LIVENESS, MULTIFOCALITY, AND EAVESDROPPING IN ETHNOMUSICOLOGICAL FIELDWORK RESEARCH AT GHANAIAN FESTIVALS AND ROYAL FUNERALS

by

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Abstract: Ethnomusicological research that involves live, sprawling, multifocal and integrated ceremonies often present liveness-induced challenges that may undermine the authenticity of the research outcomes. This article describes multifocal and integrated music making performances such as festivals and royal funerals in Ghana and how the vagaries of liveness are largely responsible for nuanced peculiarities which every live musical performance assumes. The article argues in favour of a central role for eavesdropping among informed participating audience members in data gathering efforts as an important strategy for dealing with liveness-induced contingencies in multifocal and integrated performance events.

Keywords: Liveness, multifocality, eavesdropping, ethics, performance, *kplejoo*, festivals, royal funerals, participating audience, Ghana.

Introduction

The main argument of this article is that eavesdropping on informed participating audience members may constitute a viable source of data for research in live and multifocal performance events. I consider that participating audience members may double their roles as sources of information about a particular event based on privileged insider knowledge. As such, while they may not be part of the inner core performers, they do participate in the production of an event. Eavesdropping, according to Hage, is a *habitus* that involves the deployment of the bodily capacity to hear, "to meet the challenges that a specific social milieu throws at you by the mere fact of your living and evolving in it" (2014: 145). In this essay, the term is invoked as listening to the verbal and bodily reactions of participating audience members in a live public performance in real time.

This article examines the liveness factor in ethnographic research, particularly research that involves multifocal performances as exemplified in most Ghanaian traditional festivals and royal funerals. A live event is heard and seen at the very time of its occurrence. Live events are open, processual, and ephemeral, and like performance, the only evidence that a live event is taken place is through a present-absence, agency, and embodiment (Salter 2010, Schechner 2007). This is true even of musical performances that are based on scores; each live rendition is bound to be marked with uniqueness, no matter how subtle the differences. Margaret Drewal argues about this variability of the

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performance practice as one that "challenges the notion of an objective social reality as well as the notion that society and human beings are products." She asserts, "Not only is performance production, but both society and human beings are performative, always already processually under construction" (1991: 4).

The definition that privileges liveness as existing in the here-and-now to the exclusion of technologically mediated forms has generated opposing scholarship. Scholars such as Auslander (2008), Fry (1993) and Salter (2010) have contested this binary opposition arguing for the recognition of the "live and the mediatised as parallel forms that participate in the same cultural economy" (Auslander 2008: 5). They base their argument on the extensive levels of entanglement of human lives with technology in contemporary times. My view, however, is that the mediatisation argument should not be too generalised as if to suggest that all aspects of human culture and everyday life have become dependent on the media or technology. There are several African rituals that hardly entertain any form of technological mediation even when they are performed in the open. A more recent example is the late *Asantehemaa's* gold dust adorned body which was laid in state in Kumasi for four consecutive days during the funeral in early 2018. The body and aspects of the accompanying rituals were opened to public viewing but not to the media, and neither was any form of electronic coverage allowed. During such events, scouts may look out for violators to confiscate their equipment. Where people have managed to escape with secret recordings, their cameras have sometimes drawn a blank. Such ritual events demand that the liveness experience "…must be examined not as a global, undifferentiated phenomenon but within specific cultural and social contexts" (*ibid*.: 3).

Multifocality is originally a medical term which refers to simultaneous presence or multiple foci- "arising from or pertaining to many sites or locations" in the same body (Miller-Keane Encyclopedia 2003). When applied to the arts, multifocal events are simultaneous performances of art forms such as singing, drumming and dancing, possession dramas and magical arts, performed by different sets of artists, at adjoining locations, within the same arena (Koen 2011). Multifocal performances encourage sections of participating audience members to move freely from one presentation to another. The blend of sounds from the multiple simultaneous activities, particularly drumming sessions, often creates the impression of chaos. However, each event constitutes an important unit of the composite event and is united to it both thematically and contextually. Often, each unit represents an interest within the larger polity. Hence, the multiplicity of performance units in traditional festivals and royal funerals in particular, tends to speak to a spirit of community and social power.

