in new things” (p.c. 2002). This assertion sparks my curiosity as a native Ga who creates and employs different ethnic musics in a harmonious representative way that, apart from aesthetic beauty, engages inter-ethnic life.

The above factors (changes) have contributed to the musical processes of the Ga people. Today the Ga location in Accra is multi-ethnic, which has somewhat subscribed to Ga-fused forms of the languages spoken there. This fusion is even reflected in groupings such as cultural groups that perform traditional and popular forms. I examine the kpanlogo-hip life connections next, as part of the broader hip life inter-ethnic music-derivatives.

3.2.1. *Kpanlogo-ing and Hip Life (ee-lolo hip life –e’)* Culture

Kpanlogo music has been important in hip life music. I will say its incorporation into hip life culture is kpanlogo-ing (ee-lolo hip life –e’ in Ga where lolo is the nickname for kpanlogo). Jeff Quaye (JQ) is a sound engineer who borrows from the basic kpanlogo, jama, and gome beats/music and community singing/clapping forms to back his recording of local languages in hip life music. There are kpanlogo influences of bell timing and the heavy bass line similar to the first and second tamalin drum response in a typical kpanlogo piece in many hip life musics. The pieces osibisaaba, adowa, boboobo, kete, gome, kolo mashie, oshweboo, agbadza, kinka, bamaya, kpushimo and nyomkro have all been infused with popular hybrid electronic forms to usher in popular musics.

Kpanlogo’s unique rhythms and songs are inseparable from the people practicing them. For a fuller understanding of their music and dance’s place in the Ghanaian arts, including within hip life, there are a few knots to untie. The movements that are unique to *kpanlogo* make the morally upright (by Ghanaian standards) frown, or resisting the vulgar elements, but the infectious music makes them “peep the action” with smiles – only to switch to a neutral facial expression when spotted looking at the joyous practitioners.

There is a traditional basis for most Ghanaian highlife and hip life music genres. The band Osibisa coined its name from osibisaaba (a dance and music form of the Elmina tradition in Ghana). Kolo mashie, gome and kpanlogo of the Ga people, influenced the music of King David (of the *Aye fe notse* fame). Adowa has been used by Reggie Rockstone in his *Maaka Maka!* album. There are numerous instances of similar fusions.

3.2.2. Connecting Traditional Modes of Discourse with Rap

Ghana's palm wine music and highlife music showcase European influences, as seen in the style of highlife made popular by E.T. Mensah (aka the King of highlife). Reggie Rockstone (aka the Godfather of hip life) confirms the blending of Ghanaian highlife and American hip hop, to "hype" hip life music at the time. This hip life/rap concept has sparked heated debates among generations as to foreign values and impact on Ghanaian youth. A review of traditional practices shows the origin of rap used in today's hip hop music. The interlocation of local rap has always been a function of a local town announcer, or a Chief's *Okyeame* (linguist, spokesperson) pouring libation (below) to the ancestors.³⁸



Figure 5. Nai Wulomo pouring libation at Accra, 2006. Photo by Author.

³⁸ The town crier (*Okyeame*) roles, then and now, function in landmark areas of the traditional community alongside current electronic communications.

This libation invokes broader issues of language, tone, rhythm and songs. Each announcement by a town crier has an eloquent message delivery and compares to a TV or radio news reader. This announcer in the Ghanaian community embodies the history as told many times in their tenure of office. The *ngogo* bell is played to get the attention of the community. Repeated from block to block, the news spreads quickly. The same applies to festivals when ritual libations are hinged on the precise accounting of themes communicated to the gods and ancestors, as well as to the local people, reassuring them of the existence of their ancestors and providing guidance and blessings.

The linguistic tone, high, low, and various shades in between manifest in musical structures. Sounds that are embedded in the dialect and tonality, whether it is Ewe, Ga, Akan, Dagbani, or Fanti, etc., all use a variety of traditional tones in their repertoire. A town crier can send signals that indicate happiness, alertness, celebration, war, a thief caught, or a farm animal gone missing. At times when society deems the message irrelevant, they hoot at the town crier: “hooo-oo” (with progressing pitch level). There is a unique form of rhythm in the tonal flow, as a form of talking coupled with specific facial expressions. Libation is like a communiqué between the living and the supernatural world, and is a place of serene inner belief and customs of a people (both the physical living and spiritual living). Wind, rivers, rain, sun, and stars: all are stakeholders in the transmission. A town crier can say, “On a sunny day like this one can you believe Adjei’s goat is missing from the yard?” in speech that takes the shape of short melodies, pauses and “spits,” like a rapper in today’s hip hop rap battles in the hood.

In attempting to provide a genealogical or network mapping of hip life music (see Appendices C 9 & 10), broader issues are addressed within the global interactions of London, New York, and Accra, and their influences. Shipley,³⁹ an anthropologist who documented Reggie Rockstone in the movie *Living the Hiplife* (FESPACO 2007), says that it is “important to recognize . . . the complex way that hiplife music shows us the movements around the Atlantic world” (*Afropop Worldwide*, 11 June 2009: n.p.), implying that Ghanaian diasporic forms, musical forms, and religious forms are ongoing trans-Atlantic movements.

3.3. Popular Music Scene: Highlife Music

The arrival of brass band orchestra music with British/European colonial activities influenced highlife music to become one of the most popular musics found in Ghana.

The term highlife is an umbrella term for various styles of local transcultural dance that evolved in Ghana beginning in the late nineteenth century. All involved fusion of traditional African musical and performance elements with imported ones from Europe, America, and the African Diaspora . . . The earliest was Adaha in the 1880s in the Cape Coast area. This highly syncopated form of local brass band music had its origins in the nineteenth century European and West Indian regimental bands of the colonial forts. (Collins in Philip M. Peek and Kwesi Yankah, 2004: 275)

The transformation is still ongoing. Today’s highlife contains interesting and blurry displays of all the various sub genres, as well as the hip life inclusion in the original highlife, but hip life artists like K.K. Fosu sing more highlife and less rap in their music.

³⁹ Shipley offers his views on hip life in an interview with Siddhartha Mitter, producer of *Afropop Worldwide*. See “The Hip Hop Generation in Africa: Ghana & Ivory Coast” < http://www.afropop.org/radio/radio_program/ID/674> for the whole discussion.

Highlife music still shares generational flavours and studio effects, a clue to its unique appeal (see Appendix A 10).

Highlife plays a role in assimilating many forms into one genre, as Coplan explains: “The ‘guitar band’ and ‘dance band’ [brass band] are closely related sub genres of highlife, and the ‘concert party’ [traditional theatre] combines guitar band music, folk satire, and drama” (1978: 96-114). The fact that there are traces of many traditional forms in highlife brings people together, since they can access the music and lyrics and also taste imported influences. Coplan elaborates further: “Highlife transcends ethnic boundaries, and it appeals to both rural and urban peoples through the presentation of topical issues, indigenous and neo-African cultural ideas” (96). The diverse “[t]raditional recreational musical types (versions) such as kolomashie [osibi], kokomba [ashiko], and kpanlogo [dagomba], show influences of highlife” (96); mapping the historical journeys of transplanted Africans (with their musics) to America. Returned slaves also contributed to the *highlifing process* of the genre (which in turn, has somewhat shaped hip life music). Returning to the definition, numerous scholars have treated it (see Collins, 1985; Waterman, 1990; Akrong, 2003). The late Faisal Helwani, music producer and owner of the Napoleon Club, posits that highlife

is a world class music, the combination of good jazz and good Caribbean sound. Where it came from, I’m not bothered with, you know, those who say it came from the sea, or it came from land or it came by seamen, or it came from the mountains – I know it is good music. (p.c. 2007)

Helwani is talking from the standpoint of a music industry professional. He has worked with a range of musicians, including the most popular highlifers, spanning over forty years

in Ghana and elsewhere. Helwani's position is in response to the debates about highlife's origins, who popularized it, where and when. Helwani's recording experience speaks to what he defines as good music – noting the harmonies, the melodies that exhibit an imported influence, as well as traditional drumming that signifies the identities and relationships of a place.



Figure 6. Faisal Helwani at Bibini Studios Osu. Photo by Author 2007.

The relationship between traditional African music and highlife is an interesting network of mutual links according to Helwani.

Because the root of highlife is traditional music, I am not going to give anything African to anything else but to African traditional music. Up until today, that African traditional music is the root of all music in the world. Because when you think of R&B, where . . . [did] all the black artists . . . come from? Is it not Africa? . . . They [some Westerners, historically] took traditional music from here and it

was developed in the West and re-exported back to us in a finished form, you understand? I mean I'm not against development, but we have to recognize where it originated from. When you look at funk music, look at the *Bamaya* from the Northern part of Ghana. That's funk. (p.c. 2007)

Western Diamonds is a prominent band in Ghana; the Police, Army and Fire are also active bands. They all have the ability to blend the combined languages of divergent ethnicities in Ghana. The taste for the Other became evident, caused by seeing new instruments played with different techniques and musical approaches, which people in Africa and other places attempted to explore (see Flaes, 2000). Those who had the "privilege" (considered so at the time) of studying at British/European-influenced schools like John Teye Memorial or Achimota Secondary had the chance to learn Western music and how to play instruments such as the trumpet, euphonium, etc.⁴⁰

In a discussion between Collins and the artist Olaiya,

Victor Olaiya confirms this: "E.T. Mensah . . . was an inspiration to me. . . . He in fact dominated highlife scene in Africa in the early fifties. We the up and coming artists then [owe] . . . everything to his band, style, arrangement and harmony" . . . According to Michael Awoyinfa "Olaiya said that although the two of them are giants he would consider himself a shorter giant compared to E.T. Mensah." Olaiya concludes, "with his years of experience, his age and discipline, I concede that he is a taller giant." (in Oti, 2009: 180)

⁴⁰ Note that in 1952, E.K. Nyame started the guitar-band highlife which later became the music of the concert party (Collins, in Peek, Kwesi and Philip, 2004:275). By the "early sixties, [a Nigerian artist] Rex Lawson's highlife music excelled itself to the extent that many Nigerians 'transferred' Rex Lawson's 'citizenship' to Ghana" (Oti, 2009:7). Bobby's switch from "jazz" to highlife music, and recording "Taxi Driver" as noted by E.T. Mensah (179) added a perspective to highlife. Dr. K. Gyasi, Dr. Paa Bobo, Akwesi Ampofu Adjei, Amakye Dede, and Nana Tufour are some of the key players in the Ghanaian highlife scene. All this time the creative musical talents of highlife musicians were still brewing. "The 1950s saw the rise of highlife in Ghana, with E.T. Mensah as one of the heroes of the genre. This was the emergence of a truly popular music" (Oti, 2009:352). E.T.'s period was amazing, raising the existing bar of performance to a whole new level of virtuosity.

Blacking's discussion of a "sonic order" must be considered in terms of mode: "innate or learned or both, [it] must be in the mind before it emerges as music" (1983: 11).

Reflecting on Blacking's ideas, I began music-making through pots and pans and knew the sound I anticipated (based on the inner language I understood). This occurs with the persistent exploration of sound anywhere within and around me. Traditional singing and drumming styles in my community as well as with classmates have shaped my understanding of traditional forms of learning. These forms also include the academic dimension of the structures that shape music-making as prescribed by the master artists.

3.3.1. Original Highlife

Collins noted that "the term highlife . . . was coined in the 1920s when the ballroom dance orchestras of Ghanaian elite (such as Excelsior Orchestra, Cape Coast Sugar Babies and Jazz Kings) began to orchestrate the local Adahas, street-songs, and palm wine tunes" (in Peek, Kwesi and Philip, 2004: 275). The space and time of a musical transformation is reflected in the process of music making. In Ghana, this prelude fostered the integration of many foreign musics into Ghanaian traditional musics. For instance, "Opim was special music for the concertina [i.e. blues played on this instrument]. Another rhythm they [Elmina people, etc.] played was Ashiko, a Highlife played with a musical saw" (Collins, 1985:15). The first president of Ghana, Osagyefo Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, encouraged Ghana's traditional arts (*circa* 1957). "He established state schools for revitalizing and transmitting traditional music and for retraining highlife musicians in

traditional idioms” (Veal, 2000:47). Since his efforts shaped pan-Africanism as well as nationalism, credit is given to him for preserving Ghana’s arts and culture.

Live guitar bands in Ghana play favourite tunes like *Yaa Amponsa* (a female Akan name), which are sampled by most highlife bands. Ephraim Amu’s incorporation of the *Yaa Amponsa* tune in his compositions for choirs has been extremely popular.

Generational and religious taste, identity and environment have all been key factors in the spread of highlife music, or for that matter any popular music. Such increases in popularity have opened the way for sub genres of highlife to emerge.

3.3.2. Sub-Genres of Highlife

Many versions of highlife have developed over the years and set the stage for the emergence of hip life and its associated sub genres. *Gospel highlife* is a popular phenomenon in Ghanaian society. The influx of Christianity and Islam, and the gradual shift in spiritual beliefs in search of a specific faith, have brought with them a vast belief system. Christianity has had an impact on music-making and given rise to a whole different cultural outlook to the Christian faith. The hymns, choreographic filing to the pulpit to donate offerings, European/Roman architectural underpinnings of the physical structure, and theological perspectives, have all manifested themselves in the lives of Ghanaian Christians. Gospel highlife is an important feature in the broad spectrum of Ghanaian traditional, popular and contemporary musics and its variants. The Tagoe Sisters were two popular singers in the gospel music scene in the early to mid-1990s. Diana

Akiwumi, now Hopeson, is another gospel musician artist. In a discussion, she narrated her attraction to gospel music.

I had an encounter with God. You know in Ghana we are very religious, so there are crusades, hearing about God is common . . . Sometimes I'll sleep and dream I was singing this particular song. I'll wake up and the song is still there, I go and record it, and later I'll learn it. Or sometime a known song, an old song, becomes such a blessing to me. I had something like "Trusting You" – it's a hymn. It's an old song. At a point in my life I was so low that that song brought revival to me, and it's like Wow, once it's a blessing to me I will sing it to make it a blessing to people who may be going through the same thing. (p.c. 2006)

There are numerous shades of gospel music in all Ghanaian major dialects. English is at times used also. The gospel element cuts across the subgenre themes; for example, Ghanaian traditional music played with gospel highlife music flavor (e.g., Hopeson's 1993 *Winner* album). Cementing the theme, in this context, with the preaching of the gospel these artists play, gains the support of the churches as the lyrics conform to the norms of the religion. In response to the content of her albums, Hopeson notes that,

For every album I do, you will find my reggae, you will get my highlife, it is normally praise, and then I will have something very traditional. That is either agbadza, or adowa or anything, very traditional. Then I will have worship, which is normally soft. Sometimes I have a hymn. So it is mixed. (p.c. 2007)

Once the local people can identify with and access the music, they are bound to welcome it. A number of artists believe in the importance of stylistic versatility. Thus Hopeson or Lord Kenya may have their albums reaching out to broader audiences through their choice of styles. The music business is broad and competitive; if you can manage creativity of artist(s), then you are in production.

One of the unique styles of Ghanaian singing forms is traditional *a cappella*, a branch of gospel highlife music. A group like 3AM uses this style of presentation. A

number of these groups exist in secondary schools, youth clubs, and Christian groupings. Religious institutions encourage many forms of singing, including the a cappella style. Yet in certain instances, an a cappella group may utilise the special ability of members to imitate the drums, guitars, horns, piano, etc. However the voice is a powerful tool that conveys the imagination of the artist through music.

Reggae highlife is another subdivision. Reggae highlife can be broadly defined as highlife music with reggae instrumentation. It reflects the Jamaican influence as well as the British colonial influence prior to Ghana's independence in 1957. Ghanaian musicians such as Oheneba Kisi and Rocky Dawuni are known for their reggae highlife. Kisi's music discusses themes of love and relationships. Musicians K.K. Kabobo and Jay Du Blay Ambolley, who carved a niche for their rap skills, utilise reggae guitar and drum backings in some of their tracks. Daniel Amponsah, Rocky Dawuni, C.K. Man, Eddie Donkor and Afro Moses are other well-known performers of reggae highlife.

Kwabena Kwakye Kabobo indicated that he is one of the pioneers of rap in the local dialect, Twi (p.c. 2007). Kabobo's works (including *Nyatse Nyatse-Girl* in 1981) have been popular on the Ghanaian music scene. Kwadwo Antwi, aka Mr. Music Man, is another reggae highlife music star, who presents an annual Christmas concert at the National Theatre in Accra. Most of the time the show is sold out in advance to a middle-class audience. The differences among the artists above lie in the myriad shades of accents of the local languages, just as when the English language is spoken in Texas or London, each may have different pronunciations for the same words. *Burgher highlife* (German influence) is another branch of highlife. The circumstances that forced many African

musicians to seek greener pastures abroad were also present in Ghana. Political instability from the mid 1970s to the early 1980s placed real hardships on the lives of Ghanaian artists, and a number of musicians who were popular in the highlife music scene packed their bags for Germany because of the poor economic situation. The main hub of their choice was Hamburg (and Bodo Steiger's studio was popular amongst Burgher Highlife artists). This is the name from which the genre derives its name, prior to its gospel influences. Many artists, including George Darko (a pioneer of the genre),⁴¹ the Lumba Brothers, Nana Tufour, Nana Acheampong, and Charles Amoah, all honed Burgher highlife as a way of passing time in Ghanaian communities, using the available technologies to create sounds nuanced in both African and popular music forms. In his treatment of "Ham-Burger Highlife – Development of a New Highlife-Style," Collins recounts that

Hamburg was the favourite place for many of these musicians – and it was there that the guitarist George Darko, singer Lee Duodu, key-board player Bob Fiscian and bassist B.B. Dowuona of the Bus Stop Band released the first Burger Highlife hit in 1983 called "Akoo Te Brofo" on their "Friends" album. . . . The most popular of the burgher highlife artists is Daddy Lumba (Charles Kojo Fusu) who broke away from the Lumba Brothers and had an enormous hit in 1998 with his contentious song "Aben Wo Ha" (it is cooked). (www.goethe.de, n.p.)

I recollect the Burgher Highlife craze with the above artists in Ghana. When the talk of the day was centred on the controversies surrounding the choice of words used by Daddy Lumba, there were different views. Sexual themes propelled Lumba's popularity to a whole new level and he thrived on the intense controversy surrounding his music.

⁴¹ See more information on Burgher highlife at <<http://www.goethe.de/ins/gh/prj/bhi/bhm/ent/enindex.htm>>. Accessed 30 Oct. 2007.

Curiosity, trendiness and peer pressure were among the factors that drove the market. This new form of “‘techno-pop’ sung in Akan [and other Ghanaian languages] and which combines highlife guitar with disco drum-machine beats and synthesizers” (n.p.) caught on well with Ghanaians at home and abroad.

The above highlife music sub genres have their associated dances. Dance and music are inseparable in Ghana:⁴² although they are not dealt with separately in the culture, for the purposes of this dissertation we briefly discuss dance aspects, from its past to its current manifestation in the hip life form.

3.4. Dance and Hip Life: From Traditional to Contemporary

In our traditional context you cannot separate music from dance . . . If a song . . . or a piece of music doesn’t make you feel like dancing, actually it’s not music at all. For it to be music it must make you feel like dancing. Looked at it from that perspective, hip life has been phenomenally successful. (Panji Anoff, p.c. 2007)

In this section I discuss the roots of music’s dance and cultural practice in Ghana, part of a road map to understanding contemporary versions of performances. These recent presentations include hip life dance gestures that in part borrow heavily from Ghanaian traditional dances, and also those movements that are embedded in highlife and hip hop forms. The dance context here in hip life practice is as fused as hip life itself (e.g., the *Azonto* dance buzz in Ghana). Looking at this background I will examine the context of dance in hip life. Hip life’s successes in recent times have blended various singing forms (with their related dances) and the incorporation of traditional drumming. The rhythm,

⁴² The discussion on African music and dance from my perspective are as “syncopated” as the criss-cross rhythms of the land, so we will take a detour into the dance components in hip life dancing.

horns, proverbial slang, or groove have motivated the emergence of the hip life dance form.

In the midst of many recently developed dance and musical forms lies the old traditional forms.⁴³ It is important to start our discussion with the traditional, as it shapes the very core of creative approaches in Ghanaian popular culture. The traditional dance forms are spread over seventy-five ethnic groupings in Ghana. The traditional dances are deeply rooted in their ethnic groupings (loaded with messages and codes that signify proverbs and poetics, chronology of historical events, celebrations, births, enthroning, funerals, weddings, wars, harvests, and worship, to name a few).⁴⁴ Any modification of the ethnic dance and its music can result in newer hybrid forms (see discussions on “transnational musics” in Taylor, 2007:141). Today, the vast majority of naming ceremony parties, beach parties, *Old Skuul* celebrations, Osu carnival street parties, university bashes, etc. in Ghanaian communities use hip life music and dance as the popular choice. Any of the above showcase the inherited elements of highlife, hip hop, reggae, into the hip life genre. *Mapouka* dance styles, break-dance, *welle shaa*, jama

⁴³ Definitions of the dance or dance forms: The term dance here, in a Ghanaian context, also includes functions of music. The two are inseparable, as orally postulated from time immemorial. Traditional African music and dances have surfaced in many countries and through various modes of adaptation have found new homes away from home. Technological advancements coupled with avant-garde explorations of the human mind, body and soul, utilized to a high level of (personal) ambitions, have contributed in many good ways to the development of arts in the proscenium theatre.

⁴⁴ E.g., otu and kple ritual from the Ga people, boboobo from the Ewe people, damba and takai from the dagomba people, akom and fontonfrom of the Akan people. For instance, all these have drum phrases that invoke language clauses, calls for war, calls for celebration, signifying triumph, etc., bringing the people together as much as entertaining them. For example, “*Adawura Kofi, ma wu hu sue*” (Twi for “may the Chief Adawura Kofi rise”) – the atumpan twin drum will sound exactly like the words in the Akan, and the Chief will stand up. Various (Ghanaian) traditional “court drummers could warn a king by drumming slight variations of a song of praise, thus to inform him of the imminent unrest among the people” (Bender, 1991:82). This is just the tip of a very large iceberg.

(similar to dunumba dance of Hamana and Gberedu, or the Zulu foot stamps with energy), kpanlogo, street acrobatics, freestyle dance movements, all rely heavily on the traditional forms. Exploring the roots of hip life can lead to some sacred dances like otu, kanja, akom, tigari, etc., which have chants and codes of invoking deeper communications with the gods and ancestors. Whenever the artist Obrafuor says *Nananom nsa*, he is inviting the ancestors for a drink (akpeteshi). This is done through recitation, like a rap in local dialect during the pouring of libation. Such classic practices are associated with customary rites (*Kusum*) at the Chief's court.

Functions and messages in Ghanaian dance forms speak to such events as naming ceremonies and recreation. (For example, the hip life artist Obrafuor will pour libation in a contemporary but loaded way along with the line *Nananom ensa*, an invitation to the great grandparents or ancestor for a drink. This is an important signifier to consult the gods with honor.) There are many more examples, as specific Ghanaian events may share traces of one or two of the above stated functions, hence a specialized technique is employed in the execution of each dance.

Movement is so vital that the very existence of a human is closely linked to the serious movements within the body, mind and soul, because,

[T]he concept of movement is also within the structure of the music, when we see people dancing, they are not just moving around, they are inspired and stimulated by something in the music and unless that thing is in the music, you cannot really express the way we do. We have two different things, somebody composing some movement and another, the music. That will come together in a performance. In that case you are moved by the music to make certain movements. (Nketia, p.c. 2002)

Similar to the earlier discussions on creative approaches, the acceptance of created community-dances in the society implies collective ownership. To understand a message in dance gesture or musical coded parlance (which I call *mi-mlin-wiemo* in Ga, or music code) means a better interpretation and honor to the tradition. The message's significance is explained through the local wisdom with proverbial thought – a signifier of ancient customary practice (this is called *fitso fitso* in Ga, meaning “very detailed communication”). For instance, when a *Kete* dancer links the first two fingers from each hand, it symbolizes love or unity; biting one finger and shaking the other hand symbolizes pain and the loss of a dear one. The proverbs in a sense encapsulate the themes and subtexts that address a variety of social commentary or life events.

3.4.1. Dance to Africa's Vibration

Adowa dance in Ghana, traditionally, is a body language. . . . [T]hen you come to agbadza, it's the sexiest dance you can ever watch. Because this is Africa. When it comes to dancing, it's about excitement. (Faisal Helwani, p.c. 2007)

Every nation has its nuances, understood within cultural dynamics and hinged on language. Physically learning to dance is always possible, but to go deep into telling a story, sending a message as encoded within the tradition, that is where the lifelong journey begins. The inner art of excelling in the communicative expectation is where we begin to talk African dance. The Ghanaian recreational pass code for all to dance is “*asaa boni nkum asaase*” (*Twi* for “a bad dance move will not hurt mother earth”). The message is that we should all just boogie or dance – no strings attached. Such general encouragement is a community effort for inclusiveness of participants in festivities.

Hip life dance fever has an infectious appeal in West Africa. Structurally, the dance to hip life music is very informal and is not restricted to one specific ethnic group dance. It is rather an amalgamation of free styles and traditional movements that cross generational lines of movement flow.⁴⁵

It is fascinating to see Obuor's utilization of adowa in his grand entrance in some of his performances, which is played as a backdrop to his creative presentation of dance. This includes a royal Chieftaincy stool (seat) in a choreographed representation of the Akan-court tradition. Obuor opens a contemporary window into an ancient tradition with his interpretation of an Ashanti Chief with royalty gathering at a *durbar* or formal gathering within the community. In line with Obour's royal performance application of dance and ritual, Gyedu-Blay Ambolley pointed out in a separate discussion that a traditional "King gets up and dances⁴⁶ and comes back to sit on a stool and that becomes ultimate, you know. Which means be seated, *simi-gwaru*,⁴⁷ in Twi" (p.c. 2007). Many

⁴⁵ These dance movements afford the critical observer codes and nuances of African performance that borrow from the following dance forms: okpii, osibi, highlife, fume-fume, adowa, and agbadza of Ghana and beyond. Thus hip life magnet includes azonto dance of Ghanaian cloth-washing gestures etc. The advent of hip life dance has not depleted the traditional dances, but has enriched them in a contemporary fused form that speaks to current trends and developments in the hip hop culture as a global phenomenon, hinged on Ghanaian traditional roots. The space of dance movement descriptions or use of Labanotation to describe every movement in hip life practice would be great but for this study the space is limited hence the brevity.

⁴⁶ The presenter Yaw Sekyi asserts that "we must give the people something they can dance to" (p.c. 2007). Movements foreign to Ghana are well assimilated into hip life-fused dance movements, be it gyrating, hip hopping, or undefined but coordinated isolation of body parts to the admiration of the observer. The youthful hip life world releases new creations all the time, just like software updates which are released within months of the original product. Hip life music and dance generate their own versions as seen in the music videos of many Ghanaian artists. The dance redefines the mood of the song, amplifies the message, and can echo salient messages depending on which artist is performing. The themes of the performance are, however, centered in the dance movements so as to choreographically project certain themes: for example, love, protest, celebration of a hero, political positioning, etc. These can be seen in small performances as well as in huge festivals such as *Old Skuul* Reunion, usually held at the La Trade Fair in Accra.

⁴⁷ Hence the name: "*Simigwa* is a branch of highlife, and that's my style of music that I've been able to come out with" (Ambolley, p.c. 2007).

recognized scholars have shared their perspectives on the Ghanaian or African traditional dance form as well as the broader cultural practices that utilize the tradition of a people. Drid Williams sums it up: “In Ghana the dance belongs first to the formal, traditional, ceremonial aspects of the total culture” (2004:236). This is a cultural positioning of life itself, because many things center on music and dance.



Figure 7. Yaw Sekyi, Accra. Photo by Author 2007.

Odette Blum’s take on Ghanaian dance offers a further elaboration on the social function of dance in the life of the people. “[D]ance is still a meaningful part of their lives. It reflects, reaffirms, and strengthens the traditions and order of society, revealing the attitudes, beliefs and values of its people” (Blum, 1973:51). Though over time the generational shifts set in, it is still African dance with a trend. The performers tread the fine lines that differentiate traditional, contemporary, and freestyle dance forms, which embody most of the dance aspirations of the people. These fine line threads identify each generation from the other. Like any culture, knowing which gestures are age-appropriate and in which settings is also an important part of Ghanaian dance. For instance *shee-waga*

(semi grinding) with a swagger or *sakotosa* (squat-grind) movements, which are loaded with vulgar meanings, may be restricted to peers of teenagers whereas the general basics of traditional and fused highlife dances offer the basic step of side-center-side approach, with a swing of the arms, either partner or solo.

My former teacher, William Ofotsu Adinku, in his discussion of Ghanaian traditional dances and their values for the Ghanaian education system, connects current and ancient educational values to the way of life of a people, and shows how the tertiary (university) level can apply these ideas effectively (1994:76). Jane Desmond also discusses in a similar line of thought, writing about “dance training,” production, and “performance and audience perception” of the form (1997:398). She speaks to dance as an embodied knowledge passed on by people. In tracing the way people gather and transmit the age-old tradition, Alyce Taylor Cheska informs us that the “current trend in contemporary West Africa is the formation of traditional dance clubs in villages and cities, open to interested members of community” (1987:136). Another trend is the creation of traditional dance ensembles in the communities as well as the national companies. Samples are the Ghana Dance Ensemble, Noyam Dance Company, and Hayor Dance Company (all based in Ghana); and African Dance Ensemble (ADE, based in Canada).

These practices help to share knowledge that existed before the introduction of Western education. Tradition goes on come what may. “Ewe boys perform a traditional dance in their village square. . . . [whilst in] visual art and traditional crafts Ghanaian artisans draw on the traditions” notes Yvette La Pierre (2004:80). Kofi Anyidoho and James Gibbs (2000:383) describe an “experiment” in which “many traditional dance

groups from different Ghanaian towns and villages were invited to the University of Ghana” in the context of understanding *Fontomfrom*. Kariamuwelsh-Asante (1996:254) describes a “dream of putting Ghanaian traditional music on the world music scene. . . . [as well as] follow the dance contests through all the regions of the country and thus African dance: an artistic, historical, and philosophical inquiry” into the inner understandings and manifestations over time. She offers representative models that can symbolize the practice from Africa to elsewhere around the globe (See Tiérou, 1992:88; Akrong, 2003). Her views are debatable. Critics may say that one should not “over-mix” cultures, Africa is not a country, but a continent. The question is, how much is enough in echoing Pan-African elements for people in and out of Africa? Once the African-locals can identify their local sound with other sound, and say it is a hybrid that is fairly reflective of how they connect with that particular element, then the culture is not “over-mixed” but is re-identified within the context of contemporary expressions.

Highlife Dance Bands (and Local Competitions) were an important feature on the West African popular culture scene in the 1950s and 1960s. I shall connect the dance bands’ natural links to the platform of hip life culture. Bonnie Graham (1988:79) observed the rapid increase in the number of bands that played regularly in various towns, and noted that they utilized Western as well as local musical instrumentation. Membership in these bands cut across ethnicities in Ghana (as well as into Nigeria, etc.), and the music incorporated local languages. There are numerous highlife dance bands across Ghana today spanning the guitar dance bands, Rumlbers International, Western Diamonds, Fire Band, Police Band, Amakye Dede, Mr. A.A.A or Ampofo Adjei Band, Black Ohuru, E.K.

Nyame, Wulomei of the Big Boy/Naa Amanoa fame, and many others. These bands are founded on different premises. For example, Mr A.A.A.'s and Amakye Dede's bands are built around an individual's skill, but the Fire and Police bands are built as institutional wings, for example the music section of the Fire Service of Ghana, of a service department. Dance bands have contributed to the nurturing and preservation of highlife music, from which today's hip life musics borrow their influences.

