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Mimesis and Aesthetics of Drum Languages as a Cultural Artefact of Some Asafo Companies among the Oguaa People of Ghana

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Abstract

Drum languages as a cultural artefact is very pivotal in the Asafo system as far as their activities in the various communities are concerned. However, much documentation has not been done on the mimesis of the Asafo drum languages. Qualitative research methods were used to obtain all relevant data as well as accessing the knowledge and understanding of the drum languages from the prospective respondents. The research revealed that Asafo drums are a set of four but only one thus the Asafokyin (tuaakwan) is used to perform the all drum languages. Again, members of the various selected Asafo communities and even some members of the Asafo groups do have foreknowledge about Asafo drum languages but cannot interpret or comprehend some of the drum languages. Institutions like schools, radio and television stations and IT companies should be encouraged to use digitized drum languages as part of their system to enhance the fore knowledge and understanding of Asafo drum languages as a cultural artefact.

Keywords: Aesthetics, Asafo, cultural artefact, drum language, mimesis

INTRODUCTION

Asafo groups of the Oguaa (Cape Coast) people in the Central Region of Ghana play an important role in the celebration of festivals and in the political structure of the community or traditional area in which they find themselves. Asafo is an ancient warrior organization that existed in all Akan societies of Ghana. The origin of the 'Asafo',), even though somehow speculative due to lack of evident literature or verbal account on the when and how, Turkson (1982) describes the 'Asafo' as a traditional military unit of a local society, which consists of able-bodied young and old men under a leader to initiate or expel opposing forces and also perform social, political as well as religious functions in time of peace. Acquah (2002) posits that the Asafo is a quasi-military organization, which is part of the socio-political set-up of almost all Akan societies to protect and defend their communities. Situating it in modern military parlance, Perkins (1994) and Acquah (2002) describe Asafo as militia in defence of the state. As a result, all able-bodied young men are initiated into the Asafo irrespective of his patrilineal status (Bentum, 2006). These Asafo groups use drums and special drum languages to communicate their messages, which are of utmost significance to the people.

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Before telephones, television, emails and many others, sending messages quickly across distance was not easy but different cultures especially Africans solved this problem through the use of drums or message drums. Johnson (2011) describes the drum as a tool for telegraph system of communication in Africa – the drum was used by our ancestors to communicate from village to village, community to community among others across the length and breadth of Africa as well as used to communicate with the supernatural world. The drum set the pace for dance and worship, ritual and rites. Other practical uses include signalling the start of the day, lead celebrations and notify the people as well. According to Johnson (2011), each drum language is influenced by the geographical location, the size of drum, the drum style, number of drums and the rhythm or beat pattern. Talking drums, and for that matter, drum languages have their roots in the ancient Ghana empire Epand (2008). Carrington (1949) also identifies how the Kele-speaking people of the Democratic Republic of Congo were using drum language to communicate mysterious messages among the villages in the forest in an expert manner.

There is no internationally accepted drum language but exists within a cultural or linguistic background. Drum communications are not languages in their own right but are based on actual natural language (Wikipedia encyclopedia). Sounds produced are idiomatic signals based on a particular speech pattern with fixed context-dependent message. This makes drum languages culturally defined, depending on the linguistic boundaries of that culture. Sometimes misinterpretations occur in decoding the message. Therefore not all, even of that same culture or linguistic background, are likely to understand the phrase or words of the message.

Turkson (1982) further indicates that Asafo drums are used as a dance instrument and a speech instrument – used to imitate speech and also intended to be heard as a language than a signal. This is because only one drum is used by the Asafo in this respect.

Nketia (1963) states that "to the Akan, the drum can and does speak", meaning, phrases and words can be transformed into drum sounds. Again, he identifies three modes of drumming among the Akans and they are:

1. Signaling mode of drumming – all forms of drumming that are considered as signals.
2. Speech mode of drumming – all forms of drumming which imitate speech or can be translated into words to be understood.
3. Dance mode of drumming – all forms of drumming which elicit movement, gesture or dance. This means there are various drum sets for the various drumming modes.

Turkson (1982) classifies the tonal pattern in Asafo music into two; unitonal and bitonal. The bitonal pattern is employed in the speech mode of drumming with two tonal levels whilst the dance mode of drumming employs the unitonal pattern.

Drums are used to recount histories, praise people and perform religious and secular dances. Drum languages are non-verbal and the drum is the medium through which intangible heritage of drum text or language is made known. Drum texts are intangible aspects of art and can be assessed or discussed through the emotional and expressive qualities or theory of aesthetics. The intangible messages and their meaning help enhance the aesthetic apperception of the Asafo and Akan art in general (Labi, 2009).