The challenge in research associated with integrated and multifocal performances is that any failure on a researcher's part to be present at the right places and times could mean the loss of critical information. Such losses could take an entire year to remedy because of the seasonality of festivals and the more occasional royal funerals. In the case of festivals, it may be possible to avert such losses altogether by viewing them every year. However, those that involve the more unpredictable and complex possession

dramas have the tendency to render any hope of recovery through regular attendance a game of chance because the new experience may be a one-off occurrence. In 2008, I missed a rare opportunity to capture on camera the dramatic acts of the principal deity called *Sakumɔ* at the Chief Priest's residence at Tema. The deity does not manifest at every *kplejoo* event, but when it does, the spectacle becomes the climax of that year's possession drama. It would mount the two mediums simultaneously and the two half-conscious mediums would perform a synchronised dance while sitting on their stools. They would proceed in synchrony to the drummers and convey the deity's greetings to them. Then they would rise to their feet and continue their dance in unison for a while. The entire event may last a few minutes. I have not chanced upon this rare drama again.

Studying the "liveness factor" in multifocal musical events is an interest in ethnomusicological research as may be evinced in the centrality of context and human agency in ethnographic and performance-oriented studies (Merriam 1992, Drewal 1991, Nketia 1985). What is new, is the emphasis this article places on the concept of "liveness" as the key factor responsible for the nuanced peculiarities that every live event assumes, even when the event represents a repetition of an earlier one. The assumption is that beyond the question of language difficulties, there are other data-gathering challenges that are associated with live and multifocal musical performances, particularly for ethnomusicologists or ethnographers who conduct fieldwork single-handedly. A strategic intervention such as high-fidelity audio and video recording, for example, may be a useful technique in dealing with the "liveness factor" in multifocal communal performances. This article instead examines the centrality of participating audience members as an important strategy for dealing with liveness-induced contingencies in field research. At the heart of such a field technique is a working knowledge of the local language as a necessary aid to eavesdropping on the participating audience members for their verbal and bodily interjections, and for taking advantage of the snowballing interactions the initial contact could induce.

Kplejoo festival, royal funerary, and the complexity of the field

The interest in the above topic and the methodological perspectives proffered, have been motivated by a fieldwork experience which had nearly resulted in failure at the 2011 episode of the annual *kplejoo* festival in Tema. The visit was one of many field trips to study the underlying aesthetic values and performance conventions of the festival. The visit was in the third year of a larger study on "traditional festivals as integrated performances" for my doctoral research. The prospect of failure was occasioned by what appeared a faulty research technique, which was to observe the performances and then speak to the authorities in their respective homes. In the end, I had to respond by going beyond my prepared field technique to gain access to the information and that was to eavesdrop on sections of the participating audience members of the community.

The *kplejoo* festival, the apotheosis of the socio-cultural life of the Ga community of Tema, is celebrated by nine out of the ten major coastal Ga-Dangme communities of Ghana. Ada, the most easterly, is the only exception (Nii-Dortey 2012). Now, however,

only two communities, in Nungua and Tema, continue to celebrate *kplejoo* as their foremost annual festival. For the other Ga-Dangme communities, *kplejoo* has been reduced to a perfunctory ritual necessity which they perform to herald their annual *homowo* festival celebrations. Tema is always the first to celebrate *kplejoo* every year, between the last and first weeks of March and April; and Nungua follows in the first week of July. The two communities are neighbours situated around 20 and 30 kilometres to the east of Accra.

The name *kplejoo* is a synthesis of two words, *kple* and *joo*. *Kple* is the name of the Ga religion and it means "all-encompassing"– a designation native Gas address only to the Supreme God. For them, *kple* is a religion of the Supreme God (Field 1961[1937], Kilson 1971). *Joo* is the Ga word for dance, but the word may also be a generic term for composite performances that involve singing, drumming, dancing, and drama. *Kplejoo*, therefore, means "*kple* dance or *kple* performance." In both communities that continue to commemorate *kplejoo,* the celebrations are always described in performative terms such as *wɔŋjò kple,* meaning "we are dancing *kple*"; *wɔŋla kple,* meaning, "we are singing *kple*"; *wɔŋshwɛ kple,* which means, "we are playing/performing *kple*", and *wɔŋshí kple,* which means "we are pounding or stamping *kple*" (with the feet). It is obvious that religious rituals and music making constitute the key features of the *kplejoo* festival (Nii-Dortey 2012).

