

## WEST AFRICAN WOMEN IN MUSIC: AN ANALYSIS OF SCHOLARSHIP

### **Women's participation in music in west Africa: a reflection on fieldwork, self, and understanding**

*by*

ANGELA SCHARFENBERGER

In June of 2006, as I packed to travel to Ghana to conduct two months of pre-dissertation exploratory research on women's music, I also packed a host of ideas about women's music in west Africa, having conducted extensive library research on the topic in the two years of graduate study I had completed just previous to my arrival in Ghana. I was hoping to find an interesting, fundable music tradition during my fieldwork that summer. I held the belief that women's music existed in west Africa as a category whose boundaries I could clearly define. I thought maybe I'd find the rare female drummer who had broken free from the taboos of gender roles in society. I wished for a group that might demonstrate a sense of female solidarity, developed through the creation of sound and movement. I sought a music tradition where women expressed themselves musically.

In other words, I sought something both beautifully exotic and utterly familiar. In the beginning of my young adulthood, I felt inexplicably drawn to African music, a pull that took me to live a thousand miles away from my hometown to study with a master musician from Ghana in the coldest state in the U.S. I've never been able to logically explain my passionate interest in African music, and have stopped trying, except to say that it is beautiful to me, and in most ways so different from my early experiences with music, which involved sheet music, singing in the car with my Dad, and long hours of solitary classical piano practice. Yet underneath my quest for a research topic I wanted to find some sense of commonality in my experience and that of the African women musicians I hoped to study, divergent as those experiences may be. By the time I visited Ghana, I had been learning and performing African music for almost fifteen years. I had experienced a sense of uniqueness by being a female drummer in the male dominated arena of west African drum classes, and I had more recently experienced the empowerment and connection of singing and playing Zimbabwean and Afro-Brazilian music with other women. Not unlike other young researchers, I conveniently slipped on my self-colored glasses when I went into the field. While I defiantly tried to live 'like everyday Ghanaians' (as I imagined that to be at the time – riding in trotros, eating fufou, and prohibiting my daughter from watching TV), I still carried, of course, the

thoughts and perceptions of my self-identity.

I sought a particular vision of musical experiences in Ghana; as much as I wanted to find the new, beautiful, exotic, I also searched for resonance with my past musical experiences. I didn't do this consciously, but in reflection, it's clear that this was my intellectually immature quest, informed by my experiences in playing music, as well as on the literary research I had done in the two years of my graduate study. The act of reflecting on our experiences and questioning how and why we think about them in the ways we do is fundamental to the process of fieldwork. While there are many 'a-ha!' moments in the field, there are perhaps just as many in the writing, in the years that follow.

This article, drawn from my Masters thesis in Ethnomusicology, serves as a brief overview of the scholarship on women's music in west Africa through 2009. It engages with my summer of fieldwork in Ghana, and the ways this experience both affirmed and negated my previous library research. It also intends to engage the cyclical process of knowing, reflection, and understanding, as it evolves over time in the ongoing inner conversation between library research, fieldwork, and writing. Clearly, our ways of knowing in ethnomusicology do not necessarily follow a narrow, simple linear trajectory. In this essay, I seek to detangle and identify the messy threads of a conversation, one of words and actions that transforms through time as we grow and evolve as researchers, writers, and human beings.

### **Scholarship**

I initially set out to critically analyze the scholarship on women's music in west Africa over the past sixty years. By the term 'women's music,' I am referring to research that describes women's participation in musical performances.<sup>1</sup> My research was initially directed by the main themes outlined in Ellen Koskoff's edited volume, *Women and Music in Cross-Cultural Perspective* (1989). I now seek to create a dialogue between that earlier-stage analysis, my fieldwork, field notes and emails written during my fieldwork, and reflections on the overall process.

This body of research on women's music in west Africa demonstrates a progression in the scholarship in that the earliest research from the 1950s and 1960s reflects the structural functionalism common to the time; it also is largely written by self-defined cultural insiders. In the 1970s and 1980s scholars begin to focus on the subjects themselves, the performance event, as well as the relationship between music-related activities and gender roles. In the past twenty years, ethnographers and scholars have engaged with current themes in anthropological literature, particularly a reflexive approach, with a growing recognition of the inseparability of theory, personal experiences, methods, and findings.

---

<sup>1</sup> Although dance is a central way that women participate, I have chosen not to highlight this for the context of this article.

Additionally, a significant turn in more recent scholarship has reflected a shift towards the development of gender studies models, as approaches grew out of feminist literature in ethnographic research. These approaches differed from previous feminist research in that scholars began to engage with the concept of gender as a continuum of behaviours and roles, rather than the polarization of male and female, which characterized early feminist writing. These later gender models are less rigidly bound to the concept of inherent patriarchal dominance, and instead focus on the multitude of women's and men's responses within socially constructed gender roles. Scholars examine how individuals manipulate, and in some cases overturn these societal roles, and in what situations this is acceptable. Thus the focus of gender studies research shifted from outlining a fixed dichotomy of powerful and powerless, to a broader analysis of the ways that individuals and groups articulate power within particular social and cultural parameters.

I will outline the major periods of scholarship, and reflect on the ways that these readings conversed with my fieldwork experiences before, during and after my time in Ghana. In this way, I hope to draw a more complex understanding of the relationships that develop over time between fieldwork and theory, and how this can ultimately inform and direct the progression of future scholarship.

### **Academic initiations**

During my early coursework as a graduate student in ethnomusicology, I was introduced to the big men and the big theories of the canon. In the methodological leanings of my institution, theory was more valued than performance. Theory based classes were required, while music performance classes were rare. While most members of the program participated in music making to some degree, many within the tradition where they would conduct academic research, the value of these experiences was not institutionally supported. On several occasions I was asked to reconsider my engagement with various African music traditions, the implication being that it was interfering with my theoretical graduate work. This prioritization of theory over experience was pervasive, and while I've not adopted this philosophy personally, I've certainly been influenced by it.

In those first few years I began to develop an interest in studying women musicians. I hoped that by studying women I could sidestep what I considered to be an uncomfortable dynamic in relating to men in a research context. I also felt a sense of moral imperative, because I found so little about women in the literature on African music as a whole, and I thought they should get their due attention. I felt an extra nudge from feminist scholarship, as well as from advisors. *Women and Music in Cross-Cultural Perspective*, edited by Ellen Koskoff (1989) was a starting point for my initial inquiry into the world of female musicians in Africa. In the Introduction, Koskoff argues that ethnographers have lacked a clear description of and engagement with women's activities in their writing, focusing instead on public spheres that are

often male-dominated (Koskoff 1989:2). The research I had read about in west Africa seemed to fit this model.

There are two possible explanations for this lack in the scholarship on women in west African music. First, the interests and gender of the scholar or ethnographer certainly affects the choices of topics studied. Male scholars conducted much of the early work on African music in the 1950s and 1960s, and as was common at the time, did not consider the role of gender in their writing. Much of this early research focused on drum orchestras and *griot* traditions. Researchers of drumming traditions primarily analyzed the male-dominated percussive elements of such ensembles, and largely ignored the female-dominated arena of songs and dances. The percussive complexity of hand-clapping often performed by women was mentioned in only a small number of studies (e.g. Aning 1969). Men have been the subjects of *griot* tradition research in Mande countries such as Mali and Senegal, with a few later examples of female *griotte* counterparts (see Hale 1994; Schulz 2001; Duran 2000, 2007).

