



MUSIC, DANCE AND MESSAGING IN THE GHANAIAN POLITICAL ARENA

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Abstract

This paper examines how music and dance shape electoral accountability in Ghanaian politics. With political party proliferation and the electoral contestation in Africa in the 1990s, scholars began to explore factors that influence electoral outcomes. Numerous academic studies have found a number of characteristics that impact electoral outcomes in the new democracies, including clientelism, ethnicity, retrospective voting, ideological stances, and rational voting. Beyond these factors, music and dance play an important role in the multiparty electoral systems in Ghana. Despite this purpose, there is comparatively little research on how dance and music contribute to electoral responsibility. Our paper contributes to filling this knowledge gap by analyzing music and dance in the Ghanaian electoral politics by analyzing the impact of 'Yen tie Obiaa,' campaign song for the 2016 and 2020 general elections by a Ghanaian Highlife icon, Charles Kwadwo Fosu (a.k.a Daddy Lumba). Drawing from twenty (20) participants, the findings revealed that lyrics of the song in addition to other electoral undercurrents have also adversely affected the candidature of the National Democratic Congress (NDC), and influenced voters who hitherto had no intention of voting for the New Patriotic Party candidate in the 2016 and 2020 presidential election.

Keywords: Popular Music and Dance, Messaging, Ghanaian political arena, Democracy, Elections, Multi-party

Introduction

Elections that are both competitive and participatory are the fundamental institution of contemporary liberal democracy that allow the people to exercise their right to self-government.

The nature of the modern democratic electoral system underpins political participation and representation at all levels of governmental authority (Diamond, 1997; Bratton & Van de Walle, 1997; Bukari, 2022;

Gyimah-Boadi, 2001; Ayee, 2002). The electoral systems of modern liberal democracies constitute a set of formal and informal rules and procedures by which citizens of a given democratic country choose their political representatives (Huntington, 1991; Linz & Stepan, 1996; Bratton & Van de Walle, 1997; Ayee, 1998; Bukari et al., 2024). Also, scholars have agreed that electoral systems do not by themselves

explain levels of electoral representation, but rather their composition either creates or blocks political opportunity for participation (Gyimah-Boadi, 1998, 1999, 2001). Political participation plays a critical role in determining voter dynamics and outcomes, especially in majoritarian electoral systems, which are used in developed democracies and many emerging democracies, such as Ghana, as discussed in this article (Lindberg & Morrison, 2008; Bukari, et al., 2024).

Ghana, like the advanced democracies, and many of the emerging democracies adopt multi-party electoral democracy following the promulgation of the 1992 Fourth Republican Constitution after the referendum on 28th April, 1992 accepting its proposal (Bukari, 2017; Anaman & Bukari, 2019b). Additionally, the Fourth Republic's political system is a hybrid that combines elements of the 1992 constitution's presidential and parliamentary systems of government. It is founded on the democratic principle of "universal-adult-suffrage," also known as the "one-man-one vote of all adults' citizens" who are 18 years of age or older. The president of Ghana is chosen directly by the people and serves a four-year, two-term (Bukari, 2023; Bukari et al., 2024).

Additionally, the 275 members of the Unicameral Parliament (as of the 2020 elections held on December 7) are directly elected for four-year terms by single-member constituencies using the first-past-the-post method.

There is a two-year overlap between Ghana's four-year electoral cycle, which divides local elections (District Assembly) and national elections (Presidential and Parliamentary) (Bukari, 2022; Anaman & Bukari, 2019b; Bukari et al., 2023).

It might be argued that the 'Third Wave' of party democracy, which commenced in the early 1990s, brought back electoral competition in many developing nations,

including those in Africa (Huntington, 1991; Linz & Stepan, 1996; Bratton & Van de Walle, 1997; Ayee, 1998; Gyimah-Boadi, 1998, 2001). With the political party proliferation and the open multi-party electoral contestation, scholars began to explore factors that influence electoral outcomes (Bukari, et al., 2022a &b). Consequently, many of the scholarly works have identified clientelism, ethnicity, ideological positions, rational voting or retrospective voting, as some of the factors influencing electoral outcomes in the new democracies (Lindberg, 2013; Lindberg & Morrison, 2008; Anaman & Bukari, 2019a; Alidu & Bukari, 2020).

