

APPROACHES AND METHODS EMPLOYED IN REVITALISING THE *SEPEREWA* MUSICAL TRADITION IN GHANA: OSEI KORANKYE IN PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract: This article examines how Osei Korankye, a *seperewa* (a west African harp) player in Ghana, managed to thrive in an often unfavourable environment for traditional musicians. The *seperewa* is a Ghanaian harp with a likeness to the *kora*. The article examines Korankye's efforts to preserve and restore local interest in *seperewa* music. The conflict between traditional musical practices and the multiplicity of sounds and ideologies brought by globalisation and cultural imperialism after contact with Europe in the fifteenth century is critical to the discourse in this article. As a result of these encounters, Ghanaian communities have lost much of their musical traditions; those remaining are cherished by a small number of individuals. Many see such traditions as a building block to most of Ghana's cultural heritage, hence the call for cultural revitalisation in many quarters. Drawing on the available literature and ethnographic interviews, I position Korankye, and his methods, as a powerful example of such a strategy for revitalisation while outlining many of the struggles he negotiated. This article corroborates existing arguments made by many that globalisation and cultural imperialism profoundly influenced African civilisations, threatening a loss of contact between communities and their customs.

Keywords: cultural imperialism, culture, globalisation, instruments, indigenous, revitalisation, *seperewa*, sustainability, tradition

Introduction

I have always been intrigued by Indigenous Knowledge Systems to the extent that I desired to quit formal education after high school and train under a traditional healer to learn the conceptualisations and philosophies behind traditional herbs and healing. This initial interest was transferred to music after my father convinced me to continue schooling. I enrolled at the university to study Sociology, Social Work and Music. I started in Music as a classical piano student but soon felt a dwindling interest in classical music. I then redirected my focus to Ghanaian traditional music and its instruments, learning to play the *atenteben*, a bamboo flute, and the *seperewa*, a harp with a family likeness to the Mande *kora* (Figure 1).

I began to sense how derogatory people's attitudes were toward the music cultures I was pursuing. Ghanaian audience members seemed uninterested in most functions, such as Independence Day celebrations and events, where these traditions were displayed. This realisation made me initially lose interest in engaging with these instruments and traditions. However, my interest and curiosity were rekindled because most national functions and commercials in Ghana employ these same traditional instruments and



Figure 1. Image of an antique type of *seperewa* without tuning pegs.
Photo credit: Wikipedia.org

performances. I have been motivated to find out why national and highly recognised university programmes use traditional materials even while the general citizenry has stereotypical attitudes to these traditions (Rausch 2013; Tostões 2013). I convinced myself with the hypothesis that employing these traditional elements in the activities mentioned above was favourable to evoking nostalgia for Ghana's cultural heritage. I employ "nostalgia" in this sense because history makes us understand that Ghanaian and other African communities followed a particular way of life, relevant and appropriate to their development, until the abrupt takeover by European colonisers.

This motivation for traditional instruments is the foundation for my argument that efforts to revive African traditional cultures must be reemphasised. Grant investigates a variety of practical tactics used to maintain the long-term viability of music cultures in local societies. These initiatives are divided into five key areas, which correspond to the five domains of music sustainability: Music education systems, musicians and communities, contexts and constructs, infrastructure and regulations, and media and the music industry are mentioned as directly influencing music sustainability. She investigates the reasons for these methods and attempts at intervention and remarks on how they overlap with more extensive cultural maintenance strategies. She concludes that, while there are significant challenges to supporting music sustainability, some of these are beyond the immediate control of researchers or communities. These include the often-limited availability of funding and resources for practical initiatives, political or legislative forces that override efforts to sustain at-risk music genres, and the ambiguous impact of mass media, enterprise, and commercial ventures on music genres. She further claims that these situations and processes are essential for developing appropriate practices for music sustainability (2016, 19–42). They are factors that sustainability efforts must consider in sustainability endeavours rather than try to overcome. With the above in mind, I proceeded to understand why the government and other significant organisations employ traditional and local practices only for special functions. I use the word "special" to show how local and traditional methods were not and are not engaged in the day-to-day activities of citizens.