This paper therefore analyses the drum language and the songs, performed by three Asafo companies of the Oguaa traditional area – Bentsir No.1, Anaafo No. 2 and Ntsin No. 3 companies – as well as its aesthetic values and philosophical meanings to the people.

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METHODOLOGY

The study area, Oguaa Traditional Area, otherwise known as Guaa (or Cape Coast being the anglicized name), is a predominantly fishing community in the Central Region of Ghana. It is also the administrative capital of the Central Region, as well as the first capital town of then Gold Coast, before the capital town was moved to Accra. Fante is the language spoken in the area. The social, political and economic structure, of the Oguaa town, cannot be discussed without enumerating the significant contribution of the Asafo Company, the Asafo drums, and their language/text.

As the study is primarily focused on the mimesis and aesthetics of drum language of three Oguaa Asafo companies, the research problem was best answered by a qualitative research approach. The researcher visited the selected Asafo companies from time to time and also as and when some performances were taking place. Some sampled leaders and prospective respondents were met at appointed dates for the interviews, discussion and explanations. Also, some drum carvers in the study area were interviewed through the snowball technique. Additionally, participatory observation was employed to enable the researchers fully examine the modes, gestures and rhythm of the drum languages.

The population for this research was classified into two: the Target and Accessible population. The target population comprised three Asafo companies namely: Bentsir No.1 Asafo Company, Ntsin No. 3 Asafo Company (Siwdu) and Anaafo No. 3 Asafo Company. The accessible population comprised Asafo leaders, Asafo drummers and members of the ensemble, drum carvers and other traditional drummers within the Oguaa traditional area.

Purposive sampling technique which best fit this study was employed to extract the data, because the respondent population that could offer the necessary information for the purpose of this study was clear to the researchers. From a homogeneous population, the sample population was classified as Asafo leaders (Supi), Asafo drummers, members of the Asafo group and the general public from the various communities. Through the snowball effects, carvers of Asafo drums were assessed to form the heterogeneous sample population. These selected samples were in a better position to give clear, accurate and reliable information for the purpose of this study. In all 3 Chiefs, 3 Tufuhene, 3 supi, 3 Asafohene, 55 Asafo members (drummers) from the selected companies and 120 persons from the various communities which totalled 187 respondents were covered.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Distribution of participants according to gender

Gender	Number	Percentage
MALE	146	82%
FEMALE	41	18%
TOTAL	**187 (100%)**	**100%**

Analysis of Table 1

From the table above, there were a total of 228 persons of both sexes to form a 100% respondents output for the study. Out of this, 187 males were involved in the study forming 82% of the total respondents and the females respondent involved were 41 in number making

18% of the total respondents. This result from Table 1 is a clear indication of the supremacy or dominance of males in the Asafo institution among the Akans in their various communities.

Table 3: Distribution of participants according to Asafo Company

Name of Asafo company	Number of persons	Number of participants from age 20 - 40	Number of participants from age 40 - ABOVE	Percentage %
Bentsir No. 1	17	11 (65%)	6 (35%)	31%
Ntsin No. 3 (Siwdu)	21	13 (62%)	8 (38%)	38%
Anaafo No. 2	17	11 (65%)	6 (35%)	31%
Total	**55 (100%)**	**35 (63 %)**	**20 (36%)**	

As shown in the table, fifty-five (55) persons formed the total respondents and participants from the three selected Asafo companies. Out of this, seventeen (17) respondents and participants constituting thirty-one (31%) percent were from Bentsir Asafo Company, twenty-one (21) constituting thirty-eight (38%) percent and seventeen (17) constituting thirty-one (31%) percent respondents and participants were also from the Ntsin and Anaafo Asafo companies respectively. From the table, within the Bentsir Asafo group eleven (11) respondents representing sixty-five (65%) percent were within the ages of 20 to 40 and the remaining six (6) representing thirty-five (35%) percent were aged 40 and above. Ntsin Asafo group was represented by thirteen (13) respondents within the ages of 20 to 40 to represent sixty-two (62%) percent of the response and eight (8) representing thirty-eight (38%) percent were aged 40 and above. Anaafo Asafo group also represented sixty-five (65%) percent of the response with eleven (11) members between the ages of 20 to 40 whilst six of them representing thirty-five (35%) percent were also aged 40 and above. On the average, sixty-four (64%) of members in the various Asafo groups are between the ages of 20 to 40. The African Youth Charter as well as the National Youth Policy of Ghana define persons within the age bracket of fifteen (15) and thirty-five (35) as youth. By this definition and with figures from the table, the Asafo institution can be described as a youthful institution made up of able-bodied men within the community.

