ÈWÈ (GHANA) STORYTELLING SONGS

AND INTERNATIONALIZING UNDERGRADUATE CURRICULUM

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ABSTRACT

Since time immemorial the Èwè of Ghana’s Volta Region have relied on storytelling to teach and rehearse their community values. (See Figure 1) Within the framework of the storytelling performance, audience members interrupt the story with songs that lead to dancing, enliven sleepy listeners, and add each song leader’s interpretive ‘take’ on the story. Singing figures prominently because it allows community participation and, indeed, reverses the artist-audience roles. During the 2016 Ohio State ATI Ghana Research and Education Abroad tour, undergraduate and faculty researchers interviewed storytellers about the current role of storytelling in Èwè communities in the regional capital Ho and surrounding towns. Because of their liveliness, the group quickly learned a half-dozen storytelling interludes, which increased their ability to participate in later storytelling events and their understanding of the Èwè language. This white paper for the Center for Global Studies at the University of Illinois Champaign-Urbana briefly discusses the Ghana Research and Education Abroad, aspects of the storytelling songs we collected, available resources for studying...
the literary and musical aspects of storytelling interludes, and curriculum ideas for incorporating storytelling songs into sociology, anthropology, music, literature and education curricula. A future peer-reviewed journal article written with Ghanaian musician, Divine Kwasi Gbagbo, will develop these ideas.

KEY WORDS
Èwè Storytelling Song, Folktale Interlude, Folk Wisdom, African Melody, African Rhythm

INTRODUCTION
The need for financial cutbacks, particularly in the arts, has hit most of our universities. The argument goes, “The arts aren’t going to get anyone a job.” Science, technology, engineering, and math comprise the subject matter that the experts figure will save the American university and thereby the broader United States economic order. However, I believe a proverb from the Èwè people of eastern Ghana counters that assertion. It advises, “A tree lopped of its branches does not move in the wind.” I propose that trimming or eliminating the arts resembles topping a tree. (See Figure 2) This pruning method not only weakens the tree’s structure and destroys its ability to create photosynthesis, which nourishes and sustains it, but, metaphorically speaking, also creates a tree that cannot bend or adjust to the storms it will inevitably face. I contend, the arts create a space for exploring human nature, including our own. They teach us valuable lessons about how to understand and interact with our community, how to find our place in it, how to survive and overcome obstacles, how to create beauty and renew our souls, and how to be alone without losing our minds. The arts allow
us to empathize with characters who are very much or very little like us. The arts both center and
ground us and allow us to soar to great heights.

I contend this proverb convincingly illustrates the point that Èwè traditional knowledge packs a
punch for those interested in growth and enlightenment. Over the past 14 years, I have traveled with groups of Ohio State ATI undergraduates to towns around Ho in the Volta Region of Ghana to connect with locals to learn about their lives and
culture. Beginning at least in the 15th century, the Èwè call “home” the area from eastern Ghana
to southern Benin (Dotse 2011:1; See Figure 3). They are not the only group living in these areas,
but they do comprise the overwhelming majority. Despite more than a century of western-style
education, the Èwè have relied on the oral transmission of community knowledge through
proverbs and storytelling to communicate and sustain their culture. However, in the 21st century,
changes are finally coming. “The children are busy with their homework and television. They
don’t have time or interest in storytelling. We organized a storytelling and they wouldn’t come,”
one farmer in Akrofu-Xeviwofe complained. A high school teacher in Ho reports, “Children are
learning the stories by reading them in schoolbooks. They have classes in moral education that
use the stories and proverbs as reference points for discussion.” In other communities,
townspeople report that they have maintained the interest and reliance on storytelling for group
solidarity. In one town Akoefe-Gadza, leaders organize storytelling sessions every two weeks.
This paper seeks to document storytelling songs and their role in the storytelling event as well as
explain some of the changes Èwè storytellers observe.

THE PROCESS
I am developing this white paper for the Center for Global Research at The University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign as part of a summer fellowship available to instructors at community colleges. Technically, Ohio State ATI does not fit the designation of either community college or regional campus because we are an associates degree-granting campus of The Ohio State University’s College of Food, Agricultural and Environmental Sciences. Despite our in-between status, the Center for Global Studies (CGS) welcomed a trio of us from Ohio State ATI to spend nearly a week at the lovely Urbana-Champaign campus. As CGS fellows we worked with a cadre of other fellows, the marvelous CGS staff and other U-Illinois faculty members in our areas of study. Home one week, my colleagues and I are continuing and expanding by email and Skype some of the collaborations we began there. Because of the value I personally gained, I highly recommend that each reader seriously consider applying for this residency. I hope that this paper
will further showcase the benefits.