Dance competitions are common events among local communities as well as regional and national. They start with peers reviewing what talents are worthy of competing and encouraging the locals to participate in the local championship. These competitions cover speech, African dance, dramatic expression, freestyle dance, funk or hip hop. They are important in talent developments. The Embassy Double-Do⁴⁸ competition is an example of a popular dance competition for youth – a forum where performers are crowned in a highly competitive way. The styles of performances range from traditional, neo-traditional, contemporary, popular highlife, to freestyle, where the complexity of the fusion is highlighted. Currently elements of freestyle have somewhat melded into hip life forms.

⁴⁸ The name Embassy Double-Do comes from the tobacco company in Ghana that makes Embassy cigarettes.

3.5. Tracing the History of Hip Life Music

3.5.1. Roots of Hip Hop through Hip Life Cultures: Africa

This section considers the beginnings of hip hop and how it has propelled itself from the South Bronx across the globe. The origins include Africa and in this context we will look at Ghana with its various ethnicities and musics. In Ghana, hip hop shares ample links with rap (*wiemo naatoo/kanemo* in Ga) music. Rap has links to the linguistic delivery of the court spokesperson of the Chief or the Chief Priest in their appellative libation communication with the ancestors, the living, and nature. It is appropriate to position hip life's story as beginning in part with the linguistic feature of *Okyeame* as mentioned above (in Akan, Ga, Ewe, or Dagbani languages, etc.).

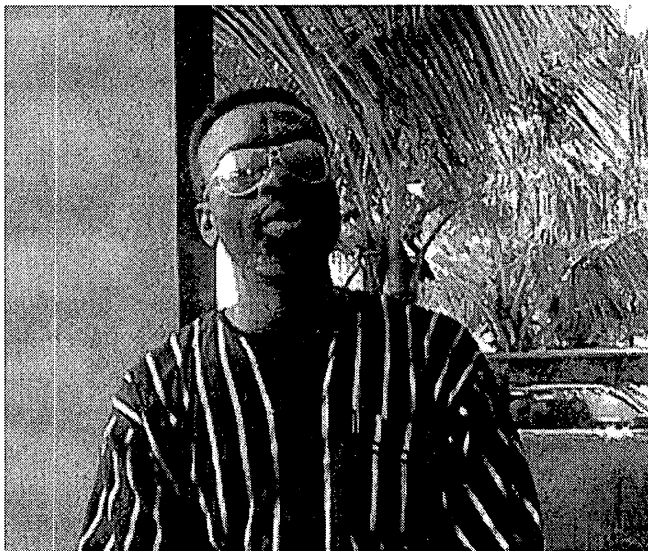


Figure 8. K.K. Kabobo, MUSIGA offices Accra. Photo by Author 2007.

The rap aspect of the dialogue in the local languages furnishes the local musicians materials to incorporate it into their musical practices. A typical ritual of libation pouring involving incantations, chants, and recitals of historical chronicles (connecting griot and

court-linguist characteristics) has played a significant role in the infusion of traditional-rap in the hip life music genre. Several artists utilize the local-rap as a prominent feature in their “traditional-in-popular” highlife musics. These include K.K. Kabobo (Figure 8) with his 1981 album *Nyatse Nyatse Girl* (*nyatse* meaning “little” in *Twi*) and G. Ambolley with *Simigwa* music and dance in 1973 – from which came *Simi* rap.



Figure 9. Gyadu Blay Ambolley, East Legon. Photo by Author 2007.

This set the stage, in part, for the development of hip life practice by Rockstone, with the influence of the hip hop movement from the Bronx.

Although hip hop originated in the South Bronx, it had but “a brief stop” there, because historically speaking it came from Africa, so going to Africa is just coming home. Many scholars have done work on the intercultural element of hip hop, as well as the various principles that underlie it (for more on hip hop poetry, rap, grafitti, MCing, DJing, etc., see Imani Perry, 2004; Thomas Hatch, 2006; Murray Forman, 2002; Steven Stancell, 1996; Osumare Halifu, 2007; and Tricia Rose, 2008). Brian George (2007:95) echoed that

“[o]n a global scale, rap as a specific cultural form traces its roots to the New York [and beyond to Africa] of the late 1970s, being originally one component of a range of linked forms which included dance and graffiti art as well as music.” This relates to the “Bronx stop” discussion above, but in a broader continuum of events. We shall also look at the integration of the hybrid music of highlife as the legacy of the British and their European colonial partners that has residues in brass band music, which in turn feeds into brass music. The band *Ohuru*’s album *Ohuru Highlife Classics* is an example of early highlife music.

The melding of hip life music by Reggie Rockstone in his experimentation with DJ Rab Bakari (after their contact at the Cotton Club, Osu) will be treated here. Scholars (see Cornish 2009; Hatch 2006)⁴⁹ have proven a lot of connections with Africa, such as the historical roots of rap, graffiti, rhythms, and instrumentation, and here I am going to zoom into some of the salient connections from the Ga tradition, as well as neighbouring traditions that have been able to interpret some of the artistic practices.

The “hip hop archives” have it that the Harlem-based DJ “Hollywood⁵⁰ is also recognized as the person who coined the term “hip hop,” which began to be used as part of a motivating line in his rhymes during parties” (see Stancell 1996:339), in the early stages of the hip hop movement. “Hip hop began in the early 1970s . . . on the streets of the South Bronx, in New York City” (Cornish, 2009:32), and is today part of almost every

⁴⁹ Additional scholars are T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, 2007; María Pérez y González, 2000; Sonja L. Lanehart, 2001; Jeff Chang, 2005; S. Craig Watkins, 2006; Richard Young, 2002; Nelson George, 1998.

⁵⁰ See also, Bill Brewster and Frank Broughton (2000:229) on similar discussions about “DJ Hollywood, whose regular shows at Harlem’s Apollo Theater and Club 371 were the first places many were exposed to hip hop.”

country's youth culture. Emmett points out that "Hip Hop (with capitals) implies the Hip Hop Culture; hip hop refers to the musical genre also known as rap. . . [In addition the spellings of **hiphop** or **hip hop** with space in between thus employ] ideological approaches to hip hop or Hip Hop" (2006:xiii, 140-145). The same modes in Emmett's discussion can be applied to Hip Life, hip life, hip-life, hiplife, and the "lives," with the latter as collaboration of *highlife* and *hip life* musics. Although in this paper I use the term "hip life," among artists, producers, fans, scholars, etc., there are many ways of spelling or emphasizing the term, all of which are correct. The hip hop discourses in Chapter One prepared the way for the following discussion.

Thomas Hatch attests to the fact that "hip hop culture came from ghetto life in the Bronx. But the ideas behind hip hop go far back in history" (2006:37). This historical perspective relates well with my understanding of, and exposure to hip hop, as well as the logic of the formation of hip hop culture. Hatch further maintains that:

Many things in hip hop aren't new. Long ago Egyptians [in Northern Africa] . . . wrote their names on the walls of pyramids. The graffiti writers are doing the same with their tags. In Africa, warriors danced to show skill and strength. In Brazil, players make a circle to play capoeira. . . . As music is played, the players do handstands and backflips to show their power . . . these traditions look like breakdancing. (37)

Growing up in the capital of Ghana in the late sixties and seventies, I witnessed the break-dance fever that captivated the youth scene. Boom boxes, then called ghetto blasters, were hip and it was common to hear hip hop's heavy beats with layers of English slang poetry. What strikes me now are the robot-like movements associated with breakdancing (see *Breakin'* 1984, and *Breakin' 2: Electric Boogaloo* 1985 movies) as well as the movements

of Michael Jackson's moonwalk. As a composer and choreographer, I see that these movements have remained fresh over time. Though rhythmic chants exist elsewhere, the traditional Ga/Akan movements in *fume fume* and *akom* dances are really the elements found in the hip hop steps *crazy legs* (see also Halifu's-Awe treatment of *Yoruba*, *Bakongo* and the Wolof people's link to hip hop culture [2007:35]). *Otu* chants and songs are traditional Ghanaian ancient rap, like chants to call on the ancestors in a ceremony on the Ga coastal belt.

Hatch also relates hip hop to capoeira. Following this thought and shifting to this martial art form, capoeira movement and music can be traced to the Angolans (and their art forms) brought to Brazilian and Jamaican plantations, among other places, during the slavery period. This form has so much to share in song and movements, and the hip hop chronicle is still a fascinating story – right on the “walls of Egyptian pyramids.” The movements in both capoeira and hip hop are martial arts-like sports in which the rules are basic African dance with the tradition as the governing referee. These are all small indicators of the bigger puzzle of hip hop culture, enshrined (historically) within the practice of hip hop and hip life found in Ghana.

In a review of Jeff Chang's *Can't Stop, Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation* (2005), Evelyn Nien-Ming⁵¹ (*The Village Voice*) notes:

Forged in the fires of the Bronx and Kingston, Jamaica, hip-hop became the Esperanto of youth rebellion and a generation-defining movement. In a post-civil rights era defined by deindustrialization and globalization, hip-hop crystallized a

⁵¹ See reviews at http://books.google.ca/books/about/Can_t_stop_won_t_stop.html?id=4aofRcBRvMgC&redir_esc=y. Accessed 15 Oct. 2009.

multiracial, polycultural generation's worldview, and transformed American politics and culture. (n.p.n.d.)

A deeper step to deciphering the hip hop myth brings us to a conversation with Imani

Perry in the *Prophets of the Hood: Politics and Poetics of the Hip Hop* (2004):

Hip hop is high-sensibility music. Even before music videos became popular the use of visual images was common in the poetry of hip hop. This holistic culture, and participatory performance culture, engages multiple senses anyway, but in addition, the lyrics themselves speak of sensory diversity in describing the effects of the music. Senses are transferred and interchanged. For example, where touch would be, sound has entered, reinforcing the sense of inundation in the musical experience. (66)

Circumstances that inspire lyrics might include social issues, current news and events, or artists' personal life situations. These circumstances become integrated into the music and give insight into the reasoning and mode of communication within broader discourses.

"Hip hop was the solution, the product of self-determination, self-realization, creativity, and pride," recounts Emmett (2006:xi), negotiating the identity and complexity of hip hop practices.

When an artist sings about homelessness, s/he may be speaking from personal experience. To look at the same song in terms of a legend, as a loaded lyric, stories unfold just like a griot accounts for history as a lived event, or as experienced and told from one person to another (a bedrock of familiar oral traditions). This connects with the well-known terminology and intonation at the Chief's courtyard in many Ghanaian traditions. Such practices are characteristic of linguistic appellation or praise singing in African traditions including: Ga, Dagbani, Akan, and Ewe of Ghana. Regional languages such as Akan in Ivory Coast; Ewe in Togo and Benin; Hausa across the West African sub-region;

and Swahili in the Central African region have all been instrumental in popular musics across the various regions. Esi Sutherland Addy of the Institute of African Studies, Ghana, in her discussion of proverbs in the film *Living the Hip Life*, noted that,

We [Ghanaians/Africans] have a very common way of creating poetry in our traditional society where a proverb, which is a capsule of wisdom, is stated and then a song will expand on the proverb. It is actually quite audacious for the rap artist to come out there and be brazen and start using proverbial language, speaking through their elders and to the whole society, for the composer actually owns that proverb once they make the song, because they are saying, “This is my perspective of the proverb.”

Proverbs⁵² are not always easy to decode in the Ghanaian languages. Fluency in language skills is needed on the part of the listener to decode and contextualize, in order to meaningfully appreciate hip life music. Others can enjoy the beat and the rhythm, but will not understand the deeper meanings of the lyrics. A demanding task is required of the lyricist to deliver a rhythmic flow to the rap. If the artist wants to be listened to, the lyrics have to flow, and the slang syntax has to cut across class boundaries so that everyone can hear and understand. Even if someone can't understand, they will be moved to ask what the meaning is. This can bring people together. There are community members who have this natural talent, who can crack jokes, and are so smart and jovial. In Ga such people are described as *Sasaanso*. These are people who can take serious issues and sing them in rhymes, where the rhyme captures all of the issue and captivates the audience. A natural structure rhythmically connects the poetic input, the rhythmic flow, and the intonation, according to the natural nuance of the ethnic language, the gestures and the expressions on

⁵² The oral literature is pregnant with many proverbs and stories that have guided society over generations prior to written documentation.

their faces. Some are so contradictory that they immediately spark humour in people.

These people have the same qualities as the linguist in the Chief's court, but are found in communities. Coming back to hip life linguists, "It's a distinct hip life sound; they have certain rhythm, certain curtains of flow" clarifies Rab Bakari, a New York-based DJ (*Living the Hip Life*, 2007). The hip life artist Sidney describes his musical beginnings:

When we started, we called our group *Nananom*, "the Chiefs" or "the rulers." We started in a palace. We had a king, a linguist, a queen mother; we were ruling the hip life world at that time. That is why we took that name, because we believe this whole thing started in the palace. I got my inspiration from my great grandfather called Osei Kwame, who is believed to be the first Ghanaian to have his song on an LP album. Black people do hip hop in America and we believe they were taken from here in Africa. Back in the days in the palace, there is always somebody who pours libation before the Chief speaks. When you put beat behind these appellations it becomes pure rap.

Panji Anoff, who runs "the oldest music studio in Ghana," describes the origins of hip hop this way: "[T]he source of hip-hop is an ancient African tradition of free styling, which is spontaneous poetry to a rhythmic pattern . . . This is an African tradition which is thousands of years old. You can say American hip-hop is an evolution of an African tradition."⁵³

In Ga oral culture, the *Wulomo*-Chief priest recites in rap as an invocation for customary ceremonies in the community. The *Luna* drummers of the *Wa Naa* (Chief) of the Dagbon tradition share the same traces of rap. They use the talking drum for the Chief's grand entrance⁵⁴ to a *durbar*⁵⁵ grounds, and use rap music and poetry in the linguist/*Okyeame*/griot style of presentation. This is a humble approach. Coming to the

⁵³ See the 2003 discussions on "Accra reclaims hip-hop."

<<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/3241007.stm>>. BBC World Service Masterpiece programme.

⁵⁴ This indicates a conserved heritage, not a hybrid stage of cultural practice.

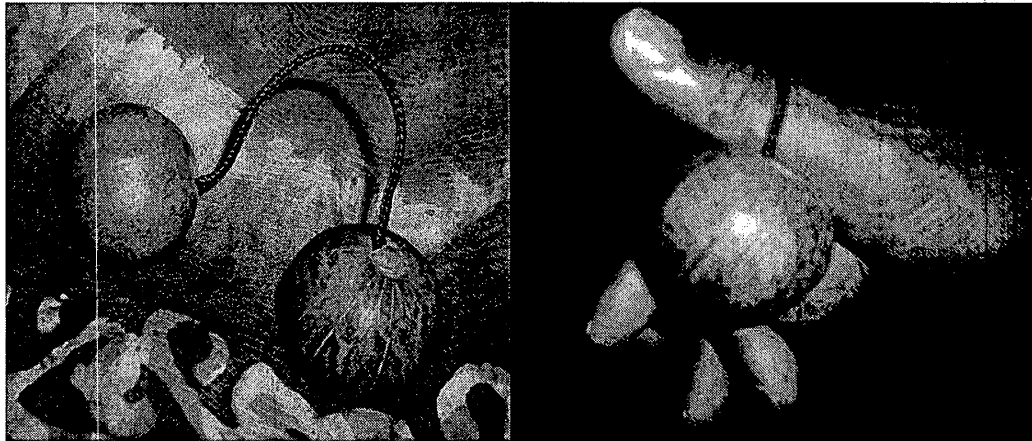
⁵⁵ A traditional gathering of people for an important event such as various celebrations or funerals.

street level of music-making and rap, these are the very basic hip hop beats *Bum bu-Tsa tsis tsis* or their derivative (see mnemonics at www.wordiq.com). “The bass drum pattern is most often the part that provides the hip hop feel. . . . [that] was innovated predominantly in soul and funk music, where beats and thematic music were repeated for the duration of tracks” (www.wordiq.com, n.d. n.p.). Hodge affirms that “Hip Hop is similarly connected to the blues, jazz, soul and Black gospel. Sampling from these genres is one of the many ways Hip Hop artists pay respect to older generations” (2010:86).

The idea of repeating a particular motif in music is popular in ancient traditions as well as current popular culture. This can be seen in various traditional Ghanaian drum styles (or for that matter, those of many indigenous peoples around the world). Such repetition of motifs, as seen above, are quite similar to repetitions found in Ga Gome styles, which are similar to the *Boom bu dat* mentioned by The Black Dot (2005:75), and are similar to the sounds of *aslato* or *aslatoa*. The *aslato* is a musical instrument consisting of two egg-size gourds with seeds in them, strung together by a thin cord. It is played with a technique that combines the manipulation of the fingers, wrist, palm and elbow. When you experience this instrument played in Ga or Akan musics, it reverberates with bass, mid, tweeter or high pitch speaker, as well as its own unique funky sound. Many well-known Ghanaian artists utilize *aslatoa* (next page). For example, Nana Danso Ambiam uses it in the Pan African Orchestra. I have played the instrument myself from childhood and explored the intricacies that it has to offer.

1

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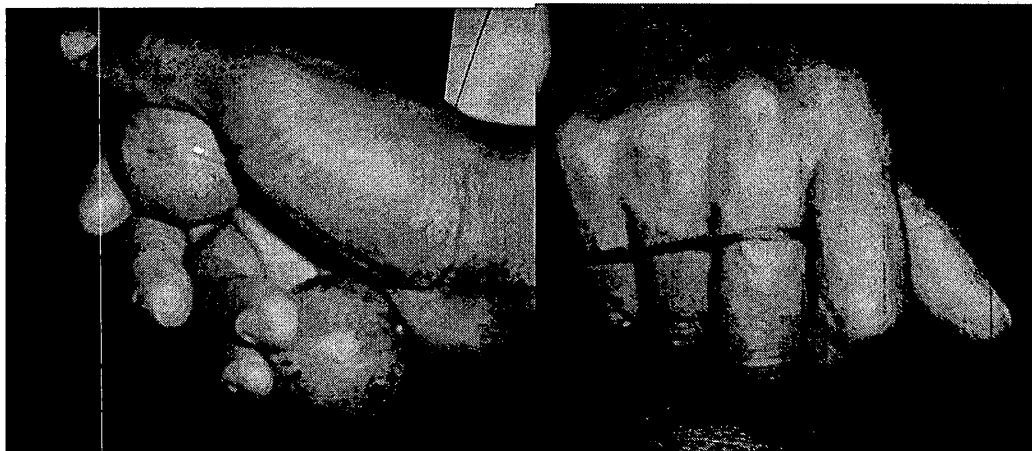


Figure 10. 1: An *Aslatoa*. 2-4 are playing positions of *Aslatoa*, 2012. By Author.

Ghana's contemporary sound in hip life music is a testament to the ancient musical practice in Africa. Thus wherever someone is in the diaspora, or if someone is passionate about performing African art forms, they engage their identity in performance – consciously or not – they still sound African. The African in them is expressed through

rap, beat-making, drumming, etc. This is similar to Randy Weston and Willard Jenkins's (2010:298) view that "When a person is touched by African music, from his skin to his soul, that person has become Africanized. Perhaps this is the true meaning of universal – something seemingly foreign that touches you and reminds you of your deepest self." This concept is also exhibited by Samy Alim et al (2009:32, 117) who shares Perry's (2004) view that "[t]he development of Hip Hop in Africa . . . is merely a return to its roots," and the BBC accounts that "moving full circle, rap and hip hop are now finding new forms of expression in Africa itself."⁵⁶

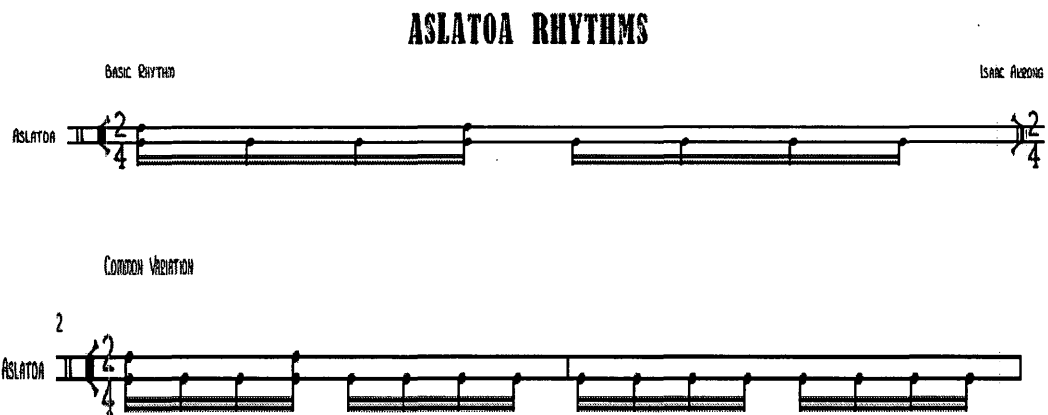


Figure 11. Isaac Akrong. "Aslatoa Rhythms of Ghana." Personal Collection. 2010. CD.

The fact that the founders of hip hop employ these same proverbial tools of musiking indirectly reinforces the notion of larger historical connections around the world, namely the global migration of Africans across the diaspora, the slave trade, and now, the global identity of hip hop culture. From Africa to Africa, hip life culture emerges (similar to the journey of African musics that went to Cuba, and returned to Africa in the 1940s

⁵⁶ See < http://www.uel.ac.uk/news/press_releases/releases/>. Accessed 10 July 2011.

and 1950s in the form of popular musics). In Japan, hip hop culture has a different historical context from Ghana, as every nation has specific histories that shape its music. These feed into the global spread of rap, jazz, R&B, and reggae into Japanese culture (Halifu, 2007:91). The same spread has engulfed the globe today, giving voice to the oppressed, or just for the fun of imitating Black culture, thereby creating a “global hood” within the youth culture “virtually” (19). In this way hip hop is like a big cushion that is able to absorb the energies of the youth. Okyeame Kwame (aka Quophi, of Emklan Entertainment and Emklan Studios), musician and radio host (Hitz FM) notes that the “linguist or *Okyeame* in Ghanaian tradition is the equivalent of MC in show business” (p.c. 2006), suggestive of the performative mode or “vibe” of Africa that is naturally and historically wired to the rest of the performance world.

To understand hip life is to understand an aspect of hip hop culture as well as Ghanaian music transformations. They are both versions of the same art form, practiced on different continents but with similar messages, fashions and characteristics. Ghanaian traditional music, or for that matter African traditional music, appeared on North American soil through slavery, and accounts of the human mosaic in the Bronx show it as a place epitomizing the American melting pot, including the descendants of Africans brought to the Americas. As discussed in the introduction, the circumstances of diverse youth in the Bronx communities shaped the expressive outlets of break dancing and B-Boying. In the form of hip hop, a transformed African musical and dance practice that

grew in popularity from the street to many mainstream cultures (e.g. see BET – Black Entertainment Television, or Much Music). As Chuck D⁵⁷ puts it:

The power is in the mic, and the power has been unleashed in clubs, arenas, stadiums, stages, and parks all over the planet. MCs are able to connect with . . . [their] audience in a way that the music alone cannot. Hip Hop, via the MC, has undoubtedly become the voice of a new generation. Much attention has been paid to the staggering impact hip hop music and culture has had on the greater American and world cultures; its influence on fashion, television, advertising, and the attitudes of the world's youth. (2007 n.p.)

In addition to fashion, television, advertising, etc., hip hop has influenced many other aspects of human culture. This includes other cultures starting to break dance, hip hop, rap and turn-table. Little did those first musicians know how hip hop would grow into a world-wide phenomenon – one that is seen by big companies as a useful advertising medium. In Ghana it is normal to see hip life artists draw crowds for corporate events.

The current commercialization of hip hop and hip life is a departure from the initial concept of social-venting or entertaining as an outlet for the South Bronx youth who pioneered hip hop. The pressures from corporations to co-opt hip hop culture into advertising and other media include tempting artists with large sums of money (perceived as by some artists and critics as “selling out”). This tends to discourage the grassroots hip hop and hip life artists who are on the street creating their art form, whereas major corporations are busy using the artist's music for their own commercial advantage. This is a site of contestation where the “hood” unconsciously shifts (or re-entrenches old ideologies of deprivation) into areas of low-income in the community roots of hip hop.

⁵⁷ See cover of Chuck D and Yusif Jah. *Chuck D: Lyrics of a Rap Revolutionary, Volume One*. 2007. See also <<https://www.hiphopbookclub.com>>.

Much has been taken out of the hood without being returned; only a lucky few are able to emerge from it. Some of those who have become known are not those who founded hip hop. Jay Z and P Diddy, for instance, are not founders of hip hop, but they are big players today. Some artists are able to cleverly navigate the terrain of commercial interests to ensure their integrity remains intact. Take Reggie Rockstone's actions when approached to endorse a beer company:

Guinness approached me to do their commercial for them. For years I would not endorse alcohol. I asked for a platform to address responsible drinking and as the song goes, keep your eyes on the road. The song was already made and they took it and made a commercial out of it, they got billboards all over the place. Just making music doesn't really pay well. I never came into this to make money because if I did, I would have left long time ago but little stuff like this pays off. (*Living the Hip Life*, 2007)

Even though every artist needs funds to record songs, Rockstone is careful with alcohol endorsements and what that means to the moral development of youth. Decisions like this take a lot of courage in a developing nation where artists face unstable economic revenues. But jumping onboard is not the best way for an artist to engage with his audience. The company knew the value of Rockstone's music, and the personality of a pioneering crowd-puller was seen as a calling card for their product's sales. And yet at the same time, Rockstone was able to accomplish his goal of putting forth a social message.

3.5.2. Genealogy of Hip Life Music

Hip life music is connected to Ghanaian events that formed the foundation of hip hop's core. Traditional African music and dance (including elements of hip hop) travelled through African slaves to the Americas. The resultant Bronx mix of multiple cultures

integrated African American and Latino youths and propelled hip hop into the limelight. African trademarks in hip hop (call and response, or “spitting” act of rap) returned to Africa (its ancestral home) through Reggie Rockstone’s interests in the rap/hip hop culture as well as his native *Twi* language. This influenced Ghanaian youth to expand and diversify the genre in many forms. “Hip hop realness is negotiated through connections to hip hop’s origins, whether via geographic proximity to the New York boroughs where the culture originated, through connections to artists . . . in the creation of culture, or through . . . performing live rather than selling records” (Hess, 2007:20fd). Hess’s view can be traced further to Africa, hence hip life’s transformations.

We can trace the beginnings of hip life back to one particular Ghanaian artist: Reggie Rockstone. Born in London, England, to Ghanaian parents (i.e., his lineage) in the late 1960s, he got his start as a hip hop dancer in the early 1980s. Hip life is linked to Rockstone’s musical explorations and performances with the PLZ (Parables, Linguistics and Zlang) group, based in the UK, before Rockstone relocated to Ghana (in 1994). Other key players in the development of hip life are DJ Pozo and Freddi Funkstone. Clifford Joseph Harris, aka TI, was one of Rockstone’s first hip hop influences. As Rockstone traveled in the United States in his youth, he collected records from some of the notable artists of the time. To date, TI’s music continues to impact him. Ayana Vellissia Jackson, in the web article “Full Circle: A Survey of Hip Hop in Ghana,” notes that

Returning to their native homeland from abroad in the early 1990’s, artists and producers like Panji Anoff of Pidgen Music, Reggie Rockstone, Freddie Funkstone, Zapp Mallet, Michael Cook, Michael ‘Coalhouse’ Horthman, and Talking Drum brought with them an appreciation for American music. Similar to

Hip Hop in rhyme patterns and the use of electronica, Hip Life strips American Hip Hop down to raw beats, infusing it with local rhythms like Adowa (A-do-wa), instruments such as Kpalogo (Kpa-lo go) drums, xylophones, and thumb pianos, samples of old High Life favorites like Alhaji Frimpong, Abrechieba Kofi Sammy, and A.B Crenstil, and vocal performances in local languages like Twi, Ewe, Hausa and others. (<http://www.avjphotography.com/AVJ_hiplifeessay.htm>. n.d. n.p.)

Rockstone released *Makaa Maka!* (I Said It, Because I Can Say It) on Kassa Records in 1997 with PLZ. This revolutionary debut changed the landscape of Ghanaian popular music and earned him the milestone title of “Grandpapa of Hip Life.” (The title song from this album will be discussed).



Figure 12. *Makaa Maka!* Album by Reggie Rockstone, 1997.

With time the theme of “I Said It” grew so strong around the world, that Ghanaian youth across the diaspora (Figure 12) began patronising and participating in hip life events.

In his early years, Rockstone travelled frequently between Accra, New York and London, where he broadened his hip hop scope. A natural performer and trained actor, his fame grew in 1992-93 as a member of PLZ, which was one of the top rap groups from

London. Also in the group were Fredi Funkstone and Jay (both from West Africa), and DJ Pogo of the UK. Among PLZ's number one hits were "If it Ain't PLZ," and "Build a Wall Around Your Dreams," which was released on an independent label called "Go For the Juggler." Some of PLZ's songs sample Fela Kuti, while others use famous highlife tunes. Rockstone is considered a versatile artist with the ability to write deep lyrics (*Music in Ghana*, n.d. n.p.).⁵⁸

Although foreign music (E.g., US hip hop) influenced the Ghanaian music scene through new media, "nevertheless, globalisation has not driven out indigenous cultural elements. It has blended into indigenous music and dance, and has been incorporated into traditional celebrations" (Salm and Toyin Falola, 2002:31). "American hip hop music, for example, has . . . [transformed] into Ghanaian hip life music, drawing on the influence of Ghana's long-standing popular musical genre, highlife, and the imported hip hop" (31).

This is where Reggie Rockstone's revolutionary efforts play out in the historical chronology. The hip life artist Sydney, in the film *Living the Hip Life*, recalled that

From 1990, we had groups like Nitty Fan Club (NFL), we had groups like Talking Drums, we had groups like Sly Lover, and we had General Marcus, Black Prophet. You know these were all rap artists. It was 1994, that is when Reggie came down, there was this big Panafest in 1994 and Reggie was like, let's do this in our own language, man. So he came out with his first album and we listened to some of the lyrics and it was so amazing and for a moment, I thought he was rapping in English and it was cheap and he said this was a revolution and so let's do it.

The performance at Panafest was inspirational and Rockstone's initiatives convinced the youth about the value of rapping in Ghanaian native languages. The word went out rapidly

⁵⁸ For more on Reggie Rockstone's development of hip life, see <<http://www.musicinghana.com/reggie-rockstone/>>. Accessed 6 Nov. 2009.

among their peers to try hip life music in their own corner. The hip life group Akyeame became “the first Ghanaian group to win the hip-life song of the year with Zapp Mallet, a record producer who produced ‘Masan Aba’ (I’m Back Again) in 1999. The group is made up of Kwame Nsiah Appau, aka Okyeame Kwame and Daniel Quophi Amoateng aka Okyeame Quophi.” This group empowered the youth by their creative appeal as well as enlightened them on the hip life musical journey.

