



# Contesting the Concept of Timeline in African Traditional Music-Dance: Perspectives from Ghana

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## ABSTRACT

The term timeline in Sub-Saharan African traditional music has been treated by several scholars in diverse ways. However, there are other dimensions to the so-called timeline beyond the constant point of reference as described by Nketia. The foremost challenge that this paper seeks to address is the fact that the term has been restricted and needs to be expanded. Consequently, it is obvious that the main goal of the entire paper is to re-examine the term Timeline. Data was gathered by listening to live performances, rehearsals, interviews, and various online performances including Zoom meetings with performers, and observing YouTube, Facebook and other platforms for critical analysis and comparative study of various dance styles from different parts of Ghana, as well as existing literature on the subject matter. Overall, the paper argues that the definitions and discussions about the concept by a couple of scholars ought to be amended and also elaborated for a deeper understanding upon further research. This will serve as a continuous discussion by other scholars and moreover, some of the confrontational approaches or arguments may help future generations to build on the discussion for the benefit of posterity.

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## INTRODUCTION

To all intent and purposes, African traditional music in this paper refers to the music practices of Sub-Saharan Africans. One of the foremost intentions why the author settles on the amalgamation of music and dance in establishing the topic of this paper is because both have been conceptualized as one art form as a result of their close association.<sup>1</sup> As a matter of course, Chernoff and Kubik's contention that 'African music in an extensive sense also incorporates dance' needs a mention in this perspective. Though the author admits the fact that Chernoff and Kubik's assertion is not the reality in all cases, approximately all the types of musical traditions mentioned in this paper incorporate dance; Consequently, in this context, music is dance and dance is music for<sup>2</sup> Kubik claims that 'both are intimately linked aspects of the same cultural complex.' Therefore, since this paper is focused on the

<sup>1</sup> J. K. Nketia, *African Music in Ghana*, vol. 11 (Northwestern University Press, 1963); A. M. Opoku, "Thoughts From the School of Music and Drama," *Okyeame* 2, no. 1 (1965): 51–60.

<sup>2</sup> John M Chernoff, "The Rhythmic Medium in African Music," *New Literary History* 22, no. 4 (1991): 1093–1102; Gerhard Kubik, "Xylophone Playing in Southern Uganda," *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 94, no. 2 (1964): 138–59.

music, it is worth noting that the word dance attached to a type of tradition in this paper is intimately related and considers the timeline of the music, and not the dance and its movements.

As a result of the cyclic description given to the timeline in the music of Africa, clapping music is one of the techniques that draws attention as far as music theory is concerned.<sup>3</sup> Clapping music is defined as ‘a phase piece for two performers clapping the same pattern throughout the duration of the piece.’<sup>4</sup> Aside from the timeline which has always been studied as repetitive, African traditional music has also been recognized by a couple of scholars as cyclic. Under those circumstances, Anku mentions that ‘one of Africa’s finest contributions to the world of music is its characteristic organization of ostinato as a compositional device’.<sup>5</sup> Analytically observing the score by Locke below (in Figure 1), it is noticeable that recurring rhythmic display in African traditional music is a common phenomenon.<sup>6</sup>

The musical score consists of five staves. The tempo is marked as ♩ = 96-120. The score is divided into two main sections, A and B, which are repeated. The parts are:

- lead lunga talk 1:** Lyrics: dan de den den dan da dan dan dan de den den dan da dan dan
- answer lunga:** Lyrics: dan den da dan dan den da dan dan den da dan dan den da dan
- answer gung-gong:** Lyrics: kan kan kan kan kan kan kan kan
- lead gung-gong talk 2:** Lyrics: kan ki ka ka ka ki kan ki ka ka ka ki
- foot work:** Rhythmic notation: R l L R L r R L R l L R L r R L

<sup>3</sup> Jay Rahn, “Ostinatos in Black-Atlantic Traditions: Generic-Specific Similarity and Proximity,” *Journal of Mathematics and Music* 16, no. 2 (May 4, 2022): 183–93, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17459737.2022.2071491>; Eric Thul and Godfried T Toussaint, “A Comparative Phylogenetic-Tree Analysis of African Timelines and North Indian Talas,” in *Bridges Leeuwarden: Mathematics, Music, Art, Architecture, Culture*, 2008, 187–94; Mark Millas Coffie, “Redefining Ghanaian Highlife Music in Modern Times,” *American Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences Research* 4, no. 1 (2020): 18–29; Willie Anku, “Circles and Time: A Theory of Structural Organization of Rhythm in African Music,” *Music Theory Online* 6, no. 1 (2000): 1–8.

<sup>4</sup> Justin Colannino, Francisco Gómez, and Godfried T Toussaint, “Analysis of Emergent Beat-Class Sets in Steve Reich’s “Clapping Music” and the Yoruba Bell Timeline,” *Perspectives of New Music* 47, no. 1 (2009): 111–34.

<sup>5</sup> Willie Anku, “Drumming among the Akan and Anlo Ewe of Ghana: An Introduction,” *African Music: Journal of the International Library of African Music* 8, no. 3 (2009): 38–64.

<sup>6</sup> David Locke, “Simultaneous Multidimensionality in African Music: Musical Cubism,” *African Music: Journal of the International Library of African Music* 8, no. 3 (2009): 8–37.

With respect to the spelling of the term, some<sup>7</sup> prefer to spell with a hyphen in between the time and line (Time-line), others<sup>8</sup> would also like to spell the term as two different texts (Time line). In this paper, the author would prefer to spell the term together<sup>9</sup> as a word (Timeline).

Certainly, it is quite questionable if the prominence of the timeline in African music has been discussed extensively by great scholars in the field of music over the past years, thenceforward, why is the need for the review of the concept in detail as far as this paper is concerned? In consequence of this debatable question aforementioned, this author humbly submits an amendment of the definition and perception of the term by a couple of scholars that would be mentioned in due course. This is done by re-examining the concept and justification of the author's arguments from further research in detail. To put it simply, the foremost challenge that this paper seeks to address is the fact that the term has been restricted and needs to be expanded. Consequently, it is obvious that the main goal of the entire paper is to re-examine the term **Timeline**. Indeed, it must also be acknowledged that Agawu claims that the subject has always been controversial and disagreements amongst scholars in the field of music are evident.<sup>10</sup>

However, a few questions kept echoing in mind before the research took place. As these questions kept presenting themselves, they served as the basis for the entire arguments in the paper. First and foremost, this author kept speculating if the timeline is always short in duration, memorable and noticeable as Jones, Nketia and Agawu claim.<sup>11</sup> Other questions are as follows: Is the so-called timekeeper totally in control of the tempo and serves as a metronome to an entire performance? Also, if it has been universally accepted that the timeline in African music is a constant point of reference, then, could it always be distinct in sound as compared to other instruments? Why is the timeline of some dances played contrarily from one group to the other? Is the timeline always a rhythmic pattern played by an individual(s) or there could be multiplicity and polyrhythmic influence in the appearance of the practice?

In the process of reviewing the term in this paper, Nketia's definition is selected as the foundation for the entire paper. Yet, there is a humble submission to Nketia's definition, and also, the concept of the timeline(s) has been expanded in the paper. As well, the timeline has been portrayed by numerous scholars as the metronome to an entire accompaniment to dances of Africa; As much as the author agrees incompletely with the assertion, it has been revised thoroughly as far as this paper is concerned.