The areas I will introduce and/or explore in this paper include:

1. Ohio State ATI Ghana Research and Education Abroad: The Arts in Ghana with Community Engagement

2. Ohio State ATI 2016 Èwè Glìtó tô Storytelling Research

3. Glìhàwò: Storytelling Song Interludes
   a. The Role of Songs in the Storytelling Performance
   b. hàgbèwò: Song texts
   c. Musical Sound
   d. Conclusion

4. Related Curriculum Ideas

5. Resources: People, Print, Online, and Audio

This current work stems from original storytelling research that owes everything to our Ghanaian contacts, the generous women and men of the Volta Region. Their openness, kindness, and collaboration make this and every project we jointly attempt possible and often successful. One early Ohio State ATI sophomore and Ghana traveler, Brittany Logsdon, coined the phrase, “You can’t out-give a Ghanaian!” The stories and songs to which I refer are theirs. Anthropologist and American Studies faculty member at Ohio State ATI, Dr. Nathan Crook and I devised this research plan to help our student-travelers find another way to understand and appreciate the farmers, traders, traditional leaders, extension officers, and church leaders who regularly welcome us into their lives. The research met its aim! Happily, we will publish a book, which we can distribute to the many contributors as a thank you gift.
OHIO STATE ATI GHANA RESEARCH AND EDUCATION ABROAD

Over the past 14 years, undergraduates and faculty members from Ohio State ATI, Wooster, OH, have traveled to the Volta Regional capital, Ho, on the Ohio State ATI Ghana Research and Education Abroad: The Arts in Ghana with Community Engagement to interact with local agriculturalists and community leaders. Students take a semester-long pre-travel course, which introduces them to both development issues and the arts, such as drama, drumming, short stories, fantasy coffins, kente weaving, sculpture, and the local language. They prepare themselves for the trip, obtaining immunizations, passports, research review board permissions and writing grants for scholarships for travel and research. They take a pre-travel course and study in-country for one month. Our schedule includes several areas of activity:

1. **Arts.** Students practice Èwè drumming, dancing, and the Èwè language during afternoon classes with local artists. They also learn how to make drums, weave kente, and print wax batik cloth. They listen to storytellers. They visit dance clubs to hear and participate in modern music and dance styles. They attend church services to hear old and new religious music. They may choose to attend the Ho Polytechnic’s Student Fashion Show featuring a runway show of the designs of 100 graduating seniors.
2. **Sociology and Leadership.** We visit Togbes (also called kings and chiefs, See Figure 4), Queen Mothers, councils of Elders in their towns and interact according to protocol. Local leaders provide lecture-discussion on chieftancy, economics, agriculture, trade, non-governmental organizations (like the UN Agenda 21, US Peace Corps, and our favorite VoiceGhana, a group that builds coalitions to improve the lives of disabled Ghanaians, [http://voiceghana.org/](http://voiceghana.org/)), women’s and girls’ issues, religion, specifically relationships between traditionalists, Christians and Muslim, healthcare, sanitation, family life, and leadership roles. During their stay, students read an academic text and about three nights a week take turns leading discussions. In 2016, we read Feintuch’s *Eight Words for the Study Expressive Culture* (2003); and in 2017, Paarlberg’s *Food Politics: What Everyone Needs to Know* (2010).

3. **Community Development.** Over the years our program has developed revolving loan plans for 11 groups of farmers and traders. Our Ghanaian extension officer of Evangelical Presbyterian Development and Relief Agency [EPDRA] helps to gather a group of 10 women and occasionally a few men. We work with the members to discuss their goals and needs. We raise $1200 and establish a group. Each farmer starts with $100. We give EPDRA $200 to open a group bank account and to provide ongoing extension services. Farmers agree to pay back the loan to their account with 10% interest. We match that interest if farmers repay on time. This slowly grows their account. The next season, they theoretically have $120 to borrow. Some groups require 25-cent monthly dues. This becomes a savings program, in addition to the initial...
loans. Group members collaborate, working on each other’s farm and hosting community workdays. See also https://ati.osu.edu/newsletters/spring-2014/ghana-study-abroad-program-celebrates-10-years, para. 3)

Mainly through these microloan-and-savings groups we have inaugurated herd health immunizations and treatments for goats, sheep and chickens in seven small towns. Most of our recent community development projects overlap with our research agendas, such as the economic viability of vegetable drip irrigation, dry season hydroponic greens production, preserving crops with a solar dehydrators, and aquaponics vegetable and fish production.

