

## LIBATION IN HIGHLIFE SONGS

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Highlife is a medium of expression that incorporates traditional folklore materials into modern song form. The main purpose of this paper is to demonstrate that traditional religious ritual, namely libation, is a great source of material for the performance of highlife songs<sup>1</sup>.

Libation is one of the most important religious rituals in Ghana. For this reason, it is also one of the most important ceremonial rituals brought into highlife performance. In order to demonstrate how libation is used in highlife songs, it is important to discuss in some detail, the functions of libation in Akan society.

### Libation in the Akan World

Of the major types of rituals in Akan society, libation is the most important. Libation is the pouring of wine or any alcoholic drink on the ground and reciting a prayer to God, Mother Earth, the deities and the ancestors.<sup>2</sup> Similar practices have been widely recorded in other cultures. For example, Margaret Alexion discusses similar practices among the ancient Greeks and the Romans (Alexion 1974: 7). Ceremonial occasions and other religious activities invariably include libation. Ceremonies such as rites of passage, at birth, puberty, marriage and death, are all rooted in religious activities during which libation is performed. Preparation of a deity, making drums, preparation of land for farming, telling oral histories, preparation of folk medicine, visits to chiefs or deities, and individual undertakings also involve essential religious libations. Libation is poured even during political meetings and during the opening of public places.<sup>3</sup>

Libation pouring seems to be a general phenomenon in other Ghanaian cultures and in most African societies. Opoku (1978: 9) indicates the spiritual and the religious need for pouring libation to the African ancestors:

The community in Africa is not only made up of the living, but also of the dead and the reality of this notion is given concrete expression in libation and other sacrifices to the dead whose participation, involvement and blessing are sought, as continuing members of the community.

Libation is designed to engage the supernatural beings in the lives of human beings. At the same time it demonstrates human belief in the power and the presence of God, the deities and the ancestral spirits. Malefijt (1978: 197) tells us that the specific messages conveyed to the

ancestors, the deities and other supernatural beings are the knowledge, feelings, needs, emotions, mood and desires of the living.

### **Twi Lexemes and the Performance of Libation**

In a ritual, libation has two aspects, the verbal and the non-verbal. Linguistically, the Twi lexemes for libation carry the semantic meaning of the ritual. In the process of libation, two sets of lexemes are used. The first set of lexemes are *nsaguo* (noun) or *gu nsa* (verb). Etymologically *gu* means "to make fall" and *nsa* means "an alcoholic drink." Literally then *gu nsa* means "to make an alcoholic drink fall" (on the ground).

The second set of lexemes used in the process of libation include: *apaeyie* (noun), *yi apae* (verb), *yi* meaning "to take", and *apae* meaning "a prayer", or literally, "to take a prayer." Equally the verb *kankye* means "to speak a prayer," "to call upon" or "to invoke." This word is used for the verbal part of the libation. Hence one can say *de nsa yi apae* meaning "using an alcoholic drink to pray" or *de nsa kankye*, meaning "using an alcoholic drink to speak a prayer, or "using and alcoholic drink to call upon or to invoke (the supernatural)." <sup>4</sup>

In a literal sense, pouring an alcoholic drink on the ground is non-verbal. However, using an alcoholic drink to pray involves both verbal and non-verbal acts. The combination of pouring a drink on the ground and reciting prayers is a unique religious form of communication with the supernatural beings. The prayer part of a libation communicates human needs to the supernatural, while the hospitable offering of an alcoholic beverage symbolically quenches their thirst and pays them the highest respect. <sup>5</sup>

In Akan society the individual is expected to spill a little wine on the ground on any occasion when wine drinking takes place. Some people also like to spill water during drinking. The prayer part of the ritual can be avoided, but it is always essential to discharge a little wine or water on the ground for the supernatural beings before drinking. Although individuals may usually engage in only the silent part of the libation, their intentions are the same as when the ritual is accompanied by words. However, the prayer part of libation calls upon an individual's rhetorical skill and creativity in the use of the Twi language. Prayers in any libation consist of metaphors, proverbs and many other figurative expressions.

Libation needs no specialists. However, since the libation ritual is basically religious, individuals who are articulate in the Twi language and culture perform elaborate libation because they possess the necessary understanding of the Akan belief system. Hence, during ceremonial occasions the chiefs, the linguists, priests, priestesses and the elders, the key Akan traditional bearers would be more erudite in the performance of libation than would others (who are less conversant with Akan tradition) in an informal situation.

One person always performs prayer in libation, but an antiphonal response may be recited by a second person. For example, every sentence is punctuated with *wie!* and *ampa!* meaning "it is true!" and "let it be!", the Twi equivalent of "amen". Traditionally, a person who pours a libation on a ceremonial occasion removes his sandals from his feet and unwraps his cloth to his chest. This behaviour is a symbol of respect to the supernatural including the ancestors. In addition, the Twi phrase *mimo ne kasa*, literally "well done for talking," is always a response from the audience to end a prayer.

