

EPHRAIM AMU’S “BONWERE KENTENWENE”: A CELEBRATION OF GHANAIAN TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE, WISDOM, AND ARTISTRY

by

GEORGE WORLASI KWASI DOR

Dr. Ephraim Amu (1899-1995) is revered and recognized in Ghana as a statesman, composer *par excellence*, father of Ghanaian art music, African musicologist, poet, music educator, a transformer and maker of Akan flutes, and a cultural patriot. While some label him as Christian, theologian, preacher, visionary, revolutionary, and nationalist, others idealize him as ‘the African’¹ (Agawu 1984: 37-73, 1996; Agyemang 1988; Amu 1988; Dor 1992: 35-95, 149-171, 217-239; 2005: 441-475; Nketia 1993: 7-23; Omojola 1995: 149-164; Agordoh 2004: 4-5, 15-28, 67-143; Coe 2005: 47-51; Laryeah 2012). Yet, given that Amu, like most Ghanaian youth of his time in colonial Gold Coast, was initially heavily influenced by Western culture and therefore acculturated, it took a body of transformational processes before he earned the preceding accolades that celebrate his advocacy for traditional African culture and African nationalism (Agyemang 1988).

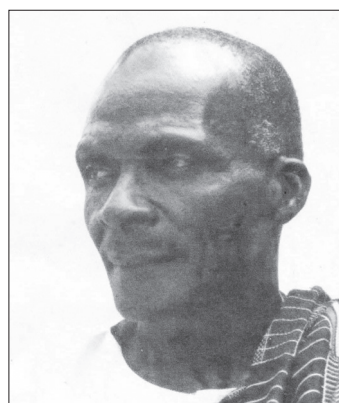


Figure 1. Ephraim Amu

By analyzing Amu’s “Bonwere Kentenwene” (trans. “Bonwere *Kente* Weaving”), an art song for voice and piano, this article explores some of these paradigm-shifting processes. They include Amu’s creation of the song’s text as a narrative on an imaginary journey that foregrounds forms of traditional knowledge and their producers, the quest and advocacy for indigenous African knowledge, weaving of the *kente* cloth, the process of making a new song, construction of Ghanaian identity through composing an art song, and dissemination of knowledge involved in his process and production of a composition. I examine the major factors that informed Amu’s inspiration, ingenuity, and agency that provoked this art song. These include translation of the generative power of one type of expressive art form into another expressive art form, his selectivity of pre-compositional resources, and his underpinning creative philosophy.

¹ Amu epitomized an ideal personality of an African who took pride in his own indigenous culture. His path-finding advocacy—in thought and deed—toward salvaging traditional African culture from the overbearing Western cultural presence in Africa remains exemplary.

Ghanaian *kente* cloth

Kente, the exquisite multi-colored Ghanaian cloth, is considered one of Africa's most sublime textiles and artistic expressions.² The beauty of this traditionally woven body wear can be compellingly imposing and imbued with a spiritual aura.³ Semantically, the term *kente(n)* is a Fante [Twi] word for a woven artifact (Adjaye 1997: 25). Like baskets, the *kente* cloth is hand-woven, therefore distinguished from mill-woven cloth produced by modern textile factories.⁴ Weavers, through the use of local hand looms, first produce what are referred to as "horizontal-narrow-strips," before later sewing several of these strips together into desired cloth sizes intended for use by women or men.

While discussion of the contested ontology of the *kente* cloth in Ghana is outside the purview of this article, it is important to note that the Ewe call their hand-woven cloth *kete*. Pronounced in middle-high tone bands, semantically this word must be understood within the context of cloth weaving process. *Ke* in Ewe means "open" or "pull-apart" the new horizontal thread from the in-progress-strip, and *te* means "compress" the same new thread with the beater to the in-progress-strip without leaving any visible space.⁵ After pointing out the major geo-cultural sources of *kente/kete* and pointing out their corresponding nomenclature and etymology, it is timely to return to the value of this body wear culturally.

To many Ghanaians the meaning of *kente* goes beyond its visual aesthetic appeal and also resides in its embedded symbolic and utilitarian values, or in what Adjaye vividly describes as the "communicative capacity of cloth" (1997: 23). While the various colors of *kente* threads symbolize different aspects of life-related phenomena, *kente* weavers use the textures of their fabrics, intricacies of the motif designs, and beauty of resultant color blends in differentiating the quality and worth of their products. Moreover, *kente* is a tool for articulating social and cultural constructs and codes of power, family, communal unity, and politics. As such, weaver's customary labeling of particular cloth-motifs with specific names and proverbs with conceptual metaphors facilitates the choice and matching of cloths with the social status or magnitude of political power of kings, queen-mothers, Ghanaian key politicians and other men and women of affluence. Accordingly, *kente* is the most common body wear of Ghanaian kings, chiefs or queens, and presidents (re-contextualized rulers) during installations

² "Ghana Traditional Textile Project: Conservation and Tourism Development," a National Conservation Research Centre (NCRC) document. Thanks to Bezaleel Dor, former Associate Director of Small Enterprise Development at US Peace Corps, Ghana, who made this document available to me.

³ The preceding truly reflects Ghanaian's perception and aesthetic imagination of their esteemed cloth, although they express their valuation in more subtle ways than tourists' open and loud compliments about *kente*.

⁴ See Boateng, Boatema (2011) *The Copyright Thing Doesn't Work Here: Andinkra and Kente Cloth and Intellectual Property in Ghana* and <http://africa.si.edu/exhibits/kente/about.htm> for additional information on *kente*.

⁵ See Lamb (1975); Posnansky (1992, 11-132) on Ewe cloth, and https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=06_o6MdgWc on *kete* weaving among the Ewe.

and swearing-in ceremonies, festivals, and other important celebratory state events.⁶ Similarly, *kente* is one of the most esteemed political gifts from Ghanaians to visiting foreign presidents and other world-renowned leaders of global organizations.⁷

These days, many so-called ordinary Ghanaians work hard to acquire *kente* as one of their most cherished belongings. Accordingly, *kente* is no longer the exclusive monopoly of the affluent. It now serves both as an articulated index of power for the wealthy and as a tool of self-empowerment for less economically privileged Ghanaians. Indeed, *kente* means different things to different people. For example, it is common practice for an Ewe weaver to weave a cloth called *sasa*, which literally suggests how a couple's love has been strongly tied up or intertwined, as a special gift and expression of gratitude to his wife for keeping her fidelity and providing the family the needed support.

In her personal narratives on what *kente* means to her as a Ghanaian, Boateng (2011) regards *kente* as a status symbol, as its acquisition marks milestones of coming-of-age, becoming a woman, marriage, and a state of economic independence. *Kente* becomes a transferred or inherited wealth, when bequeathed by parents or grandparents. Boateng sees her birthrights of Ghanaian citizenship infused in *kente* and a reason why *adinkra* and *kente* represented "visual reinforcements of [her] Ghanaian identity, [and served] as antidotes to [her] homesickness," whenever she donned them while away from home in the United States of America (Boateng 2011: 1).⁸

Scanning through biographical texts on Ephraim Amu, including photos, one obtains a sense of the extent to which he treasured *kente* cloth throughout his life. For example, Amu used *kente* cloth in/of different colors for preaching, marriage, and conducting choirs whose members also wear *kente*. He received his honorary doctorate from the University of Ghana in a *kente* cloth over which he donned the university's academic gown, which in 1965 did not yet have the *kente* strips as its lining.⁹ He was in *kente* when he was honored during the 1991 National Cultural Festival held in Kumasi.

Adjaye (1997) provides critical insights on the multiple constructed meanings by individuals and groups of *kente* in contemporary Africa and its diaspora. Beyond Ghana and the rest of Africa, Africentric use of *kente* by African Americans as a symbolic identity marker is a commonplace cultural behavior (Adjaye 1997: 23-39; N'Diaye 2005: 36). As I have observed elsewhere, "While African Americans don *kente* cloths on special occasions, such as weddings and Black History Month events, black preachers, choirs, and graduating students decorate their robes and gowns with *kente*" (Dor 2006: 515). In a video on the 1994 PANAFEST (Pan-African Festival) produced by Ghana's National Commission on Culture, for example, one can see the world-renowned African American poet Maya Angelou wrapped in *kente* as she performs

⁶ Exceptions to the preceding practice include selected use of special wardresses by chiefs for different contexts, or their preference for *adinkra* on state funerals.