4. Undergraduate and Faculty Research. Since our initial research project on Girls’ Education in 2008, we have explored agricultural and social issues. In 2016, we jointly engaged in our storytelling project for which we listened to and interviewed 47 storytellers. In 2017, our group project consisted of interviewing 42 storytellers about the Ghana Famine of 1983. Additionally, four students worked on their own projects with faculty support, “Dry Season Hydroponic Greens for Food Security,” “Ghanaian Leadership,” and “Composting Toilets for Improved Sanitation.”

5. Teaching. For local junior high school classes, students develop enrichment plans and teach nine class hours plus serve as an aid for their partner’s lessons. To name a few, students have taught Architecture from A-Z, Poetry, the Solar System, Cartooning, Art mixed media, Science experiments, Playwriting, Human health,

Figure 5: Vicentia Akpalu and Emily Hardesty, chicken farmers
Horticulture, the Wild West, Chinese, Morse code, Spanish and Chicken husbandry (See Figure 5).

6. **Tourism.** We travel to points of interest like the tallest waterfall Wli, the Cape Coast Slave Castle, Kakum Rainforest, Nkrumah’s Tomb and the Arts and Craft Market in Accra. We also venture into Togo to see local points of interest and to practice our French.

I would characterize some days as “grueling” when we wake at 5:30 am to head to a town and do not finish until the final lecture ends at 8:30 or 9 PM with little time for rest in between. Other days we enjoy significant free time on other days. Generally, this depends on the availability of resource people.

**OHIO STATE ATI 2016 ÈWÈ STORYTELLING RESEARCH**

In May 2016, a group of Ohio State ATI students and faculty members visited the city of Ho and 10 nearby dùvíwó (dù town--ví small--wó plural; all of the accents refer to the tonal inflections of Èwè, mainly low-medium-high in pitch) in Ghana’s Volta Region. We listened to storytellers tell stories, discuss their memories of storytelling events, and enumerate the recent changes they perceive in Èwè storytelling practices. Community members agree, “Each old man or woman is a storehouse of priceless, irreplaceable knowledge” (Gorlin 2000:8). Yet, in many dùvíwó, storytelling events where elders share their unusual wisdom are few and far between. Indeed, one storyteller Pauline Gollo told us that a Christian pastor cautioned her against telling these fetish or pagan stories. “He’s brainwashing us to cast aside our cultural traditions,” she asserted. “I’m telling people not to be greedy. I wonder, is he greedy? Is that why he wants me to stop telling them?” Other forces like school homework and television cartoons also undermine storytelling’s place in Èwè culture.
In our research, we applied anthropological theories and methods to what we heard and saw. Our contact person organized events with storytellers, and they chose the event setting of a schoolyard, courtyard, brush arbor, or traditional meeting grounds. (See Figure 6) Traditionally, storytellers performed around a fire or in a courtyard at the end of the day before bedtime while all enjoyed a light snack of popped corn and groundnuts (also known as *Times and Graphic*, named for two Ghanaian newspapers). For our sessions, we met with storytellers in the morning, afternoon and evening with no accompanying snack.

In the storytelling event, whether the storyteller is a 12-year-old boy taking on the new role or a seasoned veteran, the interaction with the audience in the performance event is a reciprocal relationship, requiring as much of its audience as it does of the storytellers. When storytellers perform their art, the vitality of the audience has the potential to energize the performance and encourage the storyteller to ratchet up the performance. When the audience cheers on the storyteller, everyone’s enjoyment of the event elevates. Actually, the audience corroborates, criticizes and enjoys the narrative, with audience members regularly witnessing "*Mílè tèfé/ I was there that day*" (Agawu 2007:4). For the success of the following story-riddle below, the audience must participate:

*Three boys are walking in the woods past dark picking and eating blackberries. They knew that a chief had died and headhunters were out looking for stragglers. They knew the headhunters would chop off the heads of anyone they caught and put the heads in the*
coffin with the chief. But the boys ignore all the advice. They just walk along eating blackberries—until they hear the sound of headhunters ahead in the woods. “ÂÔ! (No!)” they cry, and each boy hides. One sticks his head in a bush. The second climbs to a tree branch over the bush. The third runs a distance into the forest. When the headhunters arrive in the clearing, they immediately see the first boy, grab him, and cut off his head. “Careful,” warns the second, “Don’t spray his blood on me.” The headhunters pull him from the tree and take his head. Looking at the two heads, one headhunter wonders aloud, “Why are their teeth purple?” The third boy answers from the forest, “We were eating blackberries.” The headhunters capture him, too.