### Libation And Oral Traditional Histories

A few examples of libation taken from oral traditional histories will illustrate the meaning of certain aspects of libation in the Akan oral narrative. For example, history is extremely important in the libation performance. Genealogies and events are sometimes recited in the prayer in order to make the audience ready for the history about to be narrated after the libation. Consider the following libation by Nana Kwame Ampoma, the Aduanahene of Techiman, collected at Techiman on February 5, 1970.

#### Twi Text

Nana:

1. Nana Dwaa Hema
2. Begye nsa nom o
3. Wo ne wotwa kwan yi, ne wode numa ne mmanana yi nyinaa beware Hene Ameyaw Kwakye.
4. Se enne dadua yi a, yegyina ha seisei.
5. Asem nnee aba ne se, enne, Abrafo besi fam he, bia mpanyinsem he, benuma no nyera.
6. Esese bia wokyerekyere wo mpanyinsem.
7. Woduru Amanfoso a, wakae yaanom.
8. Mebo Nananom ho din no, wayo me awerehosem, wayo me anibresem.
9. Ne me mma ne me mmananamon, be a bennin nyinaa bate.
10. Ne seisei wayo beya
11. Se nee nka tumii yewo, ne nneema (nnooma) nee eye a, ma oko baee, nneema he asee he nyinaa, yekaka enti wama waha ye.
12. Nti mebo din saa he, esese mema ho nsa nom.
13. Woabegye nsa anom.

Amanfo: Wie! Mimo ne kasa.

#### English Translation:

1. Nana Dwaa Hema ( Name of the Aduana Queen mother).
  2. Come and drink wine.
  3. It was you who travelled with the children and the grandchildren to marry King Kwakye Ameyaw.
  4. Today we are present here.
  5. What has happened is that, when the whitemen came, they did not want anyone's history to be left out.
  6. It is the duty of everyone to tell his / her history.
  7. When I reached a ruin of the ancestors, I remembered my people.
  8. When I mentioned the elders' name, this has made me sad, this has made me distressed.
  9. My children and my grandchildren, those who do not know have heard it.
  10. They are now worried.
  11. That the power we had and the things we had, destroyed during the war are all mentioned, this makes them worried.
  12. Therefore when I mention your name, I must give you wine to drink.
  13. Come and get wine and drink.
- Audience: Amen! Well done for talking.

In order to fully understand the meaning of Nana Kwame Ampoma's libation, we must examine its historical background. The following is a brief oral history of the origins of the Aduana clan in the Techiman traditional area. According to oral tradition, the Aduana family came from the southern part of Ghana, from a place called Akwamu Awanwenseso. They first appeared in the south near the Volta River Bridge (Adome Bridge) at a town called Senkye. It is difficult to say now where these people originated. They are reputed to have emerged from the ground or a cave.

Their descendants, who first settled in the south, followed a small path made by wild pigs. They came to a cave where these wild pigs played. The place had been worn smooth, and they saw small snail shells which might have given food to some creatures. They decided to settle in the cave and called the place Awanwenseso, meaning "the place was smooth and also it had snail shells". Their first chief was called Akwamu Akoto and the queenmother, Aberewa Musu. After a long reign, Aberewa Musu died. She was succeeded by Tatatea Wonta.<sup>6</sup> When Tatatea Wonta died, she left behind two male twins as heirs to the Akwamu stool (the physical symbol of leadership) upon the death of Akwamu Akoto. Nana Dwaa Hema succeeded her. Later their great leader and chief Nana Akwamu Akoto died and the stool was unoccupied.

Finding a successor was a major problem for the Akwamu Awanwenseso people. The two twins of Tatatea Wonta began to struggle for the stool. Both the elder twin and the younger

became enthusiastic about taking over the stool. A serious dispute ensued which no one could settle.

The queenmother, Nana Dwaa Hema, seized the stool from the two brothers, for she knew that the best way to cool the animosity was to remove the stool from Akwamu Awanweneso and find a new shelter for it. She decided to take the stool and travel to the East. More than half of the population, numbering in their thousands followed her. Most of these people were elders of the Akwamu Awanweneso stool. Bearing the precious stool, they travelled to Kumasi where they lived for seven years. They then moved east to Adu Yaw Nkwanta where a segment of the people split off and became separated.

Nana Dwaa Hema's group continued past Abesim to Badu Asu. There for forty days, with the aid of elders and news carried to her by the hunters, she developed strategies for securing protection for her followers and the stool. At Techiman, she was welcomed by the village chief, Nana Takyi Firi, who then notified the Bonohene Nana Ameyaw Kwakye I of her arrival. Nana Ameyaw Kwakye married Nana Dwaa Hema and provided her and her followers with the entire territory west of his home, asking only that she use it well and let him see its yield.