In my quest to learn more about Ghanaian attitudes toward traditional practices, I

was intrigued by the work of Osei Kwame Korankye (henceforth Korankye), a teacher and *seperewa* player. Korankye is from a royal family. He was born on 24 October 1964 to Peter Kwabena Osei and Mary Abena Korankyewaa. The combination of both names resulted in the name Osei Korankye. Korankye is the male version of Korankyewaa, his mother's name. He was primarily called upon to perform at national and special functions. When I indicated an interest in *seperewa* learning, Korankye became my *seperewa* teacher and was willing to teach me for free. He made this offer because at the time few people and students at the University of Ghana's Department of Music were interested in traditional musical practices. He informed me that if his generation did not pass on what they had learned to the next generation, the legacy they had established would be lost.

This article aims to learn from Korankye's experiences in resurrecting and sustaining this musical legacy and the responses he received along the way. The article also seeks to investigate which strategies, as seen in the case of Korankye, can be used by organisations such as UNESCO and others to help revitalise and sustain indigenous cultures. I base my argument on UNESCO's Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage which indicates that globalisation and social change, as well as intolerance, have resulted in the degradation, disappearance, and the annihilation of much of the world's intangible cultural heritage. Using the concept of revitalisation to explore the initiative towards sustaining the *seperewa* and its repertoire, I contribute to developing new knowledge on *seperewa* music and the socio-political environment in which it has evolved. I describe the sustainability and revival programmes that might curtail cultural imperialism, as several scholars such as Howard (2012), Sunu Doe (2020), Titon (2009), and Titon (et al. 2019) have argued.

Many institutions and regions of the globe have a long history of implementing a mixture of preservation and promotion policies to combat the loss of indigenous music and other cultural forms (Hafstein 2004; Howard 2012). Institutes in Asia, the United States, and Australia should be mentioned in this regard because they have long-developed programmes and initiatives to curate and conserve musical traditions and artefacts that appear endangered (Mengoni and Matsuda 2016). Communities across Africa have festivals and annual programmes which seek to reinstate traditional practices that remind the citizens of their heritage and build nationalism through a sense of "who we are" when they come together as a state (Akuupa 2011). The paradigm shift for concerned individuals, communities, and organisations was primarily due to UNESCO, which named and instituted the Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity in 2001, 2003, and 2005. In 2003, UNESCO adopted the Convention for the Protection of Humanity's Oral and Intangible Heritage. Beardslee (2014) explains how China, Korea, and Japan featured as contributing countries in the three rounds for recognising masterpieces. These traditions from Asia have musical elements, showing that East Asian initiatives for sustaining musical traditions have been relatively successful. Before the UNESCO pronouncements, the United Arab Emirates, Australia, the United States of America and African nations such as Ghana,

Zimbabwe, and Mozambique, had their government and traditional, communal, and other activities geared toward sustainability (Sindelar 2017; The Burra Charter 2006).