“Which boy was the most stupid?” the storyteller queries. Audience members take turns explaining their choices. Through this interactive approach, children learn to think critically, to take turns, to consider other points of view, and to speak their minds and justify their choices. Children and adults share in sifting through, comparing, contrasting, negotiating, and reinforcing their own norms, values and worldviews. Several Ghanaian fifth-graders I told the story related their takeaway, “We should obey our mothers.” They also made drawings of the story. (See Figure 7)

Audience members also contribute to the storytelling performance by interrupting the narrative with scheduled or spontaneous song interludes. Mainly, these deepen audience members’ involvement and “enhance their retentive ability as they learn and retain the stories and songs” (Oamen 2012:192). Similar to the musical numbers in Oklahoma! or The Sound of Music
or an aria in *The Barber of Seville* or *Rigoletto*, the actors suspend the plot’s forward movement to interject a song. The delay in the action creates tension thereby heightening the audience’s interest. In musicals, the audience usually gets to know the characters better through the songs. By contrast, the Èwè audience members offer their take on events, often revealing more about themselves than they do about the story or the characters in it. When interjecting song interludes, the audience members join as co-performers to guide and manage the performance.

**GLÌHÀWÓ: STORYTELLING SONG INTERLUDES**

By formulaic opening of the call “Àgò,” the storyteller knocks on the door. By audience response “Àmè,” he receives the invitation to enter. “Misè gli lòo” follows, asking the audience members if they are ready for the story. Hearing the affirmative, “Èglí névá/Let the story come,” the storytelling begins. (See [https://video.leidenuniv.nl/media/t/0_hepzy675](https://video.leidenuniv.nl/media/t/0_hepzy675) at 8:25) The storyteller introduces the characters, a widow, a turtle and a flock of birds, a chief and his daughters, or Ayiyi (also called Anansi), the trickster spider. The plot unfolds. Not far into the exposition, an audience member leaps to her feet and often with a sly or self-congratulatory look begins a song, which energizes and focuses the group. Even when the group anticipates the song, the listeners feign surprise, rise and engage in impromptu dancing, while repeating a short chorus over and over. Repetition serves as a memory enhancer, but it also builds excitement and opens up space for more to participate and shine. After several choruses in which the energy rises and flags, the group members decide they have had enough and they wind down to end the chorus. The storyteller in his or her part tries to incorporate the song into the story.

A song interlude may consist of any song, traditional (“*Kofi kple Ama,*” see Figure 8 and [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XrzRxJ88BIU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XrzRxJ88BIU)) or modern (“Happy Birthday to You”), that is triggered by the story however tangentially.
Figure 8: Musical Example, “Kofi kple Ama”

Kofi kple Ama wo yi to la dzi, Kofi and Ama have gone up the mountain,
Be woaku tsi ve na wo dada. To fetch water for their mother.
Kofi dze anyi ye fe ta gba. Kofi fell down and cut his head.
Ama tso dokui fu anyi Ama threw herself on the ground (in empathy).

Interrupters create simple, repetitive songs on the spot, too. The most-often heard song “Gole mimli” acknowledges that every story has a source. They also accept and relish that the storyteller will dupe them with an impossible tale. They sing, “The gourd is rolling. Where it comes from doesn’t matter.”

For songs embedded in the story, the storyteller herself sings the song, like “Jane, Jane, Janeti” (See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3o5qgS88Bmk at 3:45), or starts the song and the group joins, like “Miawoe nye koviawoe /We are the warriors” (See Figures 9 and https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=txz2x54ynIs). The animal community traps a tiger for terrorizing them. The tiger cries for help and a colony of termites come to his aid. As a token of
appreciation, the tiger holds a feast for the termite-saviors. The termites jubilantly sing on their way to the party. The story advocates, “It pays to offer help, especially to the less privileged.”

Figure 9: “Miawoe nye koviawoe /We are the warriors”

Miawoe nye koviawoe. We are children of the anthill.

Miawoe du ati na kpo. We have freed the tiger.

Kpo dze aha you mi. The tiger has invited us for a drink.