What is more, essentially, it has been pronounced that timelines tend to be distinct in sound as compared to that of other instruments during a performance. Nevertheless, the author does not concur completely with the contention. Therefore, there is an introduction of **Mobile** and **Immobile Timelines**. It has also been established that there could be noticeable or unnoticeable timelines in the traditional music of Sub-Saharan Africa. For this reason, this paper argues that there is a possibility that timelines could be detected in all traditional dances of Africa. This is to state emphatically that there is no dance without a timeline. Grounded on the findings aforesaid, other concepts have been

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<sup>7</sup> Clemente K Abrokwa, "Indigenous Music Education in Africa," *What Is Indigenous Knowledge: Voices from the Academy*, 1999, 191–207; Arthur M Jones, "On Transcribing African Music," *African Music: Journal of the International Library of African Music* 2, no. 1 (1958): 11–14.

<sup>8</sup> J. H. Kwabena Nketia, "Musicology and Linguistics: Integrating the Phraseology of Text and Tune in the Creative Process," *Black Music Research Journal*, 2002, 143–64; J H Kwabena Nketia, "The Interrelations of African Music and Dance," *Studia Musicológica*, 1965, 91–101; J H Kwabena Nketia, "The Intensity Factor in African Music," *Journal of Folklore Research*, 1988, 53–86; Kubik, "Xylophone Playing in Southern Uganda"; Kofi Agawu, "Structural Analysis or Cultural Analysis? Competing Perspectives on the 'Standard Pattern' of West African Rhythm," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 59, no. 1 (2006): 1–46.

<sup>9</sup> Godfried Toussaint, "Classification and Phylogenetic Analysis of African Ternary Rhythm Timelines," in *Meeting Alhambra, ISAMA-BRIDGES Conference Proceedings*, 2003, 25–36; Bertram Lehmann, "The Syntax of 'clave'—Perception and Analysis of Meter in Cuban and African Music" (Tufts University, 2002).

<sup>10</sup> Agawu, "Structural Analysis or Cultural Analysis? Competing Perspectives on the 'Standard Pattern' of West African Rhythm."

<sup>11</sup> Jones, "On Transcribing African Music"; Nketia, *African Music in Ghana*; Agawu, "Structural Analysis or Cultural Analysis? Competing Perspectives on the 'Standard Pattern' of West African Rhythm."

created in this paper known as **Polyrhythmic Timeline**, followed by **Homorhythmic** and **Multifarious Timelines**, **Supplant** and **Associate Timekeeper(s)** and lastly, the **Homogeneous**, followed by **Symbiotic Timelines**.

Data was gathered by attending live performances and rehearsals of various groups from both the Southern and Northern parts of Ghana. On the other hand, several online performances such as Zoom meetings with performers, and observing performances on YouTube, Facebook, and various platforms that traditional music of Africa could be accessible for critical analysis and comparative study of various dance styles from different parts of Ghana. For instance, one dance could be played by more than five groups. An example is how the conclusion was drawn on dances which are multifarious. One dance type like *Adowa* which would be discussed in the findings was observed at two rehearsals by prominent groups in the Ashanti region of Ghana where it hails from, about three or four live performances, YouTube performances, and special video performances crafted for this paper. Upon listening to all these groups, the differences in the approach (of the timeline) were evident and it is at this point that the author recognized the evolution in the traditional music of Sub-Saharan Africa. Needless to say, one or two groups were never enough for a discussion because of the comparative study involved in the argument. The dances were selected purposively to back the arguments. Interviews were conducted based on the research questions above. The persons involved in this interview include instructors from both Academia and PR actioners outside of academia, Master drummers, supporting drummers, timekeepers, dancers and listeners. Listeners were involved due to the effect of what they hear or perceive during performances which were of the essence to the paper.

This paper intends to score and address instruments that execute the timeline as far as African music is concerned

### **Re-examining the Timeline**

Although timeline could be identified in numerous genres of music including Art, popular, and folk, to mention a few, this paper intends to address the term in the context of Traditional music of Sub-Saharan Africa, using Ghana as a case study. Some researchers in the field of music that have endeavored to examine African traditional music, have taken notice of timelines. Though the term was mentioned by Jones in 1958, Agawu credits Nketia as the first to have introduced the term in the year 1963,<sup>12</sup> which could be quite disputable. Either Nketia's definition could be the one that is universally accepted as scholars such as Kaufmann notes as "perhaps one of the most significant contributions of Nketia to understanding African rhythm," or better still misinformation could take place at any point in time.<sup>13</sup> However, the focus of this paper is not based on the history or the origin of the term, but the practice, and also the description or definition given by scholars in the field of music. To be specific, this paper serves as a supplement to existing literature.

Jones describes the timeline as 'a small rhythm-pattern repeated as often as necessary.' While Nketia defines the term as 'a constant point of reference by which the phrase structure of a song as well as the linear metrical organization of phrases are guided'. However, for the purpose of the argument this paper intends to hold, the author may prefer Nketia's definition. Yet, from the author's position, the understanding of Nketia's definition has been limited and needs to be extended as far as performance is concerned. In the first place, the author would have preferred '**A Point of Reference**' in Nketia's definition without the inclusion of the word **Constant**, owing to the fact that in performance, the musicians and even the dancers may not always rely on one instrument(s) as a point of reference as Nketia claims. The definition by Nketia was followed by another description of the timeline as short but persistent. If the author's assumption is right, then the controversy here may be that the description of the timeline as a constant point of reference could be referred to its short and persistent system (author's opinion); Yet, to his mind, the practice of the timeline as short and persistent does not make it a constant point of reference in practicality.

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<sup>12</sup> Jones, "On Transcribing African Music," 13; Agawu, "Structural Analysis or Cultural Analysis? Competing Perspectives on the 'Standard Pattern' of West African Rhythm."

<sup>13</sup> Robert Kauffman, "African Rhythm: A Reassessment," *Ethnomusicology* 24, no. 3 (1980): 399.

Worth bearing in mind, this paper may want to limit ‘**Point of Reference**’ to the speed of the music and dance. One must not link the individual(s) responsibility to that of a conductor of an orchestra or a choral group for the duty of the timekeeper differs from one group to the other as far as this paper is concerned. This is to state that at a point where dancers or musicians have to take a cue from an instrument or an individual, the cue may serve as a prompt to another section of the dance or the music. This does not imply that the one given the signal is the timekeeper. A Timekeeper (or the timeline) in this paper simply refers to the one in control of the tempo of the music, that serves as a point of reference. This could be the master drummer, the dancers, or any other individual who may or may not be part of the performance. In summary, the one given a cue is just a prompter and not a determiner of the tempo, though that individual(s) could play the role of both (i.e., given the cue and also serving as the timekeeper)

Intermittently, other instruments such as the supporting drums or even the lead or to be specific, the master drummer becomes a point of reference to others. It becomes more interesting when instruments (like idiophones) supporting the timeline become a guide to all others. Being a part of various rehearsals from the past till the present, constantly does one hear directors of the music (could be the master drummer, or other persons in charge of the music) communicating to instrumentalists to pay attention to the specific instrument(s) that could serve as a guide due to the rhythmic influence at that instance. Accordingly, these instruments may not be the timekeepers. Nevertheless, the intricacy of the rhythmic pattern of some timelines and what is more, the timekeeper’s inability to be stable could also be a reason for that effect. Correspondingly, even without the direction of the director of music, an individual in a group, may choose to pay careful attention to any other instrument(s) in the ensemble as a guide. This may happen from the beginning or during the performance. For this reason, timelines may move from instrument to instrument and not a constant source as described by Nketia. If a constant point of reference here refers to one source, it could then be problematic. Yet, if a constant point of reference is referred to any other instrument or person that serves as a point of reference at a given point in time, then the word could still be relevant. Therefore, it’s either the description ‘constant point of reference’ is maintained with a new approach, or amended to ‘a point of reference’ as would have been preferred for this study.