⁷ This practice does not apply to dignitaries attending a state funeral in Ghana.

⁸ That 'Black Stars' (Ghana's national soccer team's) jerseys for FIFA 2014 were lined with *kente* designs corroborates Boateng's assertion that *kente* serves as a symbol of national identity.

⁹ Some of these photos are on un-numbered pages between pages 64 and 65 in Agyemang (1988).

her poem “Africa”. The poet, poem, event, and the performer’s body wear – *kente* – all reinforce and index prideful identity with African heritage.¹⁰ The exhibition “Wrapped in Pride: Ghanaian Kente and African American Identity” further illuminates this cultural homology, and this is just one of the several exhibitions aimed at creating awareness and providing education on *kente* in the diaspora.¹¹

A *kente* motif that resonates most with this paper’s theme of creativity and knowledge is *adwineasa*, which literarily means “all the motifs have been exhausted,” or “completely explored,” in the process of producing this exceptional *kente* cloth. In the past only the royalty exclusively and deservingly wore it. Accordingly, the motif name *adwineasa* exemplifies a conscious critical aesthetic evaluation of the design that occurs in the creative imagination of *kente* weavers and reflects various degrees of their ingenuity. Only master weavers are able to produce this artistic nexus of the several intricate motifs that comprise *adwineasa*, which articulates the acme of creativity, innovative perfectionism, artistic expressivity and application of rare traditional knowledge. Fittingly, another translation of *adwineasa* is “all knowledge or skill has been exhausted.”



Figure 2. A strip of *adwineasa kente* cloth

It is necessary in celebrating the beauty of the finished *kente* cloth to also valorize its weavers as ingenious designers and producers of this art form. One need not be deceived by the normal simple lifestyle of the Ghanaian *kente* weaver, or by outward appearances of this indigenous weaving industry in relation to the “sophisticated” modern textile industry, to downplay the ontological source of this characteristic Ghanaian body wear. Although the cloth, its weaver, and weaving are all sources of novelty, I will show how Amu privileges only agency and process in his song. These are the areas to be explored in this article. But initially it is important to discuss what motivated Amu to embark on his pursuit of specific experiential knowledge of the weaving of *kente*.

Prior to Amu’s path-finding efforts as a cultural patriot in Ghana, he began his compositional career by writing Western-type songs, dictated by the strong presence of colonial and missionary cultural imprints of the 1920s in the Gold Coast. Although a son of a traditional master drummer Amu, like his formally educated age mates, was acculturated in a number of ways. The parochial schools he attended, his training as

¹⁰ The production of industrial imitations of *kente* suggests awareness of the cultural importance of this iconic body-wear and that there is ample market for it.

¹¹ An exhibition on Ghanaian *Kente* in the USA: <http://africa.si.edu/exhibits/kente/about.htm>

a teacher, catechist, and musician, demands of work place behavior, music and dress code of the church to which he belonged, and the general cultural landscape of the Gold Coast (pre-colonial Ghana) all contributed to his cultural orientation. But from the late 1920s, as Amu was teaching at the Akropong Teacher Training College in the Eastern Region of Ghana, he began to celebrate his indigenous culture and decided to learn more about traditional Akan culture through a variety of means. His keen interest in traditional culture is particularly evident in his composition of the weaving song.

Resolving the controversy on the genesis of Amu's weaving song

When preparing an earlier paper on Amu's *Bonwere Kentenwene* weaving song¹² I read two conflicting accounts about what inspired this song. While one account claims Amu composed the song before visiting Bonwere, the Asante town famous for its *kente* weaving industry, the second account documents that Amu composed the song after visiting the weaving town. What was confusing to me was that Amu's biographer, Agyemang, recorded both accounts and the first is as follows:

So far, Amu had visited some Asante towns, but not Bonwere, the premier weaving town in Asante. However, a weaver from Bonwere described the Bonwere *kente* weaving industry to Amu, telling him that most of the royal *kente* attire of the king of Asante were woven in Bonwere. Amu, our prolific and imaginative composer, quickly produced a song on the Bonwere *kente* weaving of shuttling looms before he had visited the town (Agyemang 1988: 79).

Then, Agyemang reports that Reverend David Asante Akuffo, who premiered the art song in 1929 when he was a student at Akropong, corroborates the preceding by relating, "Akuffo in words explained the background of the song in an imaginative holiday spent watching the *kente* weavers at Bonwere at work" (1988: 80). However as I read on, the second account, an excerpt from a review by Dr. Danquah of a 1933 concert given by Amu and his Akropong students in Accra and published in *Times of West Africa* on 21 March, reads: "The fifth item was *Bonwere kente wene* (sic) descriptive of the obsession of a student on his first visit when on vacation to Bonwere, the famous *kente* weaving centre..." (Danquah in Agyemang 1988: 82-83).

I noticed that Danquah does not use the word "imaginative" in his report. Whether this was inadvertent or a deliberate journalistic omission intended to make Amu's trip to Bonwere sound real, it diminishes the composer's creative imagination. To resolve my dilemma I decided to contact the composer's daughter, Misonu, to establish the truth. This was her response to my e-mail:

Certainly it was all imagination, and this exhibits his creative nature. He composed the song late 1920's or early 1930's while in Akropong. He visited Bonwere for the first time with his family when we moved to Kumasi College of Technology, now KNUST in the early 1950's. (personal email from Misonu Amu, December 28, 2010)

¹² An earlier version of this article was presented at SEM 2008 at Wesleyan University, Middletown, Connecticut.

Misonu's response validates the first account. But who can blame the author of the second account, especially given the compelling, convincing, and natural way in which the song readily captures listeners' imagination. In fact, I later encountered several Ghanaians who reason along lines of the second account.

At the "Symposium and Festival on the Music of Dr. Ephraim Amu" at the New England Conservatory of Music in February 2014, I confidently shared what Misonu told me about the weaving song. To my surprise the preceding uncertainty and questioning of this art song's genesis resurfaced during the event. Accordingly, I consulted Misonu again to clear the air authoritatively. Below is her response in which she uses her father's related publication to add to the historicity of her position.

"Bonwere kente," one of the songs in *Twenty-five African Songs*, as well as "Akwaabadwom" were both written at that time in Akropong without the codas. ... All the songs in that book were composed while at Akropong when he had not started any research in Kumasi. Actually his first visit to the village Bonwere was in the early 1950's with all of us in the family. So emphatically, it was his imagination and if anybody gives any story consider it a fallacy. Before he wrote it he had NEVER EVER been to the village! (personal communication, Misonu Amu, June 2014).

Given this evidence, in this article I will foreground Ephraim Amu's remarkable innovative imagination and descriptive ability as a hallmark of his creativity.

Bonwere: a weaving center

Dubbed as one of the art villages in the Ashanti Region, Bonwere, within an hour's drive from Kumasi's outskirts, has perpetuated its rural industry of *kente* weaving for centuries. Bonwere is a source of supply for textile merchants in Accra, Kumasi and other major Ghanaian cities. Also, it is foremost a town that Ghanaian chiefs, queen mothers, and presidents know as a source of their quintessential celebratory body wear and regalia.¹³ Today, Bonwere has become an important attraction for most people who visit Kumasi, the capital city of the Asante Kingdom of Ghana. Visitors who travel to Bonwere receive a double treat; first, they benefit from a better price on the cost of *kente*; and second, they experience the captivating *kente* weaving process through first-hand observation.