Anyigbanedo to ne loo, yoo, yoo. The entire land should stand still and listen.

Some songs serve as spontaneous interludes but a greater number fit a specific story and appear almost every time that story is told, no matter who tells it or where it is told. Other songs appear in a wide range of stories because they proclaim an inside-out, favorite message joking with the storyteller, “Wo ga blemi egbe/You have deceived us” [with your outrageous tale] or “De menya/If I’d known”) but “I wasn’t there that day” (Agawu 2007:4).

Storyteller and ethnomusicologist Divine Gbagbo offers two examples. In the first story, a mother severely beats her daughter for giving an eggplant to So, a poor woman, without first asking permission. The mother orders her to collect the eggplant, and the daughter moans, whines, and sings this song on her way to So’s home. The story cautions, “Do not give to others what you do not own.” (See Figure 10)

Figure 10: “Te Nku Deka”

Te nku deka metso na So. I gave only one garden egg (eggplant) to So.

Nonye fom kaka tu afo dzinye. My mother spanked me mercilessly.
The spider-trickster Ayiyi stars in Gbagbo’s second example. A famine has taken hold of the community. Ayiyi goes to the forest to look for food and finds a fruit tree. He enjoys his fill, cuts the tree, places it on his head, and starts for home. As he walks, he sings this song (See Figure 11 and https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FwTU5xwUZGQ):

**Figure 11: “Ati vi tukui”**

Ati vi tukui, wokpe le.
A very small tree, so heavy.

Matso de afe, wokpe le.
I’ll send it home, so heavy.

Deviwo nabia, wokpe le.
The children will ask, so heavy.

Nyemana wo o!/ Mana wo kata.
I will not give them./ I will give them.
Anansi says that the tree is heavy with fruit; but he will share it with no one, not even his children. He approaches the town and all the children of the town run out to meet him. He refuses them food and goes home. There he discovers that the tree is stuck to his head. He is forced to return the tree to the forest. After another long walk, Ayiyi meets a spirit-guide in the forest who advises him to change his behavior --if not his attitude. He returns to the town calling the children to come and eat. The tree easily falls from his head, and the children help him plant it in his compound. He feeds the entire community with the fruits.

The Role of Songs in the Storytelling Performance

Glítóto, or storytelling sessions, include other performances beyond the narration of the story (Agawu 1995:170). Both embedded and interjected storytelling interludes serve to deepen audience members’ involvement in the storytelling session and to help them remember key cultural messages. Èwè musician and professor, Daniel Avorgbedor asserts, “Musical participation becomes a social debt” (1997:405). Kofi Agawu notes that by interjecting song interludes, the audience members join as co-performers to guide and manage the performance, which flips the relationship of addresser and addressee (Agawu 1995:171). Songs also add variety, moving back and forth from speech to song. The group often repeats the song four or five times before the storyteller recommences (Locke 1992:16).

Hàgbèwó: Song texts

Song texts, Hàgbèwó, are literally means “words for carving songs.” Like for a rap musician, “a cooked tongue,” as Èwè call verbal and musical prowess, is a must for a lead singer (Agawu 1995:31). The texts of songs are “deep,” embedded with proverbs that require interpretation.
according to the community wisdom store (Locke 1992:17). Storyteller-musician Divine Gbagbo translated a popular storytelling song, “Akpokplo kuku dzime loto, ata nene, abo nene,” as “A dead frog with its back bloated and its legs and arms broken.” He continued, “The adage it derives from means, ‘One can only measure the length of a frog when it is dead.’ That’s the moral lesson.” He stopped there as though we would completely understand it. Our knowledge of Èwè proverbs and stories remains incomplete. We have much to learn. (See https://video.leidenuniv.nl/media/t/0_hepzy675 at 4:40)

Èwè songs usually employ an AABBA or AABBCA form (Locke 1992:60). They are rarely strophic. Likely, with the tonal nature of the language the singer would find it difficult to fit the one melody to the rise and fall of a second set of words.

Storytellers and interlude leaders use various devises to enhance the texts: “redundicative intensifiers” like kákákáká, meaning very, very, very; “extensions” of the vowels like in the second syllable of sègĕe, with two e’s indicating to draw it out; sonic “attention grabbers” like an explosive onomatopoeic “KPĂM” or imitative noises like kpùkpùrù when a character chews cloves; and accelerando, speeding up of the spoken or musical line, to emphasize the rhythmic aspects of the narrative and “musicalize” the language (Agawu 1995:167, 170).