The inaccessibility of certain women's rituals is a second possible reason for a lack of west African music scholarship that considers gender. The activities of women's associations and secret societies are often closed to men and cultural outsiders. Women are the central performers in certain rites of passage and initiation rituals. There may be public performances during some aspects of the ritual, such as the common practice of reintroducing girls back into society as women following initiation; but the majority of the ritual is performed to the exclusion of men and outsiders. Thus few researchers have been able to study these performances.

My research into women's music traditions in Ghana inevitably started at the University of Ghana in Legon. I was studying Twi there through a FLAS summer grant, so my first entry into the world of music was a walk across campus, from the Linguistics Department to the School of Performing Arts. There, I began talking with professors, including a meeting with the renowned Prof. J.H. Kwabena Nketia.

From the late 1950s - 1960s, Nketia began to describe women's participation in music in west Africa. These early works involve general descriptions and analyses of lyrics. Nketia was one of the first to recognize women's participation in music. He has been extremely influential on the body of research on west African women's music, both through his early writings and as an advisor to many young scholars. Nketia's initial interest in women's forms of music is evidenced in the functionalist analysis of funeral music in Ghana, *Funeral Dirges of the Akan People* (1955). Roles in the funeral setting are highly gender specific; men are expected to withhold emotional display, while women express emotional sentiments through dance and body gestures, as well as through praise, lament, and sympathy in song lyrics (1955:18). Nketia focused on pervasive themes and linguistic structural devices in lyrics, referring to their significance within Akan society.

In two later publications, Nketia describes categories of music both in terms of their function in society as well as categorically by performers (1963b; 1963a). In

*African Music in Ghana*, Nketia claimed that exclusively women's music was performed at only two occasions: girls' puberty rites and recreational forms such as maiden songs (1963b:107). In *Folk Songs of Ghana*, Nketia elaborated on how these categories of songs were demonstrated among different ethnic groups (1963a). Current with the time of his research as well as his personal philosophy, Nketia's analysis is functionalist, assuming a tone of factually descriptive.

*I'm feeling like my head is swimming a bit right now as I try to pin down just what direction I want to go in with my research. There are a few options and I guess I just need to head down those roads and then see what happens. ... It was good to speak to Nketia. He really didn't have a lot of huge ideas for me. No real new information.* (fieldnotes, July 10, 2006)

In terms of seeking a research topic, my initial conversations with Legon professors and musicians were almost disheartening; I was seeking a current, viable tradition performed by women. Like a child on a treasure hunt, I had a fixed idea of something that surely must exist somewhere in the country, and I just needed to dig deep enough to uncover it. Approaching my research topic with a more exploratory approach simply didn't occur to me at the time.

What I found at the University of Legon was the far reaches of the early research in Ghana, and it was, indeed, exciting to peruse dissertations and materials that weren't available to me in the USA. One of Nketia's students, Ben Aning, wrote two manuscripts dedicated to the study of women's music. The first, a post-graduate diploma paper, "*Adenkum*, a Study of the Music of Akan Female Bands" is significant as it is the earliest research dedicated entirely to the study of a female genre in west Africa (Aning 1964). *Adenkum* is the word for the hollowed gourds played percussively against the palms and lap, which are accompanied by call-and-response singing and performed at community events. The study compares three *adenkum* bands, each from a different region of Ghana. Aning's analysis is exceptional for his time, as he analyzes not only the societal function and instrumentation of *adenkum*, but also the role of women in society.

Aning's Master's thesis, "*Nnwonkorɔ*: A Study of Stability and Change in Traditional Music" is a thorough analysis of the function of the music, the instrumental accompaniment, and the relationship between music and dance in the Akan musical form of *nnwonkorɔ* (1969). At the time of Aning's research, *nnwonkorɔ* was performed by women informally in the evenings; women commented on social issues, often criticizing men's behaviour and commenting on other local concerns. The songs are accompanied by hand clapping and idiophonic percussion. Aning's perspective is surprisingly nuanced in comparison with the other early scholarship on women's music during the 1960s; his examination of women's instrumental performance is one of the most thorough examples found in the literature.

While Aning's work was only accessible to me in the library at Legon, when I returned to the USA, I found several other works in a similar vein. Peter Sarpong's *Girls Nubility Rites in Ashanti* is a functionalist analysis of initiation rites, including music and dance performances (1977). Like Nketia's early writing, Sarpong's analysis relies heavily on interpretation of meanings of lyrics. Sarpong's description also follows in a musicological paradigm similar to Nketia's scholarship, using Western music terminology. Sarpong details the musical performance and movement of the ritual, "... women gather together with armpit drums (*donnos*), gongongs (*nnawuro*), and other musical instruments" within the home of the initiate, to celebrate and announce the beginning of the ritual events (Sarpong 1977:23). This is a rare documentation of women's performance of musical instruments.

Almost a decade later, Simon Ottenberg's description of women's musical performance among the Limba in Northern Sierra Leone also follows this Nketian approach (1983). Women sing laments at funerals and work songs in the field and accompany themselves with drums for the girls' initiation society, *Bondo*. At second funerals, groups of women dress as the deceased person, and "behave as they remember he or she did in life, with peculiarities of speech and movement" (Ottenberg 1983: 85). Also in this decade, Jacqueline Codgell DjeDje focuses on women's music in five culture groups in Sudanic Africa (DjeDje 1985). DjeDje notes that, "It is during life cycle events...that women participate more actively in music-making" (1985: 75), including rites of passage, birth rituals and wedding songs. DjeDje also claims that women are more likely to be involved in religious songs for ceremonies of the possession cult than for Islamic rituals.

Nketia, Aning, Sarpong, Ottenberg and DjeDje are examples of important authors between the 1950s and 1980s who draw attention to women's participation in music, which accounts for a small percentage of the scholarship on west African music. In *Female Song Tradition and the Akan of Ghana* (2005), Kwasi Ampene engages an approach similar to these early writers. Published just before my entry into the field, Ampene's ethnography is rooted in a functionalist approach. He emphasizes the compositional process and the function of this song tradition in Akan cultural practices, such as funerals and political events (2005). Ampene draws on Lakoff and Johnson's metaphor theory (1999) demonstrating that pitch relationships and melodic sequences employ embodied metaphor, conveying socially understood meaning through the utilization of tonal relationships (2005:188). Performers further embed metaphor in song lyric meanings through euphemisms and proverbs.

Ampene's work is significant because it is one of the few full length ethnographies on women's music in west Africa. It is interesting that the book title refers to a 'female' tradition, when he later argues that the tradition is really only possible through the support of men, who he claims know the drum poetry and rhetorical devices necessary for song composition (2005:183). The omission of gender role discussion is particularly striking in consideration of Akosua Anyidoho's earlier analysis, addressed later in this

article, which highlighted the disparity of power between genders in the management and performances of *nnwonkorɔ* bands (1994).

Below is a description I wrote as a brief account to my family and friends in an email. I stated the simplest of facts, with the brief mention of the discomfort of being in rural areas. Later in this article I will return to my field notes from this same event to demonstrate the multiplicity of levels of this experience, from a gender-based social-cultural analysis perspective.