It seems that the so-called unchangeable construction of some timelines is the reason why some scholars describe the function of the timeline as the metronome to the entire ensemble of a dance, which could be a point of contention. For instance, Gerstin cites that ‘You can shift focus onto different relationships in an ensemble and the timeline will continue to orient you to the overall picture, or help you find your way back if you get confused.’<sup>14</sup> Here, Gerstin refers to a particular instrument(s). Also, Anku believes that ‘the music is nonetheless rigidly controlled by a recurrent rhythm often associated with the role of the bell pattern typical of West and Central African drumming.’<sup>15</sup> Chernoff makes similar remarks by describing the bell (the timeline) as the ‘heartbeat which keeps things steady.’<sup>16</sup> Practically, all these assertions may not be entirely accurate (irrespective of the type of dance) due to the fact that other instruments (including the master drummer) may not be guided by the timekeeper (as mentioned). Theoretically, yes, but practically, never in all cases. In some circumstances, the embellishments of the master drummer (depending on the mood), or the movements and tempo of the dancers, to mention a few may determine the direction of the performance as far as the point of reference is concerned. For this reason, this paper agrees partly with Munyaradzi and Zimidzi that ‘the rhythmic change, tempo, time, beat are all guided by the dancers, their intensity will determine the flow of the song.’<sup>17</sup> Though this statement may not be very true in all cases because dancers may also

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<sup>14</sup> Julian Gerstin, “» Comparisons of African and Diasporic Rhythm. The Ewe, Cuba, and Martinique «,” *Analytical Approaches to World Music* 5, no. 2 (2017): 18.

<sup>15</sup> Anku, “Circles and Time: A Theory of Structural Organization of Rhythm in African Music.”

<sup>16</sup> John Miller Chernoff, “African Rhythm and African Sensibility Aesthetics and Social Action in African Musical Idioms,” 1979.

<sup>17</sup> Givewell Munyaradzi and Webster Zimidzi, “Comparison of Western Music and African Music,” *Creative Education* 3, no. 2 (2012): 193–95.

listen to instruments for point of reference depending on the situation; Yet, in the case where dancers determine the tempo and the direction of the entire performance (whether in totality or ratio) as Munyaradzi and Zimidzi pronounce, this author may refer to the dancers at that point as playing or dancing the timeline. This is because, in such an instance, no one pays attention to the timekeeper but the dancers. In other cases where the timekeeper starts the music, yes, he/she may serve as a metronome for a while. Yet, at some point, tempos may change for various reasons as mentioned earlier on and the timekeeper may not be in control as it's perceived.<sup>18</sup>

It must be stressed again that a point of reference may not always or only rely on a distinct instrument(s) that could be bright as the idiophones. Yet, there is no doubt that in some cases, the timeline is executed in effect by one or a group of instruments and stands out as a guide to all others from the beginning to the end of a performance. Therefore, this paper argues that there could be **Mobile** and **Immobile timelines**. A mobile timeline would be described as a type of timeline that moves from one timekeeper to the other. An immobile timeline may be defined as a selected instrument designated as the timeline for an ensemble from the beginning to the end of a performance. This is to say that the tempo and the influence of the entire performance may have to depend on this instrument. In this regard, this paper may not want to describe the timeline of a particular dance as mobile or immobile because of the disparities from one group to the other. The description could only be active when the performance takes place. It must also be noted that the timeline may not always begin as the keeper. Sometimes, all instruments begin simultaneously during a performance. Any of the instruments could start the performance depending on agreement or could just be done spontaneously.

If not for the mentioning of African music only in his definition, the author could have agreed perfectly with Kubik for describing the timeline as 'a regulative element in many kinds of African music,' basing his argument on the "principles of timing,"<sup>19</sup> rather than Agawu's assertion, that timeline 'is a distinctly shaped and often memorable rhythmic figure of modest duration that is played as an ostinato throughout a given dance composition.'<sup>20</sup> Based on the arguments this paper intends to hold, the author disagrees completely with Agawu's definition with no disrespect because timelines may not always be memorable, though the word memorable or modest in duration here could be idiosyncratic. Also, as much as Agawu's concentration on his article is on the standard pattern, which is mostly memorable in rhythm and modest in duration, the definition of the timeline could have been in context as well. This is because there could be sophisticated timelines in some traditions of Africa which may not be memorable. The author may state forcefully that not all timelines in traditional dances of Africa can easily be identified. In the northern part of Ghana, some timelines may not be metrical in effect and very testing to identify a specific time signature, not even to distinguish the strong from the weak beats in a bar.

A dance like the *Takai* which is a royal dance of the Dagbamba chiefs and princes, cannot be exempted here. One may not know whether the timeline is done by the metal held by the dancers or the *donno*. In fact, it becomes more difficult to single out a master drummer as it's mostly done in southern Ghana. In other words, the concept of the demarcation of the master, supporting drummers and the timekeeper<sup>21</sup> is not always present in the Northern part of Ghana and some other parts of Africa. The concept could be present amongst the performers, but in effect, it could be difficult to tell the role of various players as could be done in most cases in southern Ghana. For this reason, one might assume that there is no timeline for most of the dances in the northern part of Ghana which may not be entirely the truth. Though it is obvious that there is subjectivity in the term complex here because what may be sophisticated to a group of people may be modest to another. To give an idea, in Ghana, what may

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<sup>18</sup> Nketia, "The Intensity Factor in African Music."

<sup>19</sup> Kubik, "Xylophone Playing in Southern Uganda."

<sup>20</sup> Agawu, "Structural Analysis or Cultural Analysis? Competing Perspectives on the 'Standard Pattern' of West African Rhythm."

<sup>21</sup> Ruth M Stone, *The Garland Handbook of African Music* (Routledge, 2010); Tanya Y Price, "Rhythms of Culture: Djembe and African Memory in African-American Cultural Traditions," *Black Music Research Journal* 33, no. 2 (2013): 227-47; Anku, "Circles and Time: A Theory of Structural Organization of Rhythm in African Music"; Kofi Agawu, "An African Understanding of African Music" (JSTOR, 2001).

sound complicated to the Akan and Anlo-Ewe, especially when performers in the Northern of Ghana display few rhythmic patterns, may sound very modest to the performers as well as their people (i.e., the Northern part of Ghana).

Nonetheless, the author is not persuaded to stick his neck out that because of complexity in some rhythmic patterns in African drumming as stated above, there is a dance without a timeline, because there is always a rhythmic influence from some or better still all instruments in an ensemble that drives dancers irrespective of the shifted accents, if Nketia's definition as a constant point of reference comes to bear. As much as African music accompaniment is mostly percussive, there could not be any type of musical accompaniment without a timeline. Hence, the author respects Matiure's assertion that 'even in purely vocal music without any clapping, there is an underlying timeline implied and that is felt by the performers.'<sup>22</sup> As a matter of course, Matiure's statement could be linked to Waterman's suggestion of a "metronomic sense" which is also expressed as an underlying pulse which is felt but not constantly expressed.<sup>23</sup> It is to be mentioned that scholars such as Chernoff and Locke have confirmed the establishment of the phenomenon, metronomic sense.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, it is obvious that even in the absence of percussive instrumentation in music, the African feels a particular timeline within him/herself.