Beyond the factors that influence electoral outcomes, music and dance play an important role in the multi-party electoral competition in terms of outcomes, particularly those in most of the emerging African democracies like Ghana's Fourth Republican democratic experiment beginning in 1992 (Bukari, 2022; Bukari et al., 2022a &b). In certain African nations, such as "Kongonya" and the Politics of Zimbabwe (Gonye, 2013) and Bobi Wine and the Political Economy of Activist Musicians in Uganda (Friesinger, 2021), this has been empirically verified but scholarly works are still relatively scarce, and this calls for further studies to establish the conceptual and empirical linkages between music and dance and electoral outcomes in the emerging African democracies.

Generally, music is a kind of art that conveys its message through harmonic sound or acoustic signals (Uche, 2019). It is the most powerful of idealist drug for solving societal problems (Spender, 1972). This explains why music is so often regarded as a popular form of expression and a universal language. Every musical composition is created in the context of culture and society. As such, policies that are deemed appropriate in one political environment are often

communicated through the use of music. More precisely, political music addresses pressing social issues in a community. Rousseau (1959) described political music as “music’s energy and the force of its expressions” (Uche, 2019, p. 262). Due to this energy's widespread appeal, some politicians have been drawn to use songs and music to express messages about themselves or their opponents (Uche, 2019). According to Garofalo (1992, p.65), songs imbedded messages can travel far beyond the political boundaries. The direct impact of music on political processes could be minute and very hard to quantify. However, a number of politicians and those who support them have made use of it to encourage voters to support them or, at the very least, to dissuade them from supporting their competitors.

What effect did the remarks made by the presidential candidate of the National Democratic Congress (NDC) on popular dance and music genres have on the outcomes of Ghana's general elections in 2016 and 2020? In the 2016 elections, did this play a role in the NDC and its candidate's defeat? And what about the 2020 elections, with the same presidential candidate? How do music and dance influence electoral outcome, generally? These and more questions underpin the conceptual and empirical relevance of this article. Available scholarly discussions on electoral outcomes in Ghana have not provided conceptual and empirical answers to these questions. Thus, scholarly works explaining the effect of music and dance on electoral accountability in Ghana is relatively scarce. Our study contributes to filling this knowledge gap by analyzing some Ghanaian popular music and dance genres. For this article, we are interested in the affluence of music and dance, but we also used the political development model, which creates theories regarding the changing linkages and charms of electoral winners based on a particular depiction of the

pertinent social milieu in terms of technological prowess and economic prosperity.

This model is useful for identifying music and dancing as an additional component that explains how parties pitch their appeal and garner electoral support in a democracy, even though it is empirically off the mark. The article then problematizes music and dance in the Ghanaian electoral politics, and interrogates the linkage between music and dance and electoral outcome. The article provides theoretical explanation through literature reviews, conceptual and empirical link between music and dance and the electoral outcomes in Ghana.

Objectives and Theoretical Foundations of the Study

In the 2016 and 2020 general elections, the NDC party and its candidate for the presidential elections’ electoral prospects are examined in relation to Charles Kwadwo Fosu's (also known as Daddy Lumba), Highlife (Ghanaian genre) song "Yentie Obiaa." The agenda setting theory of McCombs and Donald Shaw and the hypodermic needle hypothesis of Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) both lend credence to this debate in this article. These two hypotheses can be delivered in the same way. The hypodermic needle argument, sometimes referred to as the magic bullet idea, concludes that the media has an immediate, powerful, and direct effect on its audience—in this case, the Ghanaian voter.