Table 2: Distribution of participants with regard to knowledge about drum language

	Total respondent	Respondents who have fore knowledge about Asafo drum language	Respondents who understand Asafo drum language on most occasions	Respondents who understand Asafo drum language on some occasions	Respondents who do not understand Asafo drum language on all occasions	Percentage %
Chiefs	3	3 (100%)	2 (67%)	1 (33%)	-	2%
Tufohene	3	3 (100%)	1 (33%)	2 (67%)	-	2%
Supi	3	3 (100%)	-	3 (100%)	-	2%
Safohene	3	3 (100%)	1 (33%)	2 (67%)	-	2%
Asafo members	55	55 (100%)	7 (13%)	13 (24%)	35 (64%)	29%
Section of the community	120	101 (84%)	-	21(18%)	99 (83%)	64%
TOTAL	**187 (100%)**	**168 (90%)**	**11 (6%)**	**42 (22%)**	**134 (72%)**	

From the Table 2, 3 chiefs, 3 Tufuhene, 3 Supi, 3 Safohene, 55 Asafo members and 120 members from the community totalling 187 served as respondents to the interview. The table shows that three chiefs were interviewed and all three representing 100% have fore

knowledge about Asafo drum language. On the other hand, 2 representing 65% do understand the drum languages being played on all or most occasions whilst 1 representing 33% also understands the drum language on some occasions. This means, the chiefs are quite knowledgeable about the drum languages being played by the Asafo companies.

The three Tufuhene also representing a 100% of interviewed audience within that category had the fore knowledge. However, 1 representing 33% does understand the drum language played on most occasions with 2 representing 67 % can interpret the drum language on some occasions. The three Supi and three Safohene representing 100% respectively also have fore knowledge about Asafo drum language. Whilst the three Supis representing 100% only understand the Asafo drum language been played on some occasions, 2 Safohene representing 67% do in this respect with only 1 representing 33% does understand the drum language on most occasions just as the Tufuhene. This shows that the top hierarchies of Asafo company leaders are versed with traditions of their ancestors and communities which probably is a requisite to understanding drum languages. Again, activities and the chain of command within the Asafo are carried out by them before it gets to the drummer. This probably can be the reason of their appreciable knowledge of the drum and drum languages.

All 55 members from the three selected companies representing 100% have fore knowledge about Asafo drum languages. Out of this number, 7 persons representing 13% understand the drum language on most occasions. 13 persons representing 24% also understand the drum language on some occasions whilst the remaining 35 persons representing 64% do not understand the drum language on all occasions. From the table, it shows that more than half the current members of the Asafo groups do not understand the drum language being played by the Asafo on some and most occasions when they perform. Probably, this can be attributed to the multiple effects of globalization and acculturation on the youth within the Asafo groups because the majority of respondents were within that age bracket. Again, the drum languages are played on rare occasions within the communities and this affects the registrations of the drum language patterns on the minds of the individual members. Moreover, it was found out that there is no conscious and practical training for members of the group on how to play the drums and the drum language but the act is picked unconsciously within some of the Asafo groups. The 37% respondents who have a quite understanding probably can be attributed to decades of exposure to some of the drum language patterns.

On the table, out of 120 people interviewed from the heterogeneous communities of the three selected Asafo groups formed a 100% for that category. 101 respondents representing 84% have fore knowledge about Asafo drum languages. This means majority of people in the various communities are aware that the Asafo drums are used to send drum languages. Out of the 120 respondents, none could comprehend the drum language of the Asafo on all or most occasions. 21 respondents representing 18% do understand the drum language on some occasions whilst 99 respondents representing 83% have no understanding of the drum languages performed on all occasions. Relating this analysis to the research question [what is the peoples' understanding about the drum and drum languages], it shows that although persons in the communities have fore knowledge about Asafo drums being used to send drum languages, they do not clearly understand the drum languages performed or sent by the Asafo groups. However they relate accordingly to the message when it is explained to them by the drummer or anyone who also understands the message being sent. Interestingly, the drum languages are just imitations of the dialect of the people in tonal patterns but they are not easily comprehended by them. Even within the Asafo group, not all members have a total understanding of the drum language they perform on most occasions. With this, drum

languages can be described as proverbial and idiomatic tones of a particular language that is linguistically and culturally defined in context. Akin to proverbs, it requires a sober reflection and deep thinking of the individual to comprehend. Again, drum languages like proverbs are codes which are appreciated with difficulty. The fluency of an individual in his or her dialect and an in-depth knowledge of oral traditions and past events of his community or town cannot guarantee the understanding of drum languages. On the other hand, these traits are necessary for the drummer.