Generally, *kple* music making can be categorised into two sections. The first is the more sacred type that features the ritual drums, songs and dances performed solely by trained ritual officials (see Figure 1). Sacred *kple* songs are mostly sung in a mixture of

Figure 1. Medium-dancers and drummers performing the opening *kple* sacred dance, 3 April 2011. Photograph by Author.

three Ghanaian languages; Ga, Akan and the defunct *obutu* language of the autochthonic coastal Guan (Field 1961, Nii-Dortey 2012, Nketia 1988). The majority of the Ga believe that sacred *kple* songs have no human composers. The ritual officials associate their origins with the gods and ancestors, and this is how they rationalise about the sacred usages and historical relevance of such songs. The role of ordinary community members in such sacred performances best fits what Finnegan describes as a "general separation between audience and performers, but with some active contributions by those who otherwise perform an audience role" (1987: 92). Although those viewing cannot take part in such performances, they may surreptitiously sing along, interject and even dash into the arena to throw money on the performers as a sign of appreciation. Songs of this musical type belong to the anhemitonic pentatonic tonal category.

Structurally, most sacred *kple* songs have two major divisions - a solo declamatory introduction which is sung without instrumental accompaniment, and a relatively shorter but repetitive chorus that is performed in stricter tempo and accompanied on the *kple* drums. It is the accompanied second section to which the mediums may dance. The mediums, under the inspiration of their respective deities, are also responsible for introducing fresh songs, but the singing is immediately taken over by the *Olayi* (the *kple* lead singer) who guides it into the second section. Apart from announcing new songs, the introductory section signals to the percussionists the rhythmic accompaniment to select for the second section. Every freshly introduced sacred song follows this pattern of an unaccompanied introduction followed by an accompanied, danceable and repetitive section. This makes *kple* sacred performance sessions appear characteristically intermittent and less fluid when compared with other Ga musical forms.

The second *kple* musical type is the secular and more participatory of the two: it features all the praise and lampooning songs performed for purposes of social control. This *kple* song type, often in simple and compound duple time, lends itself readily to street carnivals by youth bands accompanied mostly on makeshift percussion instruments, thumping the ground with the feet, and the use of very colourful costumes. There can be as many as ten youth bands participating in the yearly festival and their memberships range between fifty and two hundred. Community participation in the performances of the *kple* bands is so fluid that it sometimes becomes difficult to separate members of the community from the real performers. Unlike the first, the second musical tradition falls within the seven tone (heptatonic) scale and has known composers made up of ordinary young men and women who belong to youth carnival bands.

Joint *kplejoo* performances, which are held four times per year at the central *kpletsoshishi* arena on Fridays and Saturdays, provide a sanctioned context for featuring both the sacred and profane musical traditions of Tema at the same time.[1] The dual arrangement encourages yearly performances that are designed to hold officialdom to account through satire, role reversal, and lampooning songs on the same platform

[1] *Kpletsoshishi* is the Ga word for "under the *kple* tree", and it is the venue for very important events involving the entire community.

with sacred *kple* songs and dances dedicated to the gods. This explains why all ritual officials of the Tema community must be present at such joint presentations. Highly animated youth bands proceed from the streets and swarm the *kpletsoshishi* arena in quick succession, singing and chanting their own lampooning songs, and thumping the ground as they dance. Each band has its own identifiable mascot, flag and a new story to reveal through songs.

Each band is permitted to perform one hit song at a time, then they would dance off into the streets for other bands to have their turn. Often, such presentations come with much uneasiness for the officials in particular who are the main target of the lampoons. When there are no youth bands at the *kpletsoshishi*, the team of sacred drummers and medium-dancers would take over the space to perform their own version of *kple* music until another band returns to the field (see Figure 2). Such brief moments often provide a rare respite at *kpletsoshishi* and create space for appreciating the sacred music and dances and their accompanying props in context. The two tonal traditions not only define the sacred and secular binaries of Ga musical culture but also embody the generality of their socio-cultural values and beliefs (Hampton 1978, Nketia 1988). This is the reason the joint performances not only complement the street dances but also mark the climax of *kplejoo* celebrations for each ritual year.