According to this theory, the mass media might directly and uniformly affect the public by introducing messages intended to elicit a particular reaction. Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) referred to a strong and direct information flow from the sender to the recipient as "a bullet and a needle." According to the bullet hypothesis (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955), the message is a bullet that

is discharged into the viewer's "head" from the "media gun" (Nyonator, 2020, p. 18). According to the hypodermic needle model, the passive audience can be effectively reached by media messages. This theory's proponents see the media as a bold means of getting knowledge out to a wider audience, who are also helpless to stop the message's influence. Nyonator (2020), Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) view the audience as a passive object that is being "shot" with a lot of media content. This theory details how songs have some amount of influence on the Ghanaian voter.

The agenda setting hypothesis developed by McCombs and Donald Shaw is also pertinent to the debate in this article. The hypothesis states that grassroots organizations are impacted indirectly by the mass media. Its core principle is the establishment of a social agenda. The theory states that the media's agenda of issues has a significant impact on the public's opinion. This hypothesis influences public opinion and raises awareness. The agenda setting hypothesis is supported by McQuail (1993), who asserts that agendas set by the media, public policymakers, and policymakers have an impact on people's interpersonal communication and personal experiences (Nyonator, 2020). According to Brown (2000), society's thought processes are greatly influenced by the media.

The theoretical underpinnings mentioned above have helped literature in a variety of formats to better understand dance and music in society. First of all, dance and music are powerful mediums for expressing social life throughout human history and are intangible forms of art (Biko, 1978; Storr, 1993; Gyekye, 1996). Additionally, Storr (1993) pointed out that music and dance are a potent vehicle for communicating love and hate, friendship and enmity, joy and pain, hope and despair, and more. Music and dance have enormous

influence on society in terms of their ability to stimulate communal collectivity, and could also offer binding power, and these have the potential of unifying people in society. For these key roles music and dance are considered as the most powerful tools for social mobilization and sensitization (Biko, 1978; Storr, 1993; Gyekye, 1996). Music and dance do play an essential function in socialization, sensitization, mobilization and cultural transmission from generation to generation in society. Many academics have therefore concurred that dancing and music have a socializing function. As Biko puts it:

“Nothing dramatises the eagerness of the African to communicate with each other more than their love for song and rhythm. Music in the African culture features in all emotional states. When we go to work, we share the burdens and the pleasure of the work we are doing through music. This particular fact, strangely enough, has filtered through to the present day. Tourists always watch with amazement the synchrony of music and action as Africans working at a roadside used their picks and shovels with well-timed precision to the accompaniment of a background song. Battle songs were a feature of the long march to war in the olden days ... in other words, with Africans, music and rhythms were not luxuries, but part and parcel of our way of communication” (Biko, 1978, p. 41).

The gestures and motions used in dance and music represent communal life and widely recognized norms and values, such as deference to authority, readiness to assist others, and accountability for the social growth of the group (Gyekye, 1996). Furthermore, Kwame Nkrumah's idea of "African Personality Consciousness" in relation to dance and music implies that: a social revolution must be firmly supported by an intellectual revolution, one in which the goal of our philosophy and way of thinking is

to redeem society. The environment and living situations of the African people must serve as the weapon for our philosophy. Philosophical consciousness is the term used to describe the theory that must underpin this social revolution (Nkrumah, 1964).

Both Nkrumah (1964) and Gyekye (1996) noted that, communalism is demonstrated by the sharing of a common social life, dedication to the community's common good, understanding of reciprocal responsibility, concern for others, independence, and solidarity. Additionally, Gyekye (1996) asserts that we must inculcate in every citizen a sense of personal commitment to state affairs and the conviction that any harm done to the state as a whole instantly affects the individual. Nkrumah (1964) cautions that in order for politics to be genuine, state institutions must regulate men's conduct in order to uphold their moral principles. Through the "arts" of modern democracies, the role and effectiveness of dance and music in electoral studies can also be determined in the framework of participatory democracy. In order to address both local and national development challenges, the idea of "Participatory Democracy" expands the democratic space and the participation of the general public. According to Nkrumah (1964), a new social system must include a supporting ideology because theory and practice are inextricably linked. This implies that music and dance could be employed as tools for raising public awareness. Regarding this, Ghana's (2004) cultural strategy asserts, among other things, that culture is a dynamic entity. That culture emphasizes the coexistence of the past and the future in the present, and it is founded on our notion of Sankofa, which creates a connection with the positive parts of our past and present. As a result, it represents our people's perspective on how traditional values and the needs of modern technology interact in the current