The constituents of Asafo drums among Asafo groups of Oguaa (Cape Coast)

According to the carvers, there are five categories of drums set in the Akan community. They are Apirede, Kete, Fontonfrom, Moses kyin and Asafo kyin. These drum sets come in four, five or more pieces. The Asafo drums among the Asafo companies in this study and in Cape Coast are made up of four pieces in the set.

Table 3: Musical instruments of the Asafo groups in Cape Coast

		***Asafo* Groups**						
Instruments		***Bentsir***	***Anaafo***	***Ntsin***	***Nkum***	***Abrofomba***	***Akrampa***	***Amanful***
Drum	*Asafo kyin*	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Agyegyedo	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	ɔpintsin	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Akroma	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Gong	*Dawur amponsah*		✓					
	Dawur ngyegyedo	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Dawur mfae	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Bell				✓				
Side drum							✓	
Whistle		✓			✓			
Horn			✓					
Bigel					✓			
Kɛkrɛdae(rattle)						✓		

[What drums (types) are used by the Asafo Company?] From the table above, it shows and illustrates that the Asafo drum constituents of Asafo groups in Cape Coast are a set of four and can be described as the open ended type of drums. The four pieces as illustrated in order of sizes are; 1. Asafo kyin also known as Tuaakwan, 2.Agyegyedo or Adam, 3. pintsin or Ampae and 4. Akroma or Ansaba / Ansarba



Figure 1: Asafo kyin (Tuaakwan) drums



Figure 2: Agyegyedo/ Adedem drums



Figure 3: Xpintsin or Ampae drum

An exclusive conversation with Odomankoma Kyerama Pra (the master drummer for Anaafo Asafo group), also revealed that the Akrampa Asafo group, originally by their creation, were not using this set of drums but were using some contemporary drums such as the side drum. This means that some years back, this group did not perform any drum language. However, they have since and currently being using these drum pieces.



Figure 4: Ansaba or Akroma drum

Prefix of Asafo drum language

At the start of a play of any of the drum patterns and drum languages, the master drummer with the Asafo kyin will play the drum:

Kon! Kon! Kon! (3x)
Xdomankoma bo adze, brzbrz boo adze
Me abodzin wofrz me Kweku Shibura

The "kon kon kon" is like an alarm to draw attention to him and to prepare the minds of the people in the community for the message. The drummer then proceeds to show appreciation to God the creator of the universe and nature. He plays appellations as well in honour of the gods, ancestors and so on as recognition of the source of his life, strength and skills and finally announces his presence by drumming his name. Depending on the occasion, the drummer greets the community and plays some appellations of the community and then goes on to greet his Asafo company and other Asafo companies if there is any present. The Asafo greeting drum text is played three times. Also, the significance of the greeting to other Asafo companies is to find out if they will want to help. Notably, all these drum texts are prefixed to the main message.

Asafo drum language text for the death of a member

The death of a chief, queen mother or any prominent figure in the community

Kon! Kon! Kon!
Oguaa akxtx (town appellations)
Akyemfo birefi Akyemfo (Asafo groups' appellations)
Odomankoma Bxadze
Brz brz Bxadze
Asaase na huntuma abx ngua
Woridzi aszm bzn

Fun n'abasa gu n'akoko (2x)
Hommbra Hommbra
Hommbra mpiren mpiren
Oguan no wuda xdasanyi wu da
Kwesi Antobam kx ne samankyir
Kumkum brzbrz

Literally
The 'kon kon kon' is a drum cry is first sounded to the 'Asafo' groups of the community for a message. In line 2-5 we hear of drums sounding appellations of the town, the Asafo groups and of God the creator (Odomankoma Bɔadze). The earth (Asaase) and dust (huntuma) are in a seeming confrontation with each other. What could be the reason for this? (Lines 6-7). Line 7 provides the most probable answer- a corpse lay motionless with its hands across the chest. The proverb – 'Oguan no wuda, ɔdasanyi wu da' means human beings can die unexpectedly just as what happens to sheep (Oguan).

From the text, the drummer greets the town and recounts the history of the town and his Asafo group as well as acknowledging the creator and the atmosphere or setting. This part of the text is also seen as a call for members and other groups to sensitize them about the funeral and to help in other arrangement. The same drum language is played in the case of a chief, queen mother or any prominent figure but with emphasis on their stool name or title as required by tradition. After playing this text, the drummer then plays appellation about or for the dead amidst some proverbs. The dead is also sometimes given a message through the drum to take to the underworld.