Figure 2. Mediums/Dancers being accompanied by a horn blower at *kpletsoshishi*, 3 April, 2011. Photograph by Author.

The challenge of multifocality in field research

As may be inferred, the multifocal performances described above present research challenges to a lone field worker interested in understanding the underlying aesthetic conventions of the entire festival. Fundamental among the challenges is the sheer size of the performance area, which stretches beyond the *Kpletsoshishi* area (the size of a football field) into the streets of the town. Other challenges include the number of groups performing independently and simultaneously within that vast space, and the sheer number of people involved in such activities which make it difficult to collect data. It is important to add that these performance features and the research challenges they represent are not peculiar to *kplejoo.* They are indeed common to many indigenous African performance arts including festivals and royal funerals (Cole 2003). Where appropriate, I will refer to another event I attended recently to further illustrate the concept of multifocality in Ghanain musical performances and the research challenges they represent.

At the royal funeral of the late *Asantehemaa*, Nana Afia Kobi Serwaa Ampem II, I counted in excess of five *nnwomkorɔ* bands[2], the same number of *kete* bands[3], magical art performances, and processions of chiefs and their retinues. The procession of chiefs was a regular feature of the funeral, as several chiefs from various parts of Africa and the African diaspora marched in with their musical ensembles to mourn with the bereaved Asante monarch, Nana Osei Tutu II.

The event which took place in the Asante capital, Kumasi, from the 16 to 19 January 2017, was held over an area of approximately 200 square metres within the *Manhyia* Palace. Additionally, there were other activities taking place on the main durbar ground, the size of a standard football field, where I counted 64 paramount and sub-chiefs in attendance. Each chief had his own retinue and drum ensemble. In the inner perimeter of the *Ohemaa's* palace, where the body was laid in state, were seated other drum ensembles who were performing as mourners walked in and out to view the body. Movement in and out of the palace was impeded, and the multiple drumming activities filled the immediate *Manhyia* atmosphere with a continuous droning sound. While that sound served the intended purpose of honouring the memory of the queen, its blurry resonance constantly interfered with recordings of individual ensemble performances. The question is: in such multi-focussed presentations, how may one field worker cover such events so that the information obtained is comprehensive? And if one were to make a choice between two or more activities being performed simultaneously, how may this be effected particularly if one were experiencing it for the first time? This was why, beyond the filming of many of the proceedings, eavesdropping on the participating audience members was appreciated as a reliable strategy to help one gain an understanding of the performance.

2 *Nnwomkorɔ* is originally a female traditional musical ensemble of the Akan of Ghana. In recent years, however, a few men may be admitted into *nnwomkorɔ* bands, mainly as instrumentalists.

3 *Kete* is originally a drum ensemble for Akan royalty.

In Tema, the additional incentive for eavesdropping as a research technique was posed by the flurry of verbal interjections emanating from the participating audience members. This made it difficult to follow proceedings. It was like a verbal game in which highly animated community members (mainly women) displayed their dexterity and knowledge of the verbal arts with a bluff. One would hear loud roars of acclamation that often spread from one end of the arena to the other like a Mexican wave, and observe flashes of movements by highly animated persons who showered gifts on their star performers or spread pieces of cloth on the floor for the mediums to dance across. The roars would mostly include specific words and expressions like *mo! mo! mo!*, meaning "well done." This word of appreciation is particularly addressed to youth band members for mustering the courage to criticise officials who had done wrong during the year.