One question that keeps ringing in mind is 'In the absence of a specific instrument(s) that could be bright and distinct (as compared to all other instruments in an ensemble) in colour which could be referred to as a timeline, what becomes the point of reference? Indeed, in some dances are very difficult to tell a specific instrument or group of instruments playing the timeline. Either there is call and response in the display of the instruments or all instruments perform contrast rhythmic patterns simultaneously. To be clearer, some of these rhythmic patterns may be executed in an unnoticeable ostinato. This can be referred to as the **Polyrhythmic timeline**. This refers to a kind of unnoticeable or undetected timeline played by all instruments in diverse rhythmic configurations, either in ostinato or in different patterns altogether. This act happens in several dances from the Northern part of Ghana such as the *Damba* dance which is rooted in the Islamic history of Northern Ghana. As already stated, a distinct timeline is not always found within polyrhythmic timelines or in other words, polyrhythmic patterns. Yet the rhythmic structure and influence that becomes the point of reference could not be taken for granted. This is to mention that in the absence of a distinct instrument that could play the role of the timeline, the multiplicity in the execution could also serve as the timekeeper.

It is for this reason that this paper disagrees with the declaration that the West and Central Africans are known best for the timeline as Anku states because scholars like Matiure confirm that timelines are evident in Zimbabwean music and indeed in other parts of Southern Africa.<sup>25</sup> Again, observing dances amongst the people of South Africa such as the *Khoisan*, *Bapedi*, *Zulu*, *Swazi*, *Xhosa*, amongst others, the identical patterns played by all instruments could serve as timelines. Therefore, this paper terms such as **Homorhythmic timeline**. Here, the term is defined as a group of instrumentalists, playing the same or slightly identical rhythmic patterns in effect throughout a particular music-dance or a section of it. In effect here, signifies that it may or not be the intention of the performers to render the rhythms in unison, but in the ear of the listener, it sounds in one accord. In Ghana, a dance like the *Nagbegu* (some call *Nagubeigu*) in the Northern part of Ghana, among the Dagbons is an example in this regard. Nonetheless, performers in their ankle rattles dancing rhythmically for the sound to be stable in the South African dances mentioned above are all capable of serving as timelines at some point. Worth noting, some dances may decide to incorporate both

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<sup>22</sup> Sheasby Matiure, "African and Western Views of Rhythm Literacy and the Implications for the Teaching of Music in Zimbabwean Primary Schools," 2002.

<sup>23</sup> Richard Alan Waterman, *African Influence on the Music of the Americas* (University of Chicago Press Chicago, IL, 1952).

<sup>24</sup> Chernoff, "African Rhythm and African Sensibility Aesthetics and Social Action in African Musical Idioms," 49-50; David Locke, "Principles of Offbeat Timing and Cross-Rhythm in Southern Eve Dance Drumming," *Ethnomusicology*, 1982, 245.

<sup>25</sup> Anku, "Circles and Time: A Theory of Structural Organization of Rhythm in African Music"; Matiure, "African and Western Views of Rhythm Literacy and the Implications for the Teaching of Music in Zimbabwean Primary Schools," 7.

**Polyrhythmic** and **Homorhythmic** interchangeably. Of course, it is evident that some polyrhythmic patterns are very similar to that of homorhythmic; Infrequently, one could be muddled in distinguishing between the two.

Additionally, as far as deliberations in this paper can tell, the timeline in traditional instrumental music of Africa is one of the components of a particular music/dance played by an instrument(s) in an ensemble that assists one to identify a particular kind of music/dance. This is to emphasize that it is not the timeline only that determines a particular kind of music or dance. As a direct consequence, the author respects Agawu's assertion that the timeline or standard pattern serves as an identifying feature or signature of a particular dance/drumming, but would humbly like to make two suggestions to Agawu's claim from his opinion.<sup>26</sup> In the first place, he would have preferred dance/music instead of dance/drumming as pronounced by Agawu, because some dances are accompanied by both drumming and other musical instruments such as the voice, xylophone, flutes, and trumpets, amongst others. Every so often, these instruments could be a part of the components that determines a particular dance and cannot be taken for granted. It is worth bearing in mind that one component of music that enhances dancing in the African context is singing. Song texts in the traditional music of African music tend to carry social commentary aimed at cleansing the society, cultural belief, history, social and moral values, to mention a few. The *Sikyi* and *Bɔsɔɛ* dances performed by the people of the Ashanti region of Ghana are an example in this respect. The rhythmic patterns played by the drummers are identical in such a way that it is the text of the songs that distinguish the two dances. Also, some dances in the Northern parts of Ghana may include Xylophones and others. Above all, Nketia observes that in the playing of the *Kete* (Also played by the people of the Ashanti region) the voice, flutes and trumpets are occasionally present.<sup>27</sup>

A combination of both vocal and instrumental introductions may also be used. In the Akan *kete* dance for example, the preparatory song may be sung by one or two soloists alternating with a flute ensemble. This alternation of voice and flutes goes on until the cantor brings in the chorus. The flutes stop while the drums take over and a dancer moved by the music steps into the ring. Sometimes the preparatory piece for the *kete* dance may be poetry declaimed to the accompaniment of a bell. On special occasions talking drums and trumpets take part in the musical preparation for the dance.<sup>28</sup>

The concept of dance-drumming by various scholars in the field of music has been a bit of a challenge to the author's thoughts and thus humbly suggests that the apothegm (dance-drumming) could only be used in context, that is a dance without pitched instruments. For instance, Locke believes in the same concept of dance drumming.<sup>29</sup> In the opening of his article, he mentions the list of instruments in the southern Ewe drum and mentions the inclusion of the voice as a continuation of the discussion in the next paragraph. Does this mean the voice is optional in African traditional music and not recognized as an instrument because of their reluctance to amplify the voices of singers, which enables drummers in most cases overshadow the voices in dynamics?

An argument one may raise to this opinion is that the singing or playing of any other instrument in an ensemble is part of an entire dance and therefore this so-called opinion may not be very crucial and could be disregarded. This assertion aforementioned may sound right, but in practicality, dance and drumming have the potential to forget about any other pitched instrument. One may decide to mention just a dance, which covers all components. However, the moment any of the components of the dance is/are being mentioned as an attachment to the dance, classification begins. For instance, the dance/singing, or the dance/drumming, or the dance/movements, and so forth. For this reason, the paper would have preferred dance/music in Agawu's submission. This is because the author believes that, the music attached to the dance covers drumming, singing, or any kind of pitched instrument.

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<sup>26</sup> Victor Kofi Agawu, *Representing African Music: Postcolonial Notes, Queries, Positions* (Psychology Press, 2003).

<sup>27</sup> Nketia, "The Interrelations of African Music and Dance."

<sup>28</sup> Nketia, "The Interrelations of African Music and Dance."

<sup>29</sup> Locke, "Principles of Offbeat Timing and Cross-Rhythm in Southern Ewe Dance Drumming."

Secondly, the author does not entirely agree with Agawu that the timeline or standard pattern serves as an identifying feature or signature of a particular dance/drumming because the similarities in the make-up of various types of music(s) in Africa enable timekeepers to borrow consciously or unconsciously from one culture to the other. In this regard, in order to recognize the feature or signature of a particular dance, one may have to move beyond the timeline by observing other components in a particular dance such as the instruments of the ensemble, the movements of the dancers, costume, lyrics if any, the rhythmic language, or pattern played by a master drummer if any, to name a few, to determine the exact music or dance being played. This is the reason why it is challenging to be convinced that the timeline only has the capability of determining a specific kind of music or dance as pronounced by Agawu, all because of the sameness or resemblance of some timelines from one dance to the other.