In order to comply with his request and as a sign of her appreciation, she gave him a golden hoe. Soon a son was born to them. Upon reaching manhood he occupied the stool which had been vacant since its departure from Akwamu Awanweneso. This is how Nana Ameyaw Kaako, the son of Bonohene Nana Ameyaw Kwakye I came to occupy the Aduana stool. This is the historical background of the above libation.

### **Libation and History of the Deities**

In addition to historical allusion in libation, libations from priests and priestesses often deal with the origin of the deities and their functions. Several deities in the traditional pantheon are mentioned together with some Akan clan names. The following are examples of such libations. The first is a libation by Nana Okomfo Adwubi collected at Pahowosu village (via Asueyi) Techiman, January 17, 1971.

#### Twi Text:

1. Nana Amma Sewaa begye nsa nom,
2. Asaase Yaa nsa o
3. Timponim Taa Kofi nsa
4. Aduana Tweabrade nsa
5. Oyokofoo asamanfoe nsa
6. Asuo Jama Boe nsa o
7. Atinikum Boe Gyan begye nsa nom

8. Nana Faa Mensi nsa o
9. Timponim Taa Yaw nsa o
10. Enye bone bi apiafo
11. Enne Kwasié, ena mete ha sei, na Timponim Taa Kofi
12. Nana Amma Sewaa begye nsa nom.

English Translation:

1. Nana Amma Sewaa come and drink wine
2. Earth Yaa wine, o
3. Timponim Taa Kofi, wine.
4. Aduana Tweabrade wine (one of the totemic clans).
5. The ancestor of Oyoko clan wine, o
6. River Jama Stone wine, o
7. Alirikum Stone Gyan (a deity) come and drink wine.
8. Nana Faa Mensi wine, o
9. Timponim Taa Yaw wine, o
10. There is nothing wrong by your leave
11. Today is Sunday and I am staying here and I am here with Timponim Taa Kofi
12. Nana Amma Sewaa come and drink wine.

The following oral history illustrates the meaning of the libation and demonstrates how libation sustains vital elements of the birth of the Taa Kofi deity in the Techiman traditional area. The birth of the god Taa Kofi at Pahowosu village is credited to Nana Amma Sewaa, the aunt of Okomfo Adwubi. She came from Papaase Kokofu. When she was born she held a *bodua* "whisk" and *dufa* "medicine" in her left hand. When she grew she often fell to the ground and people thought she had epilepsy. When a god was consulted they found out she brought her god from Heaven and it was the god Taa Kofi. She became *okomfo* and grew very old before she died.

*Okomfo* Adwubi's mother was going through puberty when Nana Amma Sewaa died. After that she became pregnant and gave birth to a daughter, called Adwubi. When Adwubi grew, she came to her place of origin, Techiman (her mother's town). She was always cantankerous and would not marry. She was possessed by her father's family god, although she was a Muslim and her name was Amina. She went to the bush and came home after two weeks. In the bush she was surrounded by very short people and although their language was whistling she understood them all. They called her name and she answered and sometimes they taught her

medicine. At first the townspeople did not know what had happened to her. When they discovered that her father's family god possessed her, they performed the necessary customs. She has been *okomfo* for the god for about twenty-two years now. The following libation by Nana Kwaku Addae, Taa Kuntunu Bosomfo, was collected on August 19, 1970.

Twi Text

1. Tweduapon Nyame, gye nsanom.
2. Asaase Yaa gye nsa nom
3. Tano Kuntunu gye nsa nom
4. Wo na wobekyekyeree kro yi
5. Na, enkanka na ekaa mpanyin ne mmofra
- .....
- 10 Tweduapon Nyame gye nsa nom
11. Asaase Yaa gye nsa nom
12. Tano Kuntunu gye nsa nom
13. Taa Mensa Kwabena gye nsa nom
14. Atiokosaa gye nsa nom
15. Efi Botwerewa Kwaku gye nsa nom
16. Taa Mensa Kwabena gye nsa nom
17. Wie! Kranka Afua nsa ni o
18. Twunpuduo nsa o
19. Taa Kora nsa
20. Taa Yaw nsa
21. Taa Yaw nsa
22. Anikokoo nsa
23. Taa Kora nsa
24. Abosom nnuasa nyinaa memmegye nsa nom afi
25. Na mua nyinaa woso a ebeka abe
26. Ene se, Nananom na eyeɛ adeɛ yi gyaa ho
27. Yede koo Gyaman bae
28. Na yen nso nkwadaa yi yete ho
29. Yen nso yemma bosom no anim ngu ase da.