Other expressions included; *nyɛ'ŋ tsere noko oo!*, meaning, "you (people/performers) are blowing our minds"; *nyɛ'ŋ kɛɛ noko oo!*, meaning, "you (people) are saying something (declaiming)"; and *nyɛ he yɛ fɛo nɔ'akpa,* meaning, "you are looking beautiful indeed." The expressions were attached to drum rhythms, dance movements, and songs. Interjections such as *eŋɔɔ ei!*, meaning, "this is sweet indeed (that is interesting)"; or *mɛni ŋɔɔ nɛkɛ*, meaning, "what a sweet rendition this is"; *mɛni yɔɔ fɛo nɛkɛ,* meaning, "what a beautiful scene this is", seemed to have general reference to a myriad of presentations and incidents (including choreographed dance movements, uniformed performers, and paraphernalia) because they were repeated over and over. Other expressions came in the form of appellations and praise names; such as *katamanso bὲέma* (the man of *katamanso*)[4], *Naa yoo* (grandmother goddess) and *oodemlɔ oo,* or *eŋmɔŋ oo!*, meaning "new" or "fresh." These were specific to particular characters and actions.

I had to abandon my prepared field technique, which was to observe the performances and then speak to the authorities in their respective homes afterward. At the risk of shifting focus from the main activities, I resorted to eavesdropping on the more outspoken participants as a strategy to link the verbal interjections to the actors. Then I made follow-up enquiries about the meanings of what they were saying and for what purposes. "Please let me disturb you for a while", is how I normally introduced myself in the local Ga language. The questions followed after I had managed to gain their attention: "What did you say just now?" "Why did you say that?" "What does it mean?" I limited myself to these three key questions as I did not want to deny the participants the chance of enjoying the performance.

The participating audience members were always willing to provide information, and more of it on request. Every member I spoke to attracted unsolicited contributions from other members standing nearby. Sometimes, the unsolicited contributors proved a lot more helpful than those initially contacted. They provided what turned out as more reliable explanations about many of the interjections and the day's performance in general. As it turned out, some of the more vociferous participating audience

[4] This is the praise name for the principal deity of Tema, *Sakumɔ*, for the role it is believed to have played in their ancestors' victory over the Asante in the *Katamanso* war of 1826.

members I interacted with were not as informed as their posturing in the verbal game had suggested, and that was an inherent flaw in deciding on suitable interlocutors. The success of eavesdropping as a data-gathering strategy seemed contingent not only on the availability of unsolicited information, but also on the snowballing interactions that the initial contacts engendered. That was how I was able to circumvent the initial challenge in my fieldwork.

Eavesdropping as a tool for research

The descriptions above raise critical issues with regard to best practices for ethnographic research, particularly those that involve conducting fieldwork at live, multifocal events. Key among the issues is the subject of liveness and the various ways its ontological features of "physical real-time situatedness, co-presence spectatoring and spatio-temporalness" condition every single performance event as original (Salter 2010: xxxiv). The importance of liveness in ethnographic research is premised on the argument that any data that is gathered outside a live performance setting, is comparatively more difficult to corroborate than those gathered in the course of it. The probable exception to this observation would include studies that focus on the underlying histories of genres. This is because the music making or performance context in general, as demonstrated in the *kplejoo* and Asante narratives above, often presents contextual and human behaviour-related variables that make the aesthetic outcomes of even known performance traditions unique and therefore less predictable than other forms of ethnographic studies. Dynamics occasioned by the genres' multifocal nature and contextual constraints relating to occasion, time, space, as well as spectatorship are all formidable variables that condition each live performance's uniqueness and needing to be investigated in its own right. There are other variables relating to a performers' reflexivity, creative idiosyncrasy and psychological mind frame during the performance, as well as other liveness-induced passions and contingencies which hold the answer to the success or failure of live events.[5]

The fundamental challenge to eavesdropping on participating audience members in public performances is, first of all, that the researcher ought to have basic competencies

[5] During the penultimate dance of the *kple* sacred dance in 2011, the drummers decided to test the dancing competences of the trainee-mediums with intermittent rhythmic drills instead of cooperating with them as before. When the trainee-mediums failed to dance as well as expected, the master drummer quibbled angrily, "who trained you?" His comments, which in effect questioned the competence of their trainers, moved the senior mediums to take over the arena, perhaps to show that the trainee-mediums' lapses might be due to inexperience. Soon after, the senior mediums also started to complain openly against the drummers by claiming that they were not playing well enough. Many of the senior mediums even stopped dancing midway to resume their seats in obvious discontentment: "You must go and look for more experienced drummers to come and perform *kple* for us next Friday", chided the most senior medium to the officials present. The entire event failed and everybody went home disappointed as a result. What saved the day for everyone present was the mandatory closing time at 18:00. The following Friday's climactic possession-drama was however a resounding success. The drummers performed creditably: this was because they were in a more congenial performance mind-frame as compared with the previous week.