Bonwere and Adanwomase are synonymous with Asante *kente*, just as Agortime Kpetoe and Agbozome are with the production of Ewe *kete* in the Volta Region. The Northern Region is also a source of another type of Ghanaian hand-woven cloth called *fugu*, mainly woven in Daboya.¹⁴ But while discourse on the production, preservation, and development of Ghana's traditional textiles, as well as Amu's song, tend to focus on weaving centers—towns and villages, it must be mentioned that individual weavers can be sparsely located in other villages, towns, and even cities after migrating from a notable weaving center. For example, Zakli Azila migrated from his Agortime Kpetoe

¹³ Ashanti royal cloths are also woven in Adanwomase (Ghana National Conservation Research Centre document).

¹⁴ From a Ghana National Conservation Research Centre document.

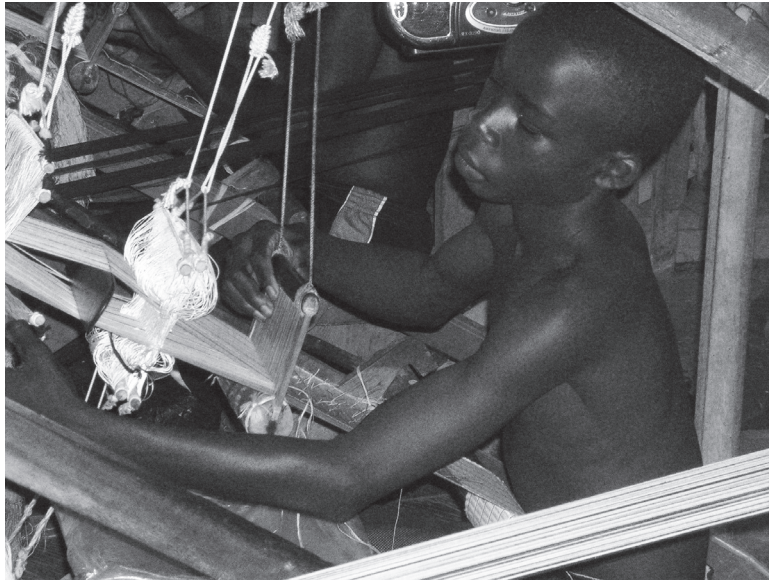


Figure 3. A boy weaving *kente* at Bonwere with the traditional loom.
Photo: courtesy of Annette Holloway

hometown to Alavanyo Wudidi¹⁵ (also in the Volta Region), where he lived and wove *kente* for people in and around that locality. Presently, weavers at the preceding centers are being encouraged to work corporately at the same physical workplace so that they can win more financial support from both internal and external sources to develop their industries. However, the original practice was/is for weavers from the same center to weave at their respective individual family homes, although they may hold periodic meetings to discuss their common vocation. I argue that Amu's reference in the lyrics of "Bonwere Kentenwene" to hearing the sound of *kente* weaving from the first house he entered upon arriving at Bonwere evokes the older practice.

Bonwere Kentenwenedwon (The Weaving Song)

From this introductory discussion of Dr. Ephraim Amu, the *kente* cloth and its production in Bonwere, I now redirect focus on the weaving song itself. Before analysis of the song text, I present the song's original Twi lyrics and their English translation. Figure 4 contains the lyrics of the four verses through which Amu narrated his experiences on his journey. Each verse concludes with a refrain/chorus. Since the text was prepared as a guide for students to learn to sing the chorus, it excludes the spoken interludes, but it has the scores of the refrain/chorus. As in other Amu songs, "Bonwere Kentenwene" is in Akuapem Twi,¹⁶ the version of Twi spoken in Akropong.

¹⁵ Alavanyo Wudidi is about sixty miles north of Agortime Kpetoe.

¹⁶ Twi is the language spoken by the confederacy of Akan ethnic groups. Each group speaks its unique dialect.

BONWERE KENTEJWENE

Words and music by
E. Amu

Verse 1: Akyinkyinakyinkyiyi ama mahū nmena,
Akyinkyinakyinkyiyi ama mate-nse-maa,
Asante Bonwerε kentejwene miḡhū bi da o,
Asante Bonwerε kentejwene mentee bi da o.
Kwame Onimadeeyo ne kentejwene n'abo 'me gye,
Ne nsa, ne nan ne nsedua, se wogyigye ni:

Chorus

mp s s s s

Kro, kro, Kro, kro, hī, hī, hī, hī, kro hī kro hī kro kro kro,

7 s s s s

hī, hī, kro kro kro, hī, hī, kro hī kro, kro hī kro n'a - ye me deo, a -

13

ye me deo, Bon-we-ε ken-te - we - ne n'a! A - ye me deo, a - bo me gye.

Verse 2: Kentejwene dwom yi afa madwene dennej
Babiara a mefa mereto no dennej
Na nnipa a wohū me nyinna hūi se asem da me so
Na mehō yee wɔɔ ɲwɔɲwɔ ma wɔbɛkyeree me so.
eno Ohūonimmɔɔ befaa me kɛ kɛsoe ne fi,
N'ɔpataa me ara, bisaa me manantese.

Chorus

Verse 3: Ohūonimmɔɔ ante mase ara de,
Nansō ɔɔɔ mmɔdenj yee hō biara māa me,
ɔmaa me ɲkate ɲkwan pa bi di mēe pa ara
Na ne dew maa me werε fii me dwom no kakra.
ɔmaa me baabi pa dae ɔdasum pε mehɔɔ dagye,
Kentejwene dwom koro yi ara na mereto.

Chorus

Verse 4: Mankye Bonwerε ho na mesaj mebaa fie,
Me dwom no ye nnipa pii de na wɔpe atie,
ɛmaa mani gyee i pii se manya bribi pa rekɔ,
Na miduu fie pε mekɔɔ ahenfie anantesebo,
Mmrante nē mmabaa nē ɲkwakoraa, mmerewa nē mmɔfra,
Wɔbae, beboa e Wɔɔ nyinaara bekyeree me so.

Chorus

(c) 1961 Presbyterian Book Depot Ltd.

Figure 4. Bonwerε Kentejwene Chorus melody, verse and chorus lyrics. Score courtesy of Presbyterian Book Depot and Felicia Sandler.

Below is the English translation of the song lyrics including the spoken interludes, prepared with assistance from Safo and Kate Aboaku.¹⁷

Verse 1

Akyinkyiŋ akyinkyiŋ ama mahū nneema
Traveling has made me see several things

Akyinkyiŋ akyinkyiŋ¹⁸ ama mate nsemaa
Traveling has made me hear new things

Asante Bonwere kente ηwene miηhūu bi da o
Asante Bonwere *kente* weaving, I have not seen before

Asante Bonwere kente ηwene miηtee bi da o
Asante Bonwere *kente* weaving, I have not heard before

Kwame Onimadeeyo ne kente ηwene n'abɔ me gye
Kwame Onimadeeyo the knowledgeable one's skillful *kente* weaving marvels me

Ne nsā, ne nan, ne nsedua, se wogyigye ni
His hands, his legs, his fingers all help in producing the sound

Refrain:

Kro, kro, kro, kro, hi, hi, hi, hi. Kro hi kro hi kro kro kro, hi, hi, kro kro kro, hi, hi
Kro, kro, kro, kro, hi, hi, hi, hi. Kro hi kro hi kro kro kro, hi, hi, kro kro kro, hi, hi

Kro hi kro, kro hi kro nà ye me deo, aye me deo
Kro hi kro, kro hi kro pleases me, it pleases me

Bonwere kente ηwene nà! Aye me deo, abɔ me gye
Bonwere *kente* weaving pleases me, and has made me happy

Verse 2

Kenteηwene dwom yi afa madwene denney
The *kente* weaving song has captured my thoughts (imagination)

Babiara a mefa mereto no denney
Everywhere I passed I would sing it aloud

Na nripa a wohūu me nyinaa hūi se a sem da me so
All the people who saw me realized that I had something on my mind (anxiety)

Na mehō yeη wɔη ηwō ηwā ma wɔbɛkye ree me so
All the people who saw me were shocked and they crowded around me

eno Ohūonimmɔɔ bɛfaa me kɔe kɔsoe ne fi
Then an elderly woman had pity on me and came and took me to her house

N'ɔ pataa me ara, bisaa me manantese
After comforting me, she then asked about my journey's mission

¹⁷ Safo and Kate are Ghanaians living in Oxford, MS, and Safo is a native Twi speaker.