English Translation:

1. Almighty God come and drink wine

2. Earth Yaa get wine and drink
3. Tano Kuntunu get wine and drink
4. You created this town
5. You have left behind young and old
- .....
10. Almighty God take wine and drink
11. Earth Yaa take wine and drink
12. Tano Kuntunu take wine and drink
13. Taa Mensa Kwabena take wine and drink
14. Atiokosaa take wine and drink
15. Botwerewa Kwaku take wine and drink
16. Taa Mensa Kwabena take wine and drink
17. Kranka Afua, this is wine oh!
18. Twumpuduo wine, o!
19. Taa Kora wine, o!
20. Taa Yaw wine
21. Taa Yaw wine
22. Anikokoo wine
23. Taa Kora wine
24. All gods come for wine
25. When all trees shake, the oil palm tree will never be touched
26. Our grandparents created this thing (the god)
27. They sent it to Gyaman and brought it back
28. We are now taking care of the god
29. We shall not disgrace the god.

The history of Kuntunso village was recounted by Nana Kwaku Addae, Kuntunso on August 19, 1970. He explained how the village of Kuntunso (named after the god Taa Kuntunu) was settled as a result of the visit of certain gods to the Techiman traditional area of Ghana and how one god, Taa Kuntunu, chose Kwame Ansah to be his custodian. Ansah was travelling with a group of people from Medoma (Ashanti Region). When they reached the Tano River they were very thirsty and Kwame Ansah was asked to bring some river water back for them. The river had recently flooded slightly and when Ansah reached out his pan, the river current pulled it from him. In an effort to recover it he was caught by the current. After a while the people began to worry and when they could find no trace of him, they assumed that he had drowned.



Three years and seven days after his funeral celebration the people learned of a man named Kwame Ansah who had acquired considerable wealth. Investigating, they learned that with the help of the god Ansah had lived those years beneath the river. He had departed the river an *Obosomfoɔ*, bearing a staff and wearing a long plaited hair. Ansah observed that where he had come out of the river an elephant had passed by, and he realised that he ought to build a house beside the animal's footprints. It was a good omen.

Ansah met some travellers en route to Techiman. He inquired about Takyi Maaso and told of his experience at the river. They described for him the town of Takyi. The travellers carried Ansah's news to the chief, who, upon Ansah's request, charged a person to meet with Ansah. This person returned to the chief and informed him about the special god of Ansah beseeching his chief to adopt this deity into his community.<sup>7</sup>

It is asserted that Ansah, the *obosomfoɔ*, became possessed by the god and revealed to the Krontihene that his god would have his shrine at the place where the elephant had left footprints; the god would also reveal its name after its house had been built. The Krontihene helped Kwame Ansah build a shrine from branches of the oil palm tree and when the Krontihene walked to the god's abode the god told him that he was called Tano Kuntunu, meaning the god from the part of the Tano River where it curved or bent. The river was flowing on a curve, and *kuntunu* means, it is curved or bent. Hence Taa Kuntunu became the name of the god. The village, having been created by the god himself, became the abode for the god and for *Obosomfoɔ* Kwame Ansah. Ansah never went back to Asante and he became *Odikro* of the village, as well as *Obosomfoɔ* for the god. Hence every person from Ansah's village who succeeded Ansah's stool became both the *Odikro* and the *Obosomfoɔ* (Warren and Brempong 1974: 222-29). From the foregoing account we can see how libation can give clues to oral histories in Akan society.

### **Libation In Highlife Songs**

Libations as presented in highlife songs do not differ very much from the traditional texts. Indeed libation texts in highlife songs can be considered as variants of these ceremonies because the prayers are similar to the traditional ones. The content of the modern form is rooted in tradition and draws its inspiration from the belief system.

In order to illustrate this point let us examine one libation by the All Brothers' Band collected in 1970, and compare it with the traditional libations presented earlier. The following libation appears in the highlife song *Se yebeye yie nia*.

#### Twi Text

Nkyekyemu 1:

1-4. Se yebeye yie nia yennim oo (x 4)

Nkyekyemu 2:

5. Nananom Bretuo nsamanfoe ee
6. Ahenfifoe nsamanfoe
7. Aduanafoe nsamanfoe
8. Agonafoe nsamanfoe
9. Asenefoe nsamanfoe ee
10. Asenefoe mma megye nsa nom
11. Ekoonafoe rama megye nsa nom
12. Eye a mongyina y'akyi akyigyinapa
13. Momma osianefoe biala mesan yen
14. Adaadaafoe bia madaadaa yen
15. Afi na yenso yetoto bi ahwe.
16. Yesre Nyame ahwe se yebeye yie anaa

17-18. Se yebeye yie nia yennim oo (x 2)

Nkyekyemu 3:

19. Obiara nim adekyee mu asem
20. Obiara nim se nea yebe wie
21. Agya kokroko Onyame deefoe yi
22. Ono ara na yede yen nsem nyinaa hye ne nsa