in the audience's native language. In the case where the main researcher cannot speak the language, a trusted research assistant or informant who speaks the language should be employed. This lends credence to the argument by Stephens and Delamont (2006) which privileges collaborative research over single-handed efforts in ethnographic projects which focus on embodied activity.

The second challenge is how to avoid or minimise the possibility of ethical breaches of a participating member's right to privacy and self-determination. Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2007) have described such possible breaches, as part of the "problems of ethical dilemmas" in qualitative research. It is an ethical dilemma because it straddles the field worker's right to know and the participant's right to privacy (*ibid*.). In the context of carnivals, for example, eavesdropping could interfere with the rights of revellers to behave within the latitude afforded by the occasion. In social research, eavesdropping on participants could be faulted further for its inherent weakness to infringe upon the ethics of "…no harm to participants" (Babbie 2010: 66) because it hardly makes room for the informant's prior informed consent.

It can be argued that the weight of these ethical concerns, important as they are in fieldwork, is significantly obviated by audience members who voluntarily speak in the open, which makes their comments a public rather than a private matter. Additionally, their proven willingness to repeat and clarify what they had said after they learnt that someone had been listening in on them not only minimised the occurrence of any ethical breach but also amounted to their tacit consent. Thus, it can be argued that where the information being sought is already in the public domain, and eavesdropping poses no risks to health, privacy and self-determination (Babbie 2010, Hemmings 2009), then it ought not be judged as an ethical breach. It ought to be seen as a convenient and unavoidable field technique for dealing with an unanticipated field reality that transcends the methodology and tools of data collection.

The participating audience member as informant

Informed participating audience members, identifiable in live musical situations through observation, eavesdropping and on-the-spot interactions, are fundamental to researching live music making events because they may provide valuable information about an event. They have strategic roles in creating the performance traditions (Okpewho 1992), constituting the live performance events, and appreciating them (Barber 1997, Finnegan 1992). Additionally, they are relatively easily accessible (more than the main musicians and dancers, and the so-called traditional authorities) for purposes of helping to decode the layers of aesthetic conventions and utterances they make in the course of the performances.

The idea of a participatory audience is an admission that "…audiences are not the same" (Barber 1997: 2). As different musical forms and their associated performance traditions are products of history, so are their participants (Finnegan 1992). Additionally, participatory audience members at a given performance may range from being mere spectators and cultural-outsiders who observe complete separation from the main

performers, to more knowledgeable audience members who know and may be known by the performers, and participate actively in performances based on knowledge and shared interest (Nii-Dortey 2017). Since such socio-cultural phenomena evolved through the interactive inputs of all social categories, their subjective views are equally needed in interpreting what constitutes as meaning (Duranti 2010, Reed 2003, Throop and Murphy 2002). Participatory audience members are familiar with both the liturgical and performance procedures of such events which is why they are able to react intelligently to whatever occurs. Thus, like the ritual officials, they share in the liminal tensions which such events are designed to resolve. In traditional festivals, like *kplejoo*, one such liminal tension is in how to successfully end one ritual year and usher the community into a new year with greater hope of fecundity, social cohesion and renewal through the guidance of the gods (Badejo 1996, Cole 2003).