¹⁸ Literally, the word translates as walking, the oldest means of travelling from one place to the other.

Spoken Interlude

Ose: "Meba, edeβeη?" Mese: "Awo, hmm!"

She said, my child what is it? I said, my mother

Meye osuani a mifi Akurɔɔɔη Asuaekunini no mu

I am a student/learner from the Akropong Teacher Training College

Na mate sɛnea Bonwerɛ kurow yi agye diη wɔ kenteηwene mu

I have heard that Bonwere town is famous for its *kente* weaving industry

Na wɔgyaa yeη kwan yi, maba sɛ mehwɛ nea metee wɔ hɔ no

This is why I have come to see what I have heard

Menya miduu kurow no mu pɛ, ofi a edi kaη a miduu hɔ mu no

Immediately I got to the town, and as I entered the first house

Metee. Na mekɔ hui sɛ ɔpanyiη Kwame Onimadeɛyɔ reηwene kente

I heard, went, and saw elder and skillful Kwame Onimadeeyo weaving *kente*

Agya Kwame Onimadeɛyɔ nɛ kente diη a menya mebɔe pɛ

At the mention of elder Kwame Onimadeeyo's name

Na dwom no de mehɔ abɛhyɛ manɔ:

The song instantaneously came to my lips:

Sung Refrain

Kro, kro, kro, kro, hi, hi, hi, hi. Kro hi kro hi kro kro kro, hi, hi, kro kro kro, hi, hi

Kro, kro, kro, kro, hi, hi, hi, hi. Kro hi kro hi kro kro kro, hi, hi, kro kro kro, hi, hi

Kro hi kro, kro hi kro nà ye me dɛo, aye me dɛo

Kro hi kro, kro hi kro pleases me, it pleases me

Bonwerɛ kente ηwene nà! Aye me dɛo, abɔ me gye

Bonwerɛ *kente* weaving pleases me, and has made me happy

Verse 3

O hūonimmɔbɔ ante ma se ara de

She (the old woman) did not understand my pitiful situation

Nansɔɔ bɔɔ mmɔ deη ye hɔ biara māa me

Yet she did her very best for me

ɔmaa me ηkateηkwan pa bi di mēe pa ara

She gave me the real exquisite peanut-soup

Na ne dɛw maa me werɛ fi me dwom no kakra

I was very satisfied and the delicious soup made me forget part of the son

ɔmaa me baabi pa da e ɔdasum pɛ mebɔɔ dagye

She gave me a comfortable place to sleep and as a result a strong dream hit me

Kenteηwenedwom kora yi ara na mereto

Even in the dream I was singing the same *kente* weaving song

Spoken Interlude

eno Ohūonimmɔbɔ nɛ nefipamfo nyinaa nyan bae

The woman and her household all came

Begyinaa me daŋ a meda mu no ano, retie me dwom no

And gathered in front of the house in which I slept, to listen to my song

Na me ara anadwodwom nɛ ne de

You know how pleasing this night-song is

ekɔɔ won so ara yiye, maa me gye a mabɔ no saŋŋ wɔ bi

It went well with them and they applauded me

Na se mefre dwom no a, na wɔŋ nyinaa gey so:

As I intoned the song again, they all responded, singing:

Sung Refrain

Kro, kro, kro, kro, hi, hi, hi, hi. Kro hi kro hi kro kro kro, hi, hi, kro kro kro, hi, hi

Kro, kro, kro, kro, hi, hi, hi, hi. Kro hi kro hi kro kro kro, hi, hi, kro kro kro, hi, hi

Kro hi kro, kro hi kro nà ye me deo, aye me deo

Kro hi kro, kro hi kro pleases me, it pleases me

Bonwerɛ kente ŋwene nà! Aye me deo, abɔ me gye

Bonwerɛ kente weaving pleases me, and has made me happy

Verse 4

Mankye Bonwerɛ hɔ na mesan mebaa fie

I did not spend too much time at Bonwere before returning home (Akropong)

Me dwom no ye nnipa pii de na wɔ pe atie

My song appealed to several people and they wanted to listen to it again

ɛmaa mani gyeei pii se manya bribi pa rekɔ

I was very pleased that I have found something to take back home

Na miduu fie pe mekɔɔ ahenfie anantesebɔ

As soon as I reached home I went to the palace to tell what had transpired

Mmrante nɛ mmabaa nɛŋkwakoraa, mmerewa nɛ mmɔfra

Young men and women, boys and girls, old women and children

Wɔbae, be boae. Wɔŋ nyinaara bekyeree me so

All came and surrounded me ready to listen to my message

Spoken Interlude

Mise, nnipa ŋkɔ ara a ebeboaa hɔ, ofi biara mu

I say, everybody from every house gathered

Aŋka ɔtwe, aŋka adowa

There was no antelope left, there was no deer left

ɛn'na mehwɛɛe komm na mise: Ei, nnipa dɔm yi

So, I reflected quietly and then said: E! What a magnitude of a crowd!

Amanee beŋ po na mobɔ wɔŋ a ebe wɔŋ ani?

What message could I give to this gathering that would satisfy them?

en̄de edi me Bonwere kentenwene dwom yi ara

I resolved that it should be nothing but the Bonwere *kente* weaving song

Na mede mahyehye so, na okyeame no asom, na amanfo no agye so

So, after I started it, the linguist¹⁹ also continued, and the crowd responded

Na efi ho, wofa kurow no beŋkum anaa nifa, apuei anaa atɔe a wo bete:

Since that time, if you went to the west or east, north or south, you will hear:

Sung Refrain

Kro, kro, kro, kro, hi, hi, hi, hi. Kro hi kro hi kro kro kro, hi, hi, kro kro kro, hi, hi

Kro, kro, kro, kro, hi, hi, hi, hi. Kro hi kro hi kro kro kro, hi, hi, kro kro kro, hi, hi

Kro hi kro, kro hi kro n̄a ye me deo, aye me deo

Kro hi kro, kro hi kro pleases me, it pleases me

Bonwere kentenwene n̄a! Aye me deo, abɔ me gye

Bonwere kente weaving pleases me, and has made me happy

Lyrics, form, genre, and creative contexts

After listening to the song [DVD track 1] and focusing on the lyrics, one can conclude that Amu was telling a story as both the key narrator and protagonist. But what is the story's message? Who are the key characters, and how did their roles reinforce the message? Who are the target and participating audiences? What communicative devices did Amu privilege and how effective were these? What accounts for the broader cultural meanings of his message?

A close reading reveals that Amu deploys the strophic form and folk tale narration model for a purpose. Ideally, the verses allow the composer to center his narration on a particular custodian of Akan traditional knowledge as dictated by contextual shifts during the journey. Thus, while Verse 1 focuses on the skillful weaver and the weaving soundscape, Verse 2 references a composer's birthing of his song and the Bonwere community's response to the Amu's needs. Verse 3 recounts the old woman's hospitality, and Verse 4 relates Amu's return home and then at the palace where the roles of the chief and linguist, a Ghanaian royal rhetorical expert and orator (Yankah 1997), are prescribed by tradition. In keeping with the practice of a recurring song sung during typical storytelling settings, the refrain that concludes each verse of "Bonwere Kentenwene" suggests a profound novelty that the lingering images from the *kente* weaving experience provided Amu. Furthermore, while the verse serves as the call section in which the lead singer can vary his song texts or have melodic commutations,²⁰ in subsequent verses the refrain is the fixed chorus section that first the old woman's

¹⁹ A traditional linguist, called *okyeame* among the Akan people. (See Yankah 1995)

²⁰ Melodic commutation is a process of substituting melodic tones with vertically related ones during the repetition of the same melody in a performance.

household and then the crowd at the palace sing. He ends with "Since that time, if you went to the west or east, north or south, you will hear the song," thereby alerting a culturally informed listener of the finality of the narration, because folktales normally end in such formulaic constructions. However, the Ghanaian traditional concept of *amaneε* or *nantese* [Akuapen Twi] during the conduct of a journey requires two brief narratives from the traveler: one upon arrival at one's destination and the second at the traveler's return home. Accordingly, Amu performed the first to the elderly woman and the second at the palace. But, within the broader context, the narration may be viewed as sharing of acquired knowledge through a composition. Also of thematic interest is the level of musical participation Amu has included in this art song.

