I ENCONTRO INTERNACIONAL DE ETNOMUSICOLOGIA NEGRA

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Opening Conference

Black Ethnomusicology: Sounds, Epistemologies, and African Legacy in the Studies of Music, Dance, and Dramatic Arts

Kwasi Ampene
Professor Kwasi Ampene, FGA
Tufts University. Medford. Massachusetts. USA

Thank you for your kind introduction. I'm reminded of my last visit to Porto Alegre in 2022 coincided with the FIFA World Cup in Qatar. Here I am and the World Cup is happening again in the US, Canada, and Mexico. This time, I hope Ghana and Brazil will go to the finals and Ghana will be Brazil!

My sincere gratitude to the organizers of the First International Meeting of Black Ethnomusicology for inviting me to present a keynote lecture for this historical meeting. I am particularly grateful to Professor Dr. Pedro Acosta da Rosa and Paulinho Martins de França for their vision, initiative, and hard work in organizing this inaugural event. For all the right reasons, Professor Acosta could not join us for this conference. My thoughts and prayers are with Professor Acosta and his family for the passing of his Dad.

This is my second visit to the historical and beautiful city of Salvador, and it is truly an honor and humbling for me to set the meeting in motion with my keynote lecture. I am also thankful to the authorities at the Federal University of Bahia, my colleague professors, and amazing students for welcoming me with open arms. Greetings to our colleagues who are in various locations online.

I was asked to share my views on the framing theme for this conference, **Black Ethnomusicology: Sounds, Epistemologies, and the African Legacy in the Studies of Music, Dance, and the Dramatic Arts.** Admittedly, this is such a broad topic that it might be challenging to provide exhaustive discussion and analysis in a

short span of time. My goal for my lecture then is to give you food for thought, and to continue the conversations around Black ethnomusicology. In that sense, I would like to begin with only two questions. **What is Black Ethnomusicology? And Is Black Ethnomusicology Necessary?** Instead of providing direct and straightforward answers, I will attempt to answer the two questions by sharing with you, my lived experience as a Ghanaian and African, and my formal training in music studies to offer you my perspectives on Black Ethnomusicology.

Although I live and work in the United States of America, I am originally from Ghana. I studied at the University of Ghana where the father of African musicology, Professor Emeritus J.H. Kwabena Nketia of blessed memory, and his likeminded colleagues, Efua Sutherland, Joe de Graft, and Albert Manwere Opoku, created the School of Performing Arts in post-colonial Ghana. Initially, they started with the School of Music and Dance in the Institute of African Studies and in 1962, they expanded it to include Drama and Theatre Studies.

First, I shall discuss two major concepts: 1) the integration of music, dance, and dramatic arts in relation to African worldview and notions about "music," and 2) the hiring of master performers from traditional societies to teach music and dance classes at the university. Having done that, I will briefly touch on how these two concepts resulted in the creation of the J.H. Kwabena Nketia Archives at the University of Ghana.

Music, Dance, and Dramatic Arts

Here is one of the reasons why Nketia and his colleagues combined music, dance, and drama in a single space. **[Slides] mponponson** (sword), **apakantuo** (a gun), **ntwene** (drums), **kroponkyinye** (umbrella), and **debo** (large handkerchief). You may agree with me that, apart from the huge drums, the sword, the gun, the umbrella, and the large black handkerchief are not musical instruments and not worthy of studying in ethnomusicology. But wait a second, let us watch this video clip. **Slide: show clip first**

and tell them the context and meaning of dance). The occasion was the annual Breman Esomkeseé (Grand Worship or Remembrance Rites) when the Asantehene represent his subjects in the Royal Mausoleum to perform rituals in remembrance of his deceased forbears. The clip here is when the Asantehene takes a break from the rituals to report to the citizenry that all is well. His report is not in a written form or a verbal announcement but as you can see from the video clip, his report is in a form of a dance. Or a dance narrative with props including a gun, a sword, a large handkerchief, umbrella, and instrumental music, and not forgetting the cheering audience with hands and swords raised.