The main limiting factor on members of participating audiences is that, unlike the officials, they have not been officially initiated into the ritual orders of their communities to qualify them to perform sacred ritual duties. Thus, they cannot join in very sensitive ritual ceremonies nor watch the officials as they perform such duties. It is this lack of ritual authority that makes this social category amenable to eavesdropping and engaged for information about a performance while it is in progress. From the *kplejoo* examples cited earlier, it can be argued that their shared knowledge about a performance coupled with the freedom to speak openly about it when it is still in progress are the two major strengths owned by informed, participating audience members. Members of this social category are partly responsible for creating, owning, and utilising most of the enduring, performance-related terms and expressions that are deployed in describing and appreciating the live music-making processes. The *kplejoo* experience in Tema gives an indication about one of the ways participating members may influence the development of performance-related terms: one informed member may throw in a word or expression out of excitement. Depending on how catchy the word or expression sounds, it catches on over time and soon becomes a part of the performance vocabulary of the community. The Ga words, *oodemlɔ,* and *eŋmɔŋ!*, for appreciating newly commissioned medium-dancers and their maiden performances (cited above) are recent examples of this phenomenon. Originally, these were words hawkers of fresh maize used for their wares.

Okpewho affirms this "activity and creativity…" of the audience (Barber 1997: 347) in his analysis of the performance of the "Ozidi Saga" as recorded by Clark in the 1960s.[6] The "Ozidi Saga" is a traditional *Ijaw* (Nigerian) "fight" story that is performed, normally, over seven nights. Clark's recording of the story, according to Okpewho, accounts for all comments made by the audience members that impacted both positively and negatively on the speed and direction of the story. Okpewho remarks: "the story told under such circumstances is a sum total of the narrator's descriptions and the audience's observations, in a sense that the entire performance is a collaborative activity" (1992: 62). Bakhtin

[6] John Pepper Clark is a well-known Nigerian author and playwright.

similarly alludes to this factor in audience behaviour: "Each epoch, each literary trend and literary-artistic style, each literary genre within an epoch or trend, is typified by its own special concepts of the addressee of the literary work, a special sense and understanding of its reader, listener, public or people" (Jackson and Prins 2014: 232). Though Bakhtin's observation relates directly to Western literary aesthetics, it has implications for general audience behaviour in the development of artistic trends and epochs and they may influence the evolution of special concepts associated with their performances.

Admittedly, not all the information some informed participants reveal is accurate. This inherent weakness is potentially resolved through on-the-spot corroborative interviews. This explains why the combined strategies of eavesdropping on what the participating audience members say during performances, followed by probing questions, and taking advantage of the snowballing interactions the initial exchanges engender, seems a more reliable data-gathering technique in live performance research, intrusive though the technique might be. This is, because, in spite of the immense experience they are believed to possess, the so-called elite or authorities are unable to provide information while the performances are in progress. Their socio-political statuses as officials impose greater restrictions on how to behave in public. For instance, unlike the audience members, they cannot engage in extended levels of friendliness and openly show emotions in public. This deficiency of the authorities partly explains why I ought to have treated the informed members of the audience as important sources of information as I had done earlier with the authorities, and the two inner core performers of musicians and dancers.[7]

Festivals as ideal sites for eavesdropping among an informed audience

Traditional festivals in Ghana are, generally, well-known seasonal enactments of the lifetime experiences that have shaped the beliefs, values, ideals, and general worldviews of indigenous communities (Cole 2002, Opoku 1970). They involve elaborate ceremonies including rites of purification, drumming, dancing, singing, a recital of local history and the affirmation of values. Despite their esoteric foundations, festivals constitute an integral part of traditional African popular culture because of their elaborate, public performances (Bame 1991). They have two main components; the more serious, sacred ritual segment, and the more playful, secular and entertainment-oriented component. The *kplejoo* event on that day, in as much as it was a serious requirement on the community's ritual calendar, was also a sanctioned forum for entertainment, particularly for those who constitute the bulk of the participating audience members. Thus, the playful behaviour put up by them on that day was partly informed by the binaries of the sacred in opposition to the secular or playful. It is not in all performance situations that the community may engage in such levels of verbal indulgence. As stated earlier, there are performances to which they may not be invited or their roles may be limited to mere

[7] Together the three, made up of the drummers/musicians, mediums/dancers, and the participating informed audience members, constitute the *kple* performing triumvirate.

spectatorship. The convivial undertone of the day's event was evident in the reversal of roles and the concomitant opportunity for ordinary community members to criticise (and insult, at the extreme) their leaders whom they suspect of wrongdoing. It was an opportunity they would not have again until the following year's festival.