Song texts may be a spoken patterned rhyme or a melodic song or a combination of the two like “Prom, Prom, Prom,” which starts out all rhythm in the first two lines then turns melodic in the second two (See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3o5qgS88Bmk at 5:10). “Bebe li be lo” provides a tongue twister in a rhythmic patter that elicits great joy when an interrupter introduces it. (See Figure 12) Rhymes are less likely to recur in other stories than songs.

Figure 12: “Bebe Li Be Lo”

Bebe  li be lo (Nonsense syllables, tongue twister)
Ne ekpor gborvi……na le  If you see a goat…….. Catch it
Ne ekpor alevi .na le  If you see a lamb ........ Catch it
Ne ekpor koklo ......na le  If you see a fowl......... Catch it
Ne ekpor avuvi.....na le  If you see a puppy........ catch it
Ne ekpor dadi ............na le  If you see a kitten......... catch it
Ne ekpor formizi........ na le  If you see a rabbit ...... catch it.

Musical Sound

Researchers reveal that in the Èwè social context, collective events always include dancing, drumming and singing. Amegago insists the Èwè drum-dance for “social harmony,” as well as “continuity, order and stability” (2011:xviii, 49). These are inseparable. Locke calls this phenomenon, “dancing-drumming,” marrying the two (1992:8). The Èwè call the “dance-drum” repertory vu, which translates “drums,” or vugbe, which means drum language (op. cit.:12; Agawu 1995:5). Gorlin explains that, while dancers and musicians are “distinct subcultures in Western music,” they are the “same people in West Africa” (2000:9). Importantly, West African children learn to “dance-drum” as infants learn whole language, a mother-tongue, while dancing on their mothers’ backs (Gorlin, op. cit.).

In Èwè music the double bell sets the timeline often in 6/8 or 12/8 meter. The most popular patterns appear in Figures 10 and 11. In storytelling, handclapping may replace the bell to establish a counter-rhythm. Agordoh asserts that handclapping serves as a “contrasting timbre” not simply a time marker (2002:14).

In his of review of Agawu’s work, Blum outlines characteristics of storytelling vugbe, the “strategic use of repetition; the modulation of speed, pitch and intensity to depict what is being described (e.g., the motions of the different animals); and the use of nonsense syllables as sound
effects” (1998:74). For example, repetition allows 1 more to participate as they learn from earlier iterations. Not to participate, “not to sing is not to exist” (Agawu 2007:7). Everyone must participate. Additionally, the interlude interjector, with simple pitch and rhythm, “constructs a work of great complexity, through shifts of register, intricate motivic connections, and subtle tonal focus (Agawu 1998:76).

Melodies

Amegago posits that birds have inspired African melodies and that dance derives from worship of small gods and divinities or mawuviwo (2011:58). The Èwè in southern Ghana, called Anlo Èwè, employ pentatonic scales with men and women in parallel octaves. However, the Northern Èwè in the central Volta Region use seven-note scales and polyphony in thirds (Agordoh 2002:88). Èwè melodies tend to be diatonic, with song ranges of an octave, and syllabic not melismatic, i.e. one note per syllable versus embellishments of three or more notes per syllable (Agawu 1995:46). Agordoh states that the “words control the pitch” and rhythm of melodies, which missionaries were “insensitive to” in their hymnwriting (2002:12). Agawu reports that “in general there are no strophic songs in… Èwè traditional music because it is hard to match speech tones to strophic patterns” (1995:48). Archetypally, melodic patterns “descend from their high point to a low point” (Agawu 1995:50). Often, they step up and leap down. Wachsmann has a “firm conviction” that, because of the nature of Èwè as a tonal language, song “rather than dance lies at the heart of Northern Èwè modes of musical expression (1969:187).

In a favorite song, “Tre kpoes,” the Tortoise mumbles and mourns over and over, “Peer pressure brought me here” and “I am who I am, everyone has their specialness.” The melody rises and falls by steps except for two large leaps of a fourth between measures 1,2 and 3,4. (See Figure 13)
Western marching band music stresses the downbeat, which gives a strong sense of stability. African-influenced music put the emphasis on the backbeat, a sound familiar to rock fans since the 1950’s with Chuck Berry “Maybellene” and Bill Haley and the Comets’ “(We’re Gonna) Rock Around the Clock” and “Shake, Rattle, and Roll,” a cover of bluesman Joe Turner’s rhythm’n’blues song (Altschuler 2003: 31,63). Because most Western music is melody-bound and meter-bound, American students frequently admit that they have never really understood the nature and complexities of rhythm until they immerse themselves in African drumming. Drum-dancers regularly perform complex beats starting on almost
every beat of the rhythm then repeat insistently, creating intricate crossrhythms. As in Western music like “The Farmer in the Dell,” a melody may begin on a weak beat, which alters the feel of the meter (Blum 1998:76).