The drum ensemble is known as fontomfrom and the music and the dances represent heroism or Asante militancy. In the video, the drum ensemble played two dance pieces, **Atopretia** (a war dance) and **Naawea** (a celebratory dance following victory on the battlefield). The drum ensemble was already playing atopretia when the Asante King came out of the mausoleum and headed to where the fontomfrom were stationed. The custodian handed the gun to the king who in turn raised it and pointed it to his right, forward, and to his left, to signify that he was responsible for all corners of the kingdom. That action received immediate response from the people with shouts of congratulations (mo peaw). In a dramatic fashion, the custodian of the Mponponson sword pointed the hilt of the sword to the king. Grasping the hilt, the Asante king pulled the sword from its sheath and began his dance gestures by pointing both weapons in a forward and backward motion. Both of these motions correspond with the call and response dialogue between the atumpan and bomaa drummers. The king's forward hand motion corresponded with the atumpan calls, *yeeeee, ma'nka, Prempe,* and *mo nka;* while his backward motion corresponded to the repeated response, *y'akye Odikuro* (we've captured a chief) by the bomaa drummers.

The Asantehene's dance movements became intense when the atumpan and bomaa joined forces to perform the non-lexical text, *gede gede gede gede gede gede.* The Asantehene dance in a counterclockwise motion, to dramatize engaging an

adversary on the battlefield. The agitation and dancing in circles went on until the atumpan drummer reverted to his initial call, *yeeeeee.* As would be expected, the Asantehene also reverted to the forward and backward motions as previously described.

Dancing with a gun and a sword is essentially a performance of power since both objects represent visible extensions of power. **The function of the gun** is to assure our Ancestors and the living that the King will protect the ideals, the institutions, the values, and the tangible and intangible stool regalia they bequeathed to Asanteman to the end of his life. This is the same gun that he fired three times during his enstoolment in 1999. The **Mponponson sword** signifies the king's responsibility to his subjects. It is this same sword that the Asantehene used to swear the oath of office in 1999. (**slide video of Otumfuo swearing oath**). Essentially, the Asantehene is reaffirming his oath of office to the Ancestors and the living.

After a brief moment, the atumpan drummer played a signal to transition from the slow-paced atopretia to the relatively fast-paced naawea. Once the topos or the temporal reference, is established by the three *nnawuro* (gongs) players, the atumpan and bomaa players began another call and response dialogue (Agawu 2003:73). The fast tempo of naawea symbolizes success on the battlefield and contrasts the uncertainty of warfare that is built into atopretia. The emotional contrast that naawea conveyed was evident when the courtiers immediately took away the sword and the gun from the Asantehene and handed him a **debo** (the big black handkerchief). The linear repetition of the bomaa drum texts, Ohene ko, Ohene nnwane (a king fights, a king does not flee), is coordinated with the fast-paced dance movements. I would like to remind you that, the fontomfrom music, dance, the props collectively is a form of non-verbal storytelling. We may say, the Asantehene was performing Asante history and reinforcing Asante identity and values. Like all musical dramas, this requires costumes – in this case, a sword, a gun, a handkerchief, and an umbrella.

I am going to present you with another scenario. I am going to play just the audio example of these same fontomfrom pieces for you and to find out whether the

audio by itself can convey the dance narrative, visual imagery, and contextual understanding like the video. **Play audio example.** This is what Black Ethnomusicology is attempting to accomplish: **Black Ethnomusicology is** the holistic study of music. That is music, dance, and the dramatic arts. The point I am making here is that the integration of music, dance, and the dramatic arts are central to African religious and philosophical worldview. Let me throw in a word of caution here. I am by no means suggesting that we cannot study music sound as a product. That is, isolating the sound and analyzing it will definitely result in a level of understanding except that contextual and holistic analysis provides a deeper understanding.

The holistic study of music, dance, and the dramatic arts is central in African cultures. Unlike the European concept of "music," the over two thousand African languages do not have a single word like "music." As part of their religious worldview, Africans not conceive of music as a singular activity rather, music exist in the larger realm of a constellation of arts (Ruth Stone, 2007: 7-12). In other words, musical performances are intricately tied to other forms of expressive media including drama, poetry, storytelling, dance, visual arts, singing, and playing of instruments. The Asante video clip from the Grand Worship is one out of several examples in African societies and in the African Diaspora. Let me give you another example from Africa. Among the **Dogon** ethnic group in Mali, music is performed as part of a broader expressive media involving **Kananga** masks and elaborate costumes. In times of grief, ***Dama*** is performed to ensure the smooth passage of the soul of a deceased person from the village to the spirit world. We are informed that Kananga masks represent God; the crossbars are God's arms and legs. Another interpretation is that the upper crossbar represents the sky and the lower one the earth.