Appellations

Mbabanyin wodzi no akosam
Eben nsu na mboba wx mu
Bosompo na mboba wx mu

Kwame Ataapem, Akyemfo birefi mu Akyemfo
Yema wo damirifa due koszkosz
Due na amandzehu

Literally
Lines 1-3 ask of what length one's valour could take him?
To the ends of the stream or even to the rocks under the sea?
Kwame Ataapem, you tried to brave the storm
We say sorry for the tragedy
Sorry for the suffering (lines 5-6)

Mpaapaemu (farewell message)-this is the parting and a farewell message for the victim.

Kwame Ataapem
Yzma wo damirifa due
Damirifa due nantsew yie
Sz ekx a, ma ewuako foo

Literally, the text reads
Kwame Ataapem, you have our sympathy and we bid you farewell in your journey to join the ancestors. Our message for them is that they should accept you in their bosom. Fare thee well.
The purpose of the appreciation is to sing the praise and valour of the son of the land-Ataapem.

Installation of a chief or an Asafo leader

Kon! Kon! Kon!
Oguaa Akxtx (town appellations)
Akyemfo birefi Akyemfo (Asafo groups' appellations)
Odomankoma Bxadze
Brz brz bxadze
Asaase na huntuma abx ngua
woridzi aszm bzn
Nkum Asafo enya adaano fofor / panyin fofor
Sansaw fa adze a xdze kyerz

Literally translated as:
Kon kon kon that is the drum cry assembling people and sounding the appellations (Oguaa Akxtx) of the Oguaa town's people and the Asafo group itself (in lines 1-3). Lines 4-5 sound the appellation of God (Odomankoma Bxadze …). The earth (Asaase) and dust (huntuma) are in a seeming confrontation with each other. What could be the reason or issue at stake? (Lines 6-7). Line 8 report that the Nkum Asafo have now had a new leader and that it is prudent that he (the Nkum Asafo leader) be introduced to the public (sansaw fa adze a xyerz) in line 9.

The loss of a person in the forest

Kon! Kon! Kon! and plays appellation of the town or community
Nkusukum yzma hom akye (3x)
Xdomankoma Bxadze
Brz brz bxadze
Aszm esi aszm kzse esi
Pxw etu ehu
Wxmma yzndz pxw mu (2x)
Opia Mensah Abrompah (huandzin) (2x)
Wxayew, enyiwa ahwer no
Hommbra Hommbra (2x)
Hommbra nkuma nkuma (2x)
Hommbra promprom (3x)

Literally translated as
As explained early on, the kon kon kon which is the drum cry first invites the community folks to assemble before the message is delivered. In line 2, the drummer greets the assembly good morning in the name of God (Xdomankoma Bxadze, Brz brz bzadze). He then lays before the gathering the reason for the call and the assignment before them (in lines 5-7). Opia Mensa Abormmpa is proclaimed lost (line 9) necessitating a search by the group.

After this the drummer goes his own way to play some proverbs, some historical interludes about the group and motivational messages to urge the group on in the search.

Drowning in the sea

Kon! Kon! Kon! and plays appellation of the community
Nkusukrum yzma hom akye (3x)
Xdomankoma Bxadze
Brz brz bxadze
Aszm asi, aszm kzse esi
Nsu ano afxw
Wxmma yznsi mpoano
Opia Mensah- Abrompah (huandzin) (2x)
Wxayew, enyiwa ahwer no
Hommbra Hommbra (2x)
Hommbra nkuma kuma (2x)
Hommbra promprom (3x)

Literally
The drummer having played the prefix as explained then outlines the reason for the summons that is one of them cannot be traced and invites them to the beach for a search (lines 5-7). Opia Mensa-Abrommpa is mentioned as the one missing at the beach. He is ostensibly drowning and must be rescued. (lines 8-9). The group is urged on in the search. (lines 10-12)

The capsizing of a boat
Kon! Kon! Kon! and plays appellation of the community
Ekusukrum yzma hom akye (3x)
Xdomankoma Bxadze
Brz brz bxadze
Aszm asi, aszm kzse esi
Nsu ano afxw
Hommbra yznsi mpoano
Hommbra wxmbra (2x)
Hommbra nkuma kuma (2x)
Hommbra promprom (3x)

The drum language for a drowned person and the capsizing of boat are the same. However, in the case of a drowned person, the huandzin which literally can mean the 'soubriquet' or the epithet of the lost person is played by the drummer and not the actual name as in a lost person. Explaining this Xdomankoma Okyerema Pra said:

The 'huandzin' is believed to carry the soul of the person so the drum with that characteristics of communicating to the soul and spirits is used; the drum is used to ask the soul of the lost person to ask permission from the spirit in the river that his body is needed by his people for proper burial rites.