### **Dansuom I**

*Joy and I returned from our trip to Kumasi safe and sound. Our first destination was a small town in the Sefwi area, west of Kumasi, called Surano. We traveled there with a friend from the University, Osei, who is from this town. The style of music is called dansuom (“lying in water”), named as such for the large gourd that is placed upside down in a large metal tub full of water (imagine a huge pumpkin, dried, cut in half) and played with sticks, while the gourd is moved up and down to create different tones. The women also play a castanet-shaped iron bell and clappers (sticks clapped together) while singing in call and response. As the music gets moving, several of the women dance in the circle and this was definitely a highlight. Hearing and seeing this was worth the extensive journey, and the inevitable predicament that Joy and I are a bit of a spectacle in remote areas (it’s like being on stage all day). (email correspondence, July 27, 2006)*



Figure 1. Woman striking the *dansuom* gourd, Surano, Ghana (photo by author).

### Understanding gender roles

Having read Ellen Koskoff's work on gender roles before my entry into the field, I felt I had some basis of understanding the concept. In *Music and Gender in Cross-Cultural Perspective*, Koskoff criticized scholars for shying away from issues of gender roles and gender relations (1989: 2). She noted that gender roles within societies play a powerful role in shaping women's experiences in music. Taboos develop around sexuality, and women's musical behaviours often associate them to particular forms of sexual behaviour; for example, that singers of popular music are 'loose' (see Maxwell 2002). Music is also a significant arena for examining the ways that members of each gender relate to each other. Women's lyrics may have coded meanings that express frustration or protest (see Anyidiho 1993; Gueye 2004), and various masking traditions serve to question and negotiate male-dominated hierarchical political and social structures (Okyafor 1994). The following examples will illustrate these gender systems in west Africa, using Ellen Koskoff's four categories of musical performance in consideration of gender relations (1989: 10).

### Performance that confirms and maintains the established social/sexual arrangement

In all of the following examples, women's participation in music maintains women's roles within society. Rites of passage are an interesting example of the articulation of these roles, as they uphold the value placed on women as mothers and as the bearers of emotional expression. In such gender systems, it is common for women to birth not only children, but also the sentiments of the community, and honor the passing of loved ones through their body movements (dances and gestures).

Barbara Hampton utilized semiotic analysis in her investigation of *adowa*, a funeral music and dance performed by Ga women in Ghana (1982). *Adowa*, meaning 'antelope', is an elder's dance, imitating the animal's slow, graceful strides. Women act as mediators of spirits and of cultural meanings (1978; 1982). The chief mourners enact the life of the deceased through dance (1982: 90). The mourners' dance imitates the movement of paddling in a boat, indicating the journey of life and death. Hampton draws on Victor Turner's analysis of symbols to explore how Ga women reaffirm cultural values, religious beliefs, and relationships –both among the living and between the world of the living and the world of spirits (Turner 1967; Hampton 1982: 91). The lyrics and gestures in *adowa* provide a venue for the mourners to express their grief through tears, words, and kinesthetically through their body gestures (Hampton 1982: 100-102).

Kofi Agovi has written extensively on women's maiden songs among the Nzema of Ghana (1989; 1990; 1992). His research is based in literary analysis of a women's informal song genre, *ayabomo*, which was used to "talk to their men about their bad deeds in marriage" (1992: 56). Agovi illustrates the strength and potency of *ayabomo* texts and performance and found that women used metaphor prominently in their



songs; for example, “silence” was an expression of childlessness (1992: 63).

In her analysis of birth songs among the Ututu clan in Nigeria, Grace Okereke found that women’s performance was a proclamation of their joy and position as mothers (1994). She found that while women’s roles are changing in modern Nigerian society, the role of motherhood is still highly valued among their other obligations. Okereke’s textual analysis of birth songs reveals a prominence of themes describing the joys and difficulties of childbirth, and she concludes that performance affirms the value of the maternal role (Okereke 1994).

**Performance that *appears* to maintain established norms in order to protect other, more relevant values**

This category is somewhat ambiguous in that it relies heavily on the ethnographer’s interpretations of performances and experiences. According to these scholars, the more significant aspect of these performances is that these activities are empowering, healing and transforming for women. Further, while women may be acting within a male-dominated system, the articulations and negotiations of power among women are more important than those between women and men. Both empowerment, as well as power negotiation, are enacted in performance contexts, according to the following authors.

Carol Robertson, in her research with the Kassena-Nankani in northern Ghana explored how emotional bonds and spirituality are created through women’s ritual music (1989). Robertson argues that the act of ‘dressing up’ in senior women’s second burials was an act of empowerment and transformation (1989: 233). Although women are operating within male-designated positions of power, the transformation from one role to another can only occur through women performing for each other (1989: 234). Through performance, “women sing to create a transformation” (1989: 238).

Ode S. Ogede examines a genre of Igede women’s songs in Nigeria. By examining literary devices, she argues that performers as well as audience continually recreate texts over time (1994). Male domination creates competition between women, who are vying for the resources often only attainable through marriage. Nonetheless, women use art as an effective political tool to comment on the hardships of their lives.

Kate Modic employed performance theory in her analysis of the *Ben Ka Di* women’s association in Bamako, Mali. The *Ben Ka Di* association is a product of a dual-gender system, in that it is a forum for women’s decision-making about important local political issues, and it oversees the enactment of women’s rituals within the community. Modic argues that power negotiation occurs not only through the performance of meaning-charged lyrics, but also in the ways that women communicate power relations kinesthetically through the performance event. These rituals were “used to constitute power, not just reflect power that already exists” (1994: 26). The author develops the idea that “symbolic inversions in festive contexts usually relate to hierarchies of power” which exist outside of the festivities, challenging these dominant relationships through

performance (1994: 33).

These are examples of women's performance of music within a context that appears to have the primary function of continuing to uphold gender roles in society. Yet under the surface, women experience power struggles and competition, as well as transformation and emotional support amongst themselves. These are not the only examples of musical performances which have multiple layers of experiences for women, as will be elaborated further in this article.

### **Performance that protests, yet maintains, the order**

Musical performances, and especially ritual performances, are rich arenas for examining the ways that women negotiate and contest socially accepted models of engendered behaviour. Judith Butler's influential book *Gender Trouble* (1990) introduced the idea of 'performativity' to the literature on gender. According to Butler, gender is not a stagnant noun, but rather "a 'doing'; a performance that constitutes the identity it purports to be" (Hawkesworth 1997: 663). She denounced the idea of gender as a binary opposition of forces, and encouraged a more fluid, negotiated, enacted concept (Butler 1990). The performativity concept becomes as prominent for ethnomusicologists and other culture studies scholars (Koskoff 2005: 92). Deborah Heath examines the powerful role of dance for women in urban Senegal (1994). Heath argues that the dances and poems that women perform reveal a struggle over shifting notions of appropriateness; set apart from everyday practice, they are occasions for reflexive awareness (1994).