Several scholars have pointed to the existence of similar carnival contexts around the globe that elevate role-reversal, satire, verbal and non-verbal insults to ritual and institutional necessities. Evans-Pritchard's (1929) ethnography on so-called obscenities among the Ba-Illa and Ba-Thonga of Central and South Africa, and Max Gluckman's (1954) work on the Swazi *Ncwala* festival which he interprets as a rebellion against the Swazi king (King Nswati), are examples of the earliest accounts written about the African continent. It is important to note that Gluckman's hypothesis of "rebellion" has since been questioned by both Beidelman (1966) and Apter (1983), who have re-interpreted the same event as a rite of purification and permitted disrespect of the king. The many *mardi-gras* and carnival traditions all over the Americas and Europe are in many ways framed on similar ideologies as the *kplejoo*. Taking place around Easter, the carnival celebrations temporarily suspend certain moral codes about public speaking and dressing, engage in elaborate public celebrations that sometimes blur performance and existing socio-political roles, perform satires, and openly mock authorities without the fear of any reprisal (Crowley 1999, Newbold and Jordan 2016, Riggio 2016, Roach 1996).

In Tema, where I conducted the research, the more popular aspects of the festival, which is often the aspect that is opened to tourists, cannot be successfully staged without the involvement of ordinary community members. This aspect of the festival is made up not only of the more sacred *kple* ritual performances, but also of the newer and more youth-centred carnival. The subjective input of such a category of performers to the underlying meanings of the *kple* festival is not in doubt. The difficulty in seeking to engage the participating audience members in such performance contexts is how to identify the informed respondents for further interaction, and to relate the research questions to specific events outside the immediate performance contexts. Unlike the elite and the mediums, a good number of the participating audiences are transient. They are visible only on the festival grounds but hard to trace to specific homes after the events are concluded. To obtain their side of the story calls for innovative thinking guided by clearly defined research goals and sufficient background knowledge of the field so as to operate within the ethical codes of the event and the larger community. This was the main reason why eavesdropping in the course of the performances and following it with on-the-spot interviews were adopted as a research technique.

I had been involved in the field for three years continuously and had been interviewing people recommended to me as the authorities on *kple* lore in Tema and its performance conventions. I had participated extensively in a number of ritual performances with the prior permission of the officials and engaged a number of the key players in private conversations, often outside the performance settings. Curiously, none of the information I had gathered from previous visits to the same festival spoke as eloquently to the subject of the festival's aesthetic conventions and their associated

terminologies as those collected through direct engagement with members of the participating audience. And even though I had factored in the important roles informed community members have in such communal events from the outset of the research, the manner in which they did what they did was least expected. Indeed, the advantage informed community members hold over the elite and other categories of participants is in the immediate insights they provide on performance practices and their meanings. They do this through unsolicited meta-discourses and commentaries, physical actions and responses to direct enquiries from curious tourists and researchers.

Primarily, the success of eavesdropping as a data-gathering strategy seems contingent on the ability to understand the native language of the performers. It is contingent also on the chances that the informed community members will be present at the communal event and that the performance will move them to participate in it freely to guarantee the flow of unsolicited commentary on the event. When these performance conditions are met, eavesdropping and the follow-up questions they elicit emerge as an obvious pair of field strategies that may guarantee greater research results in multifocal music making events and their underlying performance conventions.

Conclusion

Ideally, researching live, sprawling and multifocal performances such as the ones described above should be a teamwork effort. However, whether undertaken by a team of researchers or done single-handedly, the knowledge that participating audience members may bring to the live research experience is beyond doubt. It is obvious why researchers would hesitate to consider eavesdropping as a viable research strategy for collecting data on the field. The idea of eavesdropping on potential interlocutors seems to offend the very tenets of ethical research. Besides, the entire process of listening in to what potential interlocutors say in order to engage them in discussions, and to record the results in a potentially busy performance environment can be rather cumbersome and distracting for both researchers and interlocutors. The perspectives proffered in this article show that when the research event is such that it is better understood in the live performance context, and both the event and potential interlocutors are a temporary arrangement, then eavesdropping becomes a convenient and unavoidable research technique.

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