23-24. Se yebeye yie nia yennim oo (x 2)

Nkyekyemu 4:

25-28. Se yebeye yie nia yennim oo (x 4)

Nkyekyemu 5:

29. Oh, All Brothers!
30. Yebeye yie ni?
31. Onyame na yeebo no npacee
32. Onyame na yeesu fre no.
33. Ono na oye y'akyigyinafoe
34. Se yebeye yie, se yenne yie

35. Ne nyinaa ye Onyame ara.

Nkyekyemu 6:

36. Yensiane kokurobeti ho mmo pa.

37. Biribiara a yebeye yede Onyame din na eye

38. Na se yeekowie nsoa yede ne din awie.

39. Obaatanpan Agya yehia mmoa

40. Yehia mmoa akwan nyinaa mu oo

41. Yebeyeie nia yennim oo

Nkyekyemu 7:

42-45. Se yebeyeie nia yennim oo ( x 4)

Nkyekyemu 8:

46. Se yebeyeie nia yennim oo oo x 4

English Translation:

Stanza 1: 1-4. We do not know whether we will prosper, oo ( x 4)

Stanza 2: 5. Forefathers, the departed spirits of Beretuo, ee (totemic clan)

6. People from the chief's house (palace).

7. The departed spirits of the Aduana people (totemic clan)

8. The departed spirits of the Agona people (totemic clan)

9. The departed spirits of the Asene people, ee (totemic clan)

10. The children of Asene come and get wine and drink

11. The children of Akoona people (totemic clan), come and get wine and drink.

12. Always stand behind us and give us good protection.

13. Don't allow any mischievous person to entrap us.

14. Don't allow any deceitful person to mislead us.

15. It is now that we are making our plans.

16. We are begging God for our prosperity.

17-18. We do not know whether we will prosper, oo ( x 2)

Stanza 3: 19. Nobody knows the things that will happen each day.

20. Nobody knows what our end will be

21. The Great Father, this bountiful God

22. He is the one we have all our troubles in His hands.

23. We do not know whether we will prosper, oo

Stanza 4: 24. We do not know whether we are going to die, oo

- 25-28. We do not know whether we will prosper, oo (x 4)
- Stanza 5: 29. Oh, All Brothers!  
 30. Are we going to prosper?  
 31. Is God that we are praying to.  
 32. Is God that we are crying to  
 33. He is our backbone  
 34. Whether we will prosper, whether we will not prosper  
 35. Everything is in God's power.
- Stanza 6: 36. One cannot bypass the thumb to make a knot (one cannot make a knot without using the thumb; one cannot bypass God in any undertaking)  
 37. Everything we do we begin it in God's name  
 38. In the end, we finish it in God's name  
 39. The good mother (parent), father we need your help.  
 40. We need help in every undertaking  
 41. We do not know whether we will prosper, oo
- Stanza 7: 42-45. We do not know whether we will prosper, oo (x 4)
- Stanza 8: 46. We do not know whether we will prosper, oo (x 4)

The first four lines of the song show the 'doubt' the singers have in their own future. This doubt then turns them to the traditional religious belief system which is the pouring of libation to invoke the supernatural beings to protect their band from the hands of mischievous and deceitful people. Traditionally a libation performer asks for such protection from the hands of bad people. The Akans say *suro nipa na gyae osaman*, "Fear human beings and not the ghost." People believe that the world is made up of good and bad people. Bad people are worse than ghosts (something most people fear), because they can do damage to their own kind.

From line five through line eleven, the words, *Bretuo*, *Aduana*, *Agona*, *Asene*, and *Ekoona* are Akan totemic clan names. The others that are not mentioned in the song are *Dyoko* and *Asona*. In line six the phrase "people from the chief's house" refers to the *Dyoko* clan. The *Dyoko* is the clan for most paramount chiefs in Akan societies. Line 36, *Yensiane kokurobeti ho mmɔ pɔ* "One cannot by-pass the thumb to make a knot," presents an Akan proverb. Here the human thumb is used metaphorically for God. The proverb means that nobody can by-pass God in any undertaking. Therefore man must first put his problems in the hands of the Supreme Being.

In line 39, *Obaatanpa Agya yehia mmoa*, "Good mother, father, we need your help," refers to God. Here God is described as "mother" and also "father." Traditionally, every male parent in Akan society is considered as *Obaatan*. *Obaa* means "woman" and *tan* means "parent." This

indicates that every parent, without regard to sex, has "motherly" love for children. Hence God has motherly love for all humans who are his children.