Verse 1

Opening with a novelty, expectancy, and suggestion of how traveling enables gaining knowledge, Amu's swift shift of focus to the knowledgeable and skillful master *kente* weaver as the ontological source of the *kente* weaving process is noteworthy. Amu continues his regard for the weaver's agency by expressing his fascination with the mutual roles and efficacy of parts of the body in the creative process. Verse 1 constitutes an intersection of expectations, imagination, and knowledge.

Verse 2

When a new song is forming in a composer's mind, it yields a kind of unrest that can be misconstrued by others as strange. It was such a behavior that drew the attention and sympathy of Bonwere citizens who did not know that the stranger was a composer. The narrator (Amu) kept singing in order to memorize the song that had come to him. But how can a mere mention of a name spark a compositional idea? Remembering that Amu's primary purpose for this imaginary trip was his search for local knowledge, it must be very reassuring that Elder Kwame was introduced to Amu as the most experienced and skilled weaver, a person of the caliber that can produce *adwineasa*. Amu did not hide his excitement and joy at meeting the weaver, a true guardian of indigenous wisdom. The meaning of the weaver's name "the knowledgeable one," his distinguished acclaim, Amu's observation of his weaving of beautiful *kente* strips, the music of the soundscape, all underscores the composer's joy. This verse is about creative innovation of both the weaver and composer.

Verse 3

Akan and other Ghanaian cultural communities revere elderly women as custodians of local knowledge. They are noted for their circumstantial wisdom and judgment, which they often display with an admirable spontaneity. Whether it is during times of war or the selection of prospective paramount chiefs, elderly women contribute profound and decisive inputs. Yankah (1995: 68-83) recalls how even during traditional arbitrations involving only men, the elected team of elders who determine the final verdict normally excuse themselves from the gathering with the expression that they are going to consult

the old lady for wisdom. Such verbal allusions that attest to old women's acumen may be found among other Ghanaian ethnic groups. A classic example is Agawu's (1995: 178) discussion of formulaic disclaimer in Northern Ewe storytelling practice that names the old lady as the source of the story to divert focus and possible blame of the narrator as the author of an instructive tale or a social critique. Mention of the old lady legitimizes the story's truth-worthiness and the seriousness with which its moral or didactic intent impacts the listening audience. Similarly, the elderly woman in Amu's song demonstrates such a virtue. When most members of the Bonwere community surrounded Amu expressing their pity, it was the old lady who realized that Amu, the stranger, needed comfort, love, shelter, food – typical traditional Ghanaian hospitality. Further, when Amu narrates that she fed him with *ɲkateɲkwan*,²¹ the real groundnut (peanut) soup, he implies the epitome of a cook because making of peanut soup requires substantial display of a gendered Ghanaian knowledge. While most Ghanaians understand the national specialty that Amu describes from this general awareness, there is another reading by Amu's Akropong college students into what was a "real peanut soup."

Agyemang (1988: 52-53) documents a development at the Akropong Teacher Training College that reverberates with Amu's reference to the groundnut soup in the lyrics of Verse 3 as follows

According to Mr. Victor Opoku, a student at Akropong in 1929... "the administration discontinued the services of Ghanaian female cooks that prepared meals for the students and hired male Nigerian and Liberian chefs in their place. "...The foreign male cooks did a thoroughly bad job in their attempts to prepare Ghanaian palm-nut soup or groundnut soup..." that the Ghanaian students could hardly eat, because it was not their specialty. After "...the men cooks were paid off and replaced by women cooks from the Christian community in Akropong, [it] brought smiles [back] on all faces in the dinning hall."

I argue the students evoked this incident from their collective memory when the weaving song was premiered in Akropong resulting in their construction of meaning that was more immediate to one of Amu's imaginary creative contexts—the old woman's home and hospitality. I suggest the preceding story serves as one of several factors that contributed to their positive reception of the song. Finally, the old woman calls the young man (Amu) her son, although he is not her biological son, as is typical in Ghanaian cultural ethos of the extended family, to refer to a visiting young man as a son.

Verse 4

The chief of Akropong and his *okyeame* (linguist) are the custodians of local knowledge mentioned in Verse 4. As tradition demands, Amu could not have spoken directly to the chief. It is then important to observe that the linguist's response to the song and its message, without any need for refinement before passing it on to the chief and the populace, legitimizes the song as authentic. The *okyeame* is not simply a mediator and

²¹ This is the Akan word for peanut-soup.

enforcer of traditional protocol. He also refines texts for the consumption of the royalty and citizens. But, why did Amu decide to report his discovery to the chief of Akropong? He did this because: the chief is the highest authority of the city; Nana Kwasi Akuffo, the paramount chief of Akropong, promoted Amu's interest in traditional Akan culture; it is an important discovery that needs to be shared with the whole town and it is faster to mobilize the populace through the enabling systems of traditional courts; *kente* is associated with the royalty as part of its regalia, thus a message on *kente* weaving must be of interest to any Akan chief. The chief is pleased that Amu continued to intensify his study of his native traditional knowledge and culture, in spite of the pressures of strong Western influence. Finally, Amu was a friend to the Akuffo royal family of Akropong.

The rhythm of the melody

Listening to the rhythmic vitality of "Bonwere Kentenwene" can evoke excitement, joy, and inner satisfaction. A critical probe into the possible source of this rhythm leads me to argue that Amu drew upon the *Ohene kɔ Adwuma* movement of the *kete* suite of the Akan,²² one of the processional movements of this regal suite (Younge 2011: 200). Rhythmic motifs of this dance run through the melody, with the exception of the refrain's beginning. As such, the rhythm of a song composed about the most precious Ghanaian cloth, part of royal regalia, also evokes sonic icons of a court dance. Amu also composed his "*Enne ye anigye da*" ("Today is a joyous day") in the same rhythmic dance vein (See Amu 1993: 141-143, 147-149; Dor 1992: 39). Both songs were composed around the same time (ca. 1929-1932), which could have influenced their identical rhythms.

Phonemic tone and syllabic duration, versification, and melodic commutation

As in his mature choral works, Amu observes a close relationship between contours of spoken language and melodic tone. Similar to his treatment of tonal Twi in melody, Amu correspondingly represents the relative pitches of the shuttle and the pedals, as he heard the shuttle's "kro" as a lower pitch from the pedal's onomatopoeic "hi." To further strengthen the unity between the spoken text and melody, Amu also observes a close relationship between the relative durations of syllables in both text and melody. And at the end of certain words he requires tonal glides as in normal speech. An example can be found in the chorus where Amu simulates the sound of the pedals with glides notated with "s" written above the notes for the syllable "hi."

In other discussions of Amu's choral works, I have observed the challenges inherent in writing works in strophic form, especially when spoken inflections of tonal languages, here Twi and Ewe, dictate melodic movement and direction (Dor 1992: 90-92; Agawu 1984). It is important to observe that Amu similarly explores the device of substituting keywords in his other two solo songs, both of which are in strophic form.

²² Elikem Nyamuame (PC, June 2014) affirms the name of the dance movement I argue Amu evoked.

In the subsequent verses however, he modifies the melodic tones to reflect spoken inflections of the substituted words, but ensuring that they could still harmonize with the accompanying piano parts, a procedure that implicates melodic commutation (Dor 2005: 227-246). However, in the weaving song the lyrics of each verse are completely different and Amu had to modify melodic tones and syllabic rhythms to match the harmonies of the piano accompaniment. Working within the framework of “verse and refrain,” the repeated refrain section favors versification since subsequent verses end with the same music and do not require any melodic modification.