With regard to interventions concerning ethics, commodification and so on, a growing amount of literature raises questions about approaches to sustainability and revitalisation. Many scholars have argued that the UNESCO model and other top-down approaches appear problematic and must be reconsidered. Some have suggested different approaches to preserving, conserving, and safeguarding these “dying” traditions to realise positive results (Howard 2012; Titon 2009; Titon et al. 2019). Economic or financial factors tend to affect the intervention of sustainability or similar initiatives. The top-down strategy has been ineffective recently since it reduces the initiative’s contextual significance and commercialises the traditions in question. The UNESCO declaration, in Yung’s opinion (*cf* Titon 2009, 121), changed more than it conserved. Titon warns that the endeavour may have unforeseen repercussions, regardless of how well-intentioned it may be. Titon continues to critique UNESCO’s failure to see the practices it addresses in its list and declarations as elements in a larger, interconnected ecosystem (Ibid., 124). The problems I intend to interrogate need updated strategies, such as revising the top-down strategy used by UNESCO and, instead, prioritising the goal of sustainability rather than a focus on the notion that the dying practices are being preserved. Beardslee posits that “interventions to aid the continuation of tradition ... might work if only better methods and a more holistic orientation were found.” He argues that preservation is not the most positive goal to pursue in applied work, regardless of how it is defined or executed, because the whole concept of preservation is taking a problematic turn and that, at the core, these practices contain flawed ideas that make them unsuitable bases and frameworks for intervention. “In short”, he argues, “heritage is something that is built, and the products of the ‘building’ of intangible heritage – the festivals, workshops, books, films, archives, inventories, plaques, and exhibits – exist in a certain relationship with their objects but are not the same thing as those objects” (2014, 5).

At the Institute of African Studies Convocation (*cf* Harper and Opoku-Boateng 2019, 76) in 1963, Nketia emphasised that “(w)e believe...that the arts must develop and that the study of African traditions should inspire creative experiments in African idiom.” This statement tends to support the points about preserving music cultures. In his efforts, Nketia managed to secure funding for an archive in the Institute of African Studies at the University of Ghana. That initiative has yielded benefits, giving resources and information to current researchers and concerned Ghanaians who wish to know their past and make informed decisions on forging a way forward. Nketia intended to explore and conserve as many Ghanaian traditions which might be related to several other programmes for sustainability. Nketia focused not only on inanimate material preservation but also on human archives as the basis upon which he employed Korankye as his assistant in his Institute. Korankye later moved to the Department of Music at the University of Ghana to teach the *seperewa* to students and people interested in the tradition.

The *seperewa* in perspective

According to accounts by scholars such as Nketia (1994) and Harper and Opoku-Boateng (2019), the *seperewa* and its player were abducted by Otumfo Osei Tutu, the founder of the Ashanti kingdom, in the early eighteenth century following a conflict between the Gyamans of modern-day Cote d'Ivoire and the Ashantis of modern-day Ghana. In the hands of the Ashanti, the *seperewa* was instituted as a court instrument. It gradually became part of village life and part of the singing and storytelling practices of the Akan region, with the Ashanti being the dominant group (Sunu Doe 2020). Koo Nimo, a palm-wine guitarist and a historian at Kwame Nkrumah University, points out that the people of Bono (Brong Ahafo), Sefwi, Beguri, Gyaaman (Ivory Coast) and Ashanti are important players of the *seperewa*. It is also a prominent instrument in the church of Nkansa, a local church that employs traditional elements in worship (Interview 5 January 2020).

Albeit a smaller version, the *seperewa* is like the West African bridge harp, the *kora*. The older versions of the *seperewa* had six strings, but newer ones may have up to 14 strings. The *seperewa* relaxes on the player's lap and requires both hands to pluck the two sets of stacked strings. The strings come from a convergent point at the back of a wooden box on which lies a stretched animal skin. The box serves as a resonating chamber. The resonating chamber supports the bridge that holds the strings in independent positions. The Ashanti king is said to have loved the music of the *seperewa* so much that his successor had the instrument covered in gold and kept in Kumasi (the capital city of the Ashanti region) among his royal holdings. The *seperewa* was eventually adopted and used by ordinary citizens in storytelling traditions and became essential to group singing. Musicians would sing proverbs, and praises, and play songs, which had themes centred on concepts of struggle, love and death (DjeDje 2010; Kaye 2010; Kudonu et al. 2021). These narratives and oral traditions suggest that the *seperewa* had a significant role through the ages. Yet, little research and academic work of any significance have been conducted on the instrument and its music.