An occurrence is the fact that what Anku scored as the timeline for the *Agbadza* dance in the next figure below, is the same rhythmic accents in effect scored by Kongo as slow *Agbekor*, and Locke and Agbeli scores this pattern as *Adzogbo*.<sup>30</sup> It becomes more interesting when dances of the Ewe-land such as Togo *Atsia* adopt the same timeline. It appears that it is at this point that Temperly decided to term the pattern as ‘The “standard pattern” of Ewe drum ensemble music,’ and the author finds it challenging to accept this description.<sup>31</sup> According to the author, Chernoff is rather accurate if he notes that ‘It would be difficult to find an African musical tradition that did not contain this rhythm, and, similarly, the rhythm frequently supports many pieces in many traditions’ repertoires.’ It is in the same regard that Agawu observes that a closely related timeline is found among the Yoruba and they are both from the same rhythmic concept. That being the case, this paper is not of the view of labelling such a rhythm(s) as Ewe (as Temperly cites), Ghanaian or Togolese, but simply ‘African rhythmic patterns or timeline’; This is because Africa is one continent, and its countries share a lot together consciously or unconsciously. As an illustration, in the timeline of the *agbe* dance which is played by the people of Tabom (an Afro-Brazilian community in the south of Ghana), the same pattern discussed is executed with different tones.<sup>32</sup> This rhythmic configuration has been scored by Anku below. It is also known by a couple of specialists as the ‘Standard Pattern’. The first (Anku’s score) is the commonest (especially in Ghana, amongst the people of the Volta Region) and the different tone pattern mostly executed by the people of Tabom in the next is scored below. Note the different names given to the instrument for the cultural difference.

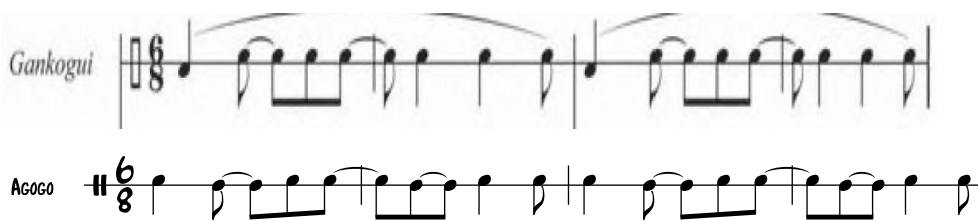


Figure 2

In fact, Pressing also argues that this standard pattern is almost maximally ambiguous, as it samples several different meters and different phases of those meters-

12 6 3 '
   
8, 4, 2

<sup>30</sup> Anku, “Drumming among the Akan and Anlo Ewe of Ghana: An Introduction”; Kongo Zabana, *African Drum Music: Incidence Analysis* (Accra: Afram Publications, 1997); David L Locke and Godwin Kwasi Agbeli, “A Study of the Drum Language in Adzogbo,” *African Music: Journal of the International Library of African Music* 6, no. 1 (1980): 32–51.

<sup>31</sup> David Temperley, “Meter and Grouping in African Music: A View from Music Theory,” *Ethnomusicology* 44, no. 1 (2000): 65–96.

<sup>32</sup> Benjamin Amakye-Boateng, “Music of the Tabom: An Emblem of Identity,” *Humanities* 8, no. 2 (2019): 95.

almost equally.<sup>33</sup> Conversely, the author is very much aware that dances amongst a particular group of people may be similar due to the identity, and other influences. Therefore, it is no wonder that the people of Anlo-Ewe (Ghana) adopt this pattern with different names. It is for the same reason that the *Dugu* and *Kore* dances, played by people of the upper west region of Ghana are very identical.

Furthermore, there are dances with various rhythmic approaches in the execution of timelines which in the context of this study be referred to as **Multifarious Timeline**. An example here is discussing the scoring of the timeline in *Adowa* dance performed by people of the Ashanti region of Ghana, the first bell which is referred to as *dawuro 1* by the author's findings is very close or identical to that of Anku's score. Yet, the patterns of the second bell (*dawuro 2*) are entirely different from Anku's. Many other scholars including Nketia, Ampomah, Arthur and Kongo, have all scored this timeline in different rhythmic repetitions.<sup>34</sup> It becomes more interesting when the musicians of this dance may pick another as the standard. The question here is who is right, and who is wrong? Anyway, as other scholars prefer to score this dance in 2 dotted crotchet beats in a bar, the author would like to score this in the time signature of 4 dotted crotchet beats in a bar because from his lens, the strong accents or the full unit of the timeline is more complete after the four dotted crotchet beats. It is scored below in Figure 3.



Figure 3

Similarly, the timeline (played on the bell) of the *Apatampa* dance performed by the people of the Central region of Ghana is another example. Despite there being only three notes played by the timekeeper in the cycle, the accents are in contrast from groups to others. The following four figures show illustrations of the diverse ways the timeline is being performed. The first is the commonest.

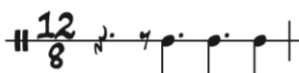


Figure 4

Others play

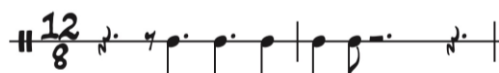


Figure 5

or

<sup>33</sup> Jeff Pressing, "Rhythmic Design in the Support Drums of Agbadza," *African Music: Journal of the International Library of African Music* 6, no. 3 (1983): 4–15.

<sup>34</sup> Nketia, *African Music in Ghana*; Kingsley Ampomah, "An Investigation into Adowa and Adzewa Music and Dance of the Akan People of Ghana," *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 4, no. 10 (2014): 117–24; Kras Kofi Arthur, "Reminiscence of Manhyia Tete Adowa an Original Composition in Contemporary Idiom Based on Adowa Music of the Akans of Ghana" (University of Cape Coast, 2008); Zabana, *African Drum Music: Incidence Analysis*; Anku, "Circles and Time: A Theory of Structural Organization of Rhythm in African Music."



Figure 6



Figure 7

Other groups play the timeline on the rattle, supported by the bell.

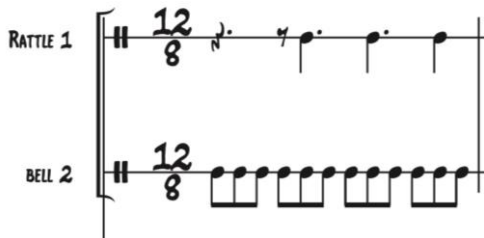


Figure 8

The motive behind the diversity in performances of such dances mentioned above may vary from musician to musician. From field research, apart from politics amongst various groups being one of the reasons, the tradition had been passed on from one generation to the other before the recording and scoring of the music took place.<sup>35</sup> Therefore, it is not very easy to pick right from wrong because no researchers were present when most of these dances were established. Also, in music performance, changes may occur and be embraced by a director of the music or even members during rehearsal, performance, or as a thought.

Taking the discussion above into account, in the nearest future, it is doubtful that raw materials or data of a particular music-dance may be used all the time, and this is to say that there may not be a standard of notation (or even discussion) as Anku, Kongo, Locke to mention a few implement in the scoring of some traditional music or dances of African cultures or ethnic groups.<sup>36</sup> In recent years, improvisation and diversity in the performance of African traditional music are gradually becoming a norm in the execution of the timeline (and even beyond) despite some of the criticism these modifications go through. Criticisms (mentioned here) such as ‘that is wrong!’ or ‘these players are abolishing the culture of this dance by playing wrongly,’ are all common critiques heard each time the author is with an instructor, master drummer, instrumentalist or musician who thinks he knows the right from the wrong. In the author’s estimation, these changes are rather an improvement on the existing interpretation in the past, rather than one thinking of its diminishment. Furthermore, in the author’s estimation, the word ‘originality’ or ‘Authenticity’ in the traditional music of Africans could be fallacious, depending on the context of discussion. It must be repeated that the originality or authenticity of traditional music and dance is the premiering of the entire work, but not the practice of the natives of the land as it seems. This is to say that since the tradition is passed on from one generation to the other, changes could be evident in countless ways. Though the natives in most cases could be close to the novelty, it is still not to be taken as binding. Also because some may want to mention that even the premiering might not have inculcated the full presentation due to various circumstances. Nevertheless, there are some up-and-coming groups or simply groups that may not be very prominent in the execution of the timeline and may be entirely erroneous.