Piano accompaniment

As part of his unflinching commitment to the cause of Africa’s cultural autonomy, Amu preferably wrote his instrumental pieces for the *atenteben*, *odurugya* and *odurogyaba*, traditional Akan flutes that he modernized, and never wrote symphonic, chamber or piano solo works. He normally accompanied his flute pieces with Ghanaian drums.

The image shows a musical score for a piece titled "Alberti bass". It is written in B-flat major (two flats) and 4/4 time. The score is divided into two systems. Each system consists of three staves: a vocal line in the treble clef and a piano accompaniment in the treble and bass clefs. The lyrics are written below the vocal line. The first system's lyrics are "hi, hi, hi, hi, kro hi kro hi kro, kro, kro, kro,". The second system's lyrics are "hi, hi, kro kro kro, hi, hi kro hi kro,". The piano accompaniment features a characteristic Alberti bass pattern of eighth-note chords.

Figure 5. Alberti bass. Score: Courtesy of Agordoh (2004: 125)

Was he then inconsistent in his creative cultural patriotism when he chose to use the piano to accompany his three art songs and the *Prelude for Atenteben*? Yes, I think he was. However, such a compromise confirms that Amu did not completely reject all Western practices. Rather, he retained practices that were suitable for his specific needs. Philip Laryea speaks to this theme when he discusses Amu's influencers and judicious use of aspects of Western culture while promoting his native traditions.

As *adikanofo* [forebears], Fraser and Aggrey were Amu's mentors. From these pioneers Amu learnt to appropriate and adapt the best in Western culture to enhance his own tradition. He was culturally avant-garde but he was not, as most people perceived him to be, an iconoclast" (2012: 186).

In an interview Laryea had with Nketia on Amu, which legitimizes and supports the preceding, Nketia recalled how Amu and his guests would drink water in calabashes, eat in earthen dishes, but would take tea in cups saying, "And so this kind of selective

The image displays two systems of a musical score. Each system consists of a vocal line (treble clef) and a piano accompaniment (treble and bass clefs). The key signature is one flat (B-flat major/D minor) and the time signature is 4/4. The first system includes a triplet of eighth notes in the vocal line. The lyrics are:

ken - te - t̄we ne n'a - lo me gye, Ne nsa, ne naŋ nen -
 faa me kœ ko - soa ne fi, N'ɔ - pa taa me - a ra, bi -
 da - sum pe me - bo da - gye, Ken - te t̄wene dwom ko ro
 kwa - koraa, mmere - wa n̄e mmo - fra, Wɔ - bae, be - boa - e Wɔŋ

The second system also includes a triplet of eighth notes in the vocal line. The lyrics are:

se - dua, se wo - gyi - gye ni:
 saa me ma - nan - te - se.
 yia - ra na me - re - to.
 nyinau - ra be - kyeree me so.

At the bottom of the second system, there are two small symbols: a stylized 'S' and a flower-like symbol.

Figure 6. Alternation of right and left hands. Score: Courtesy of Agordoh (2004: 124)

use of things from outside was also very important. And it goes through his music” (Nketia, in Laryea 2012: 187). Here it is Amu’s use of the piano, and I now discuss the dramaturgical role of the piano, which in turn will illuminate the factors of selectivity.

If the song captures the soundscape of the Bonwere *kente* weaving industry, then the piano propels the programmatic qualities of the narrative by simulating the weaving process through three main stylistic devices: the Alberti bass,²³ alternation of chords in the left and right hands, and scale fragments. At the refrain Amu concentrates on the onomatopoeic sound of the local shuttle as well as the pedals, captured in “kro kro hi hi” in the voice, while the accompanying Alberti bass figurations in the piano (see Figure 5) suggest the pulsating energy that the loom releases.

When the composer focuses on parts of the weaver’s body that are central to the weaving, such as the alternation of hands that throw the shuttle, the beater used in compressing the new thread against the in-progress-strip, fingers sorting the threads and the foot pedals that drag the bundle of threads, it is captured in both the sonic effects and the motor movements of the bilateral exchanges of the left and right hands on the piano (see Figure 6). Perhaps the following excerpt from Danquah’s review quoted earlier captures what Amu evokes in his music: “...with the shuttle travelling through the warp and woof of the yarn as the weaver manipulates this apparatus [loom]”²⁴ (Danquah in Agyemang 1988: 83).

Further, I will now explicate my objections to Laryea’s interpretation, “He [Amu] is overwhelmed and enthralled by music from an orchestra comprising the hands, the feet, the shuttle, and the loom of the weaver...” (2012: 215). It can be misleading to list “the hands” and “the feet” as instruments of the figurative orchestra implicated here. While the shuttle and the loom can loosely be described as instruments of the orchestra because the sound is coming from them, Amu’s fascination with the hands and feet in the lyrics is based on their roles and movements in the weaving process. Even in a world of an imagined “orchestral” performance, the aesthetic beauty of the movement of the hands of a harpist, for example, can be expressed along with the physical beauty of the instrument itself, in addition to the sound produced on it. Certainly, communities in the Sahel sub-region of West Africa that do not have dance drumming as part of their culture, but depend on practices of handclapping and foot stomping, with attached bells (secondary idiophones) that provide and activate rhythms for dancing, may warrant calling the “feet” and “hands” instruments.²⁵ But that was not the case with the imagined weaving and creative context that inspired “Bonwere Kentejwene.” Also, it must be stressed that Amu did not base his art song on any extant occupational song. It was

²³ “Alberti Bass: Left-hand accompaniment figure in keyboard music consisting of broken triads whose notes are played in the order: lowest, highest, middle, highest, ...and taking its name from Domenico Alberti (c1710-1746)....Alberti was in fact the first to make frequent use of it” (The New Grove 2001 [1]: 307).

²⁴ Excerpt from Dr. J. B. Danquah’s review in *Times of West Africa* of Amu’s March 1933 concert sponsored by the Honorable G.A.S. Northcote, Colonial Secretary, with His Excellency Governor Shenton Thomas and his daughter also in attendance.

²⁵ See Sandrine Loncke’s (2010) film *Dance with the Wodaabes*, for example.

entirely original and conceived by the composer from his imagination. Following is my understanding of how Amu uses the piano to evoke the sounds of the weaver's loom.

Amu references the movement of the thread through fragmented scales carried in sixteenth notes mostly in the right hand. Furthermore, the arpeggios on the piano that introduce and accompany the beginning sections of each verse (see Figure 7) add to the

The image displays a musical score for the piece "Bonwere Kentenwene" by Ephraim Amu. It consists of three systems of music, each featuring a vocal line and piano accompaniment. The key signature is B-flat major (two flats), and the time signature is 2/4. The first system includes a vocal line with the lyrics "nwe - ne n'a! A - ye me deo, a - bo me gye." and a piano accompaniment with a *DS* marking. The piano part features fragmented scales in the right hand and arpeggios in the left hand, with some notes marked with an asterisk and the word "Ped" (pedal). The second and third systems continue the piano accompaniment with similar fragmented scales and arpeggios, also including "Ped" markings. The score is characterized by the use of triplets and sixteenth-note patterns, which are used to evoke the sounds of a weaver's loom.

Figure 7. Movement in fragmented scales and arpeggios. Score courtesy of Agordoh (2004: 126)

feeling of this general movement in the threads and total kinetic energy of the loom. In his concept of “African Pianism,” Akin Euba asserts that composers can “make the piano behave like an African instrument” (1989: 151-152). In the case of the “Bonwere Kenterwene,” the piano did not simulate any traditional African instrument. Rather, it captured the soundscape and the kinetic energy of the weaving process of a traditional loom and a weaver.