In order to understand the beginnings of hip life, I visited Panji Anoff, CEO of Pidgen Music in Accra.⁵⁹ He shared with me that

Pidgen Music has been experimenting, recording hip life over the last sixteen or seventeen years. Hip life really came to life in about ’93, ’94, ’95, but the experiments to make it possible began maybe ’88, ’89, ’90. In the early years I managed Reggie Rockstone, I managed Talking Drums, and I managed to move up those two groups. Those are the two groups that really can claim to have brought hip life to the forefront. (p.c. 2007)

Reggie Rockstone is of the view that hip life was started by two people, himself and an African American, Rab International or Rab Bakari, and “of course other soldiers [hip life artists in the initial stages of hip life] who move on the forefront” (p.c. 2007). Bakari confirmed this in an interview and also modestly passed the credit back to Rockstone (p.c. 2007). The issue of whether or not hip lifers play their own instruments is a contentious one that we shall return to later. When I asked Rockstone about the musical instruments he plays he noted that “I play the mic. I got a good ear. . . . If I hear a beat that I like, that’s what I will translate, verbally, artistically.” Every band needs a “lead singer,” and “this is the role I play” (p.c. 2007). Tricia Rose elaborates on this artistic role: “the iconic focus of

⁵⁹ In Ghana it is mostly spelt *Pidgen* English, whilst it is referred to as *Pidgin* in Canada.

the rapper is the microphone; rappers are dependent on advanced technology to amplify their voices so that they can be heard over the massive beats that surround the lyrics” (2006:222).

John Collins, a professor who has written extensively about highlife music in Ghana, West Africa, shared with me that hip lifers

are not trained [like Western musicians] . . . When Reggie Rockstone [and] . . . this type of music emerged, around about the mid '90s, that's not highlife at all. Reggie Rockstone created the name hip to link highlife with his style, even if there is no connection – there was no connection, it was a marketing plot. He said he wanted to link it so that it will be more acceptable . . . so he called it hip life, hip hop highlife, and he said this in his interviews . . . I talked to him, he is quite blunt about it . . . he tricked the Ghanaian public. (p.c. 2007)



Figure 13. John Collins, 2006. Photo by Author.

At the time it may have seemed like a “trick” name, but with time and the blending of more traditional instrumentation, various kinds of hip life modes set in. In a more recent interview with Collins about hip life music, he was of the opinion that now the hip lifers

are doing quite well, since they are incorporating more live acts with bands and not just lip-synching during performances (p.c. 2009). Thus a gradual shift from the sole use of computerized sound (which was popular initially) to acoustic live instruments in stage performances has gone a long way to cross-fertilize this popular form. It is important to note that Rockstone's track and album title, *Maaka Maka!* included the adowa traditional music bell and drum with nuanced vocals of *Twi* choruses, with looped hip hop beats and layered *Twi*. So it is a revelation that hip life is "what it is" – or what it has become, a product of society.

Discussing the hybrid nature of hip life and its development through highlife music, Paul Gifford observed that both "local and Western intermingling was evident [musically]. By 1970s, highlife . . . was being challenged by . . . hip life music, a fusion of hip hop, rap, and highlife" (qtd. in Wuthnow, 2009:78-79). Hip life's rise has also been documented in numerous newspaper and magazine articles (see also Grant Barrett 2006:170). In *Billboard Magazine's* March 6, 1999 edition, Elena Oumano in the "Words and Deeds" column, wrote an article titled "Fusion-Based Hiplife Genre Invigorates Ghana." She noted that "[i]n hiplife, hip hop beats fuse with raps in any of Ghana's many languages or English-Language raps ride beats that incorporate elements of highlife, Ghana's indigenous pop style" (29). Also in 1999, Joyce Mensah of Accra's *Ghanaian Chronicle* noted the popularity of hip life, in that

Hip-life music has been the main dominant rhythm in our music industry; hardly a day passes by without radio stations blaring them on air. This is because 'westernized' youth who form the majority of our population are madly in love with it since it presents them freestyle and a break. This has indirectly led to the proliferation of hip-life music youth groups like Buk-Bak, Nananom, VIP, Sasquard,

and individuals like Reggie Rockstone, Nana King, Ex Doe, are 'idolized' by the youth. (Mensah 1999: 4)

I witnessed this myself in Accra, Tema, Kumasi, Tamale, and Cape Coast. The hip life genre is played everywhere around the country. A number of cell phone companies and media houses are utilizing hip life to advertise their products. As Rockstone says, "every radio station is blasting their music, every funeral is hip life, every TV commercial, everything hip life" (p.c. 2007). Even the streets of Accra are full of billboards linked to hip life music, the vehicle of choice for marketing in modern Ghana. Thus it implies a good business (off the artists, though it's gradually changing) by a few companies to yield economic gains from, or with hip life music.

The majority of artists tend to make little money in Ghana, a few stakeholders who are linked to artists do benefit. Business is not usually a celebrant of fairness, but it is important that businesses be sensitive to cultures – to the peoples' music, be it traditional or popular.⁶⁰ Transparency and accountability are needed.

Hiplife was almost solely the brainchild of 'Reginald Rockstone' Osei. Memory Lane: Whilst we were both in Accra from London on Christmas holidays in 1994, I vividly recollect meeting Reggie at a friend's place and hearing him rap in Twi. I was taken aback, for I'd never heard it done before – and it was effortless good. 'I'm not new to this rap thing,' hiplife's founding father – who also coined the genre's name – tells me almost nine years later. (Berrett 2006:170)

Reggie confirmed this claim in our personal communications when I visited his residence in Accra. However, he credits the New York-based Rab Bakari and a few others for making this come true:

⁶⁰ Artists deserve protection. This is where agencies such as the Musicians Union of Ghana (MUSIGA) or the Copyright Society of Ghana (COSGA) could come handy in helping members of the artist community. A healthier relationship between artistic zeal and the business of advertising or marketing needs to be emphasized in business and artistic gatherings.

The roots of hip hop are in Africa . . . what I did was I reinvented it, on a revolutionary level to suit my people, as far as rapping in my own dialect, my own language . . . this has become the soundtrack for Ghana now, as opposed to what it was before, highlife. Now it's called hip life. It's a combination of hip hop and highlife. That's how I word it, performed it, so it has become the reality, so all the kids are doing hip life, man. (p.c. 2007)

That given, hip lifer Okyeame Kwame noted that Rockstone employed a lot of heavy beats (deep bass drums) in his hip life music, “noting more hip hop-hip, and less life-highlife (the Twi language),” whereas Okyeame Kwame informs that he does hip life the other way round with more “highlife instrumentation” and rapping with local dialects to employ the “hip hop” element (p.c. 2007). Kwame is an example of the fact that from its inception through experiments to today, there are many schools of hip life musics. These will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter. Hip life is certainly growing rapidly. As Rockstone claims, it is now “the sound of Ghana” (p.c. 2007).

3.5.3 Sample Tracks of Hip Life Musics

This section explores a variety of hip life musicians' works that shaped hip life's foundational years. I examine hip life musical form by analyzing representative, influential hip life tracks that cut across the hip life sub genres and a few of their derivatives. The analysis offers a glimpse into the nature of hip life music, touching on the lyrical content of some hip life pieces.

As noted earlier, Reggie Rockstone's *Makaa Maka!* (1997) album and title track is one of the first rapped hip life works composed and sung entirely in a Ghanaian language with hip hop and highlife as well as traditional backing percussion. Rockstone's native

Twi language is tailored well in the conversation as he knocks on the door to announce his coming – “*Agoo*” – with the “come in” response, “*Amee*.” “Check it up kid ’cos nobody drop it” reads the initial raps of *Makaa Maka!*, as described in the lyrics (below).

This song is about love for a lady called Adwoa, a Monday-born Akan woman. In the song, Rockstone is pursuing this lady as if she were the only woman in the world. The view of her body is so breathtaking that he needs water to cool off the “hotness.” He proposes to marry Adwoa at all costs and to take her abroad. She should not worry about visa problems, because he has what it takes. When she wears her mini skirt, he sees rhythmic flow that is in sync with the sounds of the stilettos’ steps. He praises her dance steps and encourages her to dance and wriggle/shake with joy on the dance floor. These movements might be inappropriate for parents to see, so respecting the traditional codes is to “keep the *buuumuuu*” (“break it down,” a term in dance meaning to boogie without any social judgment) in camera – a liberated motion of inner expression by a person full of the joy of dance. See the following Samples.

Reggie Rockstone

Album: **Makaa Maka!** (1997)

Track 2: Agoo

Produced by Michael Smith-Horthman

Given the above discussion and explanation, I will be providing a transcription of Agoo song text below.

Introduction

Aaleshiu-wiwiki

whooooiiiiiooo(whistling)

Part 1

check it up kid

...,cos no body drop it –a- on air yor... you no wat I’m say’n

check it up 1-2

Chorus 1

mise agoo ameeee e
mise agoo ooo ameeee e
mise Agoo amee
Agoo amee
 ameeee
mise Agoo amee
Agoo amee
 ameeee

Part 2

Misee wanu niwuto ne wusuban kraa na efriki me
Obi mpiti nsuo-nyono ngomenisu na menisu ntete me
aye misee misu dayee sumdayee - sumdayee namisu enya me
Na krakye, krakye
 Wontumi nhu see yewo asntehene abri
efiti fie kraa
wuhumia na esrisri
Na ka anukwre manfuor nyinaa aware
medo enye kalabule
wonkomoyemide sin kelewole woaa na meware dole-dole
Newa zaaa
mikita abrokyere krataa
yebetumi etu sesiaa hema hema
hemape eye adea metumi ayea meye
wudin a ye wor asante bre
wudin na nyankoponboa shwe
 shwe shwe shwe
wayemisaa ayemisaa ayemisaa amamayesaa
a- wumami ni mami mus nyinaa apiniso
aden obisheho anaa -
wufilibi
bogger-loose
Skin-tight
aboski
kleleneke-na miti-na misee

AGOO!

REGGIE ROCKSTONE

VOICE

HORNS

ELECTRIC GUITAR

ELECTRIC BASS

DRUM SET

The first system of the musical score is in 4/4 time. The voice part consists of four whole rests. The horns part features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with a D9 chord indicated below. The electric guitar part has a similar eighth-note pattern with an 8vb (octave down) marking. The electric bass part has a pattern of eighth notes with a 10 (tenth fret) marking. The drum set part shows a consistent eighth-note pattern.

VOICE

HORNS

ELECTRIC GUITAR

ELECTRIC BASS

DRUM SET

5

The second system of the musical score is in 4/4 time. The voice part contains the lyrics: "A GOD A MEE YOU SAY A GOD A MEE YOU SAY". The horns part has a D9 chord indicated below. The electric guitar part has an 8vb (octave down) marking. The electric bass part has a pattern of eighth notes. The drum set part shows a consistent eighth-note pattern. A page number "5" is written at the bottom left of this system.

The musical score for "Agoo" by Reggie Rockstone is presented in a multi-staff format. The staves are labeled as follows:

- VOICE:** Contains the vocal melody and lyrics: "AGOO AMEE AGOO AMEE AMAY YOU SAY AGOO AMEE AGOO AMEE A MEE".
- HORNS:** Shows a melodic line that is mostly silent, with some notes appearing at the end of the phrase.
- ELECTRIC GUITAR:** Features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes, with a D9 chord indicated above the staff.
- ELECTRIC BASS:** Provides a steady bass line with eighth notes.
- DRUM SET:** Shows a complex, syncopated drum pattern characteristic of reggae.

The score begins with a measure number '9' at the bottom left.

Figure 14. Reggie Rockstone. "Agoo." *Makaa Maka!* Kassa Records, Accra, 1997. CD.

REGGIE ROCKSTONE
4X

Musical score for the first system, featuring five staves: BELL, DRUM, KEYBOARD, ELECTRIC BASS, and DRUM SET. The time signature is 12/8. The BELL staff contains a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The DRUM staff contains a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with accents. The KEYBOARD, ELECTRIC BASS, and DRUM SET staves are empty.

Musical score for the second system, featuring five staves: BELL, DRUM, KEYBOARD, ELECTRIC BASS, and DRUM SET. The time signature is 12/8. The BELL staff contains a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The DRUM staff contains a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with accents. The KEYBOARD staff is empty. The ELECTRIC BASS staff contains a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The DRUM SET staff is empty.

BELL

DRUM

KEYBOARD

ELECTRIC BASS

DRUM SET

Dm⁹ A⁵

BELL

DRUM

KEYBOARD

ELECTRIC BASS

DRUM SET

7

BELL

DRUM

8VA FLOTE SYNTH WITH VOCALS

KEYBOARD

DIM⁹

A6

ELECTRIC BASS

DRUM SET

19

BELL

DRUM

KEYBOARD

DIM⁹

ELECTRIC BASS

DRUM SET

15

5X

The image shows a musical score for the song "Maaka Maka" by Reggie Rockstone. The score is arranged in five systems, each with a staff and a label to its left: BELL, DRUM, KEYBOARD, ELECTRIC BASS, and DRUM SET. The BELL staff contains a series of rhythmic notes. The DRUM staff shows a complex rhythmic pattern with accents. The KEYBOARD staff is divided into two parts, with the upper part containing a melodic line and the lower part containing large oval markings and a "Din" annotation. The ELECTRIC BASS staff shows a bass line with eighth notes. The DRUM SET staff shows a drum pattern with 'x' marks for cymbals and a measure number '23' at the start.

Figure 15. Reggie Rockstone. "Maaka Maka." *Makaa Maka!* Kassa Records, Accra, 1997. CD.

The second track on the album, *Agoo* (above) is a song that uses Ghanaian traditional singing, rap and drums, bass guitar, and keyboard and synthesizers.

This confirms that "... most contemporary African popular music demonstrates a hybridity of form, based on borrowings from different cultures within and without Africa" (Murphy, 2007:40). For instance, the *attenteben* bamboo flute most often shares a limited range or an element of a precise Western note. Depending on the temperature of the room,

humidity level, etc., the *attenteben* keys may be sharp or flat when playing to a score. This is because the tonal language of the Akan or Ga people has room to accommodate such degrees of change that suits its local function. The same was confirmed by Dela Botri, an *attenteben* virtuoso, when he tried to record the *attenteben* melodies into a digital notation format, to no avail. However melodies played on the keyboard turned out clear on the digital score.

The first track of Obour Atumpan's album of the same name, *Konkonti Baa* (see Appendix A 2a), is a piece produced by Morriss Babyface in 2006. Obour raps over heavy beats in common time in this song. "This tune sounds similar to soca or some Caribbean styles . . . it has a very similar progression to the jazz/calypso classic as St. Thomas by Sonny Rollins. The horns are . . . played by a synth[sized instrument]" shared Chris Butcher (p.c. 2010). Some melodies are hinged on the spokesman's language, which is associated with poetry within the chief's court. Here Obour "offers a happier and more dance-like, or accessible" music to a broader Ghanaian audience (Nina Soyfer, p.c. 2010). Such a position references the common time, steady heavy double-bass, and language style of communication in the lyrics as well as shares flavours of hip hop breaks, *jama* beats, and highlife lyrics with rap. Where the people can associate with less complicated lyrics, beats, melodies and straightforward discussions in songs, viewing the song on the platform of, say, how kpanlogo music is relayed through a simple but attractive mode of music making is one way to serve a Ghanaian audience. Yet people also cherish Rockstone's adowa in the Akan communities because they can associate with the *adowa* element in the piece. Songs can shape the identity-leanings of a culture.

Obour's *Shine Ur Eye*, track 2 on the *Konkonti Baa* album, employs many sound effects, such as breaking glass, in addition to the instrumental accompaniment, singers and hip life rappers. In contrast to Rockstone's tracks, a lyrical male vocal is employed. Again, rap contrasts with sung material, whilst syncopated dance rhythms accompany it. Similarly to Rockstone's track 2 rap part (*Makaa Maka!* Track 2: *Agoo*; see Appendix A 1a), this piece employs free style rap and rhythm with high energy. It has dancing rhythms, solo and group dialogue.

Lord Kenya's *Sika mpo, Nfa Neho* (Money Will Take Care of Itself, or, No Worries About Money) is the second/title track (below). Released in 2003 by Wayoosi Label, it employs electric instrumental accompaniment, with rhythm and style similar to the *Atumpan* tracks. Its raspy rap and melodic vocal interweave. This format re-echoes the local nuances that drive the hip life music-making in this context.

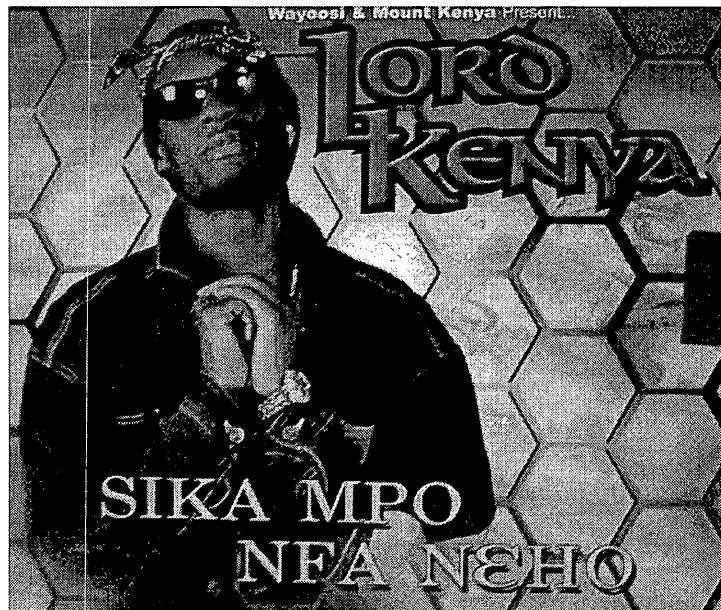


Figure 16. Lord Kenya's Album Cover, 2003.

DOUBLED BVS

HOENS

CHORDS AND NOTATION

A A A Fm Bm

ELECTRIC GUITAR

RND

A A A Fm Bm

KEYBOARDS

Bvs

ELECTRIC BASS

DRUM SET

CLAVES

6

ALTO SAX

E/B A A F Bm E A A

E. GTR.

E/B A A F Bm E A A

KEYBOARDS

E. BASS

DR.

CLV.

The image displays two systems of musical notation for the song "Sika mpo Nfa Neho". Each system includes staves for Alto Sax, Electric Guitar, Keyboard, Electric Bass, Drums, and Clarinet. The first system (measures 11-14) shows the following chord progression for Alto Sax and Electric Guitar: A, F#m, Bm, E, A, A, A. The second system (measures 15-18) shows a more complex progression: A, F#m, Bm, E/B, A, A, F#m, Bm, E, A. The Electric Bass, Drums, and Clarinet parts provide a rhythmic accompaniment throughout both systems.

Figure 17. Lord Kenya. "Sika mpo Nfa Neho." *Sika Mpo Nfa Neho*. Wayoosi Label, Accra, 2003. CD.

The seventh track from the same album is “Children of Africa” (below). This live music has a modern North American R&B influence in its instrumentation (guitar). The lyric is sung by a melodically beautiful female voice at the beginning and throughout the song; there is also a guitar part and rumba-like slow rhythms. It also sounds like the urban hip life style of the artist Chemphe.

The rap contrasts the melodic refrains, characteristic of a male’s rap dialogue with a female’s melody. The a cappella singing of the female voices is similar to Ghanaian gospel singing. The male voice’s short rap insertions imitate rhythmic accompaniment. The instrumental accompaniment enters the music a few phrases later, concluding the song with a combination of refrain, male rap/conversation.

CHILDREN OF AFRICA

LEON UGHA

VOICE

GUITAR

KEYBOARDS

ELECTRIC BASS

DRUM SET

Em G D Bm D Bm A

fill

5

VOICE

E_m G D B_m D B_m A

E. GTR.

RED.

E. BASS

DR.

9

VOICE

HELP ME SAVE THE CHILDREN OF AFRICA BECAUSE THEY ARE FORGOTTEN WE GET TO HAVE

E_m G D B_m D B_m A

E. GTR.

RED.

E. BASS

DR.

Figure 18. Lord Kenya. "Children of Africa." *Sika Mpo Nfa Neho*. Wayoosi Label, Accra, 2003. CD.

In summary these hip life tracks, offer a variety of approaches, influences, melody, rhythm, effects, and singing styles that share traces of African values. These values include earlier traditional forms of singing (poetics, proverbs, nasal intonation, chants, and libation-rites) as well as nuanced vocals. These traditional elements are interrelated in the Ghanaian cultural production, that it takes life long commitment to understand everything in their specific context. The Ga jama and Akan adowa musics have resurfaced in the current contemporary setting with their original hues. The rap from libation chants has reformed into hip hop rap in the local dialects. The synthesizer's mix and the creative efforts of hip life artists offer a pan-African expression in popular music. The age-old call and response, also used by many cultures, is a main approach in hip life, connecting the music to Africans. There are similarities to hip hop-making-beats, but hip life comes across as an African stylistic feature as its presentation is laced with local dialects, Pidgin English and Queen's English. This speaks to a various audience. A few Canadians with whom I shared hip life music responded by saying, "this is hip hop," a view commonly expressed. Hence, seeing a local adaptation of hip hop, as we do in the unique hip life vein with its ever growing sub genres, affirms the global grip of hip hop culture all the way back to Africa.

3.5.4. Language and Themes in Hip Life Lyrics

This section examines the language and context of K.K. Fosu's lyrics in *Sudwe Remix* (below), on the album *Anadwo Yede* (The Fun in the Night,) (2004). This song uses the backing vocals of Miss Vii Yvonne Ohene Djan (aka Shee) and Dan of Family House Entertainment, and features the artists Santrofi, Tinny, Batman (aka Samini), Korkorveli,

and Quata. I selected *Sudwe Remix* to illustrate some of the different approaches hip life artists have. In as much as this track utilizes highlife derivatives in technique and singing style, the rap by the featured artists has a global appeal and sound that even non-native speakers of the language can appreciate, although they may understand only a few words. Native speakers still have to listen attentively to unlock the hidden themes and messages.

PROBKO YED

The musical score is arranged in six staves, each representing a different instrument or voice part. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is 4/4. The score is divided into four measures.

- VOICE:** The first measure contains the lyrics "SOME SOUNG". The second measure is empty. The third and fourth measures are also empty.
- SAXOPHONE:** The first measure contains the lyrics "SAXING SLIGHTLY LATE". The second measure is empty. The third and fourth measures are also empty.
- ELECTRIC GUITAR:** The first measure contains the lyrics "SAXING SLIGHTLY LATE". The second measure is empty. The third and fourth measures are also empty.
- KEYBOARDS:** The first measure contains the lyrics "SAXING SLIGHTLY LATE". The second measure is empty. The third and fourth measures are also empty.
- ELECTRIC BASS:** The first measure contains the lyrics "SAXING SLIGHTLY LATE". The second measure is empty. The third and fourth measures are also empty.
- DRUM SET:** The first measure contains the lyrics "SAXING SLIGHTLY LATE". The second measure is empty. The third and fourth measures are also empty.

Chord symbols are provided for the first measure of each staff: F#m, Bm, F#m, E for the Voice and Saxophone parts; F#m, Bm, F#m, E for the Electric Guitar part; Bvb for the Keyboards part; and Bvb for the Electric Bass part.

5

VOICE

THIS IS A RE-MIX FROM R R R R A-LONG SIDE BAT-MAN BOUY A-LONG SIDE TI - NY ARE YOU REA-DY

F1m Bm F1m E

ALTO SAX.

F1m Bm F1m E

E. GTR.

Kbd.

E. BASS

Bvb

Dr.

9

VOICE

THIS IS A RE-MIX FROM R R R R A-LONG SIDE BAT-MAN BOUY A-LONG SIDE KDR - KDR-VE - LI ARE YOU REA-DY

F1m Bm F1m E

ALTO SAX.

F1m Bm F1m E

E. GTR.

Kbd.

E. BASS

Bvb

Dr.

Figure 19. K.K. Fosu. "Sudwe Remix." *Anadwo Yede*. OM Music and Lowdown Records for RAM Prod. Co. Ltd. Barking, U.K.: 2004. CD.

This is a well-arranged track loaded with proverbial advice and themes such as relationships, ideal beauty, and how to love. It utilizes a blend of multiple languages, including Ga, Twi, and English, as well as local slang. The line “*ashii gonti sɛɛ agmo kpo*” indicates the use of the thumb in the process of tying a knot, encourages teamwork in the community. The song speaks to inclusiveness and not sidelining any of the team members, in this case the thumb, an important part of the palm or a key member of the society in question. The line *odo ntiase abotere* comments on love, understanding and patience. It is laced in the lyrics in a flow of interjectory response, rap with a reggae feel, highlife and the hip life style of muziking.

Here I will discuss language and themes in the song, *World Trade Centre* by 4x4, from the album of the same name, from the trio Sylvanus Dodji Jeoffrey (aka Captain Planet), Raphael Edem Avornyo (aka Abortion), and Prince Tamakloe (aka Fresh Prince), form the 4x4 group. Under the label Double Trouble Records with Paradise Entertainment, the group 4x4 came out with the album *World Trade Center* in August of 2009. The title track, track 3, *World Trade Centre* instantly became a hit on the Ghanaian music scene, blasting on almost all radio and TV stations, in taxis, restaurants, beach and family parties, as well as school reunions. The song is implicitly political, but makes lighthearted jokes about sensitive issues. It mentions a political message to grab people’s attention through controversy. Although the group seems to take the subject lightly, there are actually deeper meanings that we will explore below. The song is in line with hip hop

and other music's provocative culture. What sells music? Sexuality is one thing. The sub-text of this song is really a female praise song.

This is a danceable song with its upbeat and heavy bass backdrop with rap praises in a conversation and singing form. It is spiced up with chant-like bursts of lyrics, heavy in tone and suggestive opposite gender conversation.⁶¹

World Trade Centre Song/Album, by 4x4, 2009. (Part One)

Go, go, go, big booty girl (4x)

Hook

Cos the way you dey make I dey wonder
If your booty was given by your mama
Ebe like say you no know say your body super
Girl, I go do anything to be your lover, baby
Make I touch your body, I want touch your body (2x)

⁶¹ This study observed in Ghana that, the events around 9/11 (in the 4x4 song) and its sensitivity in the West seems like a movie for some Ghanaians – something that came from the TV newsfeed. The same can be said of the hip hop culture of the TV feed to Africa. There is no climate of fear in Ghana like there is in the West, post 9/11. In as much as some people may condemn or wish to censor certain subject matter, music tends to offer platforms for any artistic expression. Artists don't have boundaries, but exercise freedom of speech; they are the medium of expression. In the accompanying video to the song, the woman celebrates who she is, with her body the centre of the whole song. Kinship is layered in the line, "Cos the way you dey make I dey wonder, if your booty was given by your mama," a typical inquisition into beauty resemblance or difference in the looks of mother and daughter: a form of a background check on her. The subjective appreciation of woman's beauty in this song speaks of the underlying meanings – a female praise song. The slimness of Western beauty is opposite to the definition of beauty in many places in Africa, where a full-bodied figure has generally been preferred (from before colonial contact).

In the line "thick tall girl and thick fatty girl / Soldier girl, I be soldier boy," the woman is referred to as "soldier" – referencing that she is as strong and mighty as a soldier, appreciating her strength. Interpretations can always differ depending on one's origins and leanings. The word "fatty" is not meant as derogatory, but as healthy, wealthy, and beautiful in this context. Just as the gesture of "good bye" in America is interpreted in Ghana (or parts of Africa) as "come," so the perspective of these lyrics requires some framework of cultural understanding before jumping to the conclusion that the song is merely sexist. This song is also appreciated and danced to by women of all ages with the right frame of understanding of the Ghanaian arts. That given, the skyscrapers of the World Trade Centre are compared to the breasts (Twin Towers) of the woman referenced. The notions in the 4x4 song shares Ghanaian concepts of appreciation, as one's appearance tells volumes about a person before s/he engages in a conversation. This applies anywhere in Ghana, or for that matter, in any African country.

Chorus

Never underestimate my lover
She have the World Trade Center
The twin towers to match in body, body, in body
Make I touch your body, I want touch your body
Make I touch your body, honey, make I touch your flex
Go, go, go, big booty girl (4x)
She don get body o, pretty body o
She don get body o, nice body o
She don get body o, pretty body o

Verse 1

Say I love the big booty girl, big titty girl, thick tall girl and thick fatty girl
Soldier girl, I be soldier boy
So play with me, I can be your toy
I dey love you like Americans love Obama
And I go catch you like the way them want catch Osama
I wonder, I no go dey surrender
I go be your defender, service I go render
Tell me your agenda
For my sweet sweet anaconda
Never be pretender, fire the bazooka
January December, nobody go venture
Apart from me, the director, so make I be your master
See that big booty wey edey carry dey go
They cause some traffic for the road e o

[Ga]

Mummy obolo [big mummy]
Shaamin nio ogbo [shake it till you die]
Kaakwe moko shi bo non ji ogboo [Do not look at anyone, as you are the best]
Them go fit look, but they can't touch o
Ebe so edey make them mind dey kolo
Just smile for me, oh, I want love your pretty booty
Shake it up for me, 'cause I dey love your sexy booty

The hip life trio 4x4 (above) uses themes of love and hate in a narrative context of courtship. In this case the lyric indicated an element of a man's attraction to a larger woman. Historically, during the times of hunting and gathering, a person had to be strong. Stronger women, in this perspective, can be seen as a healthy choice to be a part of the

family-team on the farm, in business (trading in the markets, etc.) or in the African home (not a house in this context).

Ghana (and most of Africa) has always been, and still is, a patriarchal society, traditional and conservative, where gender lines are clearly drawn. This song embodies layers of seemingly political, social, gender, views of beauty as well as emic and etic relationships in perspectives of the same music making, where the gist of the song was mainly praise singing for a strong female.

Popular music (hip hop) brings the world together, just as globalization brings familiarity to all of our doorsteps. The “hood” has now stretched around the globe, beating the hip (hop) into the *popular* culture in almost every country. A community of diverse youth experimenting with rap, break dance, graffiti, and poetry have reverberated the world over. Any treatment of hip hop has to hinge on the Bronx’s developments as well as revere its African American-ness, and Latinos’ contributions. This historical dimension is a pathway to understanding the call and response, as well as the act of libation recital in Ghanaian tradition, and a ritual embedded in the heart of African culture, and defines an aspect of history, the Afro-West relationship through hip life music. This means Jamaican ska, calypso, reggae, etc., all have a role to play in the hip hop melting pot. Drawing the puzzles together we see an interesting web of changes, off-shoots and hybrids of a Ghanaian music and its myriad shades.

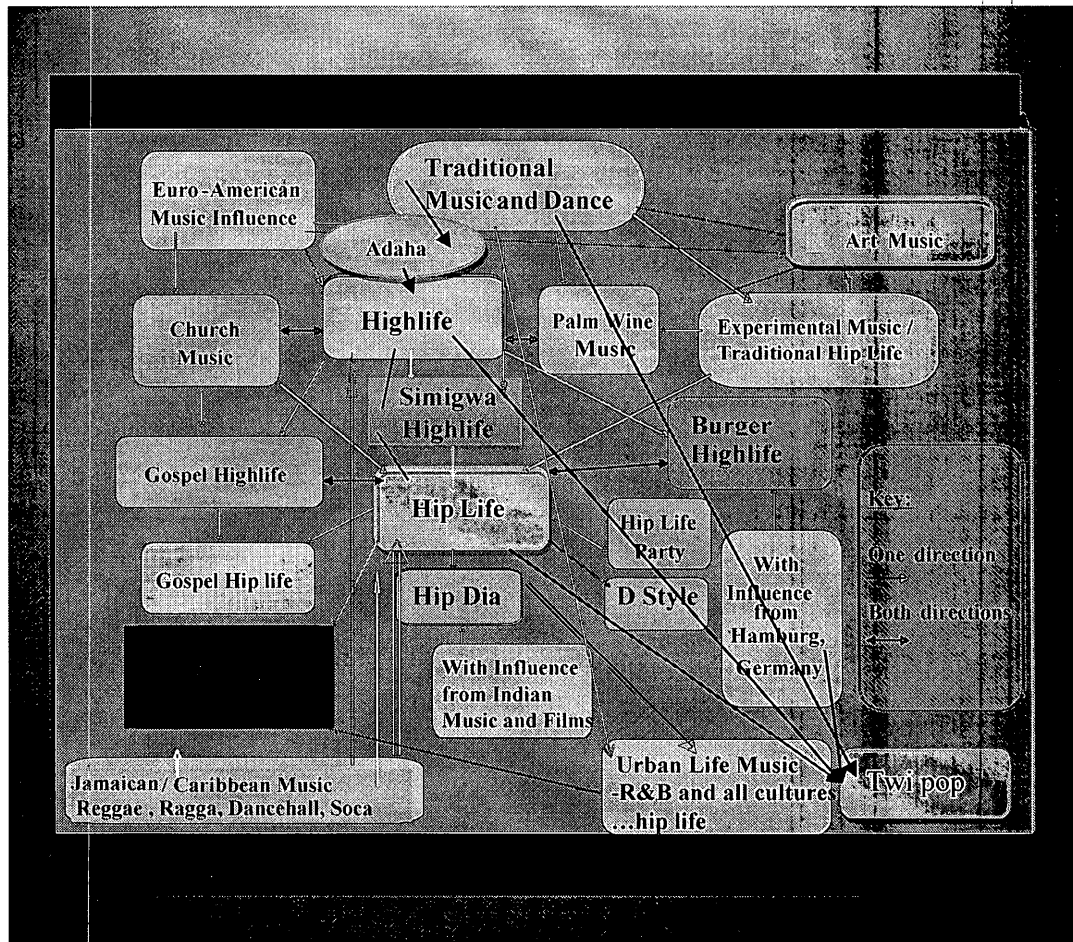


Figure 20. Popular Music and Dance Lineage: Hip Life Connections. Created between September 10, 2002 and April 30, 2012. By Author.