global cultural environment (National Commission on Culture, 2004).

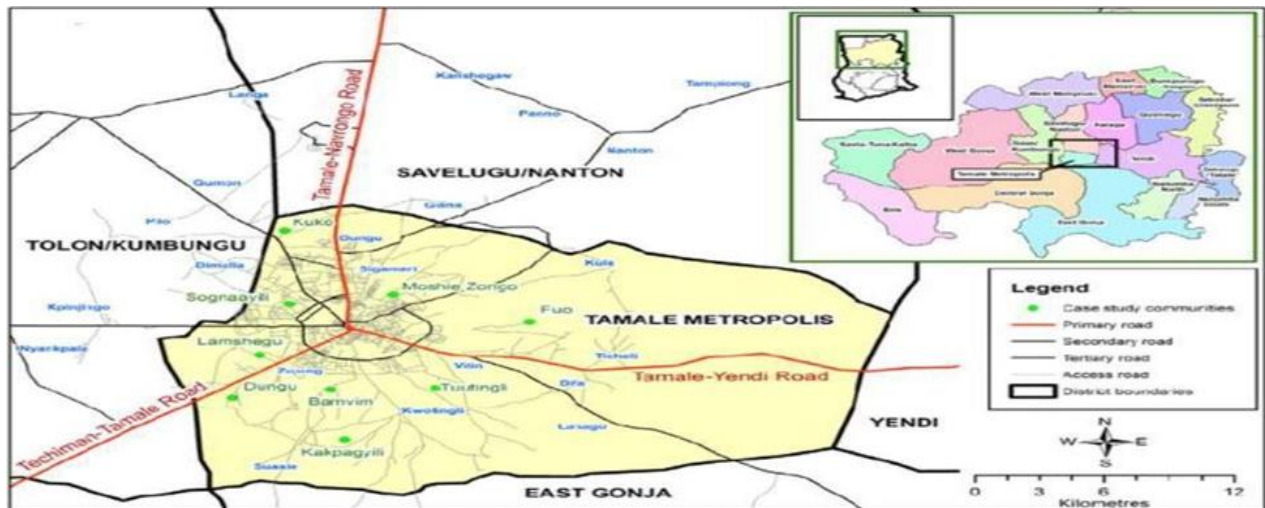
Numerous academic studies have demonstrated that dance is a medium for choreographers and performers to express strong ideas (Giurchescu, 2001). Music and dance communicate ideas through verbal sounds, facial expressions, texts, props, poetry, staging, and costumes (Giurchescu, 2001). Another aspect of music and dance as explanatory variable of electoral outcome in African democracies is the political and social economy of dance (Banes, 2002). Studies suggest that in a corrupt political system, music could be used to draw attention to issues that people find attractive (Banes, 2002). Wright (2009) and Ambrosio (2015, p. 7) have opined that music and dance could be employed as a 'political tool' to change society and as a means of protest as mechanisms by which citizens can speak out their minds against the ruling class in a democracy. Wright (2009) and Ambrosio (2015) further argued that music and dance encompass critical thinking, problem-solving, analytical, and decision-making abilities; they go beyond attractive or cool movements that can be employed to draw attention of the ruling class in key issues affecting the citizens.

Methodology

Study Area

The study was limited to the Tamale Central Constituency of the northern region of Ghana. The constituency is known for its great participation in Ghana's general elections since 1992 and constitutes one of the four largest voter