<sup>35</sup> J H Nketia, “The Role of the Drummer in Akan Society,” *African Music: Journal of the International Library of African Music* 1, no. 1 (1954): 39.

<sup>36</sup> Anku, “Drumming among the Akan and Anlo Ewe of Ghana: An Introduction”; Zabana, *African Drum Music: Incidence Analysis*; Locke, “Simultaneous Multidimensionality in African Music: Musical Cubism.”

Therefore, the author proposes that the scoring of works with multiple standards that is being referred to as multifarious in this paper, may not have to be taken as binding, but rather an idea of the design or rhythmic craft of a particular music-dance to observers and researchers in the field of music. Again, on the grounds of this, the classification of some dances may become challenging in the forthcoming years because of similarities from dances to dances. For this reason, it is recommended that music scholars may start thinking of grouping comparable rhythmic patterns of some music(s)-dances of Africa into one umbrella just to counteract the misperception in the thoughts of readers and researchers that want to study African music in detail.

For example, timelines (and beyond) of dances such as the *Gahu* and *Borborbor* dance played by the people of Anlo Ewe, Ghana, *Kpanlongo*, *Kolomashie* and *Gome* dance also performed by the Greater Accra people of Ghana known as the Ga community, *Kpatsa* dance by the people of the Ga-Adangbe, to mention a few, may be placed under one umbrella because of the resemblances in the rhythmic patterns. Also, the *Kple* dance by the ancient Ga-Adangbe, and the *deeya* war dance performed by the upper east region of Ghana (that's the Grunne speaking tribe that some may refer to as *Frafra*) could also be placed under an umbrella, despite the different storylines. The concentration here is the music and its resemblance. *Agbekor*, *Togo Atsia*, *Agbadza* and *Adzogbo*, all from the Anlo Ewe of Ghana as discussed above, the *Agbe* dance may also be grouped, and lastly, the *Dipo* dance performed for females of *Odumase Krobo* from the Eastern region of Ghana, *Kundum* dance also performed by the Ahanta and the Nzema people located in the western region of Ghana, *Fume-fume* by the Ga community of Ghana, and *Nnwonkorɔ*, *kete*, *Adowa* all played by the people of the Ashanti region of Ghana may be grouped, and so on.

Nonetheless, some dances are challenging to describe, because various groups play them so contrarily that such renditions can never be described as identical. The *Bima* dance which is a recreational one played by the people of frafra (Northern Ghana) is a typical example. Some dances may not have a resemblance to others and such dances could also stand on their own without placing them under umbrellas.

Except for all that has been discussed above, an additional thought-provoking case that would be addressed is the bell being the most recognized instrument discussed, especially in Ghana when it comes to the performance of timelines. This is another problematic assertion in practicality. Meanwhile, Nketia mentions that handclapping, gong, or some such idiophones are one of (and not the only) regular means of establishing or maintaining the beat. From the field study, to most Ghanaian students, teachers or scholars, once the bell is not present in a particular dance, there is no timeline. Worth bearing in mind, scholars like Toussaint also claim that the timeline is often performed with an iron bell that all performers can hear.<sup>37</sup> Nonetheless, it is worth noting that scholars such as Jones declare handclapping or stick beating as a timeline for a couple of works in the African tradition.<sup>38</sup> Also, scholars like Toussaint were very specific in discussing the pattern of the bembé bell that plays the timeline, even though he also acknowledged that claves and woodblocks are all potential instruments for the timeline.<sup>39</sup> Yet, in Ghana, most music scores and discussions about timelines, whether in the classroom or transcription, are mostly implemented by the mentioning of the bell, and occasionally others. Does it mean the bell is the most prominent instrument used as timelines in Ghana? From the author's point of view, it is certainly not, but it is the most discussed.

While, Gerstin indicates that timelines are often played on idiophones with precise, cutting timbres that can be heard even in the loudest ensembles: iron bells, claves (Cuba), tibwa sticks (Martinique), Munyaradzi and Zimidzi state that 'the timeline used in Singonki is mostly used in idiophones and membranophones.'<sup>40</sup> This paper, even outside the music of Singonki, agrees with

<sup>37</sup> Godfried Toussaint, "Mathematical Features for Recognizing Preference in Sub-Saharan African Traditional Rhythm Timelines," in *International Conference on Pattern Recognition and Image Analysis* (Springer, 2005), 18–27.

<sup>38</sup> Jones, "On Transcribing African Music."

<sup>39</sup> Toussaint, "Classification and Phylogenetic Analysis of African Ternary Rhythm Timelines."

<sup>40</sup> Gerstin, "«» Comparisons of African and Diasporic Rhythm. The Ewe, Cuba, and Martinique «»; Munyaradzi and Zimidzi, "Comparison of Western Music and African Music."

Munyaradzi and Zimidzi that idiophones are not the only capable instruments as Nketia states, but membranophones could also execute timelines.<sup>41</sup> Even so, this paper may want to extend the execution of the timeline to all instruments, depending on the role they play. Yet, statements like Gerstin's as mentioned above is the misperception in this respect for he assumes that idiophones are the only instruments designated for timelines, which this paper does not agree with. Above all, the discourse here is that the definition of the timeline given by the scholars that will be discussed in the next paragraph limits the term and makes observers overlook the prominence of other instruments that could serve as timekeepers. Hence, one must critically know that the timeline has been limited and needs to be expanded.

As a result, this paper does not concur with Agawu for stating that 'Polyrhythmic dance compositions from West Africa typically feature an ostinato bell pattern known as timeline.'<sup>42</sup> Although, the definition is acceptable so much in context, because it's extremely well-defined that most dances amongst the people in the southern of Ghana play timelines on the bell. Yet, instead of Agawu giving descriptions such as 'bell pattern' or 'bell rhythm' to the timeline, the author is rather certain with the other names or titles given by Agawu such as 'guideline, timekeeper, topos, and phrasing referent,' for no instrument has emphatically been cited. The argument one may raise here is that the bell mentioned by Agawu is a symbolic description and not necessarily suggesting the bell as an instrument. For instance, a Piano pattern may be played by a harp or a *Gome* pattern may also be executed by a bass drum; Therefore, a bell pattern or rhythm can as well be played by most idiophones or instruments close to the sound of the idiophones. Though this argument may sound convincing, it becomes difficult for researchers around the world to assume that the bell here is metaphoric especially when elaboration or explanation does not take place after such labelling. For this reason, the point is made that the instrument bell does not need a mention because it is not the only instrument that could execute the timeline with accuracy.

Altogether, the debates higher up are to say that it becomes quite debatable if one finds other traditional music(s) or dances with contradictory instruments (mentioned) as the timeline. Since Anku's discussion is based on the people of Akan and Anlo-Ewe, there is an agreement (to a point) with his description given to the timeline as the bell pattern, but for Anku to have continued by stating that it is the case of West and Central Africa, can not be fully agreed with.<sup>43</sup> Because even in the case of Ghana, the notion of the bell being the foremost instrument chosen as the timeline is not very communal to dances in the Northern part of Ghana as already discussed. By extension, this paper contends that a bell pattern may or not always be a timeline; In effect, timelines could always be mentioned in context, and this analysis could only be implemented during performance. To be factual, this paper may not be in accordance with the bell pattern being referred to as the timeline in all circumstances. There is a preference for bell-pattern or bell-rhythm instead of attaching the apothegm to the term timeline. As already mentioned, as much as a point of reference in the definition is concerned, the bell in any ensemble may or not always qualify to be pronounced as the timekeeper. Therefore, one must be able to establish the difference between a bell-pattern (or rhythm) and the timeline.