Communicative devices, performance history, dissemination and reception

Amu’s remarkable innovative imagination as a composer now needs foregrounding. I have already discussed how most Ghanaians marvel at how the entire lyrics of this piece are an imaginary tale, because the song text sounds very real. Furthermore, Amu has an outstanding descriptive ability and gift, a quality of all great storytellers. For example, the power of the woman’s exquisite peanut-soup made Amu forget part of his song, and as a result of his extreme satisfaction with the hospitality, a dream “hit” him when he slept. Such textual constructions can be deemed poetic. Laryea (2012: 181-197) persuasively explores “Amu the Poet”. In my study of the works of Vinokɔ Akpalu, the celebrated Anlo Ewe composer, poet, singer, I note that by African conception, music and poetry are symbiotically intertwined as poetry is sung. It is not surprising then that Amu, a Ghanaian composer of art music, earned the designation poet. Admittedly, the content and generic sources that inspired Amu’s lyrics are diverse. An entire text of a particular song may not be considered poetry, but it may contain certain phrases that can be described as poetic. A few such instances of poetic devices found in the weaving song include the characterization embedded in the names Amu gave to the knowledgeable weaver and the merciful and kind old woman. Further, Amu had the creative habit of covering all the necessary components or dimensions of an important theme in his lyrics. After his description of the coordination of parts of the body involved in the weaving process, for example, he vividly describes how everybody gathered at the palace and then all the directions where the song can be heard. The preceding poetic elements come to life when the singer, in performance, dramatizes them in a heightened storytelling mode.

Other Amu songs advocate the exercise of all the senses, and all virtues,²⁶ the need to coordinate all parts of the body,²⁷ and the need to remember that philosophical truths must be heard by all, from both the paternal and maternal sides of the extended family.²⁸ Thus it can be argued that Amu addresses the totality of being, the use of all faculties of existence, holistic perception of things including the interconnectedness of life experiences. Through use of these devices Amu’s composition readily captures a listeners’ imagination in a compelling and natural way.

²⁶ “Dzɔdzɔnyenyenyɛ” and “Nenyɔ”

²⁷ “Tiri ne nsa ne koma”

²⁸ See lyrics of “Tatanyɛviwoe”

In her article, "Dialogic Performances: Call-and-Response in African Narrating," Rachel Fretz observes:

In African performances, the actors and audiences are co-performers (Fretz 1994; Brenneis 1986). Many types of performers—dancers and diviners, storytellers, and singers—depend on an actively responsive audience to excel. In fact, many performances cannot begin without an appreciative group of responders (2004: 81).

Further, Fretz acknowledges important contributions of Harold Sheub (1975) to the study of "performers' dramatization of events, ...audience comments and questions and...narrators' reactions to listeners' participation" (2004: 82). Earlier, I discussed the extent to which Amu demonstrates an understanding of the folktale tradition in terms of structure, content, and roles of key players. In his weaving song story, evidence of the types of dialogues referenced above includes questions and answers between Amu and the merciful woman and his interaction with the linguist at the palace. Also, as already elucidated, he strategically organizes call-and-response and strophic forms within the framework of storytelling. Amu's mastery of incorporating specific audiences and ability to contextually prescribe communicative strategies into the music itself are very revealing. Typical of storytelling settings in which addressees are active participants, Amu crafted the voluntary participation of his various audiences throughout his imaginary journey into singers of the chorus or refrain of two verses. These audiences include members of the kind woman's household who joined the composer in his dream, and the multitude of Akropong citizens who gathered in the chief's palace to listen to Amu's *amaneε* or message. Performances of the weaving song that involve choruses and dramatization of the spoken interludes exemplify the dialogic interactions that the above dicta imply. Yet, Isidore Okpewho, a Nigerian scholar, thinks the audiences emit "warm presences" through their responsive participation in performances (1992: 42).

Beyond the artistic, performances of the weaving song provide Ghanaians and other audiences cultural values and lessons. Drewel succinctly summarizes work in performance studies and African folkloric research as follows:

In Africa, performance is a primary arena for the production of knowledge. It is where philosophy is enacted and where multiple and often simultaneous discourses are employed (1990: 72-86).

In addition, performance is a means by which people reflect on their current condition, define or reinvent themselves and their social world, and either re-enforce, resist or subvert the prevailing social order. Indeed both subversion and legitimation can emerge in the same utterance or act (2004: 336).

How Amu's song on *kente* weaving reiterates his broader philosophies including the celebration of traditional African knowledge and revitalization of African culture has been discussed above.

Storytelling, often sung, spoken, dramatized, and accompanied, offers multiple expressive forms for narrating a story that Laryea has cautioned cause this composition to be more than a "traveller's tale" (2012: 217). When one recalls the creative moment

and landscape of 1929, how Amu introduced himself as a student from the Akropong Teacher Training College, and how he had come to learn empirically about what he had heard about Bonwere, then it makes sense to consider criticism of some aspects of the prevailing colonial systems as implied. I agree with Laryea that Amu could indirectly be calling attention to the need for the incorporation of African cultural elements into the Teacher Training curriculum at the college in Akropong. Amu wrote the story in Akropong as he imagined the richness of the process implicated in the production of a form of traditional African knowledge in Bonwere. Further, in his composition he returned to the palace rather than the college in Akropong to share his “new research.” All of the preceding can be read as subtle counter hegemonic advocacy for change by Amu. He privileged only the “peaceful tools” of music in his creative process. But, Laryea (2012: 213-219) has rightly emphasized the Ghanaian and African patriotism that the performance of the weaving song evokes. As such, the song may suggest a subversion of the overbearing Western culture of the colonial era and later, while at the same time legitimizing African knowledge, culture, and heritage in some listeners’ imagination.

Consistent with typical traditional Ghanaian storytelling practice, the song text closes with a formulaic phrase that explains the piece’s popularity by saying “That is why since that day if one goes west or east, south or north, he or she will hear the weaving song being sung everywhere.” Agyemang (1988: 79-80) documented the warm reception the premiere performance in 1929 received at the Akropong Teacher Training College and how the whole audience left with the chorus resonating in their minds, ears, and on their lips. David Asante Akuffo, a student, was the soloist Amu himself accompanied in that electrifying rendition. I sketch a brief performance history of the weaving song below, privileging mostly notable events in the Gold Coast, Ghana, England, and the USA to demonstrate its on-going popularity as a performance piece.

In the memorable house concert that Colonial Secretary Geoffrey Northcote organized in March 1933, Amu and his Akropong student ensemble—flutes and drums—and choir left an indelible impression on the special audience that consisted mainly of diplomats, intellectuals, other politicians--internationals and Ghanaians of a very high social order and caliber. Danquah remarked “By far the most popular piece was the *Bonwere kente nwene* (sic) (Bonwere Kente weaving), an action song, led off by Mr. Amu in which the choir later joined. It received a very enthusiastic applause” (*The Times of West Africa*, Tuesday, March 14 1933). Similarly, another review, published in the *Gold Coast Spectator* of March 18, 1933, reported, “Of all the solos, *Bonwere Kente nwene* (sic) (Bonwere Kente weaving) was received with great applause” (Agyemang 1988: 82, 84).

Amu’s studies at the Royal Academy of Music in London from 1937 to 1941 not only shaped his compositional career. He also impacted his academic community in new ways, and one such moment concerns the weaving song. Amu reminisces how Dr. Bryant Mumford invited him to the University of London’s Institute of Education to share his music and dance with his students. After an impressive concert, Amu was requested to teach the students a song. “And in a short time he had taught the students from many

countries his onomatopoeic weaving and shuttling song: *Bonwere Kentewene* (sic). It was a memorable day at the Institute of Education...." (Agyemang 1988: 110-111).

Amu's family members' memories also contribute to the performance history of the weaving song. His daughter told me, "I remember he worked on these two songs and added the codas when we were at Tech. [Kumasi] and in the mid-50s he was invited to record these three solo songs for Radio at Accra. He rehearsed them several times before he went to Accra for the recording of these three solo songs. He accompanied himself." (Pers. Comm. Misonu Amu, June 2014). This recollection partly explains efforts that ultimately led to the mass dissemination of the weaving song on national radio in both the Gold Coast and Ghana at large for decades.

In 1969 Amu's student choir from the University of Ghana received a "seven minutes standing ovation" at the International Convention of University Choirs held at the Lincoln Center in New York City (Agyemang 1988: 64; Nketia 1993: 22).²⁹ A photo of Amu and his students singing the *kente* weaving song while wearing *kente* and *adinkra* cloth can be found in Agyemang (1988: 80).