Appellation is played when the person or body is found to thank the spirits or ancestors and also to congratulate themselves.

Drum language for festival times

Kon! Kon! Kon!
Oguaa Akxtx
Xdomankoma Bxadze
Brz brz bxadze
Asaase na huntuma abx ngua
Woridzi aszm bzn
Mbarimba wxkaan nda a, nda no aso
afrenhyia pa afrenhyia pa

Or

Bxbxr Mfantse akan nda ma afe aso
afrenhyia pa afe nko mbxto hzn

Literally translated as
Kon! Kon! Kon! that is the drum cry assembling people for the festival, sounds the appellations of the Oguaa people and God almighty (Odomankoma Bxadze, Brz brz bxadze) in lines 2-4.
The earth (Asaase) and dust (huntuma) are against each other. What could be the reason for this antagonism? (Lines 5-6). The countdown of days for the festival ends and the drummer wishes the men of valour a happy new year (line 7-8)

Or

Bxbxr Mfantse have counted the days of the year. The drummer wishes you many heavy returns. (lines 9-10)

Fire outbreak

Kon! Kon! Kon!
Oguaa Akxtx (town appellations)
Akyemfo birefi Akyemfo (Asafo groups' appellations)
Odomankoma Bxadze
Brz brz bxadze
Asaase na huntuma abx ngua
Woridzi aszm bzn
Aszm asi aszm kzse esi
Hommbra nkuma kuma
Hommbra mpiren mpiren
Sz nkran dodx a, ofi woana?
Sz nkran atow apetse a, ofi woana?

The drum text is translated literally as
Kon! Kon! Kon! that is the drum cry assembling people and then appellations of the Asafo group and God almighty (in lines 1-5). The earth (Asaase) and dust (huntuma) are against each other. What could be the reason for this antagonism? (Lines 6-7).
In line 8, the drummer announces the reason for the assemblage – fire. Then calls them to proceed quickly. Like ants scattered in all directions, where from these colonies of ants? For whose sake have they come?

The collapse of a building, bush fire, flooding or any calamity

Kon! Kon! Kon!
Oguaa Akxtx
Xdomankoma Bxadze
Brz brz bxadze
Asaase na huntuma abx ngua
Woridzi aszm bzn
yze- nya amandze
yze- nya amandze
Hommbra mpiren mpiren (played at a faster rate)
Adzekyee mu nszm dxx so
Obi nyim xkyena
Hommbra mpiren mpiren

The drum text is translated literally as
Kon! Kon! Kon! that is the drum cry assembling people and then appellations of the Asafo group and God almighty (in lines 1-4). The earth (Asaase) and dust (huntuma) are against each other. What could be the reason for this antagonism? (Lines 5-6).
In lines 7-9 the drummer tells the gathering that we have landed into serious trouble (yeenya amandze) and that the people should come in all haste (hommbra mpiren mpiren).
Each day brings its own problems (Adzekyee mu nszm dxx so). No one knows what tomorrow will be (Obi nyim xkyena). So come in all haste (Hommbra mpiren mpiren) lines 10-12.

Banishing someone from the community

Kon! Kon! Kon!
Oguaa Akxtx
Odomankoma Bxadze
Brz brz bxadze
Asaase na huntuma abx ngua
Woridzi aszm bzn

Kweku Mensa na Maame Mensima
xman nye hzn atsew towa mu
xman nye hzn ebu mena mu

The drum text is translated literally as
Kon! Kon! Kon! that is the drum cry assembling people and then appellations of the Asafo group and God almighty (in lines 1-4). The earth (Asaase) and dust (huntuma) are against each other. What could be the reason for this antagonism? (Lines 5-6).

In lines 7-9 the drummer announces that kweku Mensa na Maame Mensima have been banished, i.e. the people of the community have broken relationship with them (xman nye hzn atsew towa mu, xman nye hzn ebu mena mu).