As an addition to the fact that the bell is not the only instrument that serves as a timeline (as mentioned numerously), the *Kpone* music, which is created by females in the Upper East Region of Ghana, known as the *Adihesuure Pogisi* group effects timelines by virtue of clapping. This is to say that the singers, that also serve as dancers of the music clap as the timeline. Most of the time, this ostinato clap becomes the only accompaniment used in the music and varies at a faster pace by introducing an improvised ostinato, especially at points where one dancer comes into the middle of the performers to dance with dexterity. The clap comes back to its original ostinato after this point. Customarily, the clap (serving as the timeline) starts the music before singing and dancing commences.

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<sup>41</sup> Nketia, *African Music in Ghana*, 78.

<sup>42</sup> Agawu, "Structural Analysis or Cultural Analysis? Competing Perspectives on the 'Standard Pattern' of West African Rhythm."

<sup>43</sup> Anku, "Circles and Time: A Theory of Structural Organization of Rhythm in African Music."

One of the ways the performers clap (in Ostinato) in some of their works is scored below. Figure 12 shows the main pattern, and the next figure shows the switch.



Figure 12



Figure 13

Similarly, Wiggins observes ‘*Neporo*,’ performed by the people of Northern Ghana as ‘women’s music, combining clapping and singing.’<sup>44</sup> The author considers the clap as the timeline for the dancers, despite the different rhythmic structures of the clap. Also, Munyaradzi and Zimidzi testify that the Sikuma people of East Africa create their own repetitive rhythmic pattern of clapping done by their bystanders.

Another illustration is the timeline of the *Bamaya* dance, which is performed by inhabitants of Dagbon in the northern region of Ghana. Dancers play the timeline alongside their dancing; Chernoff states that African music is primarily performed as music for dancing.<sup>45</sup> Again, he continues to state that ‘important parts of musical sound are frequently contributed by dancers who wear leg-bells and leg-rattles, strike castanets, or attach sounding devices to their bodies or clothing,’ and this is what occurs in the performance of the *Bamaya* dance. The dancers wear the ankle rattle, and to make the timeline effective, there is a conscious effort to implement simple dance movements with simple rhythmic patterns for the legs to be able to play the rattle in metric accents. Here, the ankle rattle plays the role of the timeline until the dancers change the patterns, and the rhythmic pattern is not considered anymore (mobile timeline). However, the standardization of this dance in scoring will be a difficult task because of the contrastive ways performers play.

Moreover, concerning the performance of the *Tora* dance by the people of Dagbon in the Northern region of Ghana, in some cases, the rattle is being used as the instrument designated for the role of the timekeeper. In cases where there is no rattle involved in the performance, the *donno* becomes the brightest and most prominent instrument(s) that play(s) a repetitive pattern throughout. As the author may determine the *donno* at that point as the timeline, one may disagree. Does this mean that it has been standardized that the timeline must always be played by an idiophone? This paper does not approve of this affirmation. There is no doubt that the *Gome* drum, which is a bass drum could also be a timeline or a guide depending on the role it plays. Nevertheless, the author does not downplay the role of the supporting drummers. The supporting drummers in some cases, support the master drummers to enable them to execute their role appropriately. The only moment it becomes challenging to single out the supporting drums is when there is no lead or master drummer. Since this paper addresses the timeline, it will not discuss the role of supporting drums in detail.

However, when the bell becomes the instrument designated for the timekeeper, it may automatically be louder than all other instruments in such a way that with or without conscious effort, it projects in volume. Nevertheless, the sound of the bell may vary, and hence the distinct sound of the bell is not always evident in performances as seeming. This is to say that the density of the timeline during a performance may be very or close to being noticed or in some cases not. At times the wood at the side of the supporting or especially the master drums may be played either as a timeline, variation or effect, supporting timekeeper, transition or occasionally bring the timekeeper back to tempo or

<sup>44</sup> Trevor Wiggins, “Techniques of Variation and Concepts of Musical Understanding in Northern Ghana,” *British Journal of Ethnomusicology* 7, no. 1 (1998): 117–42.

<sup>45</sup> Chernoff, “The Rhythmic Medium in African Music.”

patterns. Some prefer calling it an auxiliary. At a point where the bell is not as loud as it is supposed to be, and moreover, no (or loud) idiophone is present at that moment, the supporting drums that play the ostinato patterns (especially the very bright ones) tend to replace the role or the effect of the timeline. It is best to name such as **Supplant timekeepers**. To be specific, the description of this term refers to the instrument(s) that replaces the timeline in the absence of the appropriate instrument as deliberate or undeliberate effect. It is worth bearing in mind that the supplant timekeepers may choose to play the exact rhythmic patterns of the timeline or not. This is to say that in the absence of the timeline, the supplant timekeepers replace the main either by playing different or the main rhythmic patterns of the original timeline as it is perceived. Again, it must be worth considering that Supplant timekeepers may just want to replace the original instrument designated for the timeline with another. The reason for this act may vary from group to group. Yet one of the most common reasons is a group's inability to get access to the original instrument within a period or a performance.

Another assertion that has not been discussed much by scholars as far as timeline is concerned is that it may have more than a player. Other players accompanying the timeline may play the same instruments with changes in rhythm or better still same rhythmic patterns, or these players may play different instruments with an entirely different or same pattern. Such players can be referred to as **Associate Timekeeper(s)**. In some groups, these players supporting the timekeeper may play softer, just to singularize the main from the accompanying. On the contrary, other groups do not adhere to this system. There is no need to judge any of the groups as right or wrong, because there may be various explanations for this act such as the director's choice to hear both the main and associate timekeepers simultaneously as a resultant, or some rhythmic patterns played by the associate timekeepers may be of influence on other instruments, and so on. The sound these instruments may produce alongside the main pattern may serve as a resultant (as mentioned), especially when players supporting do not observe the practice of soft playing or when supporting instruments are the same. In this case, the listener perceives both timeline and supporting instruments as one.

An example is the *Gota* dance (originated from the Kabre tribe of Benin, but also played amongst the people of Anlo-Ewe) which may have three bells, playing different rhythmic structures. On the face of the score below, the first is supposed to be the main timeline. In some groups, the rhythmic patterns scored below for the associate timekeepers (i.e., systems 2 & 3) are played by the supporting drums. In this case, it is needful to observe the rhythmic influence when three bells play at the same time.



Figure 14

In such an instance (Figure 14), it becomes challenging to detect the main timeline and this is one of the reasons why this paper suggests that the scoring of such timelines must be descriptive rather than prescriptive. This is to say that scoring or discussion of such timelines, must involve the associate timekeepers even when one may want to score on a system. The analysis of both the main and associate timekeepers will then be distinguished as a prescriptive score. As a matter of course, this paper contests the assumption that the scoring or discussion of timelines must always be done by demonstrating with one instrument as done by most scholars. It is worth noting that the multiplicity of some timelines must also be considered as they form part of the accomplishment.

Still on the discussion of the Associate timekeepers, the performance of the *Borborbor* dance which is played by the Anlo-Ewe of Ghana, the author would like to classify the clapping by the singers as an assistance to the timeline. Largely, associate timekeepers do not have a specific number of players. For example, in the performance of *Nnwonkorɔ* which is performed amongst the Asante twi speaking group in the Ashanti region of Ghana, some performers use two bells (*dawuro*) in the execution of the timeline. The main bell pattern will be described on the score below as *dawuro 1* and the associate timekeeper as *dawuro 2*. The scoring of this dance in this paper may not be the original, but a representation of the idea for the timelines of these dances have gone through evolution.