### **Devices For Introducing Libation In Highlife Songs.**

One method used in introducing libation into highlife song is insertion. Sometimes song poetry, which is not part of the ritual, is utilized to divide the libation prayer into several parts. For example, the All Brothers' Band utilizes repetitive phrases such "We do not know whether we will prosper, oo," to divide the ritual into four parts. As we can see from the text, stanzas 2, 3, 5, and 6 are the main libation ritual. Stanzas 1, 4, 7, and 8 are used as inserted interludes.

Another way highlife singers introduce libation into their songs is by mere reference. Singers sometimes make important references to libation and do not bother themselves to sing a whole prayer. An example is *Nsamanfoɔ mongye nsa nom*, "Departed spirits receive wine and drink", by the Broadway Band.

#### Twi Text:

Nsamanfoɔ ee, mongye nsa nom, Nsamanfoɔ ee, mongye nsa nom (x 3)  
Nananom ee, wongye nsa nom, Nananom ee, wongye nsa nom,  
Yeda Nyame ase oo, Yeda Nyame ase oo,  
Nsamanfoɔ ee, mongye nsa nom, Nsamanfoɔ ee, mongye nsa nom.  
Yeda Nyame ase oo, Yeda Nyame ase oo,  
Nsamanfoɔ ee, mongye nsa nom, Nsamanfoɔ ee, mongye nsa nom.

#### English Translation:

The departed spirits, ee, receive wine and drink. The departed spirits, ee,  
receive wine and drink (x 3)  
Forefathers, ee, receive wine and drink. Forefathers, ee, receive wine and drink.  
We give thanks to God, oo. We give thanks to God, oo.  
The departed spirits, ee, receive wine and drink. The departed spirits, ee, receive wine  
and drink.  
We give thanks to God, oo. We give thanks to God, oo.  
The departed spirits, ee, receive wine and drink. The departed spirits, ee, receive  
wine and drink.

This song only makes reference to the libation ritual and invites the ancestral spirits for a drink of wine. The song does not make use of other poetic aspects of libation as shown in the early examples. However, we can still detect that libation is being performed; the phrase "come and get wine and drink" is substantial evidence.

Several years ago, the Osibisa Band used another method to introduce libation in a song.<sup>8</sup> This type of introduction is accomplished by combining two languages in a libation performance. The following is an example of a multiple language introduction. This "libation" by the Osibisa Band was collected by the author in 1971.

Ewe Text: *Afrika Noliawo, mele mia yom ken ken ken ken.*

English Trans: The ancestor of Africa, I am calling you, truly, truly...

Twi Text: *Mommra mmeɔgye nsa nom.*

English Trans: Come and get wine and drink.

Ewe Text: *Vedomo Nolia meɔ mi, fofonyewo.*

English Trans: Household ancestors, I call you, my fathers (i.e., dead grandfathers).

Twi Text: *Mommra mmeɔgye nsa nom.*

English Trans: Come and get wine and drink.

Ewe Text: *Mia fofo siwo heku ken ken ken ken.*

English Trans: Our fathers who truly, truly....died.

Twi Text: *Mommra mmeɔgye nsa nom.*

English Trans: Come and get wine and drink.

Ewe Text: *Mia noli siawo hekua, mele mia yom,*

English Trans: Our ancestors who died, we are calling you.

Twi Text: *Mommra mmeɔgye nsa nom.*

English Trans: Come and get wine and drink.

This song combines the Ewe and the Twi languages alternately in the libation ritual. As we can see from the text, the main theme of the ritual is recited in the Ewe language, and the Akan libation phrase, *Mommra mmeɔgye nsa nom* literally "Come and get wine and drink" is used to punctuate every line of the prayer. In this case the Twi antiphonal responses *wiã* and *ampa* of the traditional libation ceremony are replaced by "come and get wine and drink." Thus this new style has emerged from the Akan traditional libation performance. The method also demonstrates the intertribal character of highlife songs.

Libation ritual is characteristic of not only the Ghanaian highlife songs. Akan libation texts exist beyond the boundaries of Ghana. The musicians who join bands outside Ghana use libation material to perform their songs. The following song, *The Witch Doctor* by Hugh Masekela, is a vivid example of this development in African popular songs.<sup>9</sup> It was taped in Bloomington, Indiana, in 1976.

Twi Text:

1. Otwereduampon Kwame nsa
2. Asise Yaa Mponyinamoa nsa

3. Nananom Nsamanfoɔ mongye nsa nom.
4. Asuo Bresua nsa.
5. Ata Kofi nsa.
6. Boakye Gyan nsa.
7. Yaw Apea nsa.
8. Asuo Tano nsa.
9. ɔkyerefoɔ Kokroko, ɔkyereboakyere
10. Osu keseɛ odi agyinamoa nsa
11. Nananom Nsamanfoɔ nyinaa, mongye nsa nom.