Colonial travellers, explorers, government officials, and missionaries such as Bowdich (1819), Beecham (1841), and Brodie (1853), among others, have documented the existence of the *seperewa* dating as far back as the seventeenth century in the Gold Coast. The *seperewa* is renowned among the Akan people of Ghana for its role in the courts of Akan chiefs, in traditional entertainment and communication. New artists are discouraged from incorporating it in their musical works because *seperewa* musicians are not well-known in modern-day Ghana due to globalisation and "the European encounter." The situation saddens Korankye and other cultural activists because they have not noticed any appreciable improvements despite spending twenty-six years on the mission to revitalise interest in the instrument.

Korankye, my main interlocutor (Figure 2), explained that the "se-pere-wa", when broken up into syllables, is a result of the speech-imitating characteristic of the instrument. "Se" means to talk, "pere" means to touch or pluck and "wa" is a diminutive ending that signifies "little." Hence, the name "seperewa" means, "this small instrument



Figure 2. Korankye playing his modified seperewa. This *seperewa* is modified with guitar tuning pegs and increased strings. Photograph by Author.

communicates when you touch or pluck it.” Korankye is regarded as one of Ghana’s top *seperewa* players. He has been able to revitalise interest in the *seperewa* by teaching in institutions such as The University of Ghana and the University of Education, Winneba, collaborating with highlife musicians and performing at national events and other functions. Korankye says that, like the Ashanti *atumpan* drums, the *seperewa* can speak by imitating the tonal contours of the Twi language. The *seperewa* player can recite proverbs, praises and appellations by singing in line and imitating the melodic lines of the *seperewa*. In a declamatory, quasi-recitative fashion, the *seperewa* player may sing as he delivers praises or proverbs and recites appellations to the patron who commissioned the performance. People who come across a *seperewa* performance marvel at its unique style as the sounds relate to speech surrogacy. The *atumpan* drum and other instruments used more often in Ghana, notably those connected to Ashanti music, do not share this characteristic.

In an interview¹ with Korankye in July 2017, he mentioned that he embarked on his quest to revive the endangered instrument and its tradition by exposing and teaching it to foreigners and Ghanaians. He has travelled extensively within Ghana and abroad for performances and workshops and recording collaborations with other musicians to revitalise this instrument. The *seperewa* was almost extinct as far as performance and audiences were concerned until Korankye dedicated his career to sustaining the instrument and its performance traditions. To comprehend Korankye’s

¹ This interview was in 2017 when I was in Ghana and learning to play the *seperewa* with Korankye. We engaged in many discussions before I settled on researching him and his initiatives for reviving the *seperewa*.

methodology and his level of achievement, this essay will proceed to analyse his work and his aspirations to revitalise the *seperewa* and its musical practice. The methods he employed in his quest, accomplishments and challenges will be discussed to situate the findings within conversations about cultural sustainability.

The Akan string theory

The *seperewa* is described as a stack of strings on the right and left sides of the resonator. There are two chords; a dominant 7th on the right and a Dorian or minor 7th on the left. This puts its tuning in the Mixolydian mode since it possesses the flattened 7th. The general harmonic musical application is as follows: the first note on the right set of strings on the instrument is doh or C if it is tuned in the key of C. The first note on the left set of strings of the instrument is re or D, and the rest of the strings are played in that sequence. That means 1 (doh), 3 (me), 5 (soh), and 7 (ti or tau) will be on the set of strings on the right-hand side of the instrument. The left side will have 2 (re), 4 (fah), 6 (lah), and 8 (doh). My harmony and counterpoint lecturer, Ken Kafui, once attributed the flattened 7th of the Akan scale to “laziness”, claiming the Akans did not try enough to reach the major 7th and thus adopted the flattened 7th in their scale. I do not agree with this observation because although the Akan scale used much of the flattened 7th note in earlier recordings, other recordings illustrate that the *seperewa* may also have a major 7th note. This is a stylistic characteristic influenced by the musician’s aesthetic preferences. Korankye explains how he utilises three tunings: the minor (usually Dorian mode), the major 7th and the dominant 7th or Mixolydian mode. This tuning method, also known as the Akan scale, influenced a guitar style, *yaa amponsah*, which made up a component of highlife music. The Kumasi trio was the first to record the *yaa amponsah* guitar style in the early 1930s. Since then, several musicians have used this guitar style in their songs, transforming *yaa amponsah* into a musical concept that has influenced Ghanaian songwriters of all genres. The *seperewa*’s performance contexts and range have also evolved. The *seperewa* was initially employed for praise singing in honour of the Ashanti chiefs, dignitaries, and other important personnel.