3.6. Sub-Genres of Hip Life

3.6.1. Gospel Hip Life

Gospel hip life has gained popularity with the Ghanaian populace, likely because historically it has shared the same trend with gospel highlife. Becca, Lord Kenya, Tic Tac, and a whole host of other musicians have dabbled in one way or another with the gospel

element of hip life. This is another means that they use in reaching out to a wider audience.

John Collins (2001), professor at the University of Ghana, Legon, describes some of the economic reasons that gospel music has thrived in Ghana (see also Paul Gifford, 2004:35). In the mid 1980s, the Ghanaian government imposed heavy taxes on the music industry.

The fact that the churches, as charitable organizations, do not pay these taxes helps explain why local gospel highlife music has boomed in Ghana since the mid 1980's. They do not pay import duties, income tax or entertainment taxes and so live music patronage of the church [for it] to survive. On the other hand the commercial live music sector has been almost taxed to death.

1. A super import duty of 160% on band instruments that are classed as luxury items even though for a musician they are the tools-of-the-trade.
2. A pre-paid entertainment tax (now replaced by a pre-paid 12.5% VAT tax on the value of the tickets) on gate-proceeds for not only music promoters but also bands that promote their own shows.
3. Income tax on musicians and [other] creative artists.
4. The Internal Revenue Service allows no income tax waiver on companies that are prepared to sponsor cultural/artistic events. [Note: I believe such a waiver is now allowed for supporting sponsorship.]⁶²
5. Internal Revenue collects 15% of the banderole (now hologram) money as a pre-paid income tax on musicians and producers.
6. 4 % of the 40% levy on blank cassettes introduced in 1988 goes [to] Customs and Excise. (Collins 2001:6)

The “luxury” taxes on musical instruments in Ghana were a challenge for artistic life and tourism. Thankfully these taxes were later reduced in 2004 (see Collins, 2006). According to Collins on the comparative influence and inconveniences of these numerous taxes, gospel music had a field day in its development, as it was exempt. Today, gospel singers

⁶² Looking at some factors on the above, many musicians had left Ghana due to high tax, and curfews. “In early 2004 President Kuffour’s own interest in the Music Industry became evident when he reduced the import duties on musical equipment that has crippled the music industry since the early 1980s”. This import tax in part affected the growth of the music industry.

branch into all areas of musical practice in Ghana, including hip life. As Collins noted, church-going musicians have an advantage in terms of the tax-less environment. As well, these musicians have access to avenues of support from churches, pastors and other religious organizations that seek to help their members.

The melodious singers of gospel music that have surfaced in hip life bring many elements, as shaped by the colonial musical practice, both through English language and local vernacular languages. After all, these syncretic elements that share roots in highlife and hip hop are very fused, carefully threaded and re-appropriated into the contemporary hip life genre: gospel hip life, or “G-life” for short (see Gifford 2004:35; Wuthnow 2009:78). Another form of hip life is the Islamic influenced Sahel is the Northern hip life music, which has been in part championed by the artist Big Adam (also part of King Ayisoba’s “I Want to See You, My Father”’s fame). He employed “melismatic vocal style of music popular across the Sahel,” in this case Dagbani – the *Asalamu-Alaakum* album (Ham, 2010:340).



Figure 21. King Ayisoba (on right) with performers, Accra. Photo by Author 2007.

3.6.2. D(different)-Style

D-Style can be attributed to the musician Nathaniel Totimeh aka Korkovelli. He noted in a discussion, after a 2005 performance to a Ghanaian audience in Toronto, that his type of music is called D-style, which is a form of hip life music that he has coined “different” (p.c. 2005). According to him, D-style is hip hop colored with the already existing hip life, thus re-melding highlife, which is recontextualizing the contemporary music forms, with English, Twi, i.e., a different flavour of hip life music (e.g., *Zaaza African Woman*, 2005). Thus D-style becomes very different by structurally leaning toward hard core Bronx hip hop more than the other sub influences such as highlife and reggae. This may be seen as cooption and repurposing of hip hop beats to the local music. For example, it may imply 90 percent hip hop and 10 percent highlife and reggae. In reality it might sound as any hip hop in America, which raises the question as to the idea of “different” when it is just another of the hip hop groove with a Ghanaian rap vibe. This seems to be another tricky one, just as Rockstone is considered by some to have “tricked” in the branding of a popular genre, hip life.

The cooptions involved in the practice of Korkoveli’s definitions speak to syncretic making of the Ghanaian and American popular culture (highlife and hip hop). No one regulates the contents of hip hop or highlife, to attempt any justification of representation when the process of appropriation here invokes queries such as, who do you represent? The self-composed-ness of the local – highlife (and the hybrid – hip hop) – offers puzzles for debates on validity. For the sake of the focus here, I would say it is an ever-changing soundscape, where artists may share the freedom of naming their work

according to what they think. What critics think is always useful to the review of the soundscape but the authenticity of hip lifer speaks in multiple contexts that may be understood with time.

3.6.3. Hip Dia

Hip Dia can be attributed to Sony Achiba's musical invention of the early 2000s. Inspired by Indian music, he visited Bombay to learn more about Indian music and to incorporate them into his music. The Indian influence is evident when you hear his songs (*Indian Ocean I*).

[H]e combines Hip-Hop Hi-Life and India style together (i.e., HI[P]-DIA) that makes him the first Ghanaian who have ever come out with this kind of style. . . . The way he performs, the dress and artistic moves makes people call him Indian man. (*Modernghana.com*, n.d. n.p.)



Figure 22. Sony Achiba. Photo: Courtesy of *Ghana Nation*. <<http://www.ghananation.com/profile/music/Sony-Achiba.asp/>>. Accessed 27 Jan. 2006.

Achiba was greatly influenced by Shakka Delwani's films, and named some of his tracks and albums as *Indian Ocean 1* and *Indian Ocean 2* (Telephone conversation, 2002). We also see the Ghanaian influence in his lyrics, for example "*maton nkyene amowu dimoko adamase*," where someone sold salt to a person and is thanked in the form of pepper (comments on ungratefulness to a kind gesture). These were versions that he had hoped would compete with the "current" hip life that was then the buzz in Ghana (around 2002). He was the main person in the hip dia subgenre, (though Kenya also sampled some Indian drumming in *Sika Npo Nfa Neho*, works). People responded positively to his music and dance, because it tapped into a popular penchant for Indian films. Thus Hip Dia⁶³ made its contribution to Ghanaian music, consciously or not, with a new take on hip life.

Ghananation.com noted that

In the year 2000 his first album came out. But he later withdrew all the tapes from the market due to technical hitches. Two years later, Sony came out with another hit album, named HIP-DIA, instead of hip-life . . . No wonder the name has become household name in Ghana; mention Achiba's name and kids started dancing. He was able to sell Two Hundred and Fifty Thousand (250000) copies of tapes in Three (3) months. The album is Nine (9) months old and he has sold about Five Hundred and Fifty Thousand (550000) copies. (n.d. n.p.)

Initially, technical quality was lacking in part of his music production, pointing to the early stages of many musicians' process and product quality. Sony played a role that influenced the bigger picture of hip life culture.

⁶³ Sony Achiba's music; see <<http://www.musicinghana.com/sony-achiba/>>.

3.6.4. Hip Life Twi Pop

Hip Life Twi Pop is one of the newer entries (2011) on the Ghanaian music scene. The King of Twipop and UN Volunteers Celebrity Ambassador⁶⁴ is the rapper Dr. Cryme (an acronym for “Creative Rhymes You Most Enjoy”),⁶⁵ “who has shared stages with Busta Rhyme, Spliff Star, Rick Ross and other world renowned artists.”⁶⁶ Dr. Cryme is the founder of the new sub genre called Twi Pop, which Chris Twum of *The Chronicle* argues is mainly driven by the earlier highlife musicians, “the likes of Asabea Cropper, Gyedu Blay Ambulley, Amakye Dede, Kodjo Antwi, Pat Thomas and Daddy Lumber.” Pointing to Tema-Accra as the place where this new Twi pop is gaining ground, “which is Hip Hop in disguise,” he felt this new form “could not maintain its identity” and advised that “may be it would be better if they go back to their traditional music identity, to unearth their hidden talents, by sampling some of the old highlife tracks from the past which Ghanaians can identify with.” It is debatably positioned as a new sub genre: “Dr. Cryme’s ‘Finally Finally’ album which embraces Twipop, an emerging genre of music in Ghana, [was] officially . . . released in July [2011] followed by album tours accordingly.”⁶⁷ This includes *Kill Me Shy*, and *Fre Me* songs. It is an interesting growth and influence pattern that the hip life revolution is taking many shapes, forms and names as a part of the popular music scene of Ghana.

⁶⁴ Dr Cryme shines at GMA. 11 April 2011.

<<http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/entertainment/artikel.php?ID=206735>>.

⁶⁵ Dr. Cryme. “Between Hiplife Twi Pop; and Highlife is the Answer.” 18 June 2011.

<<http://www.myrekone.com/news-center/ghana-entertainment-news/5940-between-hiplife-twipop-highlife-is-the-answer.html>>.

⁶⁶ Dr. Cryme. 14 May 2011. <http://itubeghana.com/articles/read-rapper-dr-cryme-surprises-37-military-hospital-on-mothers%E2%80%99-day_45.html>.

⁶⁷ “Rapper, Dr. Cryme Surprises 37 Military Hospital On Mothers’ Day.” 14 May 2011.

3.6.5. Reggae Hip Life, Dancehall Life/Ragga-Life and Soca Hip Life

Credit and respect is given to Bob Marley and the Wailers for their contribution to the popularity of reggae music, which brings Jamaica into the picture of the Afro-diasporic transatlantic form of sound. As with hip hop, there are also rap elements in reggae. Reggae and soca share an interesting syntax of rap and flow, and their lyrics contain serious punches, depending on the artists involved. In Ghana, one of the popular reggae hip life artists is Samini. Rocky Dawuni, Kojo Antwi, Lord Kenya and Obour are well-known artists who have shaped reggae music into different facets of hip life. Lord Kenya is considered a pioneer in utilizing reggae as well as other forms in his version of hip life music. I will now look at Dancehall/ragga-life, and Soca hip life.

Dancehall started in Jamaica in the late 1970s with groups including The Lone Ranger, Yellow man and Josey Wales. Coupled with digital production techniques, the famous Sleng Ten Rhythms formed the basis for establishment of dancehall (Koss, 2008:62). Rashaun Hall notes, in “Mainstream Warms to a New Reggae Mixe,” that a few key players in the new *mixe*, including “Beanie Man’s all-star collaboration and Paul’s hip hop-inspired lyrics” helped shape the spread of dancehall music (*Billboard*, 12 Oct. 2002:63). According to Paul, “dancehall is just the cousin of hip hop, which is where I want to crossover to” (63). This indicates how an artist can try new things in similar idioms of hip hop, from dancehall style, such as incorporating bouncy bass, rap and patoi. It may result in a new version of the genre. The dancehall music of Jamaica in the 1970s can be characterized by “a deejay toasting (or rapping) over a riddim. Dancehall is also known as bashment, a term which can refer to either the music itself or a large party where

dancehall music is played.”⁶⁸ It also has many “sub-genres present in the dancehall arena, ‘slack lyrics’ – with R to X-rated content – are very popular” (n.d. n.p.). This is a departure from reggae music’s conscious lyrics. In the Carribean islands, Soca music⁶⁹ emerged from

Trinidad and Tobago. Soca is a blend of traditional calypso and classical Indian Music. . . . Lord Shorty is a musician credited with inventing soca in the early 1960s when he added Indian rhythmic instruments (like the tabla) to traditional Calypso to create a new sound. He called his genre “solka,” as in, “the SOuL of KAlypso”. “Soca,” a misspelling of his original term, eventually caught on as the generally accepted spelling. Soca is not, as many people assume, a fusion of calypso and American soul music. (*World Music*, n.d. n.p.)

Now a section of hip lifers have incorporated soca (also rooted in *aslatoa* traditional rhythms in Ghana), hip hop, and highlife to form the soca hip life sub genre. Repositioning the global sound in Ghanaian and other languages, hip life is ever-changing. Dancehall and soca hip life music have been popular with several hip life artists, including Samini, OD4, Okra, and many others who have integrated these Caribbean sounds into their music.

On August 10, 2007, I was in Ghana when “Orville Richard Burrell, known all over the world as Shaggy led a notable cast including Marlon Asher the Ganja Farmer, Samini, Wutah, Praye and Tic Tac for a thrilling night of fun. . . . this was a roots, rock, ragga and dancehall session” (Effong, 2007:15). The performances exhibited talents from different parts of the world, shedding light on how the home (Africa—historical slavery to America/Caribbean and back) of rap, patois, ragga dancehall and soca have been a part of

⁶⁸ Dancehall Music. <<http://worldmusic.about.com/od/genres/p/dancehall.htm>>. Accessed 26 Dec. 2010.

⁶⁹ Soca Music <<http://worldmusic.about.com/od/genres/p/SocaMusic.htm>>. Accessed 26 Dec. 2010.

historical accounts, and also the contemporary culture. Samini is a hip lifer whose ragga blends are currently bringing him great popularity in Ghana. William Asiedu noted that Samini who picked MOBO awards held in London and also collecting the Ghana Music Awards in Accra celebrates his winnings (34a). His lyrics in favour of women, beauty, and goodness seem to have won the hearts of many. I have been fortunate to see him in concert twice. At Afrofest 2009 in Toronto, Samini performed on the Youth Zone stage.



Figure 23. Emmanuel Samini, TV Africa, Photo by Author 2007.

His performance with the audience was very interactive; he improvised using English, patois and *Twi*, using these languages effectively in his lyrics as well as employing the heavy beats (pounding bass drums against sharp snares, high hats, bass/lead guitars with raspy vocals) and the jams (spontaneous musiking within the performance). This is reminiscent of the renowned artist Yellow Man with his live stage presence and interactive take on reggae hip life. At a previous concert in Prampram Beach in Ghana, in 2007, I observed a similar vibe with the youth audience waving their hands and jumping to the

sound. He employed a live band in the show. MultiChoice Ghana, representatives of “Channel O” indicate that. . . Samini has also been nominated in the Best Ragga Dancehall Video and Best African West Video categories for his video on his “African Lady” song (Asiedu, 34b). The diverse nominations in the best ragga category speak to the steady interest in the genre, since it shares an already popular foundation in the music business of reggae and ragga the world over. It is an entertaining, informative, and educative medium into which socially conscious messages are imbued with passion.

Dance hall, ragga and soca have gained ground in Ghana. In the recording studio of Okyeame Kwame, I observed Okra’s overlay of lyrics or vocals in an interconnected dancehall and soca style. He had worked on the backings, and I was present when he was laying down the tracks. I observed how he came up with the lyrics, and what influenced him to use certain melodies and bass lines.



Figure 24. Kevin Adisi (aka Okra), Accra. Photo by Author 2007.

It reminded me of the Herculooids – the speakers of DJ Cool Heck, during the initial concepts of hip hop in the Bronx, as well as Afrika Bombata’s heavy bass. Okra is a symbol of Ghana, Jamaica, New York, and other world flavours in his artistic presentation. Until you are told that he is a Ghanaian by birth, you wouldn’t know that this is a Ghanaian youth, because he’s fluent in English, patois, local pidgin, and the vernacular languages including his mother tongue. This is the marking of Ghanaian hip life’s take on today’s globalized sound.

The popularity of dancehall hip life as well as the other forms of hip life may be partly explained by Collins’s analysis of the effect of the night-curfew of the 1980’s on the live music scene:

Between 1982 and 1984 there [were] two-and-a-half years of night curfew which drastically curtailed the activities of commercial night-clubs and Ghanaian popular entertainment. . . . After the curfew was lifted in 1984 the open-air night clubs were invaded by dozens of mobile discos or “spinners” who had previously operated in small discotheques. . . . as their “spinning” equipment was cheaper to buy and operate than those of the larger highlife and concert bands. (2001:4)

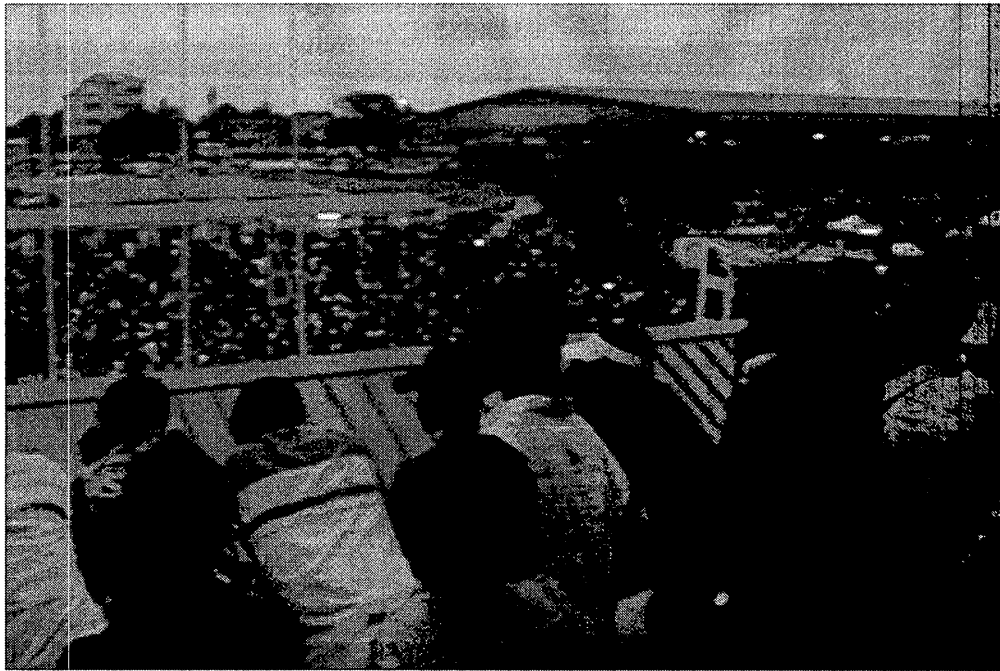
Once hip life came to stay on the Ghanaian music scene, so did its sub genres, be it dancehall, hip life or the rest. It is important to acknowledge its positioning in the political events that shape its influence, especially the spinning of records and the digitization of acoustic Ghanaian music.

3.6.6. A Cappella Hip Life

Today a cappella has reinvented itself with the help of modernization, and imitative trends that open a wide array of vocals, from the living room to the street, courtyard to banquet hall, and ritual to nightclub settings. In a cappella singing all the parts of the harmony as well as the guitars, drum beats, horns, etc., are imitated by the vocal manipulation of the mouth, throat, chest, stomach, and head with ethnic languages, and English. Ghanaian tonal languages (and numerous other African dialects) are so rich in texture that there is a lot of material to take from them. They are saturated: a little can go a long way in blending with the hip life version of a cappella. This can feed into Collins's campaign for "live format, unplugged non-synthetic African popular music" (2001:1), as a road map to *Making Ghanaian Music Exportable*. Many of the artists I interviewed, consciously or not, sang a vocal improvisation to illustrate a point they were making. They ushered in versions of a cappella into hip life; this was evident to me when I observed artists' backstage preparations at the Old Skuul Reunion (1-4 below) at the Ghana International Trade Fair site at La Accra (29 August 2009). Each group of hip life artists (or school year groups) shared a few songs, while they blasted punch lines of what they stand for in the hip life world.



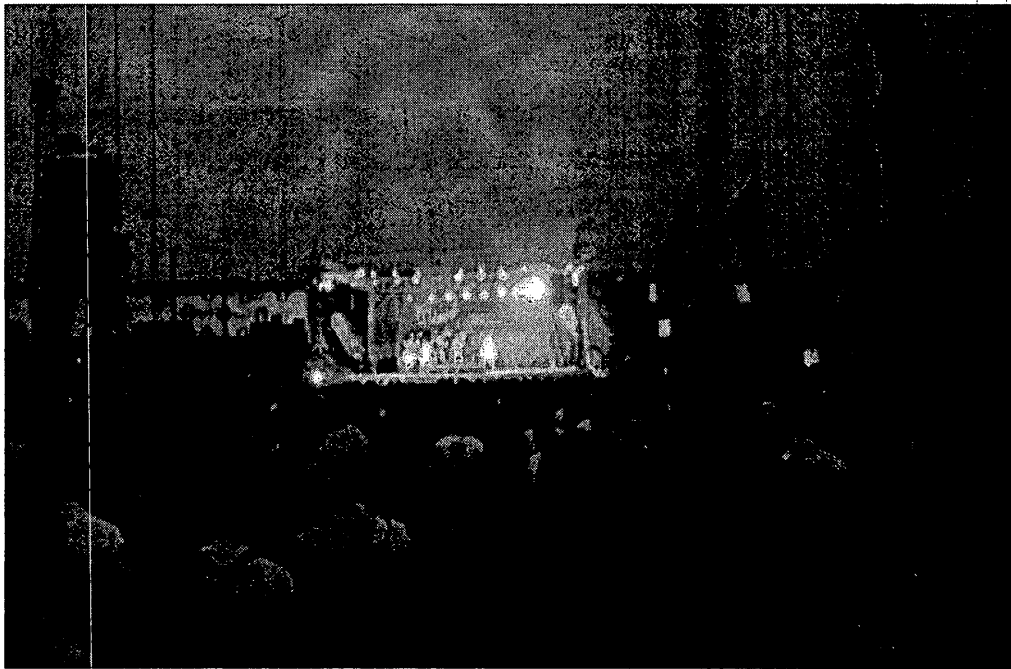
1.



2.



3.



4.

Figure 25. 1-4: Old Skuul Reunion, Ghana International Trade Fair site at La Accra. 29 August 2009. Photos by Author.

This was quite a spectacle. As well as in performances, hip life artists often include a cappella singing in their informal social gatherings. Music via *a cappella*⁷⁰ comes in handy for many social forums.

The 2007 Nescafé African Revelation music talent competition at the Ohene Gyan Sports Stadium in Accra showed the winning a cappella group:

The winning group, Traffic and the runners-up NLC put up their best in all the three challenging rounds of performance to snatch the top prizes from 13 other contestants. Each of the 13 groups selected from six zones, Klala, 3 Units, Mmrantepa, Traffic, NLC, African Drum, Agoro, Nsuo, Nkwantanan, Nkenten, Ranking Family, 12 O'clock and Keyholders, composed an acapella in the second round and an original recorded song in the third round. (n.p.)

The very elements that shaped their talents of singing are embedded in the groups' efforts as well as partaking in purposeful competitions that revealed these singing a cappella talents. This occurs in a moderated programme with judges controlling the selection process.

3.6.7. Urban Life Music

A fusion music sub genre, urban life surfaced in Ghana around the latter part of 2007. "Apart from the old music genres we used to know more have been introduced like Hiplife, Hip-dia and the current . . . [genre] introduced by Henry Agyekum Chemphe known as the 'Urban Life music.' This is a type of music he describes as the fusion of

⁷⁰ The 29 March 2010 edition of www.mtaafm.com offers useful information on various musics, including a cappella in Africa. The site presents almost all Ghanaian hip life artists (including Samini, Okra, Obrafuor, Lord Kenya, Reggie Rockstone, etc.). A capella is the main tool of singing, rap also depends on the same tool of the voice. It all lends itself to hip life, highlife, or any form of singing. Other artists who incorporate a capella, along with their albums, are: Teddy Kalanda Harrison's Tam Tam; Blue African Skies's Ithemba; K-flava's Wachen Kulia ("Stop Crying"); Spliffstah's Hawakujua; Oxygen aka O2Man's Knowledge is Power!; N.T.O's "Jangu" ("Come On"); Generalmatata's Natty Woman; Emilien's Mamzelle; Mwalimu G-ni's Grass of the Savannah; Generalmatata's That's How We Flow; and Green-genius's Green-genius (n.p.).

R&B and all the perfect cultures of all the music genres,” offers Naana Ntiri on *Chemphe Tops International Chart Weekly Fylla* (2). His hit singles, *No Pampanaa*, *Menka* and “Why You Dey Treat Am Bad” continue to increase in popularity. Sound engineer Kaywa of Groove Zone Records has been instrumental in the works of Chemphe such as *Music Soul* and *You and Me*, a dual album for international and local audiences. According to Naana Ntiri’s accounts, “Chemphe is under Flava Records for both production and management and aside being a musician he is a professional computer programmer and attained his IT certificate from NIIT” (2). There are intra sub-genre hip life hybrids in Ghana. Okyeame Kwame notes that,

There is R&B-based hip lifers like Okyeame Kwame’s, with a big-band sound. There is the JQ, *Jama*-based rhythms, with horns and bass; there is the sound engineer/producer Appiatus’s Caribbean soca, highlife, and rap version, like that of Jamaican toast⁷¹ music. Other hip life branches are Ofori Amponsah’s highlife music that features rappers; and now Wuta’s and Okra’s integration of reggae in hip life that uses rap is also making inroads. (p.c. 2007)

Hip life has all these sub-genres as well as developing more since artists like to explore many new areas. See Appendices C 10-11 for additional entries in hip life music.

3.6.8. Traditional Hip Life Music: Movement by Dela Botri

I have known Dela Botri for many years as a virtuoso *attenteben* (flute) performer with the Pan African Orchestra and then with his group Hewale Sounds. He has an innovative instrumentation perspective on hip life music and he is one of the artists who has revolutionized the process of hip life music with a complete performance with live

⁷¹ Toast is like speaking, toasting over rhythms style of reggae. <<http://www.jamaican-traditions.com/jamaican-music.html>>. Accessed 17 Dec 2010.

Ghanaian traditional musical instruments. These performances utilize horns, gome, kpanlogo, dawuro and akasha (makes similar sounds like Aslatoa) instruments in a carefully tailored funky backdrop for local dialects in his tracks. Through using a traditional sensibility in generating a cross cultural nuance, hip life reaches the world through Ghanaian indigenous sounds. Hence, Botri's hip life innovation stands out. Botri's style can be seen in the works of the Fokn Bois – the duo Kuborlor and Mensah, who have taken the Ghanaian airwaves with their active sounds based mainly on traditional instrumentation.

3.6.9. Summary of Sub-Genres

Having taken a hip life tour of Ghana and seeing various takes on this music, we can see that D-style, hip dia, reggae hip life, gospel hip life/G life, dance hall ragga life, soca hip life, Urban life, and a cappella hip life, have all made history. Hip life has been hugely influential on the Ghanaian music scene, spawning many other music genres. As I type there might be another sub-genre on the way. Between 1999 and 2010 there has been a steep departure from the old forms of highlife into hip life music, as well as a reinjection of a bigger dose of highlife into hip life. This has given a fresh breath to some of the conservatives of Ghanaian popular music.

Each sub-genre is truly unique and has been shaped by many influences, such as identity, language, place, and media are instrumental. The circumstances, communications and inspirations that led the founder Reggie Rockstone to create hip life are worth noting, as traditional practices have always offered a multitude of repertoires. Rockstone pulled

from this repertoire, and because of this the genre of hip life will never lack in indigenous resources to mix with the global trends. This includes studio creations by any artist. Hip life credits also go to the ancestors, and key figures like K.K. Kabobo, G. Ambolley, et al, for their input on proverbial Twi rap initiatives (when it was not yet called hip life).

3.7. Conclusion of Chapter Three

This chapter has explored the labyrinthine changes in Ghanaian traditional musics through popular forms, such as mappings from jama Ga folk music to hip life popular forms, as well as from local adaha through highlife to hip life. So the story and variety of hip life musics is endless in the contemporary Ghanaian music scene. Though a developing country, Ghana's peculiar economic and political challenges that once hinged on the British colonial enterprises have influenced the arts tremendously.

The earlier adaha original highlife music influence has translated into 2012's contemporary highlife and hip life music, which now incorporates synthesized sounds. Whilst E.K. Nyame, E.T. Mensah, and Sunny Ade, among other great highlife stars, have made their contributions to the highlife historiography, there have been many forms of highlife, from dance band music, guitar band stand, "something" or prepressua music with nyomkro singing as well as palm wine musics.

Ghanaian tonal languages have been a huge part of hip life music. Forms of the music like the osibisaaba, adowa, boboobo, gome, okpii, kolo kashie, oshweboo, agbadza, and nyomkro, have all been infused with popular hybrid electronic forms. On the dialects

and how they factor in here, take the instance of the Luna drummers of the Wa Naa (Chief) of the Dagbon tradition. This form shares the same traces of rap with the talking drum for the Chief's grand entrance to the durbar grounds, and rap music and poetry in the linguist/*Okyeame*/griot style of presentation. Hip life is big on fusions and is still fusing almost anything that comes its way. This is clearly reflected on hip life tracks (see Appendix C, Table 1 across all the regions in Ghana). The variety in the stylistic influences (melody, rhythm, effects, and singing forms) shared traces of Ghanaian cultural values that identifies with its people (as well as relates to the global popular-culture soundings) position hip life's accessibility the world over. These values comprise traditional forms of singing/timelines as well as nuanced vocals.

Hip life has set the tone within the trends of the past decade in Ghana. It gave shape to the wave of hip hop coming from the Bronx that blew in through the breeze of globalization.⁷² Given Ghana's economic challenges, artists are still making music in a variety of circumstances. The high taxation (a super import duty of 160% on band instruments, [see Collins, 2000:11]) of the 1980s had a terrible effect on the musicking enterprise. Although that tax is no more, it surely impacted popular music in

⁷² It was such that the media craze that afforded the highlife competitions also gave rise to dance competitions. In addition we have the Embassy Double Do dance craze with Adjetey Sowah, Sir Robot, Fire Killer, Tobias Temple, Azigiza Jr., Slim Buster, Alex Otu, and Bokete, among others, all of whom made an impact on the Ghanaian music and dance scene. This and other developments within Ghanaian youth culture are strongly rooted in Western media and the influx of foreign videos-that played a role in the very making of highlife and hip life musics. As evidenced in the Burgher highlife and most of the sub genres of hip life, the travels of artists across the world shaped much of the music. In the middle of all these influxes is a piece created by Obuor who not only uses his traditional Akan drumming but also incorporates the proverbial narratives in highlife and hip life music, including the changes and adaptations that shaped the social and political structure of the court practice (or Chief's palace). This is not a surprise in the Ghanaian context, given the court traditions in its 75-plus ethnicities.

contemporary Ghana. The music journey still goes on in Ghana in the *life(s)* (i.e. *highlife* and hip *life* musics). Such is a phenomenon of growth in the repertoire of Ghanaian musics. So in effect, “*Agoo*” (“knock”) from Reggie Rockstone’s hip life movement has been responded to with “*Amee*” (“come in”) by Ghana and the world.