Regina Dake tells the story of an old woman and her grandson. During a time of famine, the Mama feels frustrated because Togbe’s ram is feeding on the few vegetables growing in her garden. Secretly, she kills the ram. But townspeople report to the Togbe that they have heard her grandson’s mindless song, “Fia Fa Gbotsu Ke.” This results in his Mama’s execution. (See Figures 14, 15 and https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=izkfa5C2aaM) Note the steady dotted quarter notes on the strong beats one and four played by the bell, the energetic clapping following the bell notes which rocks the beat, and the melody pattern of long notes, short-long, long-short, long. This shows a typical Èwè melodic pattern.

Figure 15: Musical Example, “Fia Fa Gbotsu Ke”

Fia fa gbotsu ke, This ram, which is owned by the king,
Mama wui lo, Grandma killed it,
Maùma daa midu Grandma cooked it
Azi goto. For us to eat.
Accompaniment and Harmony

Èwè say, “Edze fiawo to dzegawo to,” which translates “harmony is pleasing to the ears of kings” (Amegago 2011: 189). Harmony conforms to the melody of the group, but according to Agordoh, the musical sense of the Northern Èwè focuses on listen to the horizontal flow of two voices in thirds as equals with “scant regard for intervallic relationships” (2002:16). For Èwè musical taste is not only “what one hears but what one believes” comprising “deep emotional and conceptual values” enshrined in the community context of dance-drum (op. cit.:17). An example of harmony in thirds occurs in a storytelling event at Wegbe-Kpalime. (Listen to https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iI4BF85C_mE&feature=youtu.be at 2:50). Participants always clap and sometimes use a bell or drum to accompany melodies and urge on the singing and dancing.

Conclusion

In summary, families and communities arrange storytelling sessions to bring people together. Divine Gbagbo explains, “Storytelling inculcates in the younger ones moral lessons that will help them grow into responsible adults. Stories may therefore be deliberately chosen to teach any moral lesson, i.e., against theft, laziness, or disobedience to parents, if an adult realizes that a child is exhibiting traces of any of those unacceptable behaviors.” Through this study, I am seeing how storytelling serves as a window into Èwè culture and learning the ways that Èwè use stories to perpetuate their value system. Through stories they teach their children and remind themselves of the structures, promises, and commitments that underpin their life together.

Collaboratively, Gbagbo and I will demonstrate how song interludes play an essential role in stories. Because of their all inclusive and active nature, they involve the community in
rehearsing their moral lessons. Furthermore, tracking storytelling songs reveals how culture evolves. Songs range from culture-specific to borrowed songs sung in many different languages, including using languages that differ from that of the story and in languages that the participants can no longer translate.

**RELATED CURRICULUM IDEAS**

In a personal conversation, Kenyon College American Studies professor Peter Rutkoff describes three ways that art functions in a culture, as a window, guidebook or mirror. The window both frames our view of the culture and allows us to observe a new worldview. The guidebook feature shows us how a culture instructs members to live according to community parameters. The mirror aspect accents the ways that seeing others helps us to see ourselves more clearly. This storytelling research allows our students to perceive all three aspects of the art form of storytelling songs.

To start, I suggest that faculty members play:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iI4BF85C_mE&feature=youtu.be and/or
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3o5qgS88Bmk or summarize some of the information in this paper, tell an Èwè story, or present the riddle for discussion.

1. For Sociology and World Religions: Listen to an Èwè storytelling event.
   https://video.leidenuniv.nl/media/t0_hepzy675 Ask students to observe and discuss the social context and the social messages of Èwè stories. What American contexts similarly instruct community members about their social roles and norms?

2. For Literature: Compare a storytelling song text and an American musical or opera text.

3. For Education, Grade School level: Write a list of questions related to a storytelling song like “Trepwe.” Teach the children the song. Try adding a struck bell or triangle. Use your questions to elicit discussion about the people who created the song, their contributions
and messages. Discuss where they have heard moral lessons (TV, religious meetings, family stories) and analyze for effectiveness and content.