Cynthia Schmidt demonstrated that the Kpelle Sande women's secret society in Liberia provides women with an important vehicle of power. Schmidt argues that Sande performance does not invert the larger power structure in society, but rather negotiates these systems internally, by empowering women through activities that "promote confidence and organize leadership and resources, thereby creating leverage within the society" (1990: 139). The Kpelle Sande is responsible for the education of young women in the norms and rules of behaviour, ultimately embodied through music and dance training (1990: 134). The transition to adulthood "is most distinctively displayed in an enlightened and virtuosic performance of a Sande dance...[which is]..considered a refinement of the values of composure, discipline and form drilled into an initiate.." (1990: 136). Echoing Butler's 'performativity,' Kpelle femininity is not a noun but a verb; it is a ritual enactment which simultaneously subverts the patriarchal power within the larger society.

Similarly, Ruth Phillips interrogated the events of the Mande Sande. Phillips argues that among the Mande Sande society, masking is an example of the idea that, in Victor Turner's words, "Cognitively, nothing underlines regularity so well as absurdity or paradox. Emotionally, nothing satisfies as much as extravagant or temporally permitted illicit behaviour" (in Phillips 1978: 275). While demonstrating the powerlessness of men in a temporary setting of mask performance, this satire is only possible because of women's relative power as a member of the Sande (Phillips 1995: 108). These

masquerades reiterate socially correct behaviour; the idea of male impotence, parodied by the Sande mask performance, is seen as a curse that the Sande society can impose on men who demonstrate inappropriate conduct. Simultaneously, masking celebrates the successful application of the powers of the Sande and affirms their teachings as each new group of young women enters into the society (Phillips 1995: 110).

### Dansuom II

*The whole village it seems gathers around for the performance, and Osie tells people not to make too much noise, so here's this performance in an African village, in a completely non-Africa way. Despite that, the beauty of the women's voices was really phenomenal, and the looks on their faces was amazing also. I think the highlight was the dancing. The dancers often came in pairs and then play-acted different roles, some of which were extremely funny, like a woman waving her folded up handkerchief between her legs like a penis. Then another woman would come and dance across from her or in front of her, in very lude gestures. It was clever, and I could see this gleam of mischief when I asked about it afterwards. (Fieldnotes, July 25, 2006)*

By poking fun through performing gender, the women in Surano could turn traditional power relationships momentarily upside down; in the context of the *dansuom* performance, men, women, and their different bodies were used as the mode to laugh at stereotyped gender roles.



Figure 2. Women playing with gender roles during *dansuom* performance, Surano, Ghana.  
Photo by author.

In west Africa, meanings embedded in lyrical metaphor and through ritual behaviours are the two most common means of protest women have at their disposal in music performances. Song lyrics are a particularly rich ground for expressing protest, as women often use encoded language to communicate their concerns regarding the community. There are several explanations for the predominance of analyses and interpretation of lyrics in research on west African women's music. First, women's music is described as being largely vocal; therefore it has drawn the attention of scholars whose interest lies in folklore and oral literature. Second, women's music is a rich area of exploration for scholars with an interest in metaphor and proverb. It is through these forms of indirect speech that women frequently negotiate power within their communities.

*I haven't even read Kwasi Yankah's book on indirect speech fully, and yet I feel that I could write the second volume of it now. I mean it is everywhere here. People share news and ask requests of you indirectly always, never directly. When there is something someone wants you to know they figure out who will tell this information to you and say it to them. And I am BARELY allowed to speak to anyone else in the house directly. It all must go through Papa. Which is really frustrating to me because I have generally felt that being direct was the best way to go. But I am not allowed to do so because of all the rules here. I tell you it makes me feel crazy. I guess it especially bothers me here because it feels like such a mechanism of control.* (Field notes, July 15, 2006)

Here I express my frustration with indirect speech, coming from a culture where 'speaking your mind' is highly valued. Yet traditionally in many west African cultures, this indirectness, through singing, is the only sanctioned public space for women's voices. Through songs, they criticize political leaders and chastise their husbands for wrongdoings. In many cultures across the region, women could not express these sentiments outside of the context of song performance (see Anyidoho 1994; Gueye 2004). Some scholars have expressed concern that the post-colonial experience is weakening women's position as oral narrators, as these 'traditional' venues have become less prominent in modern lives (Ogundupe-Leslie and Davies 1994: 5).

In *Hausa Women Sing*, Beverly Mack explores the poetry and song compositional processes of *waka*, a women's genre often sung by individuals within the home or family compound (2004). She argues that low-status Hausa singers "say and do what other women cannot, criticizing the status quo, and encouraging behaviour that is not normally condoned" (1983: 185). Mack examines the impact of gender roles within Hausa culture, noting that although women live in seclusion, they are able to express themselves through the performance of poetry and song (2004: 8). Zainab Haruna illustrated that in northern Nigeria, women have been influential in political and social arenas through their song commentary (2000: 160).

Ghanaian linguist Akosua Anyidoho described how women use *nwonkorɛ* song texts to "articulate views with which the community, or a section of it, is in accord" (1994:

142). Women's lyrics both praise and condemn men in the community, depending on their behaviour (1994: 152). She notes that the innovations in the genre have largely been due to the power of men's participation as managers and instrumentalists, and that this level of involvement has a direct correlation to the increased prestige of the genre (1994:146). Anyidoho further argues that men's involvement in *nnwonkorɛ* perpetuates the inequality of gender roles among the Akan (1993). While men were able to benefit from participation in the popular, lucrative female genre *nnwonkorɛ*, women could not have the same mobility to participate in the male song genre, *apae* (1993: 397-8). She examines traditional gender roles and how innovations in the genre have shifted the power to men's benefit.

### Dansuom III

*There is I think seven performers in all. While they rehearse there are no men, but when they perform, Osei's brother plays the calabash along with another woman. For the lie of me, I could not figure out why. It was no more difficult than what they were playing on the clappers, and he is not singing or any other way really a part of the spirit of the thing – i just have no idea why he was there.*

*Osei is trying to direct everything. Sing this, don't sing this, turn off the recorder now. I was again annoyed. It seems to be a common thing here – someone in various scenes takes over and decides he is boss. I just wanted the women to do what they would do, not what he is telling them to.*

*Oh, and that was the other thing, because of my weak Twi, Osei interpreted for the interview, and frankly very little of what he interpreted came from anyone's mouth but from his own head. So that was strange also. I just felt like ok, this is Osei's group; they started doing this because he encouraged them to and told them that every so often they will make a little money from it. So he is their patron of sorts, and while he is there he gets to be the big man come back to the small village, way overdressed and acting in a way that to me looks pompous, where he is barely even talking with people. Except to tell them to do something. (fieldnotes July 25, 2006)*

In the above excerpt, I'm questioning the role of Osei, and why a women's performance had to be under his thumb. I further am confused by the participation of Osei's brother in the event. In reflection, the role of these men likely had as much to do with the context of the performance as anything else. This was not a spontaneously occurring performance, but one that Osei had organized, one that would bring the village some money and him some status; in consideration of this, it's more understandable to me now, why he had the liberty to direct the performance.

### Performance that challenges and threatens established order

Performances that significantly challenge and threaten the established order in women's music in west Africa can be found most frequently in ritual settings and popular music

performance. Each of these performance forms have an inherent flexibility which allows for new innovations. Rituals are noted for being a space where norms can be overturned, and popular music creates a space for new constructions of identity and femininity, influenced by global markets. More surprisingly, there are several examples of this category – performance that challenges the established order—with music associated with major religious traditions such as Islam and Christianity, where such flexibility is perhaps not as immediately evident.