CHAPTER 4: THE EDUCATION OF THE MUSICIAN

4.1. Artists' Education and Apprenticeship

This chapter explores the experiences of Ghanaian musicians living in Ghana, including how they negotiate the paths of music practice, from learning to performance. Multiple perspectives are revealed including life stories shared by numerous hip life and highlife artists and the social impact of their music experiences.

Many people that I spoke with in Ghana believe that the education system can be improved. Panji Anoff asks, "Does being a professor make you a better musician than the illiterate man in your village, who taught you what music is about? Maybe not" (p.c. 2007). There are few "formally" educated artists in Ghana. I spoke with several established musicians and industry personnel who complained that some young artists do not have the skills of their "trained" predecessors. Many artists do not play instruments, but rely on technology to provide the music. Some artists, such as Reggie Rockstone, see these artists as hopping on the bandwagon in order to make quick money.

If you listen to what's going on now . . . A lot of these kids got no skills. People feel it's just a way to make bread, a quick buck, play some shows, obtain a visa to leave the country . . . Not trying to pay your dues. So [their] music of course will manifest itself as garbage. (p.c. 2007)

Faisal Helwani shared a similar view, comparing his experiences with musicians in the early 1979s with those of today:

In those days, we used to have good musicians in this country who play the music according to the note. And they know how to tune their guitar and they know when they are wrong, when they have to stop and start all over again, unlike today where you have these so-called hip life musicians who do not even know the key they are singing in . . . who're singing the same song that has no end. (p.c. 2007)

Greg Mingle echoes this view on the state of talent and skill based on education. “Look at the way people come up. You go into the city, the majority of them can’t play a single instrument . . . Right now we are in the age of computers. You just have to rhyme something and you are backed by the engineer, that’s it” (p.c. 2007).

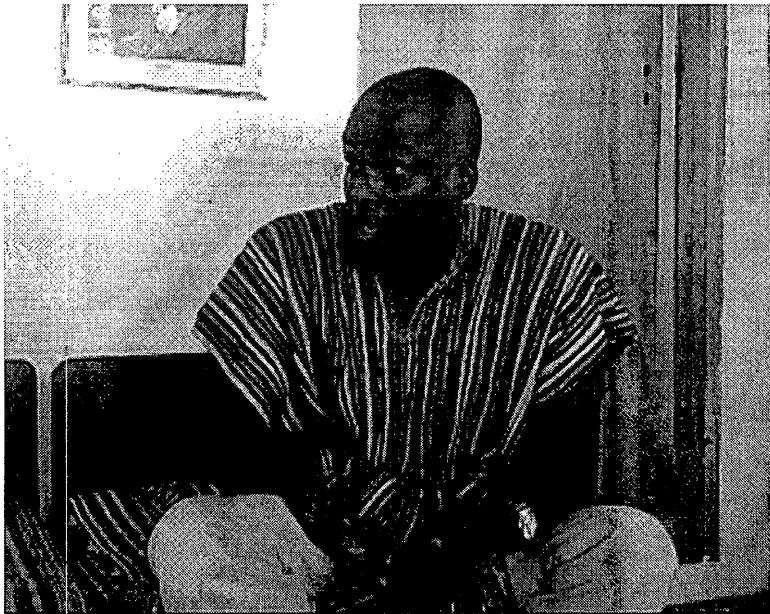


Figure 26. Greg Mingle, Osu Accra. Photo by Author 2007.

Why is it important to have education and what are the repercussions of not being well educated? The artist and educator Terry “Sir Robot” Ofosu feels that it is important to have “some education, so that when a body is no longer capable of taking you onto the stage, to workshops, to perform, you have something to back [you up]. Being able to stand on your own . . . across Africa, and if possible, across the world” (p.c. 2007). In an

American article on education, Nikhil Swaminathan⁷³ echoes the words of Northwestern neuroscientist Nina Kraus' efforts in "Saving School Music Programs":

Playing an instrument may help youngsters better process speech in noisy classrooms and more accurately interpret the nuances of language that are conveyed by subtle changes in the human voice. . . . People's hearing systems are fine-tuned by the experiences they've had with sound throughout their lives. . . . Years of music training may also improve how sounds are processed for language and emotion. (n.p.)

This is one of many voices that speak to the benefits of training in the Western musical context. Music has been part of Ghana's education system from the 1960s, but unstable governments, which lasted to the late 1980s, have diminished certain foundational structures of the Ministry of Education. In the mid-1980s Junior and Senior Secondary Schools were established "to create a more technical and practical oriented education. This was part of the rationalisation program for education that Ghana undertook after the IMF/World Bank inspired Structural Adjustment Policy" (Collins 2001:9). Music lost its independent status in the Junior Secondary School and became incorporated into cultural studies, and was no longer a core subject in Senior Secondary Schools (9). Collins feels that a generation of urban youth has been created who mainly listen to and watch computerized music, videos, and lip-synched performances, and who are unfamiliar with popular band instruments in live performances. He notes that,

[a]lthough the JSS/SSS re-organisation did demote music as a school . . . subject it did at the same time broaden the scope of music to include popular music. The introduction of sets of instrumental/recording equipment would be invaluable in teaching children to produce their own popular dance-music, sound engineering,

⁷³ Swaminathan, Nikhil. "A Neuroscientist's Argument for Saving School Music Programs." *Good Education*. Feb. 2010. 22 Mar. 2010 <<http://www.good.is/post/a-neuroscientist-s-argument-for-saving-school-music-programs/>>.

mixing and multi-track recording techniques. It might also be possible to bring in unemployed veteran musicians and concert performers . . . to help teach in areas such as improvisation, composition and general live performance stagecraft. (9)

Panji Anoff argues that the absence of music education in primary schools teaches children that literacy and numeracy is all that matters. However, he believes, music is what really enables a child's mind to develop; it helps teach them how to think, not just how to learn. He points to kindergarten classes for proof of this, saying that most of what children at that level do is sing, play and clap, because these things coordinate children with people around them, and develop the brain. Anoff believes that as children start performing and learning traditional songs and dances, they are learning important cultural lessons, such as the significance of specific kinds of movements, why they are important, and what they mean in a traditional context (p.c. 2007). Collins also describes the benefits of music education: "Besides helping establish the personnel for the 'World Music' export sector, research in many countries has shown that music as a part of one's education not only enhances musical creativity but also enhances verbal and mathematical skills, physical coordination and is a general intellectual toner" (2001:9).

While people who have grown up to become musicians have clearly learned their craft somewhere, if not necessarily in elementary schools, there remains a gap in many musicians' extended general education, which is hurting artists. As Terry Ofofu notes, if artists had had any kind of support from organizations, "most would have been literates, or semi-literates by now. But because there wasn't any support for up and coming musicians and dancers, until now, some of my peers never went to school." Ofofu sees the effects of this when artists can't fully navigate the world of contracts, and may not be able to

express themselves very well in “English,” and in particular some male dancers are finding their female partners, who are younger and who do have an education, are speaking on their behalf (p.c. 2007).

Reggie Rockstone points out that, “We were really colonized. This is the only country where if you don’t speak English it’s a crime. Ghanaians are the only people who look at another Ghanaian and say, ‘Look at your black face’” (Shipley, *Living the Hip Life*, 2007). There are dual meanings and identities at play here. The “blackness of a face” – true Ghanaian – may be a euphemistic way of communicating with a peer, but if the information is heard by a person untrained in the traditional ways, it may be seen as an insult. Yes, black is black, but the understanding of “blackness” goes beyond the aesthetic hue element – and affirms the dynamics of specific African coded ethnic structure. Returning to Ofose’s point on self-expression, Ofose makes a valid point that an educational institution should encourage one to learn as much as possible and to focus on what one intends to be in both short and long term scenarios. Isaac Amuah⁷⁴ outlines a path for rescuing the situation. While there are things that Ghanaian universities and

⁷⁴ Though education is generally not free in many parts of the world, provisions were made in the Ghanaian context to improve the structures (music and culture in schools) initiated by Nkrumah in the 1960s to re-ignite or boost the educational curriculum. It is laudable to see the advocacy role John Collins takes to government, arguing for tax incentives for musicians, as well as importers of musical instruments, to put bands back to work (Collins, 200:11-14). He recounts the elements lacking in techno-pop culture (that has been the music of recent youth), whilst hoping to reboot the somewhat extant guitar bands and bring live music back to the nightlife in Ghana – not an easy task with the complexities of the Ghanaian economy and the (in)stability of decision-making bodies with regard to music. How can we fix the existing problem of pedagogy as well as the content that suits the African classroom? In the search for the type of education Ghanaian musicians need, and what is currently being done, it is evident that the “. . . development of indigenous African music is, to a greater extent, the responsibility of the educational system. To avoid total *eclipse* of the African rich musical heritage, there is the need for a formalized programme of the study of indigenous African music at all levels of the educational system” (Amuah 1997:2, emphasis in original).

schools, and the Musicians Union of Ghana (MUSIGA) are managing, educational needs are still not being fully met. In Ghana, it is a challenge to place music or the fine arts at the forefront of the government's agenda when so many other areas, such as economics, commerce, healthcare, scientific research, agriculture, mining, are still under-funded.

Diana Hopeson, who attended the School of Performing Arts, Legon, is another artist who believes that more needs to be done to enhance the system of education for artists in Ghana. She notes that many artists are made because their talents are *discovered* – but they are not necessarily educated. She feels that Ghana needs an arts school focused on the *business* aspect of the arts, as well as theory and performance. Artists who are educated this way would find many more career doors opening to them in the industry (p.c. 2007). Ofori, who was working on his Masters in Choreography at the time of this interview, supports Hopeson's view, noting that he observes a big gap between coming to the university and actually being trained (p.c. 2007). Some artists trained in Ghana are still not taught the basics about how to manage their careers. According to Greg Mingle, "We need those seminars badly. I was talking to [a colleague], he said he went to the music school in London. The first thing they were taught . . . [was] how they were going to promote and sell their music" (p.c. 2007). While it is true that in the West these things may not be taught formally either, but may be learned through the process of working in the music industry, in Ghana the industry is still developing and there are fewer opportunities for business development.

Hopeson believes that programs to teach career skills could also be offered by the Musicians Union of Ghana (MUSIGA). As its president at the time of our interview, she

notes that although MUSIGA does offer educational services to artists, they should still be doing more, such as “workshops and seminars to educate our members on how to prepare your kit, CV, how to get gigs, how to manage your band, how to make your demo, recording process, and things like that” (p.c. 2007). The Copyright Office is an organization that does offer seminars to educate artists, the general public, and also security agencies (since piracy affects the police when they are going out on raids).

Elsewhere in the developed countries they are introducing aspects of copyright education . . . so that from the word go, children will know that you cannot take somebody’s music and just twist it and say it is yours, without going for the authorization from the person. (Ms Yaa Attafua, p.c. 2007)

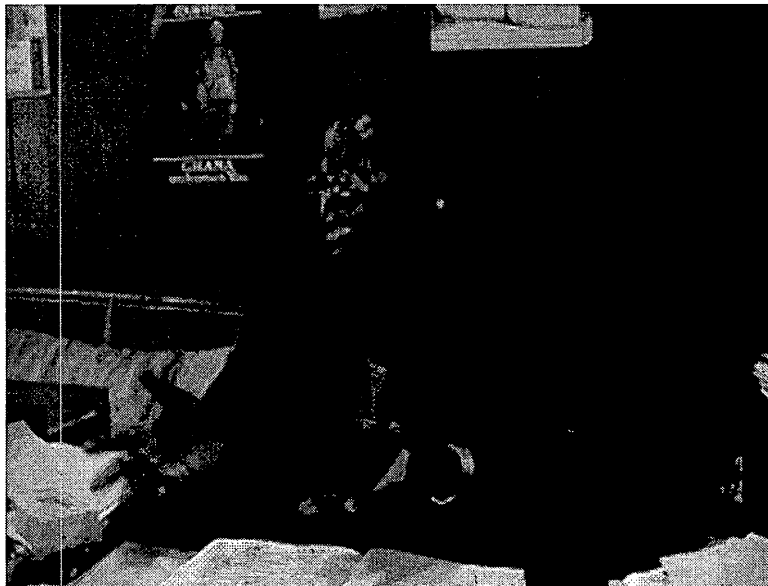


Figure 27. Ms Yaa Attafua, Copyright Office, Accra. Photo by Author, 2006.

There are some accounts from the 1930s on music, and general education, that have been employed in musicians’ skill development. In John Collins’s article “The Generational Factor in Ghanaian Music: Past, Present and Future,” he notes that, just as important as the music of school children was that of school drop-outs and truants like the

“no good boys” of Ghana in the 1930s and the “street urchins” of South Africa in the 1950s who respectively created neo-traditional *Konkoma* and penny-whistle *Kwela* music⁷⁵ (2000:2). Although it is evident that factors beyond the arts affect the artist at times, it can be said that

In West Africa, the drop-out and delinquent factor in generational conflict became more important after independence, when the dramatic expansion in the educational system resulted in an increase in the number of western educated youths unable to find employment in the modern sector. Twumasi (1975:49) mentions that the sudden increase in youth unemployment in Ghana during the 1950's was one of the factors that led Prime Minister Nkrumah to establish the Workers and Farmers Brigades. These trained and hired young unemployed as musicians and actors for the Brigade bands and concert parties that were established from the late fifties. It was these that also, in the face of strong parental opposition, opened up the popular entertainment profession for a whole new generation of women concert party performers.⁷⁶ (2)

In addition to formal education through universities, artists' education can happen in many ways, including informally through experiences with other artists, mentorships, and through kinship. Experiences interacting with other seasoned artists – being inspired and motivated by others – means a lot to the mutual development of participants. Here a seasoned artist notes, “I also learn from them [students]. Sometimes their compositions attract me, and sometimes I will experiment with their songs . . . I would say that my interaction with them also educated me, more so” (Ebo Taylor, p.c. 2007). Taylor had been invited by Professor John Collins to teach courses at the University of Ghana, which eventually led to an appointment there. His experience integrates informal as well as

⁷⁵ Reference to *Konkoma* music was from Professor A.M. Opoku, p.c. 7 September 1990. For *Kwela* see Coplan, 1985:157.

⁷⁶ See Collins 1994 chapt. 23 and 1986, chapt. 32 and 33.

formal learning modes within the university setting as well as mentor formats (Taylor, p.c. 2007).

Does an apprenticeship mode of learning work? Panji Anoff, a producer who, in the early years of hip life, managed Reggie Rockstone and Talking Drums, feels that you can only learn from other musicians through apprenticeship. Anoff argues that students cannot learn from “teachers,” but from working professionals in the field they are studying. “If I want to learn how to be a musician, I won’t go to a teacher, I’ll go to a musician . . . So that transition, especially in the arts, of replacing an apprenticeship with academic discourse, I don’t really believe [it] can achieve what the apprenticeship can achieve” (p.c. 2007). Music(ian)-teachers are few in Ghana, and a Western educational program is mainly for the West, but can be customized for Ghana.

What happened that youth were no longer guided to seek apprenticeships? Part of it was due to the need to survive economically. Anoff notes, “there was a break; the younger artists did not go to the old musicians for their apprenticeships. They felt it was not necessary, because they do not come from a culture of excellence. They come from an environment of mediocrity, *takashie*. Just force it.” Sometimes this young generation operates like the “microwave” culture where instant gratification is the deal. Anoff detailed specific cases where knowledge is attained with quality through the informal mode. “I have seen apprenticeships where somebody is learning how to be a master xylophonist or a master drummer, and for the first five years their teachers won’t even teach them anything about music at all.” Apprentices will be learning other things, such as how to maintain the teacher’s house, learning how to deal with friends and visitors, and

how to make the instrument – because traditionally most Ghanaian musicians made their own instruments. It may be five years before s/he will even get sticks to hold. “It’s not, ‘I’m going to show you this.’ He’ll just say, ‘Today the Chief is coming to do some ceremony. I’m not going, so you go.’ He knows simply because you have been with him every day and night for these last five years, you know what to do” (p.c. 2007).

Apprentices learn a lasting discipline in the arts as well as develop into responsible artists, in this context. However, Anoff sees a problematic shift in the music industry. Ghana is losing the apprenticeship system.

This change of emphasis, using teachers rather than apprenticeship system, is also what has undermined the continuity of our music industry over the last, at least five hundred . . . maybe even a thousand years. Our musical evolution has been very continuous, because one generation learns from the previous generation. They adapt and modify to suit the times . . . and in turn they teach the next generation . . . by a system of apprenticeship. There is almost no formal apprenticeship in education [within the existing structure]. (p.c. 2007)

A product of Western education himself, Anoff embodies contrasting views. The kinship of ideas/skill, passed on to the younger ones in the traditional practice have been reformatted into Western education (or an attempt to do so in a musical sense) in Ghana and other places. Anoff argues that we need to appreciate how total apprenticeship is (debatable), and how incomplete the academic teaching process is (arguable). He feels that many people learn only a portion of the necessary knowledge, and think that they know it all without realizing the gaps in their education.

All they had to do is learn, so all that they know is how to learn about something and not how to think about it. . . . An apprenticeship teaches you how to think about things, how to teach yourself. It is a process. You are now going out into a better world, because your education is not formal, it is up to you to extract those things. (p.c. 2007)

Anoff believes that the most efficient transfer of information is from grandparent to grandchild. “There is a love and respect between those two people, they have time for each other, and under those simple circumstances, information transmission is hard and fast and it sticks in the brain” (p.c. 2007). Thus Anoff endorses kinship in skills among others. Africans can benefit from the West (and vice versa), and yet Africans have traditional modes of education that should not be lost in a move to adopt Western systems. Traditional kinship could be integrated into an educational curriculum conducive to the idioms of Ghanaians. A sustainable new form of programming with consistent improvements can be useful.

On leadership in education: the majority of people I spoke with believe that this needs to begin with government, to empower the musicians with education. I had the chance to visit the studios of Greg Mingle, a radio presenter at the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation, who relayed that, “they are being given the food rather than being taught how to go for the food. You can only be taught how to go for the food through education” (p.c. 2007). Mingle sees this as a vicious circle. Though it takes a lot for the Ministry of Education to address the notion of being there for the people, many people are still unhappy with their absence in shaping viable support for the up and coming musicians.

In a separate discussion, Alhaji Sidi Kubuari, then-president of MUSIGA, noted that organization’s efforts to link younger musicians with older ones to impart some instrumentation skills (p.c. 2002). On my 2006 tour of the MUSIGA facilities, the new

president showed me their classrooms and computers, and studios with musical equipment for learning/renting as well as hosting events.



Figure 28. Alhaji Sidi Kubuari, Djorwulu. Photo by Author 2007.

I was pleased with this progress, but how many musicians, including the registered members of the association, know about it? One of the facility's benefits is that members enjoy discounts on studio time. The triple heritages of African culture, Islam and the West have influenced the values, attitudes and aspirations of the African, as Mereku (2000:36) notes, echoing the position of Mazrui (1986). Mereku's "Teacher Education for Music Education in Ghana: A Critical Review and the Way Forward for Competency-Based Music Teacher Education" shares that the inheritance can be carefully navigated with the help of good policies that reinforce the Africanization of Music Education, as posited by Michael Ohene-Okanta's in his article "In Search of an African Philosophy of Music Education for Ghana," in which he mentions Kneller's (1971) position on culture. Echoing

Kneller's position, Ohene-Okanta maintained that "culture is the content of education. Culture is also noted to include modes of thinking, acting, and feeling, which are expressed, for instance, in religion, language, art, and so on" (see also Ohene-Okanta 2000:12). The various issues that contextually thread the making of standard education in Ghana call for re-views of the modes of training youth.

4.2. Social Impacts of Hip Life Music

This section considers social connections, music and politics; education and musical training; how artists impact each other, including outside influences on African music and the influences of the West; and the impact of lyrics on youth and social behavior. Larger social issues in Africa and their relation to popular music, including changes in traditional modes of knowledge transmission, African identities and relationship with colonial legacy will round out the section. The material concludes with advice for upcoming musicians from well-known artists.

Reggie Rockstone commented that "It's not the music, it's the man [person] behind the music" (p.c. 2007), in his dialogue on the importance, value and respect accorded musicians/artists no matter what music they play.

Transformation is determined by the level and mode of impact. Hip life lyrics, themes and approaches exhibit ample information on changes in the psyche of the artists. Yaro Kasambata of Metro TV offered that, "creativity happens everywhere. Musicians pick on everyday issues around them. . . . Fela [Kuti], who picked on politicians – I mean today his music stands. . . . There is music that can make you jump, relax or feel happy.

There is [also] music that makes you sad or unhappy” (p.c. 2007). A Plus is a hip life artist doing themes similar to Fela’s. Culture is dynamic with time and space, as circumstances influence lyrics in Fela’s case. The social impact of music can take many forms and it is natural for cultures to be impacted by many influences, both external and internal. As Anoff puts it, “I want cultures to adapt. I think culture is a dynamic thing, but it is automatic for cultures to be influenced, and that is what results in evolution. But if a culture is replaced, that is where the dangers come into play” (p.c. 2007). For example, replacing *Kple* ritual music with any western music does not sustain a *Kple* tradition in Ghana. Anoff goes on to note that cultures take years and years to develop. “If something has survived hundreds of years in the area, then it is right for the area. It might not be right for another area but it is right for the area. That is why it has survived” (p.c. 2007). African music has developed over millennia in its many different forms. “African music is full of life, because we have different ethnic groups, different languages and cultures, and have a message” (Diana Hopeson, p.c. 2007). Hence Ghanaian music has undoubtedly influenced much of the world’s musical development. Most recently the influences of hip hop from the West have been shaping African music on the continent.



Figure 29. Diana Hopeson, Accra. Photo by Author 2007.

4.2.1. Social, Economic and Political Connections of Hip Life Music

Hip life artists, as well as highlife artists, reflect the demography of Ghana's 75-plus ethnic groupings and dialects. Obrafuor, Tic Tac, King Ayisoba, King David, Lord Kenya, Reggie Rockstone, A Plus, OD4, 4x4, Kwaadee, Nkasei, and Samini, represent many different ethnic origins in Ghana as well as different exposures to world cultures. In 2009 I made a nineteen-hour bus journey from Accra to Tamale in the north of Ghana. When our group stopped and settled in at the Silver Rose Hotel, we took a walk to the local restaurant and bar, which was blasting 4x4's *World Trade Centre*. I was impressed that hip life was accepted in a locale that is rich in traditional music and dance forms. The following day there was drumming in the streets, as government dignitaries were in town for a congress. I saw *lunar* drummers, *gonje* fiddlers, and singers welcoming all guests to the congress grounds in pomp and celebratory mode. In Ghana, the traditional and the

contemporary often exist side by side. Political implications of songs are seen at many levels in musical practice, from *adaha*, *kpashimo*, to highlife and hip life music forms. The context of music indicates if it is a social commentary on the community or a political statement to the establishment. Social commentary (e.g. marital comment) sometimes feeds indirectly into politics, just as lyrical swipes by artists against corrupt practices blows the whistle on certain activities. Hip life is not new to this, since hip hop is explicit by nature and highlife is a mildly euphemistic way of storytelling in a “sugar-the-pill” approach. The artist A Plus, in *A Letter to the West* featuring Praye Honeho (from the album of the same name), brings to the foreground issues affecting countries with challenged governance and plagued with injustice and corruption. A Plus uses a political voice for the people in challenging the establishment’s practices (see Chapter 2). In the hip life music scene, A Plus breaks the silence on the political front in an otherwise “don’t say anything, for peace’s sake” Ghanaian culture.

A Letter to the West by A Plus. Album: A Letter to the West (2008).

Anytime you file your tax inna America (Larry King)
 Anytime you file your tax inna Europa (David Beckham)
 Anytime you file your tax inna Australia (Jeff Fenech)
 Anytime you file your tax inn Asia (Yao Ming)

Remember that your money can end up in the pocket of some corrupt leader
 Or you money can be that money that is used to buy guns and ammunitions
 To kill women and children in Africa
 Because your government gives it to Africa as aid
 So put pressure on your government to do more to stop

And in Sierra Leone, you don’t wanna know
 The Lord's Resistance Army, oh, it’s a pity
 They fight over diamonds and kill people
 Who have never seen the diamonds in their lives before
 They kill pregnant women and they think it’s funny
 Abi you hear about the civil war in Rwanda
 Where the Hutus and the Tutsis commit atrocities
 And they display millions of people in Burundi
 After Mobutu Sese Seko and his Zaire
 Then we think the Congo go ever be free
 But Lord Makunda and his army still dey in the trees
 But in Cote d’Ivoire, ebe ethnicity
 You dey destroy this beautiful African country
 How on earth can you have a leader like General

Oppression, corruption, dictatorship

Chorus

Africa, where I wanna be
Life for be simple as A-B-C-D
The leaders them a greediness plenty plenty
E make the whole thing dey look like horror
movie
Africa, where I wanna be
Life for be simple as A-B-C-D
The leaders them a greediness plenty plenty
E make the whole thing dey look like scary
movie
Belly belly full wey dey kill them (2x)
Them a belly full wey we thirsty
Wanna be greedy o (2x)

Now listen, CIA
This is Africa, this be Africa
This is Africa, where I wanna be
This is where you got fruits on trees for free
And when it rains, you got diamonds on the
ground for free
Sunshine and rain, to grow the seed
Timber and gold , plenty plenty
Now we get plenty oil abundantly
Life for be easy as A-B-C-D
Prosperity, na this for be the key
But what do we see? Disease be all we dey see
HIV, e kill mummy and daddy
Hungry, we no dey get food to eat
In this 21st century, some school under trees
In the abundance of water, the fool is thirsty
Cos we've had leaders like Iddi Amin, Fode
Sanko, Charles Taylor and Farrah Ahin
Can you imagine a man like Jonas Savimbi
And in Southern Sudan, there is the Janjaweed
And they terrorize and kill women and babies
And in Somalia, there has never been peace
In Liberia, 10 years of brutality

Guei

But for Zimbabwe, ebe Mugabe
You no go fit be like Mr. Mandela, Mugabe?
Your people dey hungry and your big belly full
Ebe vanity upon vanity, Mugabe
Hey Raila Odinga, Mwai Kibaki
I hear say you people smoke some peace pipe
I don't believe, I think you smoke the weed
Cuz you no dey even care how your people dey
feel
Idriss Deby, would there ever be some peace
country in Chad, your beloved country
Africa dey under siege, there is the need for speed
I sit back and watch Africa like ebe horror movie
Nah this be rumble in the jungle, season 23

Repeat Chorus

Bridge 2x

Hrrr heeee hrrr heee hrrr
The leaders them dey scare scare we too much
Them alone wanna hide hide and chop all
You no go give we some (2x) (too bad too bad)

(Africa, fire in Africa, fire in Africa, hunger in
Africa)
Stop the war, stop the killings, stop corruption
Wipe up dictatorship
We need peace in Africa
We need schools, we need education
We need houses, we need peace
Make this place a better place for us
For our children, and our children's children
No more dictatorship, oppression, corruption, Oh,
malnutrition
Oh Lord
Africa, give us reason to live
Let's live in Africa
No more war!

A Letter to the West (above) speaks to the world, clearly defining and pointing,
questioning leaders and role models as well as calling upon individual responsibility.

When A Plus and Praye Honeho bring such issues to the musical scene, it sends a wake-up

call to governments and to people from all walks of life to review and assess their actions and inactions.

In the case of Ghanaian artists, there is not extreme brutality as witnessed in some African countries, but just warnings that artists should be careful in their lyrics. Examples include the lyric battles between Chicago and Ex-Doe, or A Plus and Sidney's critiques that denounce corrupt leadership (see Appendix A 2). A Plus's music made inroads by being a voice of the people; criticizing presidents and ministers through music that was groundbreaking in the conservative Ghanaian culture. The diplomacy and tact employed by A Plus puts thoughts and music on a political, intellectual as well as a democratic footing that seeks to give voice to the voiceless.

Economic standing and power play an underlying role in Ghana's music industry. An artist approached me a few years ago to complain about the lack of government financial support he received in his bid to complete a recording and pay studio fees. His demo work was only played when he gave DJs payola, which had drained his finances. Another artist confirmed that this was a commonplace occurrence affecting up and coming artists. Some artists, with challenges such as lack of other income or access to government funding for recording, promotion and marketing, may gravitate into a cycle of financial difficulty despite their rich artistic talents. Pioneers such as Akyeame, Reggie Rockstone, Samini, Obuor, Obrafuor, Tic Tac, and Lord Kenya have laid down good foundations that have heralded growth in the hip life world. Many well-known artists have made inroads into self-reliance while many others still struggle to appear on the musical scene. The challenges that I have witnessed in Ghana range from a lack of professional management

to self-styled musicians (who are the majority, with only a few artists being well trained by renowned mentors). I met a young artist called Edem who, along with a host of others, was looking for management as well as producers in his bid to keep his career on a steady course. Collaborations with established artists could be eye-opening for some of the younger, emerging artists. For instance, anyone into ragg-life (a combination of ragga/dancehall and hip life music) may want to talk to the artist OD4 at Cool Entertainment production company/agency.

Enthusiasts of the Soca-dancehall style of hip life can see Okra at Okyeame Kwame's studios, or talk to the well-known Emmanuel Samini. Reggie Rockstone mentors the Mobile Boys, and grooms a variety of artists in various styles. His interests include poetic and Pan African takes on issues facing youth in Ghana and abroad. Power within the music business is like any other business or politics where economic standing reflects what you command, including the network of producers and promoters of music.

A look at the relationship between hip life and highlife tends to expose some generational rifts. The highlifers initially seemed to consider themselves above the hip lifers, relegating the hip lifers to rap and hip hop beats. Many are now coming to recognize the value of the new generation's style. On the 1953 Senofone label, Collins noted that,

Some highlife[r]s' lyrics also reflect the worries that the older generation has in understanding the ways of the young. An example by the Black Beats dance band is their mid-1950's record "Tsutsu Blema Beneke" which translates from Ga as "the old days were not like this." This song was an adaption of an old Ga highlife song that laments on how things are changing, and how young lovers are behaving differently, by showing their affection too openly. (4)

Some members of the “microwave generation” seem to have no time to invest in the production of time-tested music genres. This may be a fault of modernity and the lack of access to the same opportunities available to earlier generations. The making of hip life music has the element of looping and synthesized sound, then stretching the digital technology with various effects on the material being created. Sony Achiba as well as Okyeame Kwame are of the view that although a live band can play such music with live instrumentation, some of the effects cannot be achieved in a live setting, but can be carefully attained in the studio (Kwame, p.c. Gbawe, 2007), given that the studio’s computer processes cut down costs during the era of Africa’s “permanent” recession.