Even though the contexts of performance changed from mostly solo performances to band performances, Korankye maintains the old context of praise-singing and solo, recitative style singing. He occasionally plays with other musicians in a band setting. Aaron Bebe, Asa, Kyeremateng, and Afro Moses are well-known *seperewa* players who oppose Korankye’s style and play in a full band setting. Korankye has increased the instrument’s range from one to two octaves which he says has given it a “bonny sound”, allowing for easy collaboration with other instruments. Compositions that employ stories and other forms of traditional knowledge and proverbs tend to provoke people to enquire and delve into the past, eventually revealing historical facts. These are the reasons why Korankye believes that there is a good chance for his style of music to survive in the music sector in Ghana.

Akan philosophy, music, and material culture

The original context of the *seperewa* and its music changed when the instrument left the courts of the Ashanti chief and entered community life. Korankye calls *seperewa* “sit down” music, meaning that audience members must listen attentively and contemplate the lyrics. He says most of the *seperewa* music requires close listening because the performer sends messages about sanitation or the environment, a social event or tells a story with moral lessons. Listeners may not have time to dance because it is like a philosophical presentation by the performer (Agyefi 2021; Owusu-Poku 2021). Koo Nimo says this is one of the reasons why the *seperewa* style must not be forgotten:

The style of the *seperewa*, mainly the *odonson* (Akan traditional music style), which translates as “letting love prevail”, allows the performers to speak to their listeners in such a manner that it provokes their deep thoughts. The performer can talk about morality more provocatively in an era of “moral nakedness.” The use of these language styles tends to provoke thought, making the traditional style different from the other recent styles. Imagine saying the maggot was killed by palm wine or the mudfish died of thirst; these things are not bound to happen under normal circumstances, so if they speak like that, it tends to tease a deeper level of thought (Interview 5 January 2020).

He explained how he derived much of his guitar style from the *seperewa* style known as *odonson*. The style includes arpeggios and simple chords, giving the player room to “sing” or recite words over the instrumental part. The *odonson* style is the hallmark of Akan music; the audience listens to what the performer sings, not the musical sounds. Nimo says he applies *odonson* in his compositions mainly because of his love for the style and how this style can easily be played on the guitar. The *seperewa* finger-picking style was transferred onto the guitar, as first documented in the 1930s (Beecham 1841, 71; Schmidt 1994).

Ampene (2020) describes how Ashanti music requires its performers to know proverbs, the literary usage of language and in-depth knowledge of traditions and customs as well as history. The lyrics are more important than the musical qualities. The value of its lyrical content is the reason why there is an upsurge of concern by the elderly and other Ghanaians that the customs and traditions need to be revived. Bebe mentioned that countries such as Senegal, Gambia, Mali, Guinea, Mozambique and Zimbabwe, portray their traditional cultures and instruments with pride. He says that in most performances outside Ghana, he sees how people from these countries revere their traditional cultural elements. He blames the pioneers of highlife music, such as ET Mensah, Pat Thomas, Amakye Dede and the rest, who failed to adhere meticulously to traditional and local instruments in their music. Almost all of them explicitly used western instruments such as the guitar, saxophone, piano, trumpet, and drum set, with a slight influence of traditional styles and instruments. Korankye says it is not entirely their fault as they were overwhelmed by novelty and were exploring these novel instruments and styles. Furthermore, the media also had a role in the decline of traditions: “even today, the media is not helping to promote traditional instruments. It looks like everyone is concerned about money; hence, even to get airplay, you must pay and If you don’t have money, your music sits in your room” (Interview 20 November 2019).