Chinyere Okafor describes how Igbo women innovatively engaged a new tradition of masking in ritual processes (1994). In the Izzi clan in Nigeria it was historically unacceptable for women to wear masks. Women developed the masked performance of Ogbodo-Uke by borrowing from men's masking performance. The mask ensemble consists of senior women who recruit young men to play drums. Okafor concludes that “women's masking reinforces the strength of women's power in Igbo culture as well as the flexibility of the tradition” (Okafor 1994: 20). She argues that women are not powerless to societal gender structures, but rather negotiate these institutions to their advantage.

The Malian popular music genre, *Wassoulou*, was traditionally dominated by ‘macho’ male vocalists who emulated the clothing and demeanor of Malian musician-hunter societies. By the late 1990s, several female *Wassoulou* singers became extremely popular on an international level, spurring interest in the way that women overturned traditional gender stereotypes in Mali, as illustrated in *Wassoulou* performance practice. Lucy Duran (2000) describes this phenomenon of popular female artists appropriating hunters' songs. Female singers utilize ritual symbols of hunting, which are traditionally taboo for women, such as rifles and camouflage outfits, to overturn gender roles. Heather Maxwell examined the relationship between politics and power in *Wassoulou* performance (2002). She found that *Wassoulou* singers created a unique aesthetic through the blending of indigenous and Western instruments and stylistic features. This balanced combination of aesthetic choices and the ability to socially negotiate Bamako music business dynamics determined the singers' success (Maxwell 2002).

Several authors address women's agency in relation to Muslim societies in west Africa, where female musical performance is often not widely accepted. Barbara Cooper analyzed Niger women's performance of the Hajj, the pilgrimage to Mecca (1999). Traditionally an exclusively male genre, women's ability to perform the pilgrimage, thus earning them the title of *hajjiya*, is relatively new and signifies a new social position for women. Cooper further argues that it is through this performance that women gain greater access to the cultural and spiritual capital of Islam (1999: 105). Margaret Kassam examines the role of women in popular culture in northern Nigeria (1996). She notes that in that male-dominated Muslim society, female popular singers are commonly associated with prostitution and waywardness (1996: 121). Yet, women voice their concern on social and political issues, and overturn sexual norms

of behaviour (1996: 122).

Koskoff's categories assist in defining the continuum of experiences for women in musical contexts in west Africa. These categories can aid researchers in understanding some of the common ways which women experience music. Researchers during the period between the 1970s and the early 21<sup>st</sup> century have had an interest in representing the disparities of power between genders in west African cultural contexts. This feminist agenda was later problematized by researchers who highlight the dual gender system model and more recently, those interested in developing an Africanist-based perspective on feminism.

### **Searching for the elusive research topic**

What I didn't recognize before my fieldwork experience was the significance of the gender role systems in west Africa, particularly the dual-gender system. In her study of queen mothers, Beverly Stoeltje examines these dual-gender systems which "include one or two female leaders who occupy positions of authority in parallel with the male leader, usually considered a chief or a king" (2004: 379). Ethnographers have noted that these dual-gender systems are evident in economic systems as well, and that women and children have been more adversely affected than men in recent times (Potash 1989: 195). Stoeltje has argued, however, that women have "developed strategies for coping effectively because they do understand the structure of power relations" (2002: vii). Several authors examine the performance of these strategies in musical contexts (see Anyidoho 1991; Modic 1996; Burns 2008).

This dual-gender system is evidenced by rituals and activities where men's and women's activities are separate from each other, and yet each serve complementary roles within society as a whole. While these systems are common to many societies in west Africa, the power of women may, in some cases, be shifting and diminishing in the post-colonial reality. Some scholars, such as Sowah Mensah (1990) and Joseph Adjaye (2004) argue that the post-colonial system has greatly impacted this dual-gender system, creating an imbalance in power. This, in turn, affects the performance of some genres such as women's ritual music, as communities, families and individuals balance between traditional forms of education, such as puberty rites, and post-colonial education systems, such as boarding schools wherein young people spend a good deal of time away from their family homes and communities (Mensah 1990:26).

#### *Ewe Ceremony*

*We went out to Aboba again on Saturday night. The ceremony was more intense this time, or maybe I was paying better attention. Many of the women became possessed during this time. It was later explained to me that they would become possessed by a certain spirit and as others would recognize the spirit then they would lead the person to be dressed in their costume. Different spirits take on different characteristics that are immediately understood by the group. The person may then offer some prophecies. One thing I immediately noticed*

*was that the possessed person seemed to sort of direct the event during the time. They could go around the ring to greet everyone, start and stop different rhythms, it was as if all the action was directed towards this spiritual entity, and they were in charge. It reminds me of the diagram of status that (Linguistics professor) Kofi Agyekum explained to me (which was immensely revealing to me and still something I have been trying to apply to my experiences). He basically gave this paradigm of status and power in any given relationship, and I wonder if he could add supernatural entities to the equation. In that ceremony, it was the entity, through the members of the community with the least status (women), who directed the event. I find this fascinating.* (Fieldnotes July 29, 2006)

The above excerpt demonstrates a new approach to understanding male and female gender roles in Ewe society, for example. Here, the women are subordinate and have limited power and access to resources. Yet in ritual context, they were the members of the community who would become possessed, and therefore the ones to direct the proceedings of the ritual, at least for the time they are possessed.

### **Recognizing our own stereotypes**

In terms of seeking a research topic, those initial conversations with University of Ghana professors and musicians reflected my limited stereotypes; I was seeking a current, viable tradition performed by women. In so doing I overlooked other possibly rich experiences, such as research with the Ewe women described above. As previously stated, I had a fixed idea of something that surely must exist somewhere in Ghana, and I just needed to dig deep enough to uncover it. Underneath this quest was a desire to demonstrate a Western feminist, perhaps overly simplified notion: to illustrate how women in the developing world (in this case, Ghana) did not have equal access to resources, specifically in expressive arts, either in the traditional music-ritual setting or the urban popular music one. Approaching my research topic in a less fixed, more exploratory way simply didn't occur to me during this maiden voyage into the field. Without a clearer understanding of the existing dual gender system, my search in the field was inevitably limited.

In *Music, Gender, and Culture*, Marcia Herndon and Suzanne Zeigler asserted that a prominence of stereotypes from ethnographers regarding women's participation in music has created a narrow perspective (1990:5). They argued that stereotypes such as the portrayal of women's participation as vocalists rather than as instrumentalists, for example, has limited the body of knowledge on women's involvement in musical settings.

In west African scholarship the most frequent references to women's music are examples where women accompany themselves with idiophones, or are accompanied by male instrumentalists. Several west Africanist authors have criticized the lack of attention given to women's performance of musical instruments (Hale 1994; Burns 2008). Thomas Hale's comparative study, "Griottes: Female Voices in west Africa,"



(1994) provides an overview of the scholarship on women's *griot* traditions in the historically Muslim Mande cultures found in many west African countries. He argues that men's *griot* traditions have received the bulk of attention in the scholarship, and he further emphasizes the need for a wider perspective of Mande culture that crosses national boundaries. Hale suggests the need to examine issues such as status, the relationship between instruments and gender, and how adjustments to global audiences have impacted musical performance (1994: 80).