**English Translation:**

1. Almighty God whose day is Saturday come and drink wine.
2. Earth Yaa whose day is Thursday and who does not reject any of the animals who live on her, come and drink wine.
3. Forefathers, the departed spirits come and drink wine.
4. River Bresua come and drink wine.
5. Atta Kofi come and drink wine.
6. Boakye Gyan come for wine
7. Yaw Apea come for wine.
- 8 River Tano come for wine..
9. ɔkyerefo kokroko, ɔkyereboakyere (the great teacher).
10. The big river which eats the cat come for wine.
11. Forefathers, all the departed spirits come and drink wine

Hugh Masekela is a South African musician. His band consists of some Ghanaian singers and sometimes the lyrics of his songs are performed in the Twi language. The song *The Witch Doctor* imitates an Akan traditional priest, a custodian of a witch-catching deity. The prayer follows traditional taste by invoking the most important supernatural beings, God, the mother earth, the deities, rivers (which are also considered deities) and the ancestors. In this way Akan traditional materials are combined with materials from other African geographical areas. Highlife material is thus playing an essential role in the song traditions of many parts of Africa.

**Similarities of Highlife and Traditional Libation.**

Highlife libation and the traditional libation are very similar. The form, content and stylistic devices are almost exactly the same. The traditional libation begins with "Almighty God come

and drink wine" whereas the highlife libation begins with "Forefathers, the departed spirits of *Bretuo* clan". The content of the text is similar. An appeal to God, the deities and the ancestors is evident. Both traditional and modern libation use vivid, concrete language to explain the power and the greatness of these supernaturals. Another important similarity is the invocation of the supernatural beings to protect man from his enemies. Seeking the protection of the supernaturals is a general phenomenon, a goal for all libation rituals. Although these rituals always call for long life and prosperity for man, these goals are expressed differently in both media.

It is also important to notice the similarities in the poetic language, the use of similes and metaphors in both settings. Highlife libation, like any other libation, incorporates traditional proverbs. For example, the proverb "One cannot by-pass the thumb to make a knot," meaning "One cannot make a knot without the use of the thumb," fits well in the style of libation performance. Proverbs such as "When all trees shake, the palm tree will never be touched" are commonly part of traditional libation and are used in highlife songs. Repetition, a common device in the traditional method is just as important in highlife performance. One typical traditional repeated phrase, "Come and drink wine" or "Get wine and drink," is also incorporated into the highlife version.

Another important traditional element dealt with in the highlife libation is the use of clan names<sup>10</sup>. The Akan clan names such as the *Aduana*, *Bretuo*, *Agona*, *Asene*, and *Jyoko* cut across all sub-groups of Akan societies. For example, one can find the *Aduana* or the *Jyoko* clan among the Bono, the Ashanti, the Akwapim, and other sub-groups. Hence, we can trace a common mythological genetic descent for several Akan groups from the same remote ancestors. Thus, traditional libations greatly influence contemporary highlife songs because they offer an additional outlet in oral communication.

### **Differences in Highlife And Traditional Libation**

There are some important differences between libations in highlife songs and those in traditional ceremonies, which should not be overlooked. The differences are mainly in the method of performing the two types of libations. First of all, singers of libation in highlife songs do not necessarily pour an alcoholic beverage or water on the ground as the ritual demands. We can only assume that the rite is being performed from the recitation of the prayer, i.e., the verbal ceremony of invoking the supernaturals' powers to come for a drink of wine. The verbal message is the only indication that wine is being poured. The listener therefore must imagine that the two acts, the pouring of the drink and the reciting of a prayer, occur simultaneously.

In addition, traditional libations fit specific occasions and often they have specific audiences. Unlike traditional libations, highlife libations have no ritual specificity. Singers depend more on



generalization. For example, in the song *Se yebeye yie nia*, the All Brothers' Band mentioned several clan names simultaneously, contrary to the customary use of a single or a few clan names in the traditional libations. This kind of generalization, however, makes highlife appealing to more people.

The use of several languages within a highlife libation brings people together and makes highlife more inter-tribal and more popular. Highlife libation, because it is inserted into another verbal image, must rely upon insertion rules which differ markedly from their traditional texts. Moreover, traditional libations have primarily religious functions while highlife libations have religious, entertainment and commercial functions.