With recent hip life recordings becoming more melodious and rhythmic, this new packaging is redefining hip life as a true Ghanaian art form. Criticism against the initial hip life musics that surfaced in Ghana in the late 1990s has shaped its content and social construct. Some of the challenges (reception) may be attributed to the times and the conditions through which these two generations emerged, given that highlife enjoyed being taught in schools prior to changes in the educational system. In the void left by the cancelation of such music programs, John Collins chronicles that, “three years of night curfew during the early/mid 1980’s, heavy taxes on musical instruments, the ‘invasion’ of cheap-to-manage ‘spinners’ (mobile discos) onto the club dance-floors and the rise of local television and video productions” affected live music production (2000:10). In the early 1980s

disco music with its electronic drum beat became fashionable. This electronic variant of highlife was created by Ghanaians living in Hamburg, Germany at that time whose disco-fied ‘burger highlife’ subsequently became popular with the

youth at home. The burgher-highlife fashion was followed in the late 1990's with vernacular versions of hip-hop, ragga and rap that is now known as 'hip-life' . . . is partly a result of economic, political and technological factors which have mitigated against the large live-format popular bands, such as highlife dance bands and the guitar bands-cum-concert parties. (10)

I witnessed aspects of the challenges noted by Collins in Ghana, when we had to stay indoors from 6:00 pm to 6:00 am. One could not give or attend performances in the evenings. Thus, the nightlife career of musicians ended. Many things had to be done indoors, which eventually precipitated a wave of techno fever, a situation that fermented the idea of techno pop which has now come to stay for the youth, although most adults see it as a temporary wave. I think that hip life is here to stay so one can make good use of hip life culture. It has highlife that survived many years. Influences during Bibini Studios's *Pop Chain* student Talent Hunt 2005 initiative in schools, show that Faisal Helwani recorded the Bibini Pop Stars featuring Plus C, Konkonsa, Ediyesem, B. Black, Two White, Death Squard, Omankrado (next page), and Pimp Soldier to showcase and develop talents. None of these artists could have afforded to record if they had not been selected through this competition. The 2005 inspiration also shaped musics of mentored youth from the Bibini studios. Hip life elements or rap, meoldy, heavy base, *Ga*, *Twii*, English languages were employed in these works.

BIBINI

ORANGEADO

The musical score for "Bibini" is presented in two systems. The first system includes staves for Electric Guitar, Electric Bass, and Drum Set. The second system includes staves for E. Gtr., E. Bass, and Dr. The guitar part is mostly slash marks, with a '5' above the first measure. The bass part features a consistent eighth-note pattern. The drum set part has a consistent eighth-note pattern with 'x' marks above the notes. Chords F, Em, Dm, and C are indicated above the staves. A 'FILL IN EVERY 4TH BAR' instruction is present above the drum set staff in the second system.

Figure 30. Faisal Helwani.. "Bibini." *Afro Pop Golden Hits Vol. 1, Talent Hunt 2005*. Bibini Studios, Accra, 2005. CD.

4.2.2. Impact of Education and Musical Training on Social Life

Whereas the predecessors of hip lifers, the highlife and school bands, accessed Western education to some extent, sociopolitical changes in the latter part of the 1970s placed a hold on musical training for most youth. The ban on musical instruments and the night curfew mentioned above, among other political decisions, deeply affected artists' learning. Because there were no gigs in their usual time – evenings – many saw no point in learning to play, because there was nowhere to play in the night. This, along with

economic circumstances, compounded the dilemma of some of the hip life artists not receiving a musical education, or not seeing the ability to play instruments as important. I asked Panji Anoff, what effect this had on the music itself. He responded that hip life artists' "idols were hip hop artists who were not playing instruments, or were not guitar band leaders . . . Because their heroes were people who were not playing those instruments, they did not feel they were necessary" (p.c. 2007). This may help explain why some musicians can't or don't play instruments. But other economic factors also shape skill level. Sony Achiba, the pioneer of Hip Dia (2000 in Accra; see section on sub genres of hip life, on pages 161-163), notes that "if we can have all the equipment in the studio on the live stage, why not. It is expensive and also if you bring bandsmen and you can't afford to pay them, how do you play your music?" (p.c. 2002). Regardless of the factors, creativity can be limited. "It is one thing to create an effective rhythm because it is the only thing you know how to create, and it is another thing to create an effective rhythm because that is what you want to create" (Panji Anoff, p.c. 2007).

King Ayisoba's original creativity with the *koloogo* instrument and his unique voice, style of melody and storylines speak volumes of Ghanaian tradition. In a discussion, he shared that his father passed on the knowledge of playing that instrument to him (p.c. 2007). In a sense it reminds and reinforces the drive to acoustic music in the Ghanaian traditional sense. Anoff explains that

The first stage for me really is Burgher highlife when people [who] had no experience of our music or our culture or our background became key performers on the records. So you can take an album by Charles Amoah. [Who] . . . was playing drums and singing and playing percussion, all these things in those days, he came from that background. But if Charles Amoah is now in Germany, who is

going to program the music for him . . . ? He might describe the song to you, but I have to perform it. So if I understand the music and how the groove is supposed to be, I might be able to come close. But if I am very unfamiliar with that kind of rhythm or that kind of beat it is also difficult. (p.c. 2007)

Mapping aspects of hip hop influences, Anoff furthers his narrative of the developmental stages and the skill of the time in playing musical instruments. Though debatable, he commented that

. . . producers and engineers to a great extent were coming from the same culture and background and experience as the rapper, or the artist. So if some artist from Harlem says to another person from Harlem, “You give me a song,” like how they do, you know the kind of [groove] they do . . . , it’s a common experience. He’s a performer but he’s familiar with the experience. (p.c. 2007)

In the same vein, an artist can call a shot in the studio in which he/she requests some guitar licks of *yaa amponsa* (an Akan female name) backing and improvisational modes of the layering of the groove. This is similar to the American episode noted by Anoff.

The performer who is unfamiliar with an experience will always find it hard to recreate that experience first time out. After five or six weeks, or five or six months, or five or six years of trying to do something, it depends how difficult [it is] to teach – for something you’ve never heard, you want to recreate [it] . . . It’s much harder to recreate responses from someone who doesn’t understand. Here in Ghana often we have that problem. (p.c. 2007)

Given that it is acknowledged, especially from an old Ghanaian perspective, that an artist should attempt to play instruments, let’s take a brief look at the global structure of hip hop in terms of instrumentation. From New York to Soweto, and from Tokyo to New Zealand, it is mainly about the mic, synthesizers or digital technology and the rap (see Dyson 2004; Schloss 2004). But a lot of people have made the effort to incorporate traditional concepts that speak to their domain and origin.

The corporatization of hip hop demands further exploration. For instance, the position of rap music played by some artists, such as Jay Z's anger at the makers of the Cristal brand beverage in Leonard Pitts Jr.'s discussion of rap music. Pitts Jr. notes that "there is something poignant in Jay-Z's apparent surprise and hurt at Cristal's blithe rejection of hip-hop's operating ethos: that acceptance can be bought" (2008:23-24). In rap culture and lyrics, the word "cristal" is synonymous to living the high life, drug dealing, pimping, women, luxury cars, and things that are in the same category. The rap meaning of "cristal" has been co-opted by Cristal manufacturers, which angered Jay Z, who has used the word in many of his lyrics. This points to how certain corporations thrive on music as a vehicle to sell their products, as Frederick Rouzaud, president of Champagne Louis Roederer, parent company of Cristal, noted: "We can't forbid people from buying it. I'm sure Dom Perignon or Krug would be delighted to have their business" (23). Rouzaud is not thinking about morality, he is thinking about the profit of the business. Capital driven machinery that goes deeper into issues of Western capitalism/imperialists can be reformed to safeguard artists with respect to their art form. This includes partnership with good businesses that sustain the arts in the long run. For the arts is the emotional/aesthetic engine of society.

4.2.2.1. How Artists Impact Each Other

Mutual collaboration and assistance have been practiced over the years in many musical cultures. Visiting international artists may collaborate with local artists (local to local experiments also occur), yielding fruitful results and recordings. This was the way in

which Rab Bakari and Reggie Rockstone hit it in a relationship that yielded hip life music. The Lumber Brothers and Nana Acheampong are two unique groups who have similar styles of music, but differences in their lyrical styles, who, together with others, have collaborated. Ebo Taylor (below), a visiting highlife musician to the University of Ghana's Music Department, gives a personal account of his experiences growing up as a musician:

I also learn from them. Sometimes their compositions attract me, and sometimes I will experiment with their songs, and for example, he [John Collins] heard me on a piano . . . at one time he was almost my teacher. I would just sit as he tells me, he would listen to my story. I would say that my interaction with them also educated me. (p.c. 2007)

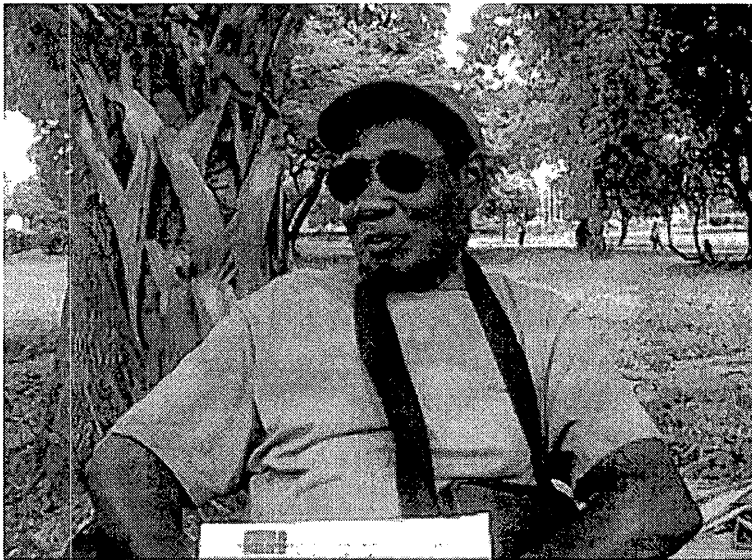


Figure 31. Ebo Taylor, University of Ghana, Legon. Photo by Author 2007.

Another internal influence comes through the media, which holds competitions in music, dance, and singing. Terry “Sir Robot” Ofose is an example of an artist who got his start through national dance competitions. “Because the dance competitions [were] loved so

much by the people, by the country, because everybody wanted to go on television and watch the finals, things like that, a lot of kids dance” (p.c. 2007).

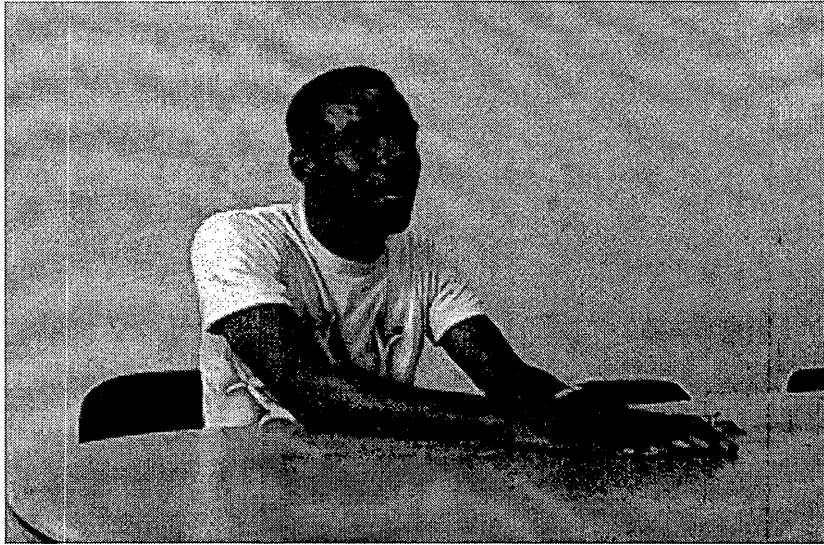


Figure 32. Terry Ofosu, University of Ghana, Legon. Photo by Author 2007.

The worldwide buzz of media attraction has hit the Ghanaian music and dance scene like a magnet. It has been a thrill to be part of something so exciting. Through these developments and influences Ghana has seen some competitions, including talent hunts and competitions, which have shaped acts of Ghanaian music. Faisal Helwani recalls auditioning about 2,400 talents for the 2005 talent hunt. “Out of the 2,400 we selected 32. They came with a song list, that’s lyrics only. Me and my son Waleed, we did three albums of eight tracks each, and we made all the music for all of them” (p.c. 2007). This project resulted in the album *Afro Pop Golden Hits Vol. 1, Talent Hunt 2005*. It revealed many new artists and songs including B Black’s *Famame*, Plus C’s *Naa Amanoa*, and Konkonsa’s *Sweet Banana*. Efforts have been and are being made, from Helwani’s time to

the present, to bring to the limelight artists that might otherwise be underground or not make it by themselves. Sometimes, however, the best efforts may have glitches.

Song	Artiste	Label
1. Yaw Dompkeh	Kofi B	4 Rees M. Prod.
2. Wafom	Dasebre Gyamena	Big Ben
3. Se Waa Maa	Christiana Love	Big Ben
4. Holiday	Daddy Lumba	Lumba Prod.
5. Osoro Bekasa	Diana Antwi Hamilton	King David Music Prod.
6. Cassanova	Nana Acheampong	Owahene M. Prod.
7. Com Centre	Castro	Prince Dare Records
8. Kakyere Me	Praye	Broom Ent.
9. Yesu Tor Me Abuoden	Maama Joyce ft. Christiana Love	Osewus Music Prod.
10. Esi	Akatakyie	Soul Records
11. A Letter to Parliament	A Plus	What's What Records
12. Emmanuella	Ofori Amponsah	4Rees Music
13. Juliana	AB Crentsil & Obuor	Family Tree Ent.
14. Mede Wayeyi Me Brewo	Vine Praise	Big Ben
15. Monto	Kwasi Pee	New Era
16. Most High God	Pastor Lenny Akpadie	Fresh Records
17. Yesu Yeda Wase	Bro Philip	House of Legend
18. Okamafo Yesu	Rev Prince Opoku	Bandex
19. Nyame Otiase	Ernerst Opoku	Pallance
20. Bom Bom	Shasha Marley	Holy Trinity Records

Table 3. Music Charts. Megahits by Graphic Showbiz (16-22 August 2007, p. 15)

Jemimah Obenewa Tenkorang (see *Graphic Showbiz*, 16-22 August 2007) of the Institute of Professional Studies, Legon, in his letter to the editor regarding the Mentor talent competitions, describes mentors not showing up for scheduled performances with their mentees, and evictees being voted back into the competition. As he wrote, this “baffled me . . . and made me believe that *TV3* pulled a fast one on us,” points to some of the challenges contestants face. (2).

Ghana struggles to retain its identity in the face of forceful outside influences. In some cases these influences lead to powerful new creative fusions, while sometimes they lead to musicians sacrificing their traditional identities. “A lot of [musicians] are trying to copy outside themes. You find people singing more about love . . . and the clips – that makes me sad, because we have so much to offer, and yet, sometimes it looks as if we don’t value what we have. We feel what is coming from outside is [better]” (Diana Hopeson, p.c. 2007). The taste for the Other and curiosity has enabled drastic transformations in otherwise conservative traditional places. Modernization and globalization play cooperatively to infuse many changes in artistic practices, from the traditional to the contemporary. In an illustration of this point, Reggie Rockstone shares his experience in first gaining recognition in the West:

When I first turned up in *The Source* magazine that was big fun, because for me *The Source* is like the bible of hip hop. . . . And me being all the way in Africa, that was nice, you know. Some of my boys were locked up in jail. *The Source* magazine is a commodity when you’re in jail, ’cause that’s how you know what’s going on, and they seen me in the magazine. [A friend] told me, “I’m telling everybody, that’s my brother!” So that’s nice, that feel nice. (p.c. 2007)

The connections between artists moving back and forth between Africa and Western countries also impact the African music scene. Western artists such as Shaggy, Jay Z and Kwasi Selassie, have all visited Ghana. Jay Z’s visit to Ghana in 2006 is a classic example of hip hop protocols and connections between artists.

When Jay Z came to perform in Accra, it caused a lot of excitement among the local artists. Musicians approached Rockstone with their enthusiasm for the visit, as he was the foremost musician of the genre of his time and in this place. Rockstone was in

support of the visit, as he was also a fan and respected Jay Z and the other artists that he works with. Rockstone also saw this as an opportunity to educate Jay Z about the local music scene and hip life:

I was like, “Yo, if you come in here hopefully we get a look in, and he can check out this hip life.” Because everybody just comes to Africa and just takes. Our brothers romanticize that, don’t forget that shit, so when they come, they almost act like they are white folk. . . . It ain’t their fault, but this is Africa, man. This is not Queens, Brooklyn. . . . Despite where your fathers, forefathers got everything they got, when you come by the mother, you got to act like this is the mother, you know what I’m saying? (p.c. 2007)

Hip hop protocol demands that artists acknowledge each other when they are visiting each others’ communities. Rockstone set about keeping up his end of the hip hop protocol. He said,

They say when you go to Rome, do as the Romans do. This is not Rome, this is home. You came home. So all the big [shots], you know, came, big cameras, big everything [gesturing], “Jay Z’s going home.” Damn, I’m like, this is my time to make somebody like Jay Z hear this story . . . this is what your brothers have been up to, doing this. They look up to you. They even emulate you, without even knowing that the very thing that you’re doing [to] get paid off . . . it started here. So I got my act together and did the whole corporate thing . . . I sent off my package, my video whatever, so at least anyone coming in here knows who’s who. (p.c. 2007)

Whenever Rockstone travels, for example to neighbouring African countries, he connects with the local artists. He finds out who is running the local music scene, and who the hot artists are as far as hip hop goes. He introduces himself and asks to be shown around the town and the local scene. It is important to learn what is going on in the locale, whom the “thugs” are, where the hot spots are, and so forth. This is how it is done. Similarly, American artists “holla” at each other when they visit American cities where other artists

are based. This is hip hop protocol. However, this protocol did not happen with Jay Z's visit to Accra.

I figure [Jay Z would], find out, and of course, if he had asked, he had enough time, then my name would have popped up, and if brothers like me, if Jay Z sat down, I know I could rap attention now. I could sell my country to him to help facilitate [the development of the art form] . . . There's a lot of talent here, man. So I figure shine some light among the folks [who] always come, help us out. The movements could actually help these kids. I mean hip life is what's feeding a lot of these kids, so even when Jay Z leaves, the very art form that's fed him and his family and his kin folk, would be working for him, that's the beautiful thing. However, shit got jumbled up, you know how it is when they come the big wigs scoop them all, put them in one . . . do whatever, they never get to meet the real [artists]. (p.c. 2007)

In addition to not acknowledging the local artists, the Jay Z contingent added fuel to the fire by asking Rockstone to open for the concert. Rockstone refused:

I'm the opening act when I'm in Brooklyn or New York someplace, but not in my spot. I'm the reason why Jay Z came . . . we're the ones that built the foundation. These kids you're seeing here, we're the ones that started this shit. . . . I said the only way I'm going to get on there is if Jay Z acknowledges me or any one of my soldiers or comrades as far as he has edified through the movement of hip life, you know bust a little freestyle with one of these artists on stage, holler, just show some solidarity that you down with these people. . . . It's frustrating, [being] treated like soil. Probably not his fault but to the people in the movement . . . that was a great disappointment. (p.c. 2007)

According to a report by Francis Addo in Accra's *Daily Guide*, it was not Jay Z himself, but the actions of CharterHouse, the organizers of the event, that led to Rockstone's exclusion from the bill. "CharterHouse had informed Jay-Z that Reggie['s] name had been removed from the list of artists scheduled to perform because Reggie said he would not perform the opening act as planned" (Ghanaweb.com, 16 Oct. 2006). Reggie confirmed this to me; he had felt disrespected in his turf, so he would not perform an opening act.

At the last minute, less than 24 hours before the concert, when we [Rockstone's team] were attempting to formulate the actual on-stage routine between Reggie and Jay-Z for approval by his management team, we were advised by CharterHouse that Jay-Z purportedly had a policy of not performing with any other artiste on stage, he pointed out. (Francis Addo, Daily Guide, Ghanaweb.com, 16 Oct. 2006)

Rockstone was explicit in his views:

Here are my own people turn[ing] back around [on] me . . . “Tell me, Reggie, who [do] you think you are? That’s Jay Z.” No, I say . . . “I don’t need him. I’m Zulu. That’s my blood right here, even Jay Z knows. Screw that.” . . . A lot of people take my side, other people take the other side . . . a lot of kids [were] really proud of me for standing up to the situation. Basically what would happen, if I had been on stage opening for [him], because what I hear from most of the opening acts . . . they was cutting their acts half way, the sound was creepy, you know all that shit. (p.c. 2007)

Addo clarified with the perspective in which, “he was not there only because doing so, would have compromised the respect his many fans had for him” (*Daily Guide*, Ghanaweb.com, 16 Oct. 2006). He further clarified that, “according to his manager, if he had attended the concert as a spectator while billed as a performer, he would have reinforced the often shabby treatment meted out to local artistes when named international artistes perform in Ghana” (n.p.). According to the *Daily Guide* on Ghanaweb.com, “although Charter House had no obligation whatsoever, to negotiate with Jay-Z[']s management on Rockstone[']s behalf, they did make genuine efforts to suggest a collaborative effort between Rockstone and Jay-Z, but was rebuffed by Jay-Z[']s management” (*Daily Guide*, Ghanaweb.com, 27 Oct. 2006). On the contrary, Francis

Addo accounts on the same site that Rockstone

refuted the promoters claims, stating that from discussions held with Jay-Z's management team, it was apparent Jay-Z had no hand in Reggie[']s removal from the performance bill and did not intend to show disrespect towards Reggie as an

artiste. Reggie, as an avid fan of Jay-Z, has enormous respect for him, as such, he did not boycott his show. (*Daily Guide*, Ghanaweb.com, 16 Oct. 2006)

These are issues that seem to take a bureaucratic approach. It could have been addressed without any fuss, given the various views on how Jay Z's team should have related to Rockstone, whatever Charter House's vision for the show, as the organizing body. The question to ask is this, was the engagement of these artists to collaborate or just do their own thing? Although a corporation invited an artist of African descent to Ghana for a show, is it just the branding in show business or just an attempt for Ghanaian youth and their collaborators to redefine their music. Maybe Jay Z was just on a business trip to perform as scheduled and had no clue of the politics of the local artists in Ghana.

Nevertheless, the ethics of hip hop as an unspoken code should have been reviewed to keep the roots cordial from the get-go. The interesting part of this is the connection of two people meeting in Africa *vis a vis* hip hop and hip life music. Had it not been the forum of performance and the existence of the art form (of their predecessors) these artists might never hear of each other, let alone initiate any efforts of stage performance. Well, there might be initiatives to put things together for the above artists as culture is always dynamic. They speak the same idioms from different perspectives so in the crossroads of disagreement, they must remember that for the music of hip life and hip hop to thrive in their respective domains and turfs, it is prudent to rise above these qualms. Other artists, for example Shaggy, and Wyclef on separate visits, have performed in Ghana without any concern by local artists.

4.2.3. Impact of Lyrics on Youth and Social Behaviour

This section examines community behaviour of the youth and the relationship it has with the lyrics of hip life songs. Love and sexual explicitness are debatable subjects when it comes to how much artists can use in their music. Hip life culture is re-echoing the music videos with exposed bodies as well as explicit lyrics that address social behavior—love or sex (see lyrics of the group 4X4). Prior to the days of hip life it was obvious that some messages were educational, telling stories, as well as packaged with language that took thinking to decipher the message and what audience it was intended for.

If you should look at the lyrics of country, they wrote those lyrics out of their true life experiences. When you read the lyrics, it's so uplifting. It's a comfort zone. It's an appeal for the distress. The same applies when you are listening to Nana Ampadu, people like that. The lyrics are pregnant with a lot of proverbs . . . a lot of inspirations. But that's not the hip life of today. (Greg Mingle, p.c. 2007)

Talking about health, work, good morals are needed in certain lyrics. Obrafuor, A Plus, and Obuor have to an extent touched on political themes. Themes that move a nation forward so a few might be doing some useful tasks with hip life music lyrics. Samini to an extent talks about love in a decent way. So it depends on where you look on the hip life radar, you'll find your choice and taste of the hip life world.

There are multiple points on how one sees love and sex in music lyrics. To the youth it is cool, to the adults sexual language is profane, and to the educator it is informative of the social dynamics of like versus dislike of love and sex lyrics. There are people who may shun some music lest they be seen as immoral, but they may play bits of the same song indoors, which is hypocritical. For instance, one may dislike Madonna or

Mzbel for certain reasons, but love their music for other reasons. So it is one thing to choose an inspirational song (say with “moral” lyrics), but now the majority of the music of hip life singers are

 talking about sex or love. Look at the continent right now. A lot of people have no jobs, a lot of people have no bed to sleep, a lot of the illiteracy rates are very high. So these are the areas which music needs to address, because music, like Bob Marley used it, he used music to conscientize⁷⁷ the people. Is that what we’re doing now? No. (Greg Mingle, p.c. 2007)

Balking against the sound and lashing out at these young artists may not be the best way to address the issue of lyrical content. The digital environment, as well as a lack of social control in the form of censoring music for appropriateness before it is launched, could be contributing factors to today’s lyrical content. Some believe that gradual education could help emerging musicians become more sensitive to the “appropriateness” of their lyrics. If more supports are in place, says Yaro Kassambata of Metro TV,

 musicians will be encouraged to write good music to inspire people. If you really want to find out what people do in their quiet time, they remember one or two lines running through their heads, and who they eventually become is what they hear. So if our media is fixated with playing profane music because this is what they can find, it means that what the youth or children are learning is profanity and it will jeopardize the future. If the music today is good, it makes the people a better people. (p.c. 2007)

This view reflects a certain position that is perhaps common among cultures and generational rifts.

⁷⁷ Create awareness or consciousness in the Ghanaian context/terminology.

4.2.4. Musiking with Art, Science and Religion

[Consider] how antibiotics were invented. Somebody simply noticed that the men and the women who worked with cows, and were exposed to cowpox many, many times, did not get smallpox. So it's just an observation, a flash of inspiration, of genius. That is what science is. So in our relationship with art, we must understand that you cannot regimentalize art. If you do, then it becomes science, and its essence is lost. Because science at its highest level is art. (Panji Anoff, p.c. 2007)

This *flash of inspiration* unfolds in many forms across different disciplines.

Observing the main area for the inspiration is the key to unlocking many of the creative elements in art, science, and religion. But the latter makes demands beyond the physical into the emotional/spiritual. The parameters of science may hinge on art, in that we can appreciate art in its best form as natural phenomenon, its modified form as science from the African perspective. Panji said,

What is art at its highest level? It's God. And God is not science. Everybody, ask them, "What is God?" They will say, "Oh, God is a matter of faith. I can't prove it." So it is not science. God is art. The more we replace our relationship with God, which is art, with our relationship with science, the further we get away from God. . . . Everybody in Africa believes in God. Because we still believe in the art of something. The person who created this world is an artist. No third-rate beast could have created this world. . . . it is a beautiful, complex art form. (p.c. 2007)

The complexity of faith and the social being affords many interpretations. The ethics of Africa, the voice of the people, whether it is music or chant, goes beyond the definition of art into cultural expression. The people understand surface, in-between and deeper notions and implications according to set codes within each ethnicity. According to Ofosu (aka Sir Robot), there is flexibility as to how individuals may "behave in society, the things we should do in society . . . but as far as our arts are concerned . . . we can open ourselves as wide as possible and still our tradition is intact" (p.c. 2007). Though there are changes in

the traditional/highlife/hip life music and dance styles over time, deep within the changes lay the core of the tradition. Those who, for instance, have an ear for a specific traditional piece can tell if it is a hybrid form. So although it may now be located within a popular sound, say, hip life, its inherent roots do not change (see Kojo Acquaye's 2009 *Se wo pe Asomdwe* – “You like peace of mind” Gospel-Hip Life⁷⁸ with ReverbNation). The color of the rose petals may seem changed over time but the roots of the rose plant remain the same, to use our earlier analogy. Keeping arts alive is indirectly keeping the people alive.

4.2.4.1. Echoing “The Power of Music”

Music has many benefits, and has good potential for positive social impact. Beginning with an example from radio, Mingle's GBC programs are designed to “conscientize” people. Among them are segments such as “*Kanawu*” “Say it even at the cost of life,” segments that deal with time management and how to impart to the youth to move forward, “*Omanyee Sane*” which talks about the traditions of the Ga people, and “Patch Up,” a segment that opens the phone lines for listeners to share apologies, thanks, condolences, etc. “My program is actually natured to conscientize” (p.c. 2007). Today, Ghana has radio stations with programs in almost all major languages and the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation reaches the entire country with AM and FM channels. Growing up with *Akasanoma* radio, one of the oldest radio boxes (sets) that transmitted in local dialects as well as the English language, I recollect listening to music, social and health

⁷⁸ <http://www.reverbNation.com/page_object/page_object_widgets/artist_335961>. Accessed 12 May 2010.

programs. Recent changes and an influx of newer forms of social media and engagement have shifted things from what they used to be.

Right now . . . the resources in this country are dwindling. Why don't we look to areas where you don't need to cut the trees, you don't need to destroy the ecology, the beautiful scenery? That is music. . . . Music is stress free. The advantage of music is enormous . . . I remember that there were two supermarkets. One had music while people shopped, and the other, music wasn't played in it. The place where music was being played was patronized. (Greg Mingle, p.c. 2007)

Understanding the freshness that music brings to the mind, soul, and heart of people anytime, anywhere, is an effective way to open windows of ethnographic knowledge into the impact of music. "You sit in a taxi and there is a radio inside. All of a sudden you've got to where you are because of the music" (p.c. 2007). This is because you were so engaged by the music played; music takes your mind off time. Reggie Rockstone adds this on the subject of the power of music,

Keep it as real as you can, to yourself, and it will definitely come across to the people as real. Always have people in mind . . . that's the thing, that's what carried us through slavery all the way till today. All our woes, music has been a comfort . . . we pray to God to music, put our babies to sleep to music, when we die, when somebody die we gonna sing to them. Music – that's just what it is. (p.c. 2007)

This is a natural thing. For instance, I looked at an ultrasound of my baby in the womb and when I heard the powerful heartbeat like *du tss---sss, du tss---sss*, on 4/4 time (*du*⁷⁹ as a heavy base) I realized again that the making of the human is itself a world of rhythms of bubbling life from source. Rockstone's advises that:

Do something that is synonymous with how you feel. People are not going to agree to everything that you feel, but if you feel it, you have the right to express that. It's the maternal instinct . . . it's almost inbuilt. It's African to make sure that whatever you do, always – it's the way of the African – [do it] for the family. (p.c. 2007)

⁷⁹ See The Black Dot's *Hip Hop Decoded* (2005:25).

Adopting specific family values in settings of the community can serve a better social outlook. Rockstone embodies family values as he shares his wisdom with the world. I believe that one of the keys to achieving a strong set of values can be through music and dance in various forms that speak to each locale. Once people identify with the music and dance, they might listen to the lyrics' message.

4.2.5. Ghanaian Social Identity and Music

In the realm of music we see distinctiveness played out on many fronts that redress local identity, and hybrid or influenced identity. This section discusses identity as reflected through language, fashion, religion, and colonialism.

Focusing on how Ghanaians have been educated or schooled, the issues of priority in subject areas may need to be reviewed. Reggie Rockstone notes the importance of language and African identity: “[P]eople go to school, learn to speak French, Spanish, every other language but their own. So hopefully if I’m spinning these dialects then somebody might say, ‘What’s he saying?’ And say, ‘Ok, maybe I’m going to learn this language, pick it up’” (p.c. 2007). Some Ghanaians see local languages as merely something that “you know already.” This is the mother tongue factor. With the help of some stakeholders, Ghanaian languages can gain currency in the student’s interest, thereby infusing the nationalistic tendency to want to specialize in this or that language or dialect. In the Junior Secondary school system, local language has been taught, and in the University of Ghana, for instance, it is a part of the African Studies program – as an

option there is Ghanaian dance, song, drumming or language. These subjects, interrelated, shape the identity of the people.