During the April 6, 2006 occasion of the Amu Memorial Lecture at Christ the King Hall, Accra, Amu's daughter Misonu (voice) and her son Seva Ephraim Anku-Quacou (piano) performed the weaving song while Madina Presbyterian Church Choir and Central Choir of the West-Volta Presbytery of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Ghana, sang the chorus in unison. The composer's grandson (then thirteen years old) accompanied his mother, reinforcing the musicality of the Amu family and contributing to the audience's standing ovation for "Bonwere Kentenwene."

More recent performances of the weaving song in Boston, Massachusetts and Oxford, Mississippi demonstrate the gradual wide geographic spread of the song, as Amu predicted in his lyrics. Misonu Amu was invited to participate in the 'Festival and Symposium on the music of Dr. Ephraim Amu' at New England Conservatoire of Music (NEC) and Tufts University in February 2014 initiated and directed by NEC composer and theory faculty member, Felicia Sandler. She together with Misonu, and other choral directors³⁰ taught the chorus section (refrain) of the weaving song in unison to four choral groups³¹.

Finally, in April 2014 Misonu was guest artist at the University of Mississippi, Oxford, for the Ole Miss African Drum and Dance Ensemble's Spring Concert.³² The weaving song was one of four items she performed.

²⁹ The LP recording of this historic performance is entitled "Afro Request SRLP 5027. University of Ghana Chorus Music Director Dr. Ephraim Amu. Ghana Asuafo Reto Dwom. Ghana Students Sing."

³⁰ Jamie Kirsch, David Freeman Coleman, and Jonathan Richter.

³¹ Tuft University Concert Singers, Tufts University Gospel Choir, NEC Youth Chorale, and the Youth Chorus of the Ghana Association of Greater Boston. Most notable among them was the group of young Ghanaian children who dressed in outfits made from factory-made imitation *kente* fabrics.

³² Thanks to the University of Mississippi's Department of Music, Inn at Ole Miss, and Multicultural Affairs for cosponsoring Misonu's visit to Oxford from Boston.



Figure 8. Misonu Amu (in *kente*) performs “Bonwere Kentenwene” with George Dor, piano, and the Ole Miss African Drum and Dance Ensemble³³ (2014 Spring Concert, Nutt Auditorium [DVD Dor, video track 1]). Photo: courtesy of Don Cole³⁴

Taking cues from the Lincoln Center and Boston performances, I taught the art song’s refrain to my ensemble members. Amu made spoken discursive content integral to the narrative in the weaving song, and by so doing ensured that both sung and spoken expressive forms of folktale narration practice heighten the song’s evocative power and affect. Misonu took advantage of the preceding during the Oxford concert and dramatized the song’s lyrics, especially the spoken narrative. She invited the singers to the stage to join her during the spoken segment of Verse 3 to enact how those living in the old woman’s house at Bonwere joined the composer, while dreaming, in singing the chorus. After Misonu had sung Verse 4 and then dramatized the spoken interlude, she signaled the chorus to resume singing the refrain, now enacting the citizens of Akropong who, gathered at their chief’s palace after listening to the composer’s *amaneε*, voluntarily joined in singing the chorus.

As can be seen from Figure 8, performing the refrain, Misonu sings with the OMADDE chorus as singers have positioned their hands to simulate a *kente* weaver throwing his shuttle. Detailed program notes and video clips of *kente* weaving shown just before the performance facilitated the audience’s understanding and reception of the song.³⁵ The concert video [DVD track 1]³⁶ provides readers a glimpse of the sonic and visual affect of the performance of the “Bonwere Kentenwene.”

³³ Front row, L-R: Yawa Dor, Raven Gordon, Kate Aboaku, John Coleman, Shelita Dillon
Back row, L-R: Jason Gordon, Quasondria Price, Darrin Bynum, Keat Johnson. Middle row, L-R:
Beneshia Norton, Yasmin Glover (they are more visible in the video than in the photo).

³⁴ Don Cole is Assistant Provost and Special Advisor to the Chancellor of the University of Mississippi on Multicultural Affairs.

³⁵ A brief video on *kente* weaving: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rZ2_al_JZno

³⁶ Thanks to Charles Miles of UM’s Music Department, video recorder of the concert. The video excerpt contains the second and third verses of the Weaving Song.

The various international performances described above translate the formulaic phrase with which a Ghanaian folktale concludes into prophesy by demonstrating that this song's power and meaning is not confined to Ghana and is heard in all four directions. Amu's composition has a global appeal and salience. Although different audiences within the global artistic community will construct their own meanings, traditional cultural and social indexes certainly inform meanings for Ghanaians. The Ewe say, "*Detsivivi yeahea zikpui*" ("It is the sumptuous soup that draws the stool"). By implication and extension, I argue that it is the "sweetness" of Amu's weaving song that draws out listeners' affect, both among Ghanaian and international audiences.

Conclusion

A key focus of this article is the celebration of processes – both the process of *kente* weaving and Amu's creative process. Amu's entire narrative recalls the compositional process, from how a song is formed in the composer's imagination to how it is made into a favorite song for/of audiences. And although audiences play a major role in determining a masterpiece, the song text of the weaving song illustrates how composers themselves somehow can know when they have created a great song.

Amu's art song demonstrates the degree to which a precious wealth of indigenous knowledge awaits the hermeneutic attention of scholars. Africanist scholars and readers who appreciate creative processes will admire the intersections between Amu's cultural consciousness and knowledge, creative imagination, and his sensitivity to the importance of his indigenous culture in relation to the operational immanent historical context he lived in. He has displayed a masterful nexus of traditional African genres, structural forms, treatment of verbal text, values, and a symbiosis of both Ghanaian and Western pre-compositional resources in "Bonwere Kentenwene." This article has sought to demonstrate the extent and domains of Ghanaian knowledge that Amu, as an imaginative composer, creatively revitalizes and crafts into his beautiful art song. Amu's use of the piano and Western tonal harmony does not overshadow how this piece serves as a remarkable Ghanaian cultural text.

Certainly, a body of factors must explain the positive reception that the weaving song has received from both Ghanaian and foreign audiences. Amu's skillfully constructed narrative about the weaving of the most esteemed and valued cloth of Ghanaians, the alternation of sung and spoken discursive narration of a story, and the dialogical buildup and interplay between addresser and addressee in the lyrics are all sources of novelty. The successful dramaturgical use of the piano in invoking the loom, shuttle, and the sonic ecology is another affect generating factor.

"If one goes east or west, north or south, he/she will hear the song." I argued that the preceding phrase brings formulaic closure to Amu's narrative, but it is also a prediction of the song's expansive appeal, affect, and salience. Amu's song, though composed

during colonial times, still has a message that speaks to the challenges of today when some continue to say: “not yet *Uhuru*,³⁷ for the liberation process is not yet over.

Amu’s valorization of African traditional knowledge was underpinned by his broader philosophy of revitalization of African culture. Considering that “Bonwere Kenterwene” was composed in 1929, then, it can be argued that Ephraim Amu, following in the footsteps of his mentor Dr. Kwegir Aggrey, was a true pioneering advocate and embodiment of the ideal “African.” Amu must be central in any historiography that aims at exploring the foundations of the “African personality” concept that several leading black nationalists and intellectuals including Dr. Kwame Nkrumah would be espousing decades later, though with variant perspectives.³⁸ Not only was Amu a cultural patriot. He was and remains one of Ghana’s foremost guardians of traditional knowledge and a remarkable vanguard of reflexive modernity.

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³⁷ *Uhuru* means liberation in Swahili.

³⁸ Botwe-Asamoah (2005: 60-64) discusses the “African Personality” concept as various thinkers posited it before Kwame Nkrumah popularized it in November 1958 at “All African People’s Conference held in Accra. See also “The African Personality” in *Time* 4/28/1958, Vol. 71 Issue 17, 32. Also Dor 2014: 247-249.

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