The various drum language texts and their matching occasions are an indication that the drum languages are performed not ordinarily but for and on essential issues and valued persons in the community. The drum languages themselves in texts are not made up of ordinary language

but rich in proverbs which arise based on the situations and occasions. The appellations and their subsequent drum language as explained by Odomankoma kyerama Pra are not pre-meditated but spontaneously inspired. To quote him, 'kyin kasa no odwir....' Metaphorically 'odwir' means arriving or descending. This can be metaphorically understood in the sense of canoes arriving ashore so the message and appellation of the drum language 'arrive' on the drummer and that the drummer becomes just a mere medium through which the message is put across. At this point the drummer may or may not be conscious of the message he is conveying. This means that there is more to the playing of Asafo drum language. A player may be a 'physical drummer' or a 'divine drummer'. A physical drummer has the characteristics of only playing for entertainment and relay of drum messages to the public whilst the 'divine drummer' has the characteristics of knowing both the physical and spiritual aspect of drums and can contact, differentiate as well as interpret messages from spirits like dwarfs, gods, ancestors, elves (samanta) and human spirits.

Aesthetic, philosophical and psychological aspects of Asafo drums and drum language

The aesthetic, philosophical and psychological aspects of the drum language as observed by the researchers were inter-related and of double effect therefore, the combined analysis. The roles of Asafo drum languages in the religious, social and political life of the people of Cape Coast is one that cannot be overlooked. There is an adage among the Akans that if you know the sound of your chief's drum, you will not get lost in public gathering. This drums home the importance of having knowledge and being able to identify with some elements of where we belong in the community. The prefix to the almost all the drum languages in which homage and reverence is paid to God the creator of the universe (Odomankoma Bxadze, Brz brz bxadze) psychologically psyches the drummer and gives him hope of a successful outcome to the issue at hand after he delivers the message – the favour of the Supreme Being shall prevail.

Psychologically, the drum patterns and language serve as a social consciousness to the people to an extent that the sound from the drum programme the psyche of the members of the community to respond socially to the meaning of the drum language in a common manner. As observed during the organized performances, the strike of the drum by the master drummer unconsciously attracted or was like a call for both members of the group and other able bodied youth in the community who were not present at the place where the performance was taking place. In response to a personal interview with some of the Asafo members who came later to join and members of the community who had gathered there, they said:

> *When we heard the sound we had no option than to come and find out what was going on so that we could all help to tackle whatever problem there was or support the group.*

In this sense, the drums and drum language patterns philosophically promote unity and serves as a binder for the people in the community, promoting a sense of belongingness and a platform for expressing social brotherliness.

The manner in which members of the community responded to the drum call expresses some aesthetic quality of attitude of the group in relation to the sound of the Asafo drum and this helps to promote peaceful co-existence and social interaction among the people. The drum language as observed is a medium through which social status or class is distinguished and acknowledged among the indigenes. During some processions, the master drummer stops at some identified spot in the community and plays appellations or recounts some successes

chalked by that individual or his ancestors and so on. Both Okyerema Pra and Okyerama Shiburaba (master drummers for Asafo No. 2 and 3 companies respectively) expressed that:

> *There are some spots in the community where there are gods and we need to acknowledge them before we pass that spot. Also in our route when we get to the house of may be our chief, sub chiefs, elders of the Asafo group and other prominent citizens of the community or society we have to pay homage or greet before we continue our journey.*

Aesthetically and psychologically, the repeated rhythmic patterns of the drumming and drum language alter the brain waves of the priest from beta brain waves to delta brain waves which induces the priest into a trance which enables him to act as a medium to communicate cryptic messages from the ancestors and the spirit world to conscientize the indigenes. This communiqué of cryptic messages psychologically breed emotional satisfaction among the people over issues that are bedevilling them. It also serves as a re-assurance to the people when they get the message from the ancestors through the priest.

A real life situation recounted by Odomankoma Okyerama Pra of an old man (a former member of the Asafo) who was bedridden in his room suddenly began to walk to the place where the Asafo company was performing the drum patterns and language. Such an experience expresses aesthetically the therapeutic effect of the sound of the drums and drum language. Again, a personal interview with some of the drummers revealed that the therapeutic effect of the drumming and drum language psychologically put them at ease and also serves as a form of exercising the body to become physically fit. This means the drumming and drum languages are a measure of healing psychologically and physically. Psychologically, the drum language aids in finding solutions to issues and challenges facing the community. For instance, when a person gets drowned, the drum language is employed as a vital key to seeking the soul of the drowned hence the surfacing of the body. This makes them relaxed, satisfied emotionally as well as upholds their beliefs and concepts in the use of the drum and drum language.