On another level, Rockstone speaks to the importance of “being bilingual . . . language is information. That’s how a lot of these folks got it wrong, when they got through they tried how we speak, that’s how they communicate, try to get in here” (p.c. 2007). Rockstone refers to the myriad of language skills utilized by both the well-intended and the not on African soil. This is how Rockstone perceives some foreigners who come to study in Ghana in this context (ways of field learning). On a specific example of identity he continued, “Look at my homeboy, Akon . . . that’s a beautiful example, Akon speaks his language. Say ‘*nyangradef*,’ he knows what to say back. But he can speak English, his Ebonics is right there because that’s where he came from” (p.c. 2007). The discussion on identity and language seems to invoke larger issues such as the legacy of the infamous colonial enterprise in Africa, slavery.

Any aspect of the beats used in hip life has its own identity as played out above, because the inspiration from each sound bite or effect is a unique flavor/idea that brings forth visual images and energy channels or creativity. This of course shapes some of the lyrics and vice versa, depending on the people involved in the art form. Now the language becomes the lifeline of the song. Once it is wired with the rest of the components of creativity and mastering you have a living art form (product) that speaks to specific people in time, and can spread to other countries. Hip life music is hiping the West African sub-region with its new sound that repackages the same African vibes through history and time. “I was in Nigeria last week, and there was no place I went to where people were

dancing where I did not hear hip life. . . . Some of the words are in Twi, some are in English; they didn't really seem to mind" (Panji Anoff, p.c. 2007). This is a key unifying understanding of a genre, such that if the power of the beat (in an African sense as the music) moves you, then you move the party beyond the borders of your heart/nation.

How does identity shape hip life clothing lines in Ghana? Through clothing, Ghanaians make statements about their identities. Hip hoppers can identify each other through their styles. "If I see a B-Boy, a Chinese, or whoever, from the way they dress, the attitude, whatever, he knows straight up that *yo*, hip hop, it's the one language that we all understand" (Reggie Rockstone, p.c. 2007). This accepted dress code in the hip hop world, including hip life, has unconsciously centralized dress code attitudes, a culture unique and bonding for the members in which acceptance is identified even through the dress code. Many artists tap into the clothing market as a way of promoting themselves. Tic Tic has a line of clothing called *Tic Tac*, on the Ghanaian market. This can be a good opportunity for artists to broaden their entrepreneurial skills and business acumen within the short and long term of their career. Specific codes of dressing can be a way to identify with a genre or culture. "As you see my man that just walked out, he's got his pants⁸⁰ there, Timberlands – if you see him, without language, you both agree on one thing, that one rhythm, you know" (Reggie Rockstone, p.c. 2007). Ghana's conservative tradition co-exists with youth heavily involved with global hip hop culture. The interesting spin here is you may see a jean with the back pockets embossed or embroidered with Kente traditional

⁸⁰ Baggy pants in this context, worn below the waist line, are called *jakoto* or *adasa* in Ga, which existed in Ghanaian culture long before hip hop cultural morphing.

fabric. Some artists there may use traditional beads in the mix of the gold necklace. So, the co-option has a particular characteristic of morphed cultures just like hip life's identity at its core.

While many Ghanaian hip life musicians are united by a shared hip hop culture, it is also imperative to preserve Ghanaian traditional clothing, as this is another vital feature of the identity of a people. Artists like Obrafuor, Obuor, Tinny, Aaron Bebe, Osei Korankye, Okyeame Kwame, Dela Botri, Antwi ne Antwi, Wanluv, Afro Moses, Ghanaba, Amakye Dede, Osibisa, King Bruce, and King Ayisoba have all kept their Ghanaian traditional identity through their clothing, music, and manners. Having said that, it is not what you wear that makes you "African." It is inborn: there is the inner African and the aesthetic image. Rockstone was born in England, lived in New York and came back to Ghana. He discusses imposed stereotypes of African-ness.

It's a global village now, get it? . . . All Chinese now are not Bruce Lee. Trying to stick these stereotypes. Just doing hip hop alone – you can't get no more African than hip hop. They want you to wear some . . . kente suit and have . . . I don't know what they want, a bone in your nose? Listen, man, I'm the real deal. . . . They try to introduce me for radio shows: "Oh we have a rapper from Africa," and then when I start talking: "He's got an American accent!" And they say, "You don't sound African." I always ask them, "What do Africans sound like?" You know, I love doing that. And then they put my music on and it's in Twi. And they like it. That's called reppin' – I'm representing. (Reggie Rockstone, p.c. 2007)

There are also stereotypes in Ghana about Africans who are deemed to be "too American."

Some perceptions mislead sections of society in the cause of traditional conservatism.

I try to explain to them that these people . . . are your brothers and sisters man, matter of fact they cut the hardest rap. Because here you are, you know your direct link, [you can] catch a bus, go to the villages, your grandmas, I mean they can too, but these are displaced people who're trying to be heard . . . people trying hard. I

find that African Americans, actually on some level, I mean it's debatable, but they seem more conscious about their roots. (Reggie Rockstone, p.c. 2007)

This calls for awareness on identity, peace and understanding as well as relationships with African descendants the world over. Rockstone puts it this way: "It has a whole lot to do with how you present yourself. . . *Ye be yeebi nayeana be ye ni nyinaa*: 'We came to do something. We didn't come to do it all.' If I die today, everybody knows hip life come up, Reggie that was his thing" (p.c. 2007). Whatever the complexity of identity understandings, it is up to people to learn and understand cultural interpretations of specific issues. For instance, a contribution to Ghanaian music history/beliefs, is unique from the German, Spanish or Canadian because they have *different* identities. Although they might all play out in specific ways, Ghanaian identity comes through in social interactions, as people have time for each other.

You cannot speak of Ghanaian identity without mentioning music. Many people are music-makers in Ghana. Music is the answer to so many things in life since in the Ghanaian context it is the very life of the people, just as dance is also integral and inseparable.

Music is flowing on the street of Ghana, on the street of Africa. In every neighborhood there is a concert hall and people composing music naturally and traditionally. [This is] unlike in the U.S. and in the West. Before you can write a song, they have to know how to read and write music and they have to compose it orderly according to the language they've learned. But in Africa, you are dealing with illiterate composers, who are composers by birth, who don't go to school, who come with ideas that [an] intellectual musician doesn't know anything about, who doesn't even know how it is put together. (Faisal Helwani, p.c. 2007)

These qualities have been the bedrock of great Ghanaian musicians from time immemorial. It is a common factor in the modes of music practice and creation. An Akan,

Ewe, Ga, or Dagbani can easily recognize the songs and language within his or her community. A person's emotion is reflective of his/her music (inspirations, sorrows, celebrations, and creativeness). Yaro Kasambata of Metro TV also adds notes on cultural kinship:

When we are talking about local music, it is very much loved in Ghana as it is very much loved in most parts of the world. It gives Ghana as a country a unique identity. As an African continent, the music also carves a niche for us, so it is one of the most important music legacies that has been left over for a very long time. It's been maintained from one generation to another and it's one of the music that has seen tremendous transformation over the years. It's one of those things that I don't think Ghana, with our quest to modernize, would leave it behind. It is something that we will pick up every way we go. (p.c. 2007)

Transformations within and beyond national borders are areas that also bring to light changes over time. The music from the 1960s that we hear on the radio and on television is quite different from what we see today but the unchanged parts are the embedded identity elements such as language and the re-invention of the contemporary that carries its history within its structure. Similar to the adage that says "a Tsetse fly that falls into butter does not become a butterfly," no matter how you modernize Ghana, Ghanaians will retain a unique identity – largely informed and expressed by their music.

4.3. Creative Process: Technology and Music Making

This section reviews the skill or educational level of artists that depend on technology, and the educational factors that shape music making in Ghana. New technologies have greatly impacted music making in Ghana and the impact has enabled musicians and stakeholders to share various modes of musical freedom of creation.

Anyone with access to a computer or a recording studio and the appropriate know-how can create an art work/product.

The topic of technology and Ghanaian music has been treated by many scholars. Braun (2002:164) notes that “What made rap so significant in the history of recorded sound was that technology had completely taken over the process of making the music.” Muller (2004:28) compared “tribal” African music and European modern technology, drawing on the SABC Magazine (26 Sept. 1952). Similarly Dinerstein (2003:119) notes that “African American musicians transmuted the propulsive rhythms germane to ritual and functional music of African music and yoked it to one of the nation’s fundamental identifying traits, technology.” This draws to the fore, Nzewi et al’s (2007:282) examination of the “technology equation” in African musical instruments, questioning “how to ensure that the use of indigenous music instruments in professional music practices retain the original human intentions that informed the indigenous science and technology underlying the construction of the instruments.” Gottstein and Link’s (1986) observations on how technology has shaped many parts of Africa’s music, identity and power relations invokes Mans’ (in Bresler, 2007:814-815) discussions on changes in urban music, popular music and the “impact of electronic music” on “the place of origin” e.g. Congo, and its return of rumba from Latin America (see Mukuna 2000).

It is clear that “the rise of mass media technologies: radio and later sound film in the 1920s, followed by television in the late 1940s [have shaped various styles]. Old modes of apprehending Others and representing them weren’t jettisoned but found themselves reused, recycled, and updated” (Taylor, 2007:211). Such developments can

also be seen in the fact that “Hi-tech fusions like Madilu System’s rumba-rap and Maloko’s soul-soukous have more than novelty value, and might well be reinvented in the future” (Ewens, 1991:214). This is applicable to West African popular musics like hip life and highlife. That given, Graham’s (1992:32) discussion of the “Ramblers, Nana Ampadu and the African Brothers, and the Sweet Talks” as well as the “music business and an adaptation to the new technology of production” (32) in the wake of the global sound brings to the foreground one of the numerous changes in the popular music scene in Ghana. For example, CDs and Blue Ray have replaced many other forms of music and video experiences in the past.

Rockstone believes that African musicians making beats with a computer have an advantage in the current industry because creating rhythms is natural for them. There is a new industry here: young African beat-makers can market their beats (rhythms) to other musicians, locally and internationally who are looking for rhythms to go with their lyrics.

Lot of these kids . . . [are] making serious beats, man, [with a] computer, the same way that Timberland or the rest of them is doing, sampling and making beats. . . . some of the beats the kids are submitting to me are sick. Amazing. So that’s another thing that I try to say: ‘beats made from home,’ homegrown beats and try to sell it to our brothers that are looking for music for their albums. (p.c. 2007)

Faisal Helwani believes that the African has a natural advantage in creating beats.

“European created the computers, because they can’t challenge Africans with their drums, because we play drums that talk” (p.c. 2007). Complementary creation may be integrated by means of both Western and “world” musical processes in which perceptions can be substantiated with collaborative efforts. Helwani acknowledges the general position of

abilities with a geographical mapping as well as ideological, because, to use the historical example of the Maroons taken into slavery, (at the time) they were not allowed to play their drums on the plantations, whilst the masters waltzed in balls. So there can be many views that raise broader issues. These issues range from embedded rhythms in the minds and hearts of the “slaves” (such that it was practiced internally and secretly) to the mnemonic singing forms (see Akrong in Sloat 2010:152).⁸¹ So forced migrations events, and other circumstances allow their rhythms to re-surface in many forms from dub to hip life (e.g., the works of Wutah of Ghana) over generations as people move from place to place.

4.3.1. Journeys of Ideas through Sound Recording

Ghanaian musicians share their unique music with the world. The creative process/journey in the arts is an elusive one to classify as an inclusive phenomenon. That act of making, through thought and practice, an item or idea and bringing it to the family, workplace, community or the world at large, is a wonderful thing. In the context of hip life music, the creative process is endless. Personal communications with DJs, studio engineers (e.g. below), and recording/stage artists have shown me how basic songs are

⁸¹ The advent of slavery and colonization changed the location of millions of Africans over a period of about four hundred years. This process included transplanting of human “commodities or properties” to the Caribbean. This commodification speaks to all nations involved in slavery, but in the Jamaican context specifically to the British transatlantic slave trade. In these events, we need to understand the history of Ghana and Jamaica that shaped their performative arts. As John Collins says, “The musical similarities or analogues between Africa and the black Americas stem largely from the fact that millions of African slaves were taken to the New World . . . taking their culture and music with them. And this has remained . . . more or less intact” (1992, 190).

layered using software that aids in the insertion of chords, horns, drums, as per the demands of a particular piece of song.



Figure 33. Mercury Quaye, Recording Engineer at Cool Entertainment Studios. Photo by Author, 2007.

A number of these pieces of songs constitute the master mixed tape that satisfies the taste of the artist or the producer. I gather that this same process may be quite similar to that in the West except it might take place in the recording studios or basement creations as in certain garage bands. I focus on the process of how the artists create and record their songs. With most artists, myself included, making music starts with ideas, moods, and focus. Reggie Rockstone reveals his perspective: “Sometimes I make music that comes off bad corny but that’s how I’m feeling at the time. When I do hip life – it is more, the kind of music that I listen to, or the kind of music that I grew up with.” Subsequently, his friends in the United States express their view of his hip life music: “They’re like: damn, man, that’s real commercial.” He sees this as a compliment.

Understanding your audience is very important, and his music addresses what the people want. “My people, they like to boogie, I can’t take that away from them. Plus I’m a boogie robot by myself, man, that’s the African, we like to boogie, stomp our feet and clap, you know, we dance.” Coming from a music and dance nation like Ghana, it is normal to dance and sing as a part of many youth cultures. But it is an important aspect in Ghana, given entertainment is within any Ghanaian community.

We have hip life music that embodies useful elements of music making based on its numerous sub-genres. Seeing the vacuum of a particular style of music, hip life in this case, was the innovation of Reggie Rockstone and his team. Digesting the micro level of a lyric he offered me this scenario in which he used the local medium to address issues that lace tradition and politics. He is referring to a visit by Bill Clinton in which Clinton wore a business suit paired with a traditional *kente* cloth.

That’s a little ridiculous. I was watching and I was thinking to myself, man if he went over to China or Japan, or some damn place man, could he wear a suit with a kimono . . . you know what I’m saying? Chinese don’t want to hear that. But Ghanaians was like, “It’s cute.” But I was like, nah. So I wrote *Clinton nkua na odi coat fra ntuma*. Clinton is the only person I ever seen wear, rock the *kente* with a full suit . . . Everyone was cracking up . . . and I was like damn, we didn’t even think about it. They was laughing but they was thinking. It was beautiful. (p.c. 2007)

The jokes draw the local people in, just as the concert parties share humour in their dramatic moving theatres. The proverbial message tends to unfold the traditional codes of dress appropriate for a country and in what context insiders feel it “raises eyebrows.” There are levels of acceptance, one the willingness to try a traditional dress of the other nation, and the notion of sharing that in the long run reinforces cordiality.

Many of the scenes in one's life feed into the musicking process. The artist Nana Akua, a.k.a. Mzbel, told me about her music creation process. "I put everything together in the house, write my lyrics in the house, with no rhythm, you know, I just say it in my head and then sing it. Then I will sing to my [sound] engineer; if it is not good I'll keep changing until it is right" (p.c. 2007). Based on daily life experiences, as many artists do, "I write my songs based on what happened. There's no 'special' motivation from anywhere. I ask myself, what will people like to listen to, what will people enjoy, and I see things around us each and every day . . . and I put them together into songs" (p.c. 2007). Depending on what a nation is going through, "People want something that will inspire them, that will make them happy, that will make them kick their feet . . . If it has to be about issues nobody will like to listen to that," because some believe it is the same issues they are trying to take their mind away from with the music. So in effect, "you kind of give a voice to each person." With varied needs of the audience she touches on relevant issues to the community: "I sing about love, I sing about money, and I sing about harassment" (p.c. 2007). In the next stage of the music after the lyrics are ready, I asked her whether she works with specific producers or engineers in the creative process. According to Mzbel she "worked with JQ, because at a point his beats were very popular, and in my first album I did almost all the songs with sound engineer CAIRO, it depends on the rhythms" (p.c. 2007).

Faisal Helwani of Bibini Studios points out that, "A good music producer must be a master musician otherwise he [she] cannot produce the musician. Definitely a good music producer must, first, have ears; two, must have the love of the music [s/]he is doing;

three, [s/]he must know about the arrangements and ideas.” It certainly makes sense that such a person “listen to good music so that you can also adopt some of your tactics. I lay my tracks and I do the mixing myself” (p.c. 2007). An example of is the kpanlogo sound track, on the *Roots of Highlife* album (1980) follows.

The image displays a musical score for the track "Roots of Highlife" from the 1980 album. The score is arranged in a multi-stem format, showing the following parts from top to bottom:

- Horns:** A single staff with a treble clef and a 4/4 time signature, containing a series of rests.
- KEYBOARDS:** A grand staff (treble and bass clefs) with a 4/4 time signature, containing a series of rests.
- BASS:** A single staff with a bass clef and a 4/4 time signature, containing a series of rests.
- Drum Set:** A single staff with a 4/4 time signature, containing a series of rests.
- KPANLOGO Drum 1:** A single staff with a 4/4 time signature, showing a rhythmic pattern starting in the second measure.
- KPANLOGO Drum 2:** A single staff with a 4/4 time signature, showing a rhythmic pattern starting in the second measure.
- KPANLOGO Drum 3:** A single staff with a 4/4 time signature, showing a rhythmic pattern starting in the second measure.
- AKASHA:** A single staff with a 4/4 time signature, showing a rhythmic pattern starting in the second measure.
- CLAPS:** A single staff with a 4/4 time signature, showing a rhythmic pattern starting in the second measure.
- NGEBO:** A single staff with a 4/4 time signature, showing a rhythmic pattern starting in the first measure.

The score is divided into measures by vertical bar lines, with a double bar line indicating the end of a phrase or section. The time signature is consistently 4/4 throughout the piece.

8

Horns

KEYBOARDS

BASS

DRUM SET

KPANLOGO DRUM 1

KPANLOGO DRUM 2

KPANLOGO DRUM 3

AZASHA

CLAPS

NGOGO

Sim ADD VARIATION

14

Horns

KEYBOARDS

BASS

DRUM SET

KPANLOGO DRUM 1

KPANLOGO DRUM 2

KPANLOGO DRUM 3

AZASHA

CLAPS

NGOGO

8vb

Sim ADD VARIATION

Sim ADD VARIATION

//

20

Trombone Solo

HOBNS

KEYBOARDS

BASS

STX ADD VARIATION

DEUM SET

K'PANLOGO DEUM 1

K'PANLOGO DEUM 2

K'PANLOGO DEUM 3

AKASHA

CLAPS

NEGOO

26

HOBNS

KEYBOARDS

BASS

DEUM SET

K'PANLOGO DEUM 1

K'PANLOGO DEUM 2

K'PANLOGO DEUM 3

AKASHA

CLAPS

NEGOO

//

32 TROMBONE BVA

Horns

KEYBOARDS

BASS

DRUM SET

KPANLOGO DRUM 1

KPANLOGO DRUM 2

KPANLOGO DRUM 3

AKASHU

CLAPS

NGOGO

38

Horns

KEYBOARDS

BASS

DRUM SET

KPANLOGO DRUM 1

KPANLOGO DRUM 2

KPANLOGO DRUM 3

AKASHU

CLAPS

NGOGO

//

44

Horns

KEYBOARDS

BASS

DRUM SET

KPANLOGO DRUM 1

KPANLOGO DRUM 2

KPANLOGO DRUM 3

AKASHA

CLAPS

NGEDO

50

Horns

KEYBOARDS

BASS

DRUM SET

KPANLOGO DRUM 1

KPANLOGO DRUM 2

KPANLOGO DRUM 3

AKASHA

CLAPS

NGEDO

Figure 34. Helwani, Faisal. "Kpanlogo." *Roots of Highlife*. Bibini Studios and Art Council of Ghana-National Folkloric Group, Accra, 1980. Audiocassette.

In order to make sense of all the tasks given in the studio team, they have to develop a broad sensibility of the music. As Panji Anoff puts it, if “you are unfamiliar with the groove that has been played then it is difficult” but if you understand it, with the necessary experience you will get somewhat closer to the essence of the music played” (p.c. 2007). Helwani strictly keeps to his studio principle: “I don’t leave my engineer to do nothing for me except put it on and off, and go and fix that microphone.” He further shared on his sound recording practice.

The decision to lay a track, the strategy of recording: it is I who [do] my mixing, nobody does it for me. I do it, with the engineer on the board I say high, low, do this, do that, let's put some effect here, let's close the effect from there, let's have echo here, let's have a reverb here...and all the hi-fi, that's my decision, that's the producer's job. (p.c. 2007)

The precise nature of audio recording requires a lot of experience, looking at the *regimental mode* of direction in Helwani's process. Depending on the team involved, others may prefer more integration of ideas, both of the engineers and the producer. I recorded the album *Shabalaba* with Kweku Emissah, a Ghanaian colleague now in Germany, at Tema ABC Studios. The tracks were all laid, with the group leader, Emissah, directing what was needed at each time. In the course of the mixing most of the group members were there and each person gave ideas as to how they felt about a particular track. On the song called *Kanya*, my original composition on the environment, when all the rhythms, attenteben flutes melodies were laid, the song, call, chants, and poetic delivery was then organized. This explored in-part melodic and spoken word with the flute at the Kodak. The parts that were not clear were retaken with a collaborative effort to archive the desired sound. On another day Emissah changed some other track backings in the main album for a particular sound to his satisfaction as he replayed the *Otu* ritual piece, rhythms and vocals. I am proud of the album as it reflected what was aimed at.

So we are musicians, my friend, we are music arrangers and if you are not a musician and arranger, you can't be a producer. So definitely a musician may be performing a song, and he [she] does something I don't like, I will stop him and I say no, let's do it somewhere else. Give me something else, I will not show how, but give me something else, do you understand, because he [she] has to contribute. (Faisal Helwani, p.c. 2007)

In a collaborative effort of contributing ideas for creative arts, there should be a mutual zeal to bring ideas to the table. Though issues of power in the studio also play a part in the producer-engineer relationship, the end products in many cases embody selected inputs of a piece of music. The piece of music that came out of technological reliance can be a wonderful asset (CD, DVD, VCD, and MP3) as well as problematic (unauthorized internet downloads and duplications) at the same time. Panji Anoff sees the downside of new technologies, in that their use has stopped many young hip life musicians from studying their musical cultural heritage to its full extent. Relying on electronic beats, many hip lifers never learn to play instruments. When artists depend on computer engineers to produce the music for them, they are that much more removed from being able to translate their own music, the way they want it, into a finished product.

If you go to a modern studio now all you see there is a computer keyboard, a piano style keyboard, a monitor and a screen, they are not instruments you know how to play. So how are you going to translate your music through these instruments you do not understand? You have to rely on someone else [sound engineer]. And that someone else does not have your background, they do not have your musical experience. (p.c. 2007)

So unless better collaboration and understandings are reached in the studio, the arts may take a different direction in sound production. The interesting thing about music is that it assumes any shape or form you want, provided the artists know exactly how they can work with the sound engineer. Emmanuel Samini is of the view that

. . . an artist tries, in live experience. Especially when you are talking about Africa, because it starts from no technology. But on one hand, technology can be indigenous to start with. Tap a drum, let's say, the technology involved is how to tap it well and get the sound you want at that moment. So if we look at the birth of acoustic or other musics which started back way before hip life, do you sometimes

draw connections in your music to some of the traditional music, or highlife? (p.c. 2007)

The skill in interpreting ideas is crucial to the communiqué between ideas and the technological translations. There was a time John Collins was recording young artists at his Bokoor Studios. The artists requested some effects that he felt distorted the beauty of the music, claiming that is what their audience wants. He reluctantly did it for them. There are times when we may prescribe the “absolute” to a client but choices have to be made for specific reasons. Studio practice has its complexities in the hip life world. The creative practice of musicians is endless from ideas through studio and their albums. But in brief only a few hip life musicians play with live bands and the majority use the synthesizers creatively. As Lord Kenya claims, he “makes Africa” (using African nuances) out of the technology or the computer (see Manu Dibango’s discussion in chapter one). If you need ideas in your music the technology can lend a hand. Remember that you’ll still have to instruct the computer very well in order to yield any meaningful results. Some of the current youth or the “microwave generation,” including myself, must be aware of the pros and cons of technology and music making, creativity and originality in their styles of Ghanaian music making.

4.4. Coffee or the Cup: Transmission and Reception in Fine Arts

We shall explore the variety of artistic transmissions and how the reception of hip life music is played out in different settings.⁸²

Working with the idea of transmission, teaching people, even the virtuoso performing, be it on a traditional drum, a stringed instrument, or a horn, you find commonalities among the virtuoso whereby in a certain state of their performance they seem to be frozen (repetition) in some mode and yet so enlightened on another realm (deep dynamic emotions) of projecting sound musically. Because once a person perfects a unique artform, he/she may be enlightened in terms of the mode of transmission (my colleague Ken described it as “lifeless subjects are given life by that perfect music at that perfect time” p.c. 2007). This is because enlightened performances serve as conduits of the tradition. Such moments brings past years of knowledge to life. However, it was

⁸² I met a colleague, who I’ll call Ken; a very good artist. We shared life experiences over coffee. He has had experience with Japanese, Korean and Arabic music. We spoke about comparative modes of transmission, how knowledge of a unique skill resides within a master artist, and ways of learning, and the cultural and religious undertones of some of these practices. He described Zen artists in Japan, who for a period of about five or ten years practice the use of the calligraphy brush and painting a free-hand circle which takes years of practice to perfect. Ken also gave an example of the process by which he learned to use a Japanese sword. His teacher had told him to practice for thirty minutes, take a break, do another thirty minutes, and so on for about three hours. His reaction was surprise and dismay. This has to do with humility and trying to go through the process of learning about a tradition, and of course he is experiencing this with the perspective of an outsider. In Ghana, for any of the ethnic cultures, you must train with, or be attached to, a master artist for over five years or longer, even washing the master’s clothes, performing household chores or farming. This is all part of the cultural learning experience, and it transforms the studious person through discipline. In hip life circles, friends pass on knowledge from one to the other over some period – but not necessarily over years, given their flirtation with technological advancements of the day. Modes of learning change kinship form but the notion of passing it on can stay the same the world over. It’s a matter of who wants knowledge and where and by whom it is offered.

perfected over many years and if the person carries it on that way there becomes a strong bond of connection between the source and the experiential world of that moment.

Ken gave me an instance of himself talking to another master drummer who was playing Indian tabla. The person explained how he sees images of past drummers in the middle of playing their solo. He sees interactive conversations, which go on for a while within the performance. In that moment there is nothing like bodily pain, because that person transforms into a higher state of mind (emotional or spiritual and metaphysical zone) (see Akrong in Sloat 2010:149).

So much is transmitting through the person to the audience. I found Ken's performance so lively. He had a live band behind him and fused Ga, Patois and Twi, and I thought, "This is globalization in performance." I can see similarities and draw connections to the very old interlocution and conversations of our Ghanaian traditional music, where even a linguist or a town crier will rhyme out a line, a message from the courtyard of the chief to highlight the dos and don'ts of the day, the moral codes for a better life.

Subsequently training and reception between artists, students, and audience as well as community brings us to the notion of the coffee or the cup and the relationship here. Meaning the music or coffee transmitted through the cup, the artist brings the very essence of how performance over time at different places yields specific results. Sometimes studying Zen over years and the implied discipline of honoring what the culture is about is essential. Just as the communication of any artist, a hip life like Samini, Obrafuor or Rockstone, also commands ethos specific to their form.

During my study in Ghana I had the chance to interact with varied generations of musicians. Notably, I was able to connect with the older folks, earlier performers who were instrumental in the highlife scene, such as Ambulley, Sidi Kubuari, Mac Tonto, Aaron Bebe, and artists and scholars including John Collins and Willie Anku. What I gathered from them in my earlier interviews in 2006, is very important—with indications that people understudying the virtuoso artist, for a number of years, should use a master and an intern kind of approach. Such an approach is similar to the traditional practice of a master and an amateur attached to that person. They (above) indicated the importance of mastering a particular instrument. Not only musicians, but it is good for anyone to learn to play traditional drum rhythms, or sing songs that have proverbs and meaning to life. On the other hand, my discussions with the younger generation, including Tic Tac, Akyeame, Lord Kenya, K.K. Fosu and a host of others, reveal that these young people are quite spontaneous in their activities as is evident in the fact that they are able to create many albums within short periods of time, mostly based on current digitization and technological advancement.

Improvements in technology have helped them to add loops, beats, and incorporate hip hop beats and other sound effects to their basic highlife music, which is already infused with basic brass instrumentation. Newer genres within hip life seek to endorse the incorporation of more traditional drumming and styles of indigenous forms like jama, kolo mashie but now the syncretization of similar sounds with digital effects has brought a whole new revolution to the process of music making at a very low cost of operation. Here I am, dealing with these two positions. The young hip lifers have their diverse categories

in terms of a core hip hop approach, a gospel approach, a highlife and 1/3 hip hop, mixed in content that reflects interesting hip life practices, and many other experiments. Talking to older generations revealed that some are coming round to appreciate what the young people are doing, and giving kudos to someone like Obuor or A.B. Crentsil, the former a hip lifer and the latter a highlifer, doing a collaborative tour of European cities where we find a live performance layered with rap in the local dialects. It reflects another way round of apprenticeship, in this case modernization presenting us with sophisticated music making of the current generation, and the well-known highlife existing. But maybe a turn of specific events gives wake up calls in the Ghanaian communities because right from the onset when Reggie Rockstone released his ground breaking album, “Makaa- maka”, it talks about: “agoo amee,” which is a traditional knock in Asante Twi Language, “Please may I enter...” all these things are connected to the tradition. The courtesy to enter in any tradition with permission, his entry unfolds a new music genre with unique fusion.

Whereas he added hip hop beats to this song and called it hip life, the notion of a section of people not accepting it that way is just to hold your nose (and pretending there’s nothing smelling), and applying that musically. Listening to K.K. Fosu singing about love in a highlife style, with Kokorveli doing rap, signals recognition. Hence we might endorse it and revisit the term hip life as coined, whether intentional or unintentional, by Reggie Rockstone during its inception.

The debates among both musicians and scholars about processes of music making, be it instrumental music or electronic music, speaks to the economic challenges that the country faces, that the youth faces, in their development of talent. Somebody has not

eaten, and yet wants to make music. How can the person afford a musical instrument, let alone afford a lesson? Do we as a society consent to a person creating the music using any available instrumentation, be it digitization, or any accessible musical instrument? As I find these young people moving with their peers, and all gathering around a certain person who holds the social capital in terms of studio equipment or particular computer programs sometimes allows a try, and through those experiments, artists potential talents of rapping, or their eloquence in the local dialect is shaped. Hence from melody, effects to rhythm are all embedded in the mimesis of holistic artform. The artform being the traditional music and dance for example, adowa, kete, kpanlogo, and osibi. These artforms are like fresh oil that has yet to be categorized into Vaseline, gas, hand creams. I use this analogy because the traditional music is so rich in allowing people to create. Look at jazz and all its categories in the west. It's just one of the branches that has grown from the roots of traditional music of Africa. According to Euba (1989:125), African "music has given birth to a number of neo-traditional derivatives, in which the emphasis is on entertainment. [Where] . . . the idiomatic elements of the old music are preserved and innovation takes place in presentation rather than content." In that similar applicable vein, Nketia's take on African art (or experimental) music notes that "while we can and must reach out to the wider world, we must ensure that African Art music grows and develops as a medium of creativity and expression in its own environment and focus in musical life" (Nketia 2004: 29).

As history of transplanted migrations occurred around the world, African derived traditions are still practiced today. Music making comes from deep inside a person,

beyond that person, it connects with the ancestors, just like magnets have their polarities, you don't tell a magnet what to connect to, if the polarities click, they click.



Figure 35. Coffee-Hip life, Cup-Audience, and Reception. By Author 2012.