*We spent the last weekend in June in Cape Coast, a historical city. The trip had the dual purpose of a little get-away and to meet Antoinette, the master drummer. The trotro ride to and fro was a bit dizzying, with miles of rocky roads — i think at least half of the way was under pretty serious construction. ...That day I also met Antoinette and her kids' group in Cape Coast. Over a few lessons I learned Tara, a piece from the northern part of Ghana, using brekete and donnos, and learned about how she came to be a master drummer. It was an inspiring story, in that she has had to struggle to be accepted as that. I've been questioning the possibility of further research with her, simply because there does not seem to be enough there to work with. I left Cape Coast feeling that I needed to start digging into some new directions, as I so far had focused my ideas on the prospect of working with her.* (email correspondence, July 6, 2006)

Ellen Koskoff argues that there is a tension “between ideas *about* people and the real experiences *of* people and which of these to privilege in our work” (Koskoff 2005:99). My example above demonstrated my limited ability to work with Antoinette, because of the aloofness I experienced during our first meeting. Again, I didn't take the time to understand more about her real experiences, developing a fixed image of her, as Koskoff cautions against. The research in the last decade illustrates the crux of these two poles.

Joseph Adjaye's research among the Krobo, one of the Andagme-speaking peoples in southeastern Ghana, examines the confluence of symbolism, music, and dance in a Dipo girls' initiation ceremony (2004). Despite the powerful quality of songs, dances and other actions within the Dipo ceremony, Adjaye argues that there is a multiplicity of experiences rather than a static, homogenous one. He describes how this ceremony, while continuing to persist and be meaningful for the community as a whole, no longer actually serves its stated purpose, to transform girls into women. “Dipo evokes the past through the present into the future...[and] is a mediator of tradition through modernity” (Adjaye 2004: 79). Such a ritual invokes multiple meanings: for the families it's a source of pride and joy, while for the initiates themselves, the experience is one of anxiety and ambivalence, and does not actually place them on equal footing as an adult. Adjaye recognizes that there are official voices and reasons for the enactment of ritual performance, and yet suggests that for each performance event, there are multiple voices and therefore, multiple agents.

Research on women's music in west Africa has tended to align with particular theoretical objectives and political agendas. Adjaye's argument shows an emphasis on privileging lived experiences over theoretical constructs. His research illustrates the multiplicity of experiences of individuals within a society.

In *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses*, Nigerian scholar Oyeronke Oyewumi argues that Western social categories of gender are biological, and that they have been arbitrarily applied to African cultures (1997: ix). Oyewumi suggests that "Africa is used merely as a vehicle for articulating Western preoccupations and modes of understanding" (2005: xiii). She argues that gender studies must take a very different turn if they are to accurately portray women's lived experiences there. "Our concern is twofold: that Africa must be studied on its own terms, and that African knowledge must be a factor in the formulation of social theory" (2005: xix).

Maramé Gueye's (2004) analysis of textual meanings in Wolof wedding songs demonstrates an African feminist perspective. Through her ethnographic research, Gueye demonstrates that the agendas of feminism, and the conclusions drawn from these, are often not applicable to African cultures. She describes how the lyrics of three genres of nuptial songs offer a broader understanding of how women negotiate power within the numerous relationships established through the institution of marriage. Gueye concludes that women's verbal arts in Africa need more serious attention, and that these nuptial songs, beyond just being a ritual or entertainment form, serve an important purpose for women in society. She demonstrates how women "claim agency and are very much aware of the many oppressive factors that exist in their culture" (2004: 201). Gueye challenges Western scholars to critically examine how African women claim power in their lives, which may differ drastically from models drawn from Western feminism. She states the importance of nuptial songs is that "it provides women with a space to voice a female identity that is grounded in Wolof culture and that cannot be interpreted outside that environment" (2004: 202).

In *Female Voices from an Ewe Dance-drumming Community in Ghana*, ethnomusicologist James Burns developed a concept of 'multivocality,' in an analysis similar to Adjaye's. Burns argues that among the Ewe in southeastern Ghana, the women continue to uphold traditional 'Culture' (Burns' interpretation of his consultants' Ewe term) through the Dzigbordi dance-drumming group in Dzodze. He illustrates that women are the primary carriers of 'Cultural' religious traditions, largely because they are more likely to be illiterate and members of various Ewe shrines (2008: 109). He argues further that the largest numbers of musical artists are women, although the literature on Ewe music has not significantly represented this (2008: 32).

Through interviewing several members of Dzigbordi, Burns intersperses observations regarding their dance style with the woman's life story, their own thoughts regarding their dance, and the message they each convey through movement (2008: 169). Burns illustrates how each dancer personally interprets the events of their lives,

creating a message through song and movement that they hope will educate and inspire their community in meaningful ways. By doing this Burns demonstrates a methodology grounded in African feminism, in that he is conscientiously including the diverse layers of women's direct experiences. One central theme is that women are empowered through their ability to perform social critiques (2008:221). He further argues that research on oral traditions "requires a new set of paradigms that highlight the creative *process* in addition to its transitory *products*" (2008: 170).

Scholars of performance in modern African contexts are challenged to weave together seemingly divergent threads – of both scholarship (as in Gueye's critique of the application of Western feminist ideology to west African women) as well as of the cultures themselves (as in Adjaye's deconstruction of the superficially unified voice of Dipo ritual). Recognition of the multitude of voices within a ritual performance is intricate and encourages deeper levels of understanding and knowledge. Scholars of this body of literature also must continue to consider whether the application of certain theories – feminist or otherwise – are appropriate to the specific cultural context of their study.

### **Departure – conclusion**

Gwendolyn Mikell argues that the contributors to the edited volume *African Feminism* adopted a fresh perspective on African women in two significant ways. First, the authors assumed that "there is a logical and intrinsic tie between the social and ideological structure of communities...and the gender-familial relationships of local areas" (Mikell 1997:5). Second, the authors demonstrated that "African women perceive these ties and are active participants in these intrinsic relationships in either supportive or challenging roles" (Mikell 1997:5).

Research conducted on the topic of women and music in Africa over the last ten years has begun to highlight the importance of gender relationships on a local level, and the active role that women play within these relationships and communities. Yet there are gaps in the scholarship that addresses women's participation in music in west Africa, for social, political, and geographical reasons. For example, several authors have argued that women challenge and critique social norms through song lyrics, yet it is unclear whether this form of challenge has had a substantial impact on individual behaviours in local communities. Some areas of west Africa, such as Liberia, have experienced greater political and economic instability, making research problematic or impossible (Monts 1989, Schmidt 1989). Meanwhile, other geographic areas have scarcely gained any attention, such as the upper Sudanic region, and smaller nations with less academic infrastructure to foster scholarship, such as Gambia, Togo and Benin.

Here, I again dialogue with my email correspondence and fieldnotes regarding my evolving understanding of my experiences with social interactions in Ghana, particularly with women.