Other question (s) for interrogation

Another question I wish to explore is why communities seem to accept initiatives for sustainability from agencies or organisations with higher authority and reject initiatives from lower-ranked entities such as individual cultural activists. Could it be for financial benefit, or is it that the higher-ranked bodies might define the logic behind the initiatives better than the lower-ranked ones? I referred to UNESCO's heritage lists for preservation (Cervený et al. 2020; <https://whc.unesco.org/en/convention/>; King 2014). Applied ethnomusicologists and activists interested in sustaining musical traditions struggle to be accepted. I explore these questions to comprehend the rationale for sustainability and the rise in these efforts, particularly in communities that might want to move on and adopt practices from other cultures. These questions address the case of *seperewa* musical traditions from Ghana (specifically Akan) and the reception of Korankye over the years.

In Korankye's situation, traditional music's prominence had declined as the cities in Ghana were dominated by highlife, burger highlife, and hiplife music.² Greater Accra, which hosts Ghanaians from various regions and residents from several other African nations was and continues as a centre for cosmopolitan activities. The cosmopolitan environment demanded the use of a common language, which led to the widespread usage of the English language in Ghana. It led to the development of a strong new middle class in Accra. Most Ghanaians were giving up customs that were viewed as antiquated or local. In Ghana, traditional music is primarily heard in local performances and is less commonly an element in popular music. Traditional music performers are occasionally engaged by the government and other larger entities. Most practitioners, however, including Korankye, complain about a lack of opportunities due to the lack of deliberate engagement with traditional musical practices. In Ghana, the phrase, *sankofa*, means "to return for the good you have left behind." The logic is that subsequent generations can learn about their history if exposed to historical objects. Following Korankye's performance for the members of the Ghana Musicians Association, the local press reported on the discovery of a "new" instrument. Many citizens were made aware of this hidden instrument and its features. This awareness helped in Korankye's quest to revitalise the *seperewa* tradition in Ghana. Even though Korankye's exposure to the most prominent people did not result in any positive change for him or in the music environment in general, he did not give up on his passion (Interview 20 November 2019).

² Highlife music evolved in around the early twentieth century from the traditional music of southern Ghana. It later spread to western Nigeria and flourished in both countries in the 1950s. Highlife employed instruments such as the electric guitar, drum set, percussion, trumpets, keyboard and bass guitar. It was when the Ghanaian music industry became redundant due to political reforms and higher import taxes that musicians who had experienced life abroad, especially in Hamburg, changed the music style. They employed pre-recorded beats over highlife songs, and the music was termed burger highlife. Hiplife, however, grew out of the mixing of hip-hop and highlife, with singing in Ghanaian local languages, mostly *twi*. One striking characteristic of hiplife is the rap that became eminent in Ghanaian local songs (Collins 2005, 2012).

While pursuing financial stability, in 1993, Korankye travelled to the capital of the Ashanti region, Kumasi, to meet Koo Nimo, the renowned palm-wine guitarist. Koo Nimo told me that his finger-picking technique on the guitar was inspired by the *seperewa* style of performance, in which the performer speaks provocatively to the audience using Akan sayings. He had been looking for Korankye for a while. Korankye claims that when he met Koo Nimo, he told him that Nketia was looking for him because he needed someone with traditional knowledge to work at his newly established institution, the International Centre for African Music and Dance (ICAMD). Koo Nimo had already met Korankye ten years earlier and had hoped that Korankye would become influential in traditional music.³ He then directed Korankye to Nketia, who wanted to promote and coordinate research in creative projects in Ghana's music and dance cultures. He also thought there could be "human archives" that embodied the knowledge of Ghanaian traditions. Korankye was employed at the ICAMD as an instructor of Akan music and the *seperewa* at the School of Performing Arts. He says he loved the institution and his job because he finally felt alive (Interview 20 November 2019).