4.4.1. Reception

The natural ritual of people to receive, adapt, tolerate, accept or reject in their reception of some forms of new music, e.g., hip life is inevitable (see above). In certain cases, reception occurs through a set of challenges. It can range from the mission of the artists, what is new, its roots to the impact of the new genre. So in effect the music and reception both come with their culture. The rite of passage for any art form including hip life occurs in its initial decade. It has been noted by Jackson, in her interview article with Cecil Perswa, “A Survey of Hip Hop in Ghana,” that:

Like all music that rises from younger generations, Hip Life has been met with a backlash. Elder generation artists and traditionalists refer to Hip Life as rebellious. The popular criticism is that if you create Hip Life you're a Yo! Yo! “Yo! Yo!

means American stuff Hip Hop kind of attitude. You watch too much Black movies like *Menace to Society*, *Belly*, and *Juice*,” says Cecil Perswa, a member of early Hip Life group NFL, “That’s why old folks don’t like Hip Life. It’s too much violence.” Perswa claims most criticism targeting Hip Life is highlighted by the belief that the new genre is too radical a departure from traditional African culture. “[But] When you listen to Hip-Life you can feel the African flavor in it,” says Perswa, “Africans. . . have our way of using the horns, the horns you hear and the beat, but it is just that rapping is going on. You know our people in Africa; they think we are doing the American way up here. It’s not that.” (Jackson 2004)

Encoding the Africanness in hip life speaks to the fact that it embodies with some nuance, which the consumers look for in the sound they hear, the themes that address popular issues that they are *aware of* in their daily life routines—themes on politics, social commentary, and nationalism. It is interesting that folks in the earlier Ghanaian arts scene have enjoyed decent speech and mannerisms, which is reflected in their songs. But the departure of the current generation sailing on the notion of a Westernized, freedom of speech, “*put it in your face*” attitude, draws sharp criticism from the hard-core conservatives of the Ghanaian traditional values. The contrast also defines the people and the customary structures. So it is understandable that there are debates on the rite of passage for hip life music. To note a few areas that share similar attitudes in the Ghanaian culture, the Ga *Homowo* festival has room, for a specific period of time, for such a mode of open communication, such as proverbs and stories that identify characters/events— a social control mechanism. For example if a married person was seen at a questionable location, it may surface in a song text. To keep a good standing within the community, calls for moral discipline. To give another example, a great fisher folk who caught the largest fish of the year may be commended in society with music and stomping to communicate with the earth *asaase yaa*. Reception in actual fact is always a huge

discussion in the communities inasmuch as there is music. However it must be noted that the parameters of the African and Western music forms borrowing some elements (including attitudes that come with the genre) in the creation of hip life means the sound journeys across the globe are endless. Today we have hip life making some inroads in Ghana during the last decade. Let us turn our attention to the context of hip life music.

In search of views on redefining the context of hip life music Lord Kenya says, “I’m a true African boy who knows how to make an African [music] out of the computer” (referring to available technology). He goes on to say:

I wouldn’t say I’ve been influenced by Hip Hop because we have structures here in Ghana. To me what I’m doing is not something I borrowed. I am doing something indigenous. Everybody samples. At the end of the day I listen to Busta Rhymes’s and I know it’s indigenous African music. It’s evolution. (Jackson 2004)

Let us view the insider’s reasons why Kenya is making such a statement. He may be reviewing the process through which he employs the African nuanced cultural production in the studio setting. In the book *Music Using African Themes in Western Idiom and Instrumentation*, Akin Euba (1989:136) observed that “Kwabena Nketia’s compositions for western instruments sound convincingly African and, even . . . composed . . . gives the impression of being instrumental transcriptions of folk songs.” This is evident in *Volta Fantasy for Piano* and *Antubam for Cello and Piano* (136). Interpreting recent modes of music making with turntables, scratch and mixing, White notes that the “extant literature on Rap concerns the transformation of the high-fidelity phonograph from a music-playback system to an expressive, interpretive music-making instrument” (1996). The understandings in African music as relayed by Lord Kenya’s views about the identity of

sound from the synthesized sound or the compositional modes of Nketia's works offers us more to unpack in this discussion. The flavor of African music is always African since the concept is to address themes in Africa and other places. So White's "transformation" views on rap is an affirmation of the re-use or recycle of the existing sounds from play back to a component in another live performance like scratch and rap—key elements in hip hop. Touching on elements/syntax of Ghanaian/African music David Locke notes that:

When practitioners [. . .] of African music compose and perform, one aesthetic goal that has impact upon the design of their musical choices is to establish and sustain the music's open-ended, iridescent quality. Guided by inherited traditions that constrain utterly free choice, musicians achieve their expressive intent by working within the framework of a musical syntax that is well established but largely un-verbalized within their cultural community. Although enormously varied across Africa and its diaspora in particular detail according to such factors as ethnic heritage, the history of inter-cultural contact and genre-specific musical features. . . (2011:49)

Such expressions of the musicians surface in the making of the popular forms of hip life.

The jama, lolo, adowa inherited paradigms are expressed through the mnemonic idioms of an African ethnicity. Such practice say in the case of hip life music is given a boost by studio technology in Ghana and beyond.

Though modern technology offers us broader ways of making things, like utilizing design software on a computer to create an African mask, what do we call the end product? An African mask. The same mode can be applied to hip life to foster a better understanding of many perspectives that underline the creative process and general reception. Reception of music can be biased, depending on what is going on in a particular community and generation. Conservatives and hardliners of cultural preservation may

have equally valid points justifying “hybrid” forms of musics. I listened to the *Jama* form music style from JQ’s Q-Lex studios like King David’s *Aaye Fe Notse* (exploited my hospitality or cheating). This song draws from the folk music/drumming style of *jama*, which connects the hip life to the Ghanaian cultural practice. According to Faisal Helwani’s views, “hip life is no music, my brother,” as he puts it, comparing it to highlife that utilizes live instrumentation (p.c. 2006). A 2007 article entitled “What is Wrong with Hiplife?” posted on Ghanaweb.com disagrees with Helwani’s view of hip life, pointing out that:

Hiplife is not about noise or rubbish but a rare masterpiece, which came to rescue High Life at a time when people have nothing to listen or choose from except music from Caribbean’s (Soka) and Nigeria at a time when our Clubs or Joints play about 95% of funky and the 5% is shared among highlife music, reggae and Soka. Today, thanks to Hiplife the same Clubs and Joints made foreign songs to struggle for [the same] airtime. (n.p.)

In the quest for posterity and the future of music/culture of Ghana as a nation, the article:

note[s] that Hiplife is not to usurp the “powers” of High Life or sort of scourge but they have to work closely to attain whatever vision our forefathers have bestowed on us, else posterity will not forgive us especially the present generation. Hiplife speaks to the youth more than any outlets. (n.p.)

Common sense in the world today informs that the sea is salty. Simply put, hip life is hip life. Music created with specific sensibility has the potential to exhibit newer traces—reminiscent of the “how” of various versions of hip life. This can be seen in the method of musiking, and current popular music trends in globalization.

4.5. Summary of Chapter Four

This chapter explored ways of understanding the form of music making and transmission (education and apprenticeship) specific to Ghana. In a teething stage artists might face some difficulty, but with time education can help change the way of musicking within the Ghanaian context. The few educated artists are encouraging the less educated ones (who actually hold the tradition as well as some educated artists) by helping them. I saw this effort with Rockstone's team of youth engaged in learning more about the music enterprise, at his Labone residence. The emic and etic perspectives on Ghanaian music are ways in which a careful integration of insider's definition of terms will help the outsiders to navigate and contextualize discourses. In a broader observation, the global sound that defines the impact of trans-Atlantic slavery and the people who over generations have worked the plantations and later their descendants artistically melded in part, hip hop in the Bronx influenced creative talents through circumstances. A true life story of the art that embodies a deep history is mirrored with time. So the Ghanaian-ness of hip life is deeper than theory but goes a long way to resonate with the celebration of African history, the world over.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

5.1. Findings

This study has explored the unique flavours that hip life music brings to Ghana, West Africa and beyond. Hip life is the child of its musical past and a future parent of its own musical and cultural lineage.

This art form has certainly grown rapidly. As Rockstone claims, it is now “the sound of Ghana” (p.c. 2007). Others differ on this subject. As Helwani claims, it is “no music” (p.c. 2006). “It is what it is,” says Rockstone (p.c. 2007). The performances that I have seen point to the fact that hip life is an extension of traditional performative modes of expression. The *Aslatoa* influence on hip hop beats and its return to hip life as a drum program is an interesting link to Ghanaian traditions.

Hip life emphasizes fusion and is still melding in an ever-changing style. In order to understand hip life one has to comprehend the Ghanaian aspect of hip hop culture as well as Ghanaian music developments. Some people view it as “too radical a departure from traditional African culture” (Jackson 2004), since the current commercialization of hip hop and hip life is a departure from the initial concept of social-venting or entertaining as an outlet for the South Bronx youth who pioneered hip hop. As discussed in this study, hip life has been featured in screenings across Africa on MTV since its launch in 2005. Generating a great deal of economic enterprise for Ghana’s youth, “hip life is what’s feeding a lot of these kids” (Rockstone, p.c. 2007). Hip life is pregnant with the past and present, and projects into the future through the myriad lenses of the youth’s experience.

Hip life is here to stay. Hence the hip life magnet invokes the history, identity, and gender issues of Ghanaians. It offers a voice for the hip lifers.

Music “lives” through morphing (instruments/languages/dialects) from one stage to another, yet maintains trademark styles and forms. The globalized or transcultural parts of the world today have played a substantial role in the dissemination of musics and influencing diverse cultural fabrics that shape tastes, interests, compositional approaches to music making, distribution and consumption. On the whole,

[i]t is obvious that most of the prolific talented voices come from the have not’s” said Hashim H [manager of V.I.P.]. “You can see this from the ghettos of South Africa to Brooklyn, New York. The poor usually speak from their hearts and have a way . . . [of] creating something from nothing.” *HomeGrown: Hip Life in Ghana* . . . is a documentary film about the group V.I.P. which follows their journey from the ghettos of Accra to their first international tour. (n.p.)

The above view sums up a sample journey of hip life music from scratch to the entire world. Hip life is a viable music, and a business that has employed many artists discussed in this study. Having redefined the popular music landscape of Ghana, the majority of hip life artists have yet to actively engage in performance using live musical instruments as in typical highlife performances. The issues surrounding piracy, payola, and lack of funding, not forgetting appropriate policies affecting the production of hip life and any other music, have to be addressed with urgency. A society’s art forms are important for its healthy living.

Hip life may be viewed as a reincarnated traditional form that left Ghana for the diasporas, and over time and space has re-emerged on African soil. The phenomenon of authenticity may be evoked through hip life music. Thus bringing us to the point of status,

education or doctrine, or the practice and theory scholars call the lens. The idea of applying a microscope to examine every existing methodology is not attainable in a brief forum such as this. However, my research has introduced ideas that are worth further study. Pittsburgh-based composer, Victor A. Grauer⁸³ admits that the field of “[e]thnomusicology desperately needs methodologies which afford a global, systematic overview of its terrain” (n.d. n.p.). That given, an investigator focusing on Ghanaian arts may try to define “Ghanaian” from a Ghanaian perspective. Though any language can be used, it is important to include the right representation of interpretations so as to protect the knowledge of the informants who go to great length to answer our research questions over a period of time. Agawu’s discussion on the context of ethnophilosophy cautions among other things that “the rejection of ethnophilosophy, some fear, would mean disregarding our [Ghanaian] languages, our modes of artistic expression, and our religions; it would mean hopping on the bandwagon of some cosmopolitan, “scientific” model” (n.d. n.p.). In the same line of thought, Blacking, in his book *How Musical is Man* (1973:x-10), points out that “music cannot be transmitted or have meaning without associations between people.” Language within human groupings cannot be overlooked in our search for musicality as a Western phenomenon. He further maintains that the “distinctions between the surface complexity of different musical styles and techniques do not tell us anything useful about the expressive purposes and power of music, or about the

⁸³ On the topic “Some Thoughts on Cross Cultural and Comparative Studies in Ethnomusicology” (n.d.n.p.).

intellectual organization involved in its creation” (x). Immersing one’s self in a search of the elements at the core of Ghanaian performance is apparent in this study.

5.2. Celebrating Hip Life Music Development from 1990 to 2012

“*Tswa-tswa tswaaa omanyee a-aba.*” (“Bring goodness to society” – Ga.)

“*Nananom begi nsa.*” (“The Chiefs should have a drink” – Akan.) “*Agoo namie afe ’to*

wo.” (“Greetings and salutations to the great grandfathers/mothers” – Ewe.) These are

familiar opening lines in Ghanaian traditional libation ceremonies, and employed by some

hip life artists in their musics. Hip life music, in its various forms, is important in Ghana

as well as in the diaspora. Its significance is hinged on its historical connection with the

Ghanaian people and their languages. The hip life (history and) practice discussed in this

study has now become one of the major sounds of Ghana. Hip life is celebrated, practiced,

and used in almost every corner of Ghana. It can be found just about everywhere that

people play music. Ghanaians’ love of hip life music is evident in their life cycle events,

since it is played at weddings, outdoorings, funerals, etc. Ghanaians love hip life music

because they can identify with it as an African popular music they understand. They get

the nuances and codes, they dance to it, and they appreciate the jokes within the lyrics.

As seen in this study, hip life music can be said to echo with *adaha* and hip hop—

particularly the full-circled West African musics that surfed the global waves of

technology. This conjecture suggests that DJ Hollywood’s hip hop and Rockstones’ hip

life, layered with Ghanaian language-nuances, position hip life music as a convergence of

cultures in Ghana. Hence hip life re-connects earlier and recent generations through its

fusions. The intersection of mimesis (or mimicking) and hybridization has been a key element for hip life music making. Currently, mimicking has permeated the human practice with technology. This in turn has resulted in a significant musiking-freedom and development for hip life artists.

The hip life enterprise has created jobs for many artists in the Ghanaian music industry. This includes youth engagement and creating self-awareness of their ability to voice their passions by using rap to express their views or concerns on local, regional and national issues. Rather than importing American hip hop “as is,” hip life re-interprets the import into a localized sound as a response to the global soundscape. Now the locals can relate and identify with the song texts and contexts of the particular hip life music. “One peculiar thing about . . . hiplife [music is] the Ghanaian identity in their lyrics [and a number of instrumentations] which made most of us proud as Ghanaians. One thumb up for such artists. This helped . . . Ghana[ian] music [in] reaching international scenes and marketing Ghana in the area of entertainment” (Ntiri, *Ghana Music*, 2011 n.p.). The great thing about hip life is that it has the momentum and audacity (i.e. in its use of technology) to redefine a music making that plays into the national lingua fabric of the over-75 Ghanaian ethnicities. Such musiking with a common denominator of the digital, acoustic or synthesized sound technology has become accessible to youth cultures in Ghana and elsewhere. Through these elements, hip life music in all its variations (e.g., gospel hip life, D- style, hip dia, *twi* pop, reggae hip life or rag life, dance hall hip life, soca hip life, urban life, a cappella hip life, and traditional hip life, etc.), shades (flavours of influences—calypso, soca, soukous, mapouka, hip hop, juju, R&B, bhangra, etc.), and leanings

(philosophical, religious, proverbial, ideological, social) has placed “food on the table” for many families. The growth of this genre has increased the number of artists in Ghana and elsewhere focusing on hip life cultural production including the recording studios and distributors. As well, it has influenced the West African sub region’s music, to an extent. VIP, K. K. Fosu, Samini, Obuor, and A. B. Crentsil’s tours also demonstrate the global navigation path that hip life is treading.

Hip life has its share of challenges – distribution, copyright and royalties, quality control, as well as sustainable structures in the music business to propel hip life further into international popular culture. Ghana’s music scene is developing at a pace that is engaging the world meaningfully. Musicians’ unions, studio practitioners and user agencies are in a position to understand the world standards in the course of administering the mechanics and governance of a music empire that is connected to the rest of the world. On the progressive side, hip life is in a position to boost tourism, by drawing crowds to massive concerts, and foster social understandings of Ghana. Within the field of study of hip life, there have been recommendations as well as critiques that delve into the concerns of the music business. The Ghana Music website (www.ghanamusic.com), as well as academicians, has shared views on hip life music and artists, including Dianna Hopeson, Reggie Rockstone, Panji Anorff, Yaro Kasambata, Nate Ash-Morgan, Joseph Oduro-Frimpong, Jeff Quaye, John Collins, Faisal Helwani, Jesse W. Shipley, and Emmanuel Samini. These views include artist education in a classroom and apprenticeships, transparent protection of artists from piracy, and proportional royalties. Various regulatory bodies, including the Copyright Society of Ghana (est. 1985) and the Musicians Union of

Ghana (est. 1974) have intervened to the best of their abilities. MUSIGA helps artists with national and international tours, offers advice, and supports member artists in contractual agreements and also disputes. Any help from the established foundations in the music business (such as the World Intellectual Property Organization) could help to streamline and effectively generate the leverage and sustainable practice that would keep hip life music as a force to be reckoned with. Hence there is a need for government and artists' agencies to make it as efficiently profitable as possible for all Ghanaian musicians.

The sound of hip life music is everywhere in Ghana and it fills a void for youth. The adults follow, realizing that this music has, to a certain extent, retained some ancient traditional identities within its dialogues and beats. This new youth culture might seem a departure from the traditional and folk music, but at the heart of it, it is now a typical Ghanaian popular music. This shift has given youth focus, a reason to move and swing to the rap-propelled music, responding to the global rise of hip hop. Adapting and redefining the Ghanaian identity of hip hop, hip life has come to stay.

My take on hip life is conceptually similar to what you may call the three sides of a musical coin. Why this? It is because of the need to appreciate the third side of the coin – usually the edge. This can be linked to cutting edge technology⁸⁴ or scholarship. It also emphasizes the importance of inner interpretations of binaries in discourses that have exhibited blurred boundaries yet have different and separate definitions by nature. There is a need to understand and study what fusions like hip life music have to offer – through the

⁸⁴ With the help of technological development, the “microwave” took over the “firewood,” in the sense that the rate at which computing helped create and re-mix sound is phenomenal. Hip life has faced the challenges of reception in its rite of passage and has increased its popularity among many Ghanaians and other enthusiasts.

intersections of ethnomusicology, African/cultural studies, anthropology, popular music studies, and dance ethnography. Is it the menu for our musical analysis only, or a bigger continuum of the musical sound-scape/culture-scape?

My dissertation research is one of many studies that could focus on the Ghanaian payola in hip life, including governance (policies), copyright (intellectual property), royalties, and how artists' work gets media airplay/coverage (whilst addressing payola issues and international record industry relations to the Ghana's Music Industry).

Hip life music is a mirror of Ghanaian society today. It reflects the society's past, present and the probable future. Thus hip life celebration here opens a window for researchers to unpack the music with an in-depth historical leaning that seems aesthetically simple. The excitement begins when one gets into the *life* of the *hip*, within hip life cultural production.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

LYRICS AND NOTATION

1. VIP, Ahomka wo mu song Twi lyrics (means 'there is comfort in it) (Excerpt)

<i>Eyε gyε gyε, sε wo checky what</i>	It is good (great), you are checking (liking) it
<i>W'anim, w'akyi, ahomka wɔ mu</i>	Your front, your back, there is comfort in it
<i>Wo honam wo biribi ara anigye wɔ mu</i>	All over body, there's happiness in it
<i>Wo nsa ho aduane koraa na εku me o</i>	(Your) food from your hands (cooking) is what is killing me ("killing" here means I am loving it)
<i>Dɔɔyεwu me ne wo ara o</i>	My love till death, it's me and you forever

2. Sydney Ofori's (and Morris Babyface's) "Africa Money" in *Barima bi ba* ("A certain man is coming") album (2007, Excerpt)

"Africa Money"

Chorus 1

Wonna money eh, ao money oh
Africa money eh, Oga dey chop am fuga fuga
Wonna money eh, ao money oh
E dey chop am fuga fuga
Oga chop am nyaga nyaga, nyaga nyaga
Buum buum buum, Oga dey chop am waa

Africa money eh, Oga dey chop am fuga fuga
E dey chop am nyaga nyaga
Oga dey chop am nyafu nyafu, nyafu nyafu
Waa waa waa, Oga dey chop am nyaà
Africa money eh, Oga dey chop am oh
Poor man dey work, rich dey enjoy
I say how we reach o, the gap between
Accountant dey chop oh

Chorus 2

Our money eh, aaw wonna money

Oga dey chop am fuga fuga
Bank manager dey chop
Oga dey chop am basa basa
Director dey chop oh
Oga dey chop am nyaga nyaga
Even pastors dey, chop chop, chop chop

Verse 1

Hey l'argent eh, l'argent eh
J'ai bien chercher mais j'ai rien gagner,
Nos chers politiques à tous coupe oh
oh oh oh oh oh oh
Oga dey chop am fuga fuga
oh oh oh oh oh oh

3. Figure 36. King Ayisoba (Albert Apozori) feat. Sjoerd, Avoyure.

CLARINET SOLO

Koko GUITAR

KEYBOARD

DRUM SET

Am Am Dm

TAKE FIRST TIME

PLAY ALL TIMES

ALTO SAX.

Koko E. Gtr.

Kbd.

DR.

Am Dm Dm

SIM. ADD VARIATION

14

ALTO SAX

E. GTR.

KBD.

DR.

Am Am

Detailed description: This musical score covers measures 14 through 17. It features four staves: Alto Saxophone, Electric Guitar, Keyboard, and Drums. The Alto Saxophone and Keyboard parts consist of rhythmic patterns of eighth notes, indicated by diagonal slashes. The Electric Guitar part plays a melodic line of eighth notes. The Drums part features a consistent pattern of eighth notes with 'x' marks above them, indicating cymbal hits. The chord progression is Am for measures 14-15 and Am for measures 16-17.

4. Figure 37. Diana Akiwumi (now Hopeson), *Halleluyah, Yedi Nkunim*.

VOICE

SYNTH HORNS

ELECTRIC GUITAR

ELECTRIC BASS

DRUM SET

CLAVES

C G C

Detailed description: This musical score covers measures 1 through 4. It features six staves: Voice, Synth Horns, Electric Guitar, Electric Bass, Drum Set, and Claves. The Voice part is mostly silent. The Synth Horns play a melodic line of eighth notes. The Electric Guitar part has a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes, indicated by diagonal slashes. The Electric Bass part plays a melodic line of eighth notes. The Drum Set part features a complex pattern of eighth notes with 'x' marks above them, indicating cymbal hits. The Claves part plays a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The chord progression is C for measures 1-2, G for measure 3, and C for measure 4.

6

VOICE

ALTO SAX.

E. GTR.

E. BASS

DR.

CLV.

C Em Am Dm G C C

11

VOICE

ALTO SAX.

E. GTR.

E. BASS

DR.

CLV.

C G C C

APPENDIX B

TABLES

Table A. Music in Ghana (Selected Recordings)

Artist(s)	Title	Genre	Producer/ Record Label, Date
Reggie Rockstone	<i>Makaa Maka!!</i>	Hip life	Kassa Records, 1997
Tic Tac	<i>Philomina</i>	Hip life	(Unspecified label), 1999
Obrafour	<i>Pae mu ka</i>	Hip life	(Unspecified label), 1999
Akyeame	<i>Nyansapo – Sensibility</i>	Hip life	(Unspecified label), 1998
	<i>Nkonsonkonson</i>	Hip life	(Unspecified label), 1999
	<i>Ntwoaso-Continuation</i>	Hip life	(Unspecified label), 2000
4X4	<i>World Trade Centre</i>	Hip life	Paradise Entertainment, Double Trouble Records, August 2009
Kojo Antwi	<i>Akuaba</i>	Reggae	Quajo-Quajo Music, 2000
Adane Best	<i>Maa-Fio (Soulja.Go)</i>	Hip life	Urban Music; Slip Music, 2002
Sony Achiba	<i>Indian Ocean I</i>	Hip Dia	Achiba Productions, 2002
Aaron Bebe	<i>N'Yong: Acoustic</i>	Highlife & Hip life	Local Dimension Band/Arion, 2003
Sakura & the Local Dimension Band	<i>Ghanaian Highlife</i>		
Lord Kenya	<i>Sika baa</i>	Hip life	(Unspecified label), 2000
	<i>Sika Mpo Nfa Neho</i>	Hip life	Wayoosi Music, for Mount Kenya Records, 2003
Tinny	<i>Makola Kwakwe</i>	Hip life	(Unspecified label), 2003
Antwi ne Antwi	<i>Aku Sika</i>	Hip life	Wayoosi Music, 2005
Various Artists, including Batman, et al.	<i>Celebrating Obour Live</i>	Hip life Ragg –life Dancehall, Soca	(Unspecified label), 2005 (Video CD)
Diana	<i>Halleluyah,</i>	Gospel	ARC studios, Tema, 2006

Akiwumi	<i>Yedi Nkunim. Live!</i>	Highlife	
Henry Agyeman Chemphe King Ayisoba	<i>No pampanaa</i>	Urban life	(Unspecified label), 2006
Various artists, Reggie Rockstone, et al.	<i>Africa</i>	Afrobeat	Pidgen Music, 2008
Sheriff Ghale, Blakk Rasta, Sherifa Gunu, Abu Mohammed, Lord Wumpini Konthene	<i>Hip Life Volume 2</i>	Hip life	(Unspecified label), 2008 (DVD)
Ex-Doe (solo artist), Various Artists, 4X4, et al.	<i>Beacon of Peace</i>	Hip life/ Highlife	Danoli Studio, Accra; Hafred Security, 2009
Mzbel (Belinda Nana Akua Amoah)	<i>Nyankonton</i>	Hip life	(Unspecified label), 2002
Slim Buster GDI	<i>Davi Medi Kuku, Maba, Go Go Wo Ho The Execution Diary - an All- Star HipLife compilation album</i>	Hip life	Ashanti International, Accra, 2000
Abu Sadiq Agorsor Akan	<i>African boy (2004)</i>	Hip life	(Unspecified label), 2004
	<i>Heaven's Door</i>	Hip life	T-Vibe Records, 2006-2007 (DVD)
	<i>The Gadangbe Association of Ontario Homowo 2006(Function that used these music-DVD)</i>	Hip life/ Highlife/ Reggae hip life	Cynthia High Tech Videos, Toronto, August 2006 (DVD)
	<i>Soldier</i>	Hip life	Tarch House Productions, (n.d.)
	<i>Anukware</i>	Afro beat	(Unspecified label, n.d.)
	<i>Rhythms of Life,</i>	Traditional	Smithsonian Folkways, January 1996

music from Ghana	<i>Songs of Wisdom</i>	Music	
Various Artists	<i>Born Again</i>	Gospel Highlife/ Hip life	Mount Kenya Productions; U Name It, (n.d.)
Dela Botri	<i>Hip Life, Traditional</i>	Traditional/ contemporary music/hip life traditional	(Unspecified label, n.d.)
Hewale Sounds - Power Traditional Music	<i>"Trema"</i>	Traditional	Arc Studios Ltd., Tema; Peoga Co. Ltd., (n.d.)
Rebecca Akosua Acheampo maa Acheampo ng	<i>Sugar</i>	Hip life	(Unspecified label) 2007
Isaac Akrong & Colin McGuire Collaborati on	<i>Kpanlogo (1- traditional; 2 - electro) Experiment. 2002</i>	Traditional/ Electronic version	Personal collection, originally played by Isaac Akrong, Winters College basement, York Univ. Toronto, 2002
King Ayisoba	<i>Africa</i>	Afrobeat & Hip life	Pidgen Music, 2008
King Ayisoba	<i>Modern Ghanaians</i>	Afrobeat	Pidgen Music, 2006
King David, featuring Batman	<i>Aaye Fe Notse</i>	Hip life Highlife	Frimprince Music Production, (n.d.)
KK Fosu (Kaakyire Kwame Fosu)	<i>Anadwo Yede</i>	Reggae Hip life & Highlife	RAM Production Co.; LowdownRecords; OM Music, (2004)
Kriptic Nana Acheampo ng	<i>Demo CD Se Eye Wode</i>	Hip life Burgher Highlife	Unpublished, 2009 (Unspecified label), 2005
Obour, with guest artists	<i>Atumpan</i>	Hip life	Wayoosi Music, 2005

including Batman, Tic Tac, Okumfuor, et al.			
Ofori Amponsah (Mr. All 4 Real)	<i>Emmanuella/She Nika</i>	Hip life/ Highlife	The Shepherd Music, 2006
Oheneba Kissi	<i>Oheweba's 13</i>	Highlife	Margus Music Productions (Distribution); Slip Music Production, (n.d.)
Osei Korankye & his Seperewa Roadmaster & Agyemang Roots of Highlife	<i>Kura Mpaebo Mu</i>	Traditional/ Contemporary	Elysee Studio, Kaneshie, Accra, (n.d.)
	<i>The Old Highlife</i>	Highlife	ArtHurtsRecords.com, (n.d.)
	<i>From Bamaya to Bosoe</i>	Highlife	Bibini Records; Arts Council of Ghana and Faisal Helwani Productions, (n.d.)
Tic Tac - The Most Wanted	<i>"Masem" - In God We Trust</i>	Hip life	Goodies Music Production & Wayoosi Music, (n.d.)
	<i>Wope? Do You Like It?</i>	Hip life	Alordia Productions; Wayoosi Music, (n.d.)
Various artists, including Tic Tac, et al.	<i>London Hip-Life Fiesta Vol. 2</i>	Hip life	Kumasi Market, Kumasi, (n.d.) (DVD)
Various Artists, including Prayee, et al.	<i>Appiatus Compilation</i>	Hip life	Wayoosi Music, (2006)
Adowa	<i>Adowa Gospel Video</i>	Gospel traditional/ Contemporary	Kumasi Market, Kumasi, (n.d.) (DVD)
VIP	<i>Ahomka Wo Mu</i>	Hip life	Produced by Goodies Music, 2003
A Plus, ft. Eugene (Praye)	<i>A letter to the West</i>	Hip life	(Unspecified label), 2008
Okomfour	<i>Okomfoo se Koo</i>	Hip life	(Unspecified label), 2004

Kwaadee	<i>Kwaadee (Aboro ne bayie)</i>	Hip life	(Unspecified label), 2002
Gyedu- Blay Ambolley	<i>Party Time The Sekondi Man The African Brother Hi-Life Jazz in America The Klassiks of Ambolley</i>	Highlife/ traditional with rap Highlife/ rap Highlife Hi-life jazz Highlife	G.F.I.C. Ghana, 1988 Dino Herrmann Productions Studios, Los Angeles, 1997 Simigwa Records, 2007 Killzone Studios, Los Angeles, 2009 Simigwa Entertainment Ltd., 2009
Diana Akiwumi	<i>Winner</i>	Gospel- Highlife/ Reggae	(Unspecified label), 1993
Daughters of Glorious Jesus	<i>Anwanwa Do Mebo Yesu Din Daa Mesom Awurade Daa Nea Yehu album Aseda</i>	Gospel Highlife	(Unspecified label), 1990 (Unspecified label), 1992 (Unspecified label), 1994 (Unspecified label), 2000 (Unspecified label), 2003
Obour Buk Bak Nkasei Various Artists The Big Band Africa Sounds Daddy Lumba	<i>Atumpan Sika Kokoo Yefri Tuabodom Best of the Best Vol. 1 & Vol. 2 Uhuru Hilife Classics Vol.1 Aben Wo aha</i>	Hip life Hip life Hip life Hip life Highlife Burger Highlife	(Unspecified label), 2004 (Unspecified label), 2002 Crazy 2 Records, 2006 Stereo Records, (n.d.) 0803 Bibini Records DiGiDi.org, 1999 Lumba Records 1999

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