*I thought I came here to learn about music, but what I've learned most about is humanity. There are people everywhere who are helpful and a few who aren't. There are different ways of communicating, but it seems to me that basic respect and humility (and laughter) can go a long way. Perhaps people in all cultures, particularly in urban areas, are pulled between individualistic and communalistic tendencies. Even in this modern city, though, it seems that what is valued – and even essential – is the connections that you have with other people, the relationships that you build and the interactions you have. Any individual act often involves the cooperation of many. At first to me this seemed extravagant and inefficient, but as the orange seller led me by the hand in the busy transportation hub ('Circle') yesterday, I felt immensely grateful – both for her guidance, as well as for her company. It has taught me plenty about the simple pleasure of just being together. (email excerpt, July 28, 2006)*

It was only in reflection towards the end of my trip, and in my musings since, that I can claim to have begun to understand the intricate web of social relationships in Ghana. In the above excerpt, the simple beauty of human kindness shines, an act that spoke volumes to me about the ways that Ghanaian women interacted with others, even an 'outsider' like myself. It demonstrated a sense of hospitality, that in my experiences in the U.S. since my field work, I have tried to emulate, particularly with African visitors. The following excerpt illustrates the inner tension that was common for me while trying to understand my role as a woman, relating to Ghanaians, and particularly to Ghanaian women.

*I also finally came to an understanding of something else that I felt very uncomfortable about. I had known it before, I was just able to put it together differently. Papa (the head of the household where I lived) wanted to send Judith (a young woman who worked for him) to get a taxi for me to go the airport. When I came back downstairs I asked him again where I should go to get a taxi. He became very upset with me and said, "I told you I would get it, why are you asking me this?" I was very respectful and then finally mustered the courage to answer his question by saying, because it is uncomfortable for me, in my country we don't usually send someone to do something, if we are capable of going for it ourselves.*

*Then I thought through that. And in general, it is true. It never ceased to amaze me the number of people who would become involved in completing a very simple task [in Ghana]. It seemed strange to me at first, and especially if it was a task for my benefit, I became very uncomfortable and embarrassed – sort of this, oh, I don't want all this fuss made over me. But I began to realize that it was not (just) because I was white that people would go and do tasks for me, it was just the way it was. (Fieldnotes August 2, 2006)*

Ghanaian scholar Sowah Mensah argues that African women's access to power and status was adversely affected by post-colonial educational and religious institutions (Mensah 1990: 11). He posits that there is a direct correlation between declining participation in women's associations and performance genres and women's diminishing power in modern Ghanaian society (1990: 12). Adjaye's research with a Dipo initiation ceremony illustrates that girls' experiences have been radically affected by post-colonialism, while Monts argues that women's power has diminished in Islamic societies.

Were my interactions with Judith, who was my daughter's teacher, and the orange seller, a result of post-colonial subordination? On closer examination, the discomfort I felt in the situation with Papa and Judith was because it seemed that she had no free will; if she wanted to maintain her employment with Papa, Judith had to do whatever he asked of her – go for a taxi, buy a few eggs, take my daughter to the corner for 'toffees' (candy). The orange seller did not seem to be operating from the same sense of social obligation, but rather that she felt compassion for my confused state and wanted to help a stranger in need, which therefore did not cause the same discomfort in my initial written reflections.

A few years after my fieldwork, I spoke to a colleague who had spent over a decade in southern Africa. I described to her my discomfort in Papa's household, how I wanted to wash my own clothes. She explained to me that to them, this appeared not only stingy, but also absurd. Why would I withhold that potential income from them, when not only most white people, but middle and upper class Africans would hire someone to wash their clothes. It was seen as part of the system of economy, part of the way that members of the community exchanged resources. That conversation put into perspective so many experiences I had with women in Ghana, wherein I didn't understand this larger picture of social economics, and how my desire to 'do for myself' (as I was raised to) was seen as stingy and stubborn, not industrious and noble. With post-colonialism came new redistributions of power and authority, and as Mensah argued, women's access to power was stressed and complicated by these new arrangements. The current gender roles, and sometimes subordination are, it can be assumed, the result of both pre-Colonial and post-Colonial times. Mensah suggests a return to more traditional expressive forms as a means of equalizing gender roles.

This review of publications from existing research on women and music in west Africa, and my experience attempting to engage in field research, reveals a need for further investigation into the ways that women's experiences as musicians have been altered and affected in contemporary, post-colonial times. It is hoped that collaborative efforts by 'insider' and 'outsider' scholars will soon add to collaborative efforts by 'insider' members of the cultures studied and 'outsider' scholars engaged in such research. Such efforts are clearly necessary in order to more fully understand women's participation in music in west African contexts.

## References

- Adjaye, Joseph K.  
 2004 *Boundaries of Self and Other in Ghanaian Popular Culture*. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers.
- Agovi, Kofi  
 1989 "Sharing Creativity: Group Performance of Nzema Ayabomo Maiden Songs." *The Literary Griot*. 1(2): 1-43.  
 1990 "Words, Music, Dance and Parody in Confusions: The Performance of Nzema Avudwene Songs." *Institute of African Studies*. Legon, Ghana: 1-7.  
 1992 "Gender, Selfhood and Social Change in Nzema Ayabomo maiden Songs." *The Literary Griot*. 4(1): 54-74.
- Ampene, Kwasi  
 1999 "The creative process in *nnwonkoro*: a female song tradition of the Akan of Ghana." Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pittsburgh.  
 2005 *Female Song Tradition and the Akan of Ghana: The Creative Process of Nnwonkorɔ*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate.
- Amu, Misonu  
 1999 "Creativity and Tradition in Nnwonkoro: The Contribution of Maame Afua Abasa." *Research Review* 15(1): 1-14.
- Aning, Ben A.  
 1964 "*Adenkum*, a Study of the Music of Akan Female Bands." Post-Graduate Diploma, University of Ghana, Institute of African Studies.  
 1969 "Nnwonkorɔ: A Study of Stability and Change in Traditional Music." Master's Thesis, University of Ghana.  
 1973 "Varieties of African Music and Musical Types." *The Black Perspective in Music*, 1(1): 16-23.
- Anyidoho, Akosua  
 1993 "Gender and Language Use: The Case of Two Akan Verbal Art Forms." Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Texas at Austin.  
 1994 "Tradition and Innovation in Nnwonkoro, an Akan Female Verbal Genre." *Research in African Literatures* 25(3): 141-159.
- Burns, James  
 2008 *Female Voices from an Ewe Dance-drumming Community in Ghana*. Unpublished manuscript, with permission from author.
- Butler, Judith  
 1990 *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge.
- Cooper, Barbara M.  
 1999 "The Strength is in the Song: Muslim Personhood, Audible Capital, and Hausa Women's Performance of the Hajj." *Social Text*, 17(3): 87-109.