He knew his position as a prominent figure in the Akan community was meant to be because he had never imagined that he would work as a tutor at a university after his inability to further his education. After a while, Korankye became frustrated in his newly-found space. He says,

I was not very happy because of my inability to speak English fluently but the founder of the Ghana Dance Ensemble, Mawere Opoku, encouraged me to overcome my inability to express myself well in English if I dedicated time to personal study. The people I was working with also challenged me because I was supposed to communicate with them as quickly as possible. I decided to register for a diploma course at the University, but my performance and work did not allow me to finish and write my first exams (Interview 20 November 2019).

Korankye remembers these difficulties and does not view them as failures but as learning opportunities that made him more resilient. If he had not gone through all these experiences, he claims he would not have been able to withstand his current circumstances. Furthermore, he was inspired by favourable conditions and challenges during his struggles in Accra (Interview 20 November 2019).

Korankye focused his attention and energy on the work and space where he found himself. He says he had reached a stage he envisioned years earlier to help others and work with dignitaries and influential personalities. In 1994, he started to work with Nketia. He was invited to Pretoria, South Africa, to perform for the swearing-in of the first democratic president, Mr Nelson Mandela. Following his performance in South Africa, he was thrust into the international limelight. He was invited to play the *seperewa* in European countries, the first of which was Norway and then the USA. He says, "in retrospect, I have met many dignitaries and been on bigger stages in this life that I am sure would not have happened if not for my *seperewa*" (Interview 20 November 2019).

³ Korankye recalled that Koo Nimo met him and his grandfather in 1987 through Andy Kaye from the University of Pennsylvania. Kaye was conducting research on the history of highlife music.

Korankye challenged himself to reach a level of financial stability and satisfaction. His passion for helping others and succeeding took a different turn as he found himself in a different field, transferring cultural knowledge, playing music and being paid. Giving him an appreciable financial standing while working with Nketia, he was required to demonstrate to students, researchers, and visitors what the *seperewa* could do. In this capacity, he received many offers from visitors and other researchers to travel overseas to work, something most people would not have imagined. Korankye decided not to leave Nketia because he saw Nketia as the one who gave him the platform to perform on the world stage.

Korankye's current situation

After the ICAMD closed, Korankye was forced to join the Ghana Dance Ensemble at the Dance Department in the School of Performing Arts at the University of Ghana in 2006. He recalls that working with the ensemble was difficult because the remuneration was insufficient. He was forced to teach the *seperewa* privately to earn an extra income (Interview 20 November 2019). He then left the dance ensemble to join the Department of Music and the School of Performing Arts as an instructor. Korankye says,

This situation also became frustrating because I did not raise enough money for teaching and was not officially employed at the Department of Music. I then wrote a letter to the Head of the Department, who made it possible for me to be compensated for my time as an instructor. The wish was granted, but I found something intriguing here. Because of our low level of education, most traditional practitioners do not get the respect and remuneration we deserve while working in the formal sector, and my case was no different (Interview 20 November 2019).

In this case, the artists who protect and preserve our cultural heritage are being looked down upon. In his discussion of a similar situation among the Badagri Ogu of Nigeria, Kunnuji posits that "... there is a social formation made up of upwardly mobile and aspiring elites, most of whom have tertiary (some possess post-graduate) qualifications, who deliberately distance themselves from indigenous practices" (2020, 33). This issue of discrimination and a lack of respect for traditions is not specific to Ghana, as my experience and conversations with artists and individuals outside Ghana have shown. Friends from different countries in Africa share similar experiences. In universities and places of higher education, traditional culture is seen as a relic. Korankye and Koo Nimo expressed their personal experiences with academia, where their work is seen as not current enough to warrant studies in higher institutions. Due to their encounters with foreign musical instruments, most of my interlocutors claimed that when they began following what they loved, they were written off as outdated and without a future. My decision to focus on the *seperewa* and the *atenteben* resulted in similar responses.