Since Bahia is the largest African population outside of Africa, and we are at the Federal University of Bahia in Salvador, let me cite three examples from here. Three pictures of **Capoeira Bahia**. Weather we define capoeira as a sport, dance narrative, or ritual drama, we cannot imagine capoeira without the music; neither can we think of the

music without the dance drama. Essentially, the instrumental sound of the berimbau, pandeiro, agogo, reco reco, and atabaque, and the call and response singing collectively guides the dance drama while the dance drama in turn guides the music. In that sense, Black Ethnomusicology has to develop a holistic or African-centered methodology to the study of Capoeira. The same is the study of **Carnival** Bahia. Carnival in Salvador involves elaborate costumes, singing, drums and percussion instruments, procession, singing etc. The religious rituals of **Candomblé** combines invocations, prayers, offerings, and spirit possession happens within the broader economy of constellation of the arts and requires holistic engagement. This is precisely why Africans do not have a single word for "music," for there is more to music than melody, harmony, and rhythm. This and other considerations are the reasons why Professor Nketia and his colleagues created the School of Performing Arts at the University of Ghana. I am by no means saying that similar ideas do not exist in Europe. There is Opera in Europe and Broadway Musicals in the US, but it is more pronounced in African cultures than elsewhere. Just look at the way Euro-Americans set up music schools and departments. For instance, let's compare the setup of the School of Performing Arts in Ghana and the Department of Music at Tufts. **SPA and Tufts:** First show Talbot Avenue, then Dept of Art and Architecture, Music Center, and further down the road is Dept of Theatre, Dance, and Performance Studies. No interactions between faculty and students.

Master Performers in the Academy

Recognizing that the skills of master performers in traditional Africa are comparable to those with Western formal education, Professor Nketia recruited master instrumentalists, dancers, and singers from different regions in Ghana and brought them to the School of Performing Arts and offered them fulltime employment. **Clip: Kakraba Lobi, Aaron Sakura, Osei Korankye, Gideon Alorwoyie.** These master performers teach artistic skills in their areas of expertise, lead ensembles, as well as

offer expertise as resource persons for students, performance, and the academic faculty in research projects that lead to publications and new compositions. The master performers also became the foundation of Ghana Dance Ensemble. All the above activities were supported by extensive field research and documentation.

Prior to setting up the Institute of African Studies and subsequently, the School of Performing Arts, Professor Nketia did extensive field research in the villages and towns to collect volumes of musical performances, storytelling, poetry, instrumental music, songs plus he recorded festivals and rituals for systematic studies. These studies were used to create new music, new stories, new dances, new musical instruments. They also led to the J.H. Kwabena Nketia Archives. **Slide pictures of archive, group picture of Kwasi, Agawu, Judith, John Collins, and Professor Nketia**

I will conclude my lecture by hacking back to the question: **Is Black Ethnomusicology necessary?** Well, in creating the School of Performing Arts and integrating music, dance, and the dramatic arts; and hiring master performers of traditional musical arts, Nketia was keenly aware that formal school systems in Africa were created by European colonial governments and missionaries who repressed indigenous knowledge systems and cultural practices. In the process, European colonialism and missionary education negated centuries of Africa's legacy of musical arts and the focus of post-colonial education in Africa, was to restore this legacy by prioritizing African worldview of musical arts.

Another issue is that the inheritance of formal education in post-colonial Africa replaced the embodied and enculturative processes in oral traditions where education is a life-long acquisition of knowledge. Orality does not mean lack of education – there is a form of "education" in traditional Africa. Ghanaians always will say, **adwene nko, na nyansa nko. Slide (**there is difference between sense and wisdom). In order words, one may go to school to acquire sense in formal education, but they may lack wisdom that comes with African-based education.

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Black Ethnomusicology in Brazil is the systematic study of Afro Brazilian musical arts that considers the African foundations of Afro Brazilian culture - which is the integration of music, dance, and the dramatic arts in Afro Brazilian communities. In that sense, Black ethnomusicology in Brazil is the same as we think of **African Musicology.** For instance, in the 1980s, a multi-authored book, ***African Musicology: Current Trends*** in two volumes, edited by Jackie Djedje and William Carter at University of California-Los Angeles, were presented to Professor Nketia **slide covers of books**. On his ninetieth birthday, we organized a symposium in his honor at the University of Ghana, and I led colleagues from the Institute of African Studies at the University of Ghana to publish another book, ***Slide Discourses in African Musicology: J.H. Kwabena Nketia Festschrift.***

In the final analysis, **Black Ethnomusicology is necessary because Black Ethnomusicology will empower Afro Brazilians to tell their own story!**

THANK YOU

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