### Libation as Religious Poetry

The essence of libation is ritual. It could be classified in the genre of religious poetry. Finnegan (1970), does not mention libation as religious poetry. She limits her study to Islamic verses and hymns and classifies other verses as oracular and not poetic:

Apart from Islamic verse the most common type of religious poetry in Africa seems to be the hymn. A common feature of this form is that the religious content consists of invocation or supplication rather than narrative, and is sometimes closely allied to panegyric. The detailed subject-matter and context, however, vary greatly with the differing religious beliefs and institutions of each people. It is among certain West African peoples that hymns are developed in their most specialized form. This is in keeping with the elaborate pantheon of divinities recognized by such peoples as the Yoruba, Fon, or Akan. (Finnegan 1970: 175)

Libation in the two forms presented here, the traditional libation and the modern highlife version, is an important form of religious poetry. The traditional libation relies upon extensive rhyming; the last word in each line rhymes with another line. There are a number of couplets and triplets. The rhymes link the phrases of the libation together. For example, in Twi, the following rhyming lines are linked together in meaning and poetic effect.<sup>11</sup>

- |                                    |   |
|------------------------------------|---|
| 3. Timponim Taa Kofi nsa           | a |
| 4. Aduana Tweabrade nsa            | a |
| 5. Oyokofoo asamanfoo nsa          | a |
| 6. Asuo Jama Boo nsa o             | b |
| 7. Atinikum Boo Gyan begye nsa nom | c |
| 8. Nana Faa Mensi nsa o            | b |
| 9. Timponim TaaYaw nsa o           | b |

- |                                    |   |
|------------------------------------|---|
| 10. Enye bone bi apiafo            | b |
| 11. Enne Kwasi, ena mete ha        | a |
| 12. Nana Amma Sewaa begye nsa nom. | c |

Repetition is also a common device in libation. Departed spirits, wine or drink, and names of the supernatural beings, God, deities and rivers are repeated several times in the texts. Furthermore, the use of metaphors, similes and many other figurative expressions are common characteristics of libation texts. In line 36 of the libation text by the All Brothers' Band, "One cannot make a knot without the use of the thumb", the thumb is used metaphorically to illustrate that no one can by-pass God in any undertaking.

In addition to these intrinsic poetic characteristics of the ritual, libation texts have formulaic openings. All libations begin by invoking the names of the supernatural beings, God, Mother Earth, the deities and the ancestors. Without these important deities, the essence of the ritual would be missing. Libation rituals should be regarded as an important form of religious poetry and should not be neglected in the poetics of African societies.

### Conclusion

The content of traditional libations used in highlife songs demonstrates that libation as a traditional religious ritual is a great source of material for the highlife songs. The examples presented here also show that proverbs, similes, and other traditional metaphors embedded in traditional libations help to give meaning to the performance of highlife songs. Although there are differences in the presentation of the traditional and highlife libation texts, the relationship between both versions is that they point to one analogy. The modern use of traditional libation texts in highlife songs indicates the trend of new cultural innovations in contemporary Ghana.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Since 1969 during intensive field research in folklore and anthropology I discovered that traditional libations are utilized by the performers of highlife songs. I therefore decided to compile some of these materials which are analysed here.

<sup>2</sup> I collected several hundreds of libation material between 1969-1971 during the recordings of oral histories in the Techiman Traditional State. Presentations of schnapps were used in pouring each of these libations. According to Nana Akumfi Ameyaw III, in the early days wine was made from honey to pour libations. The honey was buried in the ground for several years to undergo certain chemical changes and it turned into alcoholic drink which was used for court rituals including the pouring of libation. (Personal conversation, 1970).

<sup>3</sup>Public places can include the opening of a new school, community centres and other projects of community importance. Libation is poured at the opening to ensure the success of such public projects.

<sup>4</sup>*Kankye* or *upace* can be performed during food offerings but such offerings are not libations although they are accompanied by prayers. My definition of libation is limited to prayers accompanied by the pouring of alcoholic drink and other liquids such as water.

<sup>5</sup>Kofi Asare Opoku throws light on the belief practices concerning libation in Akan society. He elucidates, "It is also not uncommon, especially among the Akan of Ghana to make sure that there is water in the water container in the house before the household goes to bed, for it is the belief that the ancestors come round at night to visit their kinsmen, and they will need water to drink" (1978:37).

<sup>6</sup>Her name was originally Tatatea, Wonta was added to her name because she had twins. See Warren and Brempong (1974: 33-46).

<sup>7</sup>For further information on the history of the deity Taa Kuntunu, see Warren and Brempong (1974: 33-46).

<sup>8</sup>Osõbisa is a Ghanaian Band with a new trend in African music. The Band consists of members from different ethnic groups as well as other Africans and most of their songs are sung with the combination of the Twi and other Ghanaian languages and also predominantly English.

<sup>9</sup>Hugh Masekela is said to have gone to Ghana to arrange a tour for the Wulomei Band, a Ghanaian highlife band, to play in the United States of America. After the concert tour in the States, Hugh Masekela persuaded some of the Ghanaians to play in his own band. The Wulomei band split up and today, some of the members of Masekela's band are Ghanaians and they sing several of their songs in the Twi language together with other African languages (Personal conversation with Kofi Anyidoho, summer 1980, Bloomington, Indiana).

<sup>10</sup> For further information on the Akan totemic clans, see Meyerowitz (1956: 151-3); Opoku (1978: 99)

<sup>11</sup> The English translation does not do justice to the original language.