Opanin Kantanka, one of my interlocutors in Ghana emphasised the significance of the colonial influence on traditional practices. Colonial authorities derided everything related to tradition because they were regarded as idolatrous and of no value. Most of my interlocutors blamed the colonialists' attitude towards traditional musicians for the

lack of support they currently receive. It was a recurring theme with interlocutors that they have still not been paid after rendering services to higher institutions and other agencies.

Koo Nimo posits that we need to combine whichever knowledge we gain from elsewhere with traditional and local wisdom to make the best of them. Korankye says he is motivated by more than money and fame. He said, “my vision, all this while, has been to leave a legacy for the *seperewa*, to give the unborn generation a chance to experience authentic Akan musical tradition.” He also explained how the *seperewa* is gaining ground. When he initially followed traditional music and practices, he recalls that the situation was so bad that his Ghanaian acquaintances used to laugh at him and call him all sorts of names because the instrument was seen as something of a relic, “but I have realised that it was a matter of time because Ghanaians are now beginning to see the relevance and need for culture, hence, the reception of traditional instruments and musical traditions” (Interview 20 November 2019).

According to Korankye, these traditions are spreading throughout the country, mainly through his students from the University of Ghana, where he established an African Music Ensemble, and, the University of Education, Winneba. Korankye is optimistic that a change in attitude will eventually occur, where traditional cultures and practitioners are not treated as providers of interludes and colourful additions to events. Korankye desires that the respect accorded to other dignitaries and guests at such events will be accorded to the traditional artists (Interview 20 November 2019).

Conclusion

Through conversations with Korankye and a study of the situation in the Ghanaian music industry, I argued that there are both advantages and disadvantages in the Ghanaian system for musicians and in Korankye’s techniques for revitalising the *seperewa* in Ghana.

Korankye and other traditional musicians struggle to fully realise their visions for themselves and their communities because they are caught in a social structure that places little to no value on Ghanaian culture and a greater emphasis on European culture. Evidence suggests that modern Ghanaians have been deprived of local cultural knowledge. Many African scholars such as Mosweunyane (2013) and Sifuna (2001) verify this argument as they describe how the physical presence of foreign music cultures in Africa is palpable and evident. That is why Korankye and the other traditional musicians are concerned about being labelled archaic because they express themselves musically through their local cultures. Korankye’s emphasis on recovering local interests in *seperewa* music must deal with the standing narrative coupled with globalisation. It is reasonable to want to maintain local cultures, but as researchers of the twentieth century emphasise, culture is dynamic. Change is inevitable. Measures cannot be taken to shield one culture from another (Garofalo 1993; McRobbie 2003; Palmer 1992). Cultural components that people want to sustain can be documented in several forms - on the internet, in articles, books and stories. Griots, for example, keep

their families' genealogy, history, and oral legacies alive. As a result, the histories of civilisations have been passed down through generations.

Certain preservation methods appear to be more effective than others; hence Ghanaians concerned about cultural loss should work hard to preserve what they see as endangered. The internet appears to be an excellent archival source for cultural preservation because it can be maintained for an extended period. As stated by Korankye, Agawu, and many other scholars, postcolonial Ghana was left with distinctive institutions such as the church, the police, the army and the entertainment industry. These institutions had, and continue to have, musical practices with little to no room for traditional instruments and music. This claim has grown to the point that it has become debatable, as most of the Ghanaian population is starting to see through the myth that listening to traditional music is an indication of backwardness. The media for preservation have been re-Africanised through traditional styles in revival activities by individuals such as Korankye and others. Foreign influences which have ended up transforming the musical language of Ghana cannot be eradicated. As seen in Korankye's endeavours, cultural revivalists consciously try to incorporate Ghanaian traditions into Ghana's music, as seen in most African guitar styles such as *yaa amponsah*, *soukous*, *mbaqanga*, *juju*, *chimurenga* and *majika*.

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