Script :

What if drums could speak? To the Akan people, they can. Their tonal language may be transformed into drumming patterns which are then re-interpreted into verbal terms by all participants of the music. Drumming brings the community together, whether that be with the help of community bands alongside singers and dancers, or participating in coming of age rituals and religious associations. Dagomba drumming creates social relationships between the Akan people.While the art of drumming is highly meaningful to the Akan community, the way the drums are constructed is critical to how the music will sound.

In the community, there are two types of drums. There is the open and the closed drum.

The open drum is a single headed drum with an opening at one end while the closed drum is a single or double headed drum without any open ends. While both are played regularly, the closed drums are less important than the open drums in the Akan community(P.4 Nketia, J. H. Kwabena.)

The wood used for carving the open drums (which resembles a cedar tree) is hard and durable. The wood does not easily spoil or become rotten when exposed to insects or weather. In the past, the Akan people would sacrifice and egg to the tree that was about to be cut down to be carved into a drum. The egg was said to protect the wood from spoiling.  (P.5 Nketia, J. H. Kwabena.)

Alongside the open and the closed drums, there are two main shapes that the drums can take to.  The bottle type drum, and the semi cylindrical. Both are carefully crafted and carved when being made. Each drum is carved differently which is important due to the fact that different carvings and stylistic changes in the grain can change how the drum sounds as well as change the volume that the drum emits. (P.7 Nketia, J. H. Kwabena.)

All of the drums being played here are the closed drums taking both semi cylindrical and bottle form

The drums are commonly built with 7 sockets to hold down the hide. When the drum has been burrowed with each of the 7 sockets, they are then smoothed and individually decorated. It is extremely rare to see a drum that has not been altered.

In the Akan community, there are 3 modes of drumming. These modes represent how an individual may perceive a specific style of drumming.

The first mode of drumming is the signal mode, meaning that the drumming may be interpreted as signals.

The second mode is the imitation mode of drumming. This Includes all drum pieces which are an imitation of speech or which are intended to be heard as language and merely not as a signal.

And finally, the dance mode of drumming. This includes all modes of drumming which have implications of movement commonly expressed in the march, gesture, or dance property.

This sound clips here exhibits all 3 modes of drumming. Try to listen for the imitation of speech and the implications of dancing

All 3 modes of drumming are necessary for the identification and interpretation of drumming in community life. (P.17 Nketia, J. H. Kwabena.) The drumming is an outlet to let the rhythms and beats tell stories in group settings. To the Akan people, the drum can and do speak. Words, phrases and sentences may be transformed into drum sounds which are then re-interpreted in verbal terms by the listener.

In the drumming, nonsense syllables that are chosen to be spoken convey auditory impressions of one or more series of successive drum beats. (P.33 Nketia, J. H. Kwabena.) To expand the practice of storytelling, the Akan people form bands. These bands that the Akan before perform in offer an outlet into the communities bonding the players and the listeners. Popular bands in the Akan community are recognised social groups. Bands at a high caliber tend to be selective of their members.  Many popular bands seek the aid of an elder or some respectable member of the community, particularly in bands that are composed of mostly  young members.

These bands that the Akan people perform in offer an outlet to the community, thereby bonding the players and the listeners.

This bond can relate to Shelly Trowers senses of vibrations and how she explains that, “Vibrations provide the connection between the science of energies and bodies in movement as well as simultaneously through subjects and objects, bridging the internal and external worlds”(P.8 Senses of Vibration). Trowers stance on vibrations can directly relate with the action of Dagomba drumming in the Akan community due to the fact that both vibrations and drumming offer an internal and external experience being passed along subjects through a community to create social relationships.

Language

African languages are “tonal.” This means that the interpretations of words are determined by the tone in which syllables are spoken, or in the case of the Dagomba, drummed. The way a drum is stricken and the amount of drums being hit in different ways changes the tone, thereby replicating the speech patterns of the drummer. The entire basis of African music is derived from language. Language offers creative insights as to how a drummer can express original drumming patterns, but it also dictates the limits of his rhythmic changes, as a Dagomba drummer must not stray too far from what is comprehensible to the listeners. An important trait of a Dagomba drummer is that he conveys his message while also making good music. Similar to the Dagomba dancing of the Akan, in Brazil, capoeira music is interpreted as a sort of language that the body translates into movements. In this sound clip, you will hear an example of dagomba drumming. Pay close attention to the rhythmic changes. They are a main focus of the art, as each change plays a role in conveying the particular message and feeling of the drummer.

Religion

Religion also plays an enormous role in Dagomba drumming. The Akan use their music to speak not only to one another, but to the gods. Whether they be popular gods or simply personal gods pertaining to individuals, the Akan channel their deities for many reasons. It is well known that hardship is relatively commonplace in most parts of Africa. The Akan gain comfort by surrendering themselves to their gods through their music. Poverty, illness, sterility, fear of death and witchcraft; these are issues shared by many members of an Akan community. Using sound to channel spiritual energies is an inherent practice that is found in cultures all around the world. In *Hearing the Sacred*, Coward and Goa describe the Indian mantra, prana-pratistha, a vocal drone used to install a deity into the sculpture of the god or goddess that is being worshipped. Even if worship is not the reason for an Akan to participate in Dagomba drumming and dancing events, the strong social aspects of the culture bring forth the less religious nevertheless. These events offer friendly gatherings for community members to share. Perhaps this is the underlying basis of all spiritual gatherings, regardless of the reasons to which participants attribute their engagement. In other words, the god or deity people gather to worship may actually be the togetherness and sense of community; the people are the god, and they gain comfort from their rituals.

Conclusion

Dagomba drumming is a crucial part of the rich Akan culture. It brings people together and offers escape in times of hardship. The culture of sound strengthens communities, not only in Africa, but in societies everywhere. Sound has profound effects upon the social construction of the human race. What does this pattern say about humans? Why have we evolved to appreciate sound in such complex ways? It seems as though humans still have much to learn about the relationship between sound and behavior.

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"How to Make Dagomba Gungon Drum." *YouTube*. YouTube, 12 Jan. 2015. Web. 15 Nov. 2015.

Here are some more information for blog links regarding Dagomba drumming if you are interested to find out more

<http://sites.tufts.edu/dagomba/>

<http://nadabrahma.org/Sulleydrums.html>

<https://africanmusicuga.wordpress.com/west-africa/ghana/dagomba-people/>

Here are some Dagomba drumming videos if you are interested to see what the drums look like, what the bands look like, and how they experience drumming together.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zc5Atwec820> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x2tpj3YPC4U>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CUIcGbzViQs>

Attachments area

[Preview YouTube video Nnwonkoro - A Female Song Tradition of the Akan of Ghana - Part 3](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zc5Atwec820&authuser=0" \t "_blank)

[](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zc5Atwec820&authuser=0" \t "_blank)

[](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zc5Atwec820&authuser=0" \t "_blank)

[Preview YouTube video Akom - Ghana, West Africa - Part 32](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x2tpj3YPC4U&authuser=0" \t "_blank)

[](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x2tpj3YPC4U&authuser=0" \t "_blank)

[](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x2tpj3YPC4U&authuser=0" \t "_blank)

[Preview YouTube video Dagomba Cutural Dance](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CUIcGbzViQs&authuser=0" \t "_blank)

[](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CUIcGbzViQs&authuser=0" \t "_blank)

[](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CUIcGbzViQs&authuser=0" \t "_blank)