4. For Music Education, Jr. High/High School: Compare a storytelling song tune to a folktune or pop song you know. Consider range, intervals, syncopation, cross rhythms.

5. For Music Education, Jr. High/High School: Ask students to tell a story then ask them to add a song interlude or two to liven it up.

I will happily learn of other ways you have used this information and these songs.

RESOURCES: PEOPLE, PRINT, ONLINE, AND AUDIO

Let me redouble my promotion of the Center for Global Studies International Studies Research Lab (CGS/ISRL) Fellowship. For those eligible please consider the fabulous opportunity you have for research and curriculum building with friendly support of the CGS/ISRL Fellowships at the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign. The CGS staff has created an excellent process: spacious dorm rooms in a residence hall with easy parking, great town for restaurant choices and a fabulous frozen custard stand, one-day workshop where we met and collaborated with other fellows, meetings with librarians and faculty for finding resources and building curriculum, and a nearby arboretum for evening strolls in the gardens. Don’t miss the Japan House and Gardens.

I would like to extend my gratitude to the people who offered their advice and assistance. The greatest contributors to this work are the nearly 50 storytellers and the dozens of townspeople who performed, participated and interacted in the storytelling events.
Mr. Divine K. Gbagbo, Ghanaian Composer, Music Director for the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Ethnomusicologist and Ohio University Doctoral Candidate, for his transcriptions, translations, inspiration, and kindness. Mr. Gbagbo is also a gifted storyteller and a true inspiration.

Mr. Asase, Extension Agent, Program Coordinator, Translator, Friend, Evangelical Presbyterian Development and Relief Agency for his support and advice for our 14 Ghana Research and Education Abroad residencies.

Thanks to Gage Smith, Dr. Nathan Crook, Dr. Peter Rutkoff, and Dickson Asase for their photographs and permissions.

Dr. Lynne Rudasill, Professor, University Library, and Global Studies Librarian, rudasill@illinois.edu, for her leadership of the ISRL program and guidance and assistance in undertaking and completing this project.

Dr. Philip Yampolsky, founder of the Robert E. Brown Center for World Music at the University of Illinois School of Music, Urbana-Champaign, and a musicologist studying Indonesian, including gamelan, and Western African, specifically the percussion music of the Èwè of Ghana, music http://cwm.illinois.edu/node/102 lived up to graduate student Lindsay Ozborn’s hype when he graciously bought me an iced coffee at the Espresso Royale next to the U-Illinois Music School and spent an hour discussing African rhythm and Èwè drumming with me (Mon. 24 July 17). I felt like a graduate student who had arrived
underprepared for my orals, but Dr. Yampolsky set my mind at ease and regaled me with stories of his drumming experiences with K. Lazekpo and his abiding interest in the rhythm of African drumming. He suggested numerous sources, which I have interspersed throughout the paper.

Dr. Atoma Batoma, Center for African Studies Librarian, http://www.afrst.illinois.edu/people/batoma, specializing in Onomastic sciences and philosophy of language, kindly agreed to meet me during his two-week vacation (25 July 17). Dr. Batoma urged me to consider all the contexts where storytelling occurs, particularly beyond the traditional nighttime fireside chat. During all night wake-keeping and funerals women mourn, sing and tell the family stories, stories of their own departed. Initiation rites depend on storytelling. Initiates must tell stories about themselves, how they will grow into adulthood, and explain how they experience the culture. Praise singers, like the griots and stoolfathers, tell the stories in political settings. Warriors celebrate victories and mourn defeats and teach and reinforce lessons of bravery and cowardice with music and singing. In terrible circumstances, “warriors must remain calm” (Gorlin 2000:13). Dr. Batoma recommended:


Thanks also to Lindsay Ozburn, Global Studies Library Graduate Assistant, Center for Global Studies, International & Area Studies Library, Foreign Language and Area Studies Fellow – Turkish, European Union Center
lozburn.2@illinois.edu, and Kate Lambaria, Visiting Music and Performing Arts Librarian, lambaria1@illinois.edu.

WORKS CITED


OTHER SOURCES FOR CONSIDERATION

The following represents the suggestions of several U-Ill professors and librarians:


Burns, James. 2009. *Female voices from an Ewe dance-drumming community in Ghana: our music has become a divine spirit*, SOAS Musicology Series. Farnham, Surrey, Eng.: Ashgate.


Berkeley: University of California.