- Dje Dje, Jacqueline Cogdell  
 1985 "Women and Music in Sudanic Africa." *More than Drumming: Essays on African and Afro-Latin American Music and Musicians*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press.  
 2000 "West Africa: An Introduction." *The Garland Handbook of African Music* edited by Ruth Stone, 140-168. New York: Garland.
- Duran, Lucy  
 2000 "Women, Music, and the "Mystique" of Hunters in Mali." *The African Diaspora: A Musical Perspective* edited by Ingrid Monson. New York: Routledge.  
 2007 "Ngaraya: Women and musical mastery in Mali." *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*. 70(3): 569-602. Gueye, Marame  
 2004 "Wolof Wedding Songs: Women Negotiating Voice and Space Through Verbal Art." Ph.D. Dissertation, Binghamton--SUNY.
- Hale, Thomas  
 1994 "Griottes: Female Voices from West Africa." *Research in African Literature*. 25(3): 71-92.
- Hampton, Barbara L.  
 1978 "The Contiguity Factor in Ga Music." *The Black Perspective in Music* 6(1): 32-48.  
 1982 "Music and Ritual Symbolism in the Ga Funeral." *Yearbook for Traditional Music*. 14: 75-105.
- Haruna, Zainab  
 2000 "More Than Being Housewives: Images and Roles of Women In Folk Music and Its Performance in Northern Nigeria." *Ethnologies* 22(1): 139-163.
- Hawkesworth, Mary  
 1997 "Confounding Gender." *Signs* 22(3): 649-685.
- Heath, Deborah  
 1994 "The Politics of Appropriateness and Appropriation: Recontextualizing Women's Dance in Urban Senegal." *American Ethnologist* 21(1). 88-104.
- Herndon, Marcia and Susanne Ziegler  
 1990 *Music, Gender, and Culture*. Wilhelmshaven: International Council for Traditional Music.
- Kassam, Margaret Hauwa  
 1996 "Some Aspects of Women's Voices form Northern Nigeria." *African Languages and Cultures* 9(2): 111-125.
- Koskoff, Ellen  
 1989 (1987) *Women and Music in Cross-Cultural Perspective*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

- 2005 “(Left Out in) Left (the Field): The Effects of Post-postmodern Scholarship on Feminist and Gender Studies in Musicology and Ethnomusicology, 1990-2000.” *Women and Music* 9: 90-98.
- Lakoff, George and Mark Johnson  
1999 *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and Its Challenge to Western Thought*. New York: Basic Books.
- Lange, Barbara Ros  
1996 “Gender Politics and Musical Performers in the Iste Gyulekezet: A Fieldwork Account.” *Journal of American Folklore* 109(431): 60-76.
- Mack, Beverly M.  
1983 “Songs from Silence: Hausa Women’s Poetry.” *Ngambika: Studies of Women in African Literature*, edited by Carole Boyce Davis and Anne Adams Graves. Trenton, NJ: Africa World.  
2004 *Muslim Women Sing: Hausa Popular Song*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Maxwell, Heather  
2002 *Destiny’s Divas: Wassalou Singing, Music Ideologies, and the Politics of Performance in Bamako, Mali*. Ph.D Dissertation, Indiana University.
- Mensah, P. Sowah  
1990 “The place of women in African music.” M.A. Thesis, University of Minnesota.
- Mikell, Gwendolyn  
1997 “Introduction.” In *African Feminism*, edited by Gwendolyn Mikell. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press: 1-50.
- Modic, Elizabeth Kate  
1994 “Negotiating power: A study of the Ben Ka Di women’s association in Bamako, Mali.” *Africa Today*. 41(2): 25-38.  
1996. “Song, performance, and power: The Ben Ka Di women’s association in Bamako, Mali.” Ph.D. dissertation, Indiana University.
- Monts, Lester P.  
2000 “Islam in Liberia.” *The Garland Handbook of African Music* edited by Ruth Stone. New York: Garland. 51-73.  
1989 “Vai Women’s Roles in Music, Masking, and Ritual Performance.” *African Musicology: Current Trends*, Jacqueline Cogdell DjeDje and William G. Carter, eds. Los Angeles: UCLA African Studies Center.
- Nketia, J.H. Kwabena  
1963a *Folk Songs of Ghana*. London: Oxford University Press.  
1963b *African Music in Ghana*. Great Britain: Northwestern University Press.  
1969 (1955) *Funeral Dirges of the Akan People*. New York: Negro Universities Press.  
2005 *Ethnomusicology and African Music: Collected Papers, Volume One*. Accra, Ghana: Afram Publications (Ghana) Ltd.



- Ogede, Ode S.  
 1994 "Counters to male domination: Images of pain in Igede women's songs. *Research in African Literatures*. 25(3): 105-129.
- Ogundupe-Leslie, Molar and Carole Boyce Davies  
 1994 "Introduction." *Research in African Literatures* 25(3): 1-6.
- Okafor, Chinyere Grace  
 1994 "From the heart of masculinity: Ogboo-Uke women's masking." *Research in African Literature*. 25(3): 7-25.
- Okereke, Grace  
 1994 "The birth song as a medium for communicating woman's maternal destiny in the traditional community." *Research in African Literature*. 25(3): 19-38.
- Ottenberg, Simon  
 1983 "Artistic and Sex Roles in a Limba Chiefdom." *Female and Male in West Africa*, edited by Christine Oppong. London: George Allen and Unwin: 76-90.
- Oyewumi, Oyeronke  
 1997 *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.  
 ed. 2005 *African Gender Studies: A Reader*. Hampshire, England: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Phillips, Ruth B.  
 1978 "Masking in Mende Sande Society Initiation Rituals." *Africa* 48(3): 265-278.  
 1995 *Representing Women: Sande Masquerades of the Mende of Sierra Leone*. Los Angeles, CA: UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History.
- Potash, Betty.  
 1989 "Gender Relations in Sub-Saharan Africa." *Gender and Anthropology*, edited by Sandra Morgen. Washington DC: American Anthropological Association: 78-90.
- Robertson, Carol E.  
 1989 (1987) "Power and Gender in the Musical Experiences of Women." In *Women and Music in Cross-Cultural Perspective*, edited by Ellen Koskoff. Urbana: University of Illinois Press. 225-244.
- Sarpong, Peter  
 1977 *Girls' Nubility Rites*. Tema: Ghana Publishing Company.
- Scharfenberger, Angela  
 2006 Email correspondence, July 6.  
 2006 Fieldnotes, July 10.  
 2006 Fieldnotes, July 15.  
 2006 Fieldnotes, July 25.

- 2006 Email correspondence, July 27.
- 2006 Email correspondence. July 28
- 2006 Fieldnotes, July 29.
- 2006 Fieldnotes, August 2.
- Schmidt, Cynthia E.
- 1989 "Womanhood, Work and Song among the Kpelle of Liberia." *African Musicology: Current Trends*, Jacqueline Cogdell DjeDje and William G. Carter, eds. Los Angeles: UCLA African Studies Center: 125- 146.
- 1990 "Group Expression and Performance Among Kpelle Women's Associations of Liberia." In *Music, Gender, and Culture*, Marcia Herndon and Susanne Ziegler. Willhelmshaven: Notzel (Intercultural Music Studies I).
- Schulz, Dorothea E.
- 2001 *Perpetuating the Politics of Praise: Jeli Singers, Radios, and Political Mediation in Mali*. Koln: Koppe.
- Stoeltje, Beverly
- 2004 "Queen Mothers" and "Gender Representations in African Folklore." In *African Folklore*, edited by Kwesi Yankah and Philip M. Peek. New York: Routledge: 457-459 and 237-238.
- 2002 "Introduction." *Africa Today, Special Issue: Women, Language and Law in Africa II* 49(2): vii-xiv.
- Turner, Victor
- 1967 *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- 1982 *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play*. New York: PAJ Publications.