Figure 15

In the performance of the *Gome* dance which is played by the Ga community (from the Greater Accra Region of Ghana), the bell plays the main pattern, supported by the clap produced by singers, as well as the rattle.



Figure 16

At times, the Associate timekeepers may play identical rhythmic patterns but different tones. On the bell for example, as one note moves downwards, another moves upwards. The Slow *Agbadza* dance by the women of Dzodze (which has been scored below) in the Volta region of Ghana is an example.

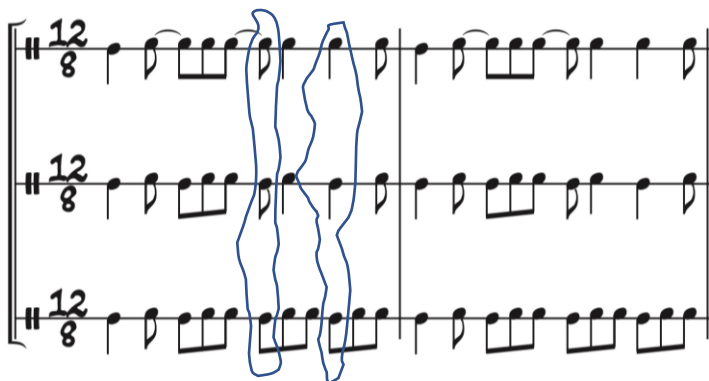


Figure 17

To be factual, not in all instances would one observe the Associate timekeeper(s) playing different rhythmic patterns from the main timeline. In fact, it becomes perplexing occasionally to identify the main timekeeper from the associate especially when they play similar rhythmic repetitions. The *Husago* dance played by the people of Anlo-Ewe in Ghana is a typical example. Both the bell and rattle play the same timeline rhythmic patterns as scored below. It is certain that the bell is the main pattern since the people of Anlo-Ewe are noted for this act.

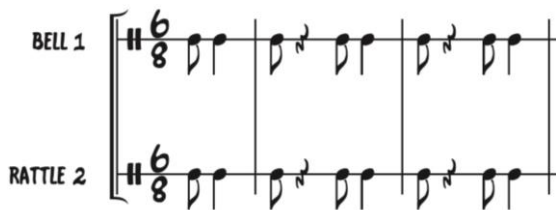


Figure 18

With respect to tempo in traditional music-dances of Africa, there is no standard. Though musicians or listeners may be able to express their thoughts on a particular music or dance they are acquainted with, being fast or slow. Such declarations are expressed when the wrong tempo they claim is performed to the extreme, that's exceedingly fast or vice versa. It is worth bearing in mind that there can be a deliberate system of changing the speed of a particular music or dance. Case in point, there is an existence of both slow and fast *Agbekor*. However, the portrayal does not depict a specific metronomic speed. Dependent on the mood of the executors, the performance may be faster or slower than rehearsed.

Although it has been established that there are modifications in the playing of timelines of various dances, this paper will be inaccurate if there is no acknowledgement that some dances have consistent timelines everywhere they are performed from group to group notwithstanding the modifications in tempo. Such can be termed as **Homogeneous timelines**. An example is the *Gahu* and *Kpanlongo* dance which has already been mentioned in the discussion. The timeline of these two dances which is always played on the bell has been kept by most groups. They are scored below in Figures 19 and 20.

*Gahu*



Figure 19

*Kpanlongo*



Figure 20

Above all that has been discussed, another point to note is that there could also be an act of what can be referred to as a **Symbiotic Timeline**. This refers to a specific timeline between the music and the dance which is not determined by anyone. Contextually, the author tends to agree with Nannyonga-Tumusuzza that 'in performance, dancers and drummers monitor each other closely and

rely on each other's non-verbal cues to shape the performance in real time.<sup>46</sup> To explain further, there could be instances where the musicians and dancers tend to depend on and listen to each other. Here, no one plays the timeline. It becomes the responsibility of both to listen to each other as stated. At this point, performers may or may not be conscious of the act, but an analyst or an observer may be able to determine this act created in this paper as **Symbiotic Timeline**. This assertion is confirmed by Nannyonga-Tamusuza, who states

While the musicians direct the dancers, the dancers inspire the musicians. While attending a wedding ceremony in 2009, I observed a baakisimba performance featuring Margaret Namusoke, a dancer, and Matia Kirbirige, the mbuutu (lead) drummer. After dancing the same motif for almost two minutes, Namusoke looked at Kibirige with a “complaining” eye, demanding a change to another motif. The drummer did not change the motif immediately and Namusoke decided to perform okudalya, a short movement motif that signals a brief stop (okusala amazina), in order to begin a new motif. The drummer had been carried away by Namusoke's dancing and had delayed playing the signal motif that leads the dancer into a new set of movements. After the performance, I spoke to Namusoke and asked her why she did not wait for the signal from the drummer before she “cut” the motif.<sup>47</sup>

This practice could be implemented in the entire music or a portion of it. For example, if this act is to happen in the middle of a performance, the timeline may appear once more at any point in time. For instance, a mere clapping could be executed by a group of people observing the performance (by-standers), or the dancers could just interrupt the symbiotic timeline by determining the tempo immediately. Also, Master drummers, or any other could be an example in this respect. Meaning the timeline could be symbiotic at a given point in time and not the entire performance, and vice-versa.

## CONCLUSION

As stated, the scoring of some dances in this paper may not be the original, but a representation of the idea for the timelines of these dances have gone through evolution. Also, using *Kpone* and *Neporo* dance that has already been discussed as a case study, it is obvious that not all timelines in the music of Africa are played in an ostinato pattern throughout a performance as discussed by various scholars. The patterns could change for various reasons (including a choreographed dance) and also dependent on the type of dance. This is to state that one or few dances can never be enough evidence to prove or declare how timelines in African traditional music are implemented. It is worth noting that Discussion in context plays a critical role in such instances.

It needs to be stressed again that the timeline of a specific dance could not be labelled to any of the types mentioned in this paper. Description of a performance may tend to give room for labelling. Case in point, one could just state that ‘though I know the timeline of *Aghadza* dance to be immobile, the Ghana dance ensemble performed the timeline as mobile. On the other hand, I'm very much aware of certain gaps as far as this paper is concerned, including the reason for the choice of instruments for the execution of the timeline, probably an elaborated history of some of the dances, specifically ones that have gone through politics and still wondering where they originated and so forth.’ However, the significance of the entire argument could not be taken for granted in the author's opinion. Aside from the fact that the thoughts in this paper may serve as continuous discussion by scholars in the field of music, some of the confrontational approaches or arguments may help future generations to build on the discussion for the benefit of posterity. Timelines have indeed gone through evolution and mustn't be taken for granted irrespective of the criticism some of these evolutions may have gone through. One may rather think of embracing some of these innovative viewpoints by some ancient and prominent modern groups as significant progress and an expansion of what African traditional music stands for.

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<sup>46</sup> Sylvia Nannyonga-Tamusuza, “Music as Dance and Dance as Music: Interdependence and Dialogue in Baganda *Baakisimba* Performance,” *Yearbook for Traditional Music* 47 (December 6, 2015): 82–96, <https://doi.org/10.5921/yeartradmusi.47.2015.0082>.

<sup>47</sup> Nannyonga-Tamusuza, “Music as Dance and Dance as Music: Interdependence and Dialogue in Baganda *Baakisimba* Performance.”

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