The skill and technique of the drummer and the drum to achieve effective communication through the use of codes and imitated human speech semblance to the human speech is warmly accepted by the people also as a rich and proper form of communication. Drum patterns and language are performed with some passion, energy; strength and joy in a right manner which produces sound that connotes youthfulness in tones making the act youthful, which is an element of African aesthetics. The shapes of the drums which are exquisite handmade products are a display of skilful craftsmanship and mastery of medium to achieving the purpose in terms of durability of the drum shell and better resonance of sound. The drums eye as carefully designed psychologically affect the mind frame of the drummer in terms of enjoying maximum protection from the spirits or ancestors and therefore enable him to play the desired drum pattern in a relaxed manner. Symbolism is an aesthetic aspect of African art hence the clothing of the Asafo kyin with the white cloth amongst the other pieces of drums is to signify it as the 'head' or 'lead' drum as well as a sacred drum pure to commune with the ancestors and the underworld for assistance and appreciation. The all over hatching grooves which are of elaborate decorations that give texture to the drum shell. The polished surface also gives it that shine and luster which is an element of aesthetic appeal as well as a connotation of good state.

The seating arrangement hence the position of the drum enhances the co-ordination among the players thereby creating unity, harmony and a balance in the resonance of sound. Again the

value accorded each drum irrespective of size as well as other instruments in a performance breeds respect or is a sign of respect members' accord to one another to enhance a communal living. Asafo drum languages are couched in idiomatic diction which aesthetically reveals the richness of the spoken dialect and the varied ways of expressions to eliminate monotony in the spoken dialect.

The premise of African aesthetics as expressed by Gyekye (1996) is much wider than in other cultures considering its values and focuses such proper, good, ethics, and morals and so on. Molokwane (n.d) also argues in his paper that 'African aesthetics exist as a socio-psychological and anthropological phenomenon'. This means that African aesthetics does not strictly conform to the view point of the occidentals such as Baumgarten and Kant. Therefore, the central notion in African aesthetics does not lie only in the beauty of an art work. This is expressed in the functional, the symbolic and the beauty in the human (physical traits) and cultural lifestyle of the individual which expresses social functions, the relevance, appropriateness and meaning to the people who use and perceive it. Therefore the canons or philosophy behind the aesthetics of African art works are grounded on the functional, symbolism, moral character, speech or mannerism. Depending on the art form involved, the aesthetic quality or value may be expressed based on the appropriateness, quality of presentation, significance movement, and narrator audience satisfaction, speech, good resonance, dramatic gestures and so on and is contrary to the European or the contemporary conception of 'art for art's sake', thus a purely aesthetic conception of art. The elements as identified by Molokwane and general to the Africans include togetherness, craftsmanship, symbolism, self-composure, luminosity, youthfulness and resemblance to human being. This clearly suggests that each art form has its own language for the judgments of aesthetics. All these aesthetic qualities are perfectly expressed in the art of the drum languages of the people of Oguaa (Cape Coast).

CONCLUSIONS

Although it is accepted that no culture can exist entirely without the infusion of another cultural traits, it must be noted that the gradual infusion of other cultural traits, character and elements over that of the people of Oguaa Traditional Area and consequently their Asafo companies is not in the right spectrum of acceptance. Oguaa Traditional Area is gradually becoming a cosmopolitan area with all kinds of deliberations and infiltration among indigenes and visitors of diverse cultures. This is partly due to an inevitable current system of governance and modernity. However, its offshoot is that presently, the expected natural role of the Asafo groups in the socio-cultural and socio-political lifestyle of Oguaa Traditional Area is one that is on the diminishing trend. Hence, much is not seen frequently about the activities of the Asafo companies that require for the use of the drum and performance of the drum language. This cumulatively has affected the fore knowledge and the understanding of Asafo drums and drum languages and the Asafo activities in their entirety.

As a measure to promote and sustain the interest of Asafo activities in the people of Cape Coast, the Oguaaman Traditional Council in partnership with other relevant bodies in the field of promoting and preserving culture should periodically organize workshops or programmes on drums and drum languages of Cape Coast Asafo companies. This will help bring to the fore the values, foreknowledge and understanding of the drum languages performed by the Asafo groups. It will also create the awareness of the important role of the drum in the set-up of any Asafo group as well as the types of drums being used by them.

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To promote the foreknowledge and understanding of Asafo drums and drum languages, the traditional council should organize performances occasionally for the various Asafo groups to perform their drum languages in their various communities for admiration and appreciation. This will help to make up for the loss of the natural occurrence for their performance giving the current circumstances. Also, institutions like schools, radio and television stations and IT companies should be encouraged to use digitized drum languages as part of their system to enhance the foreknowledge and understanding of Asafo drum languages as a cultural artefact. In addition, it will help to rejuvenate and deepen the relationship between members of the community and the Asafo group hence a sustenance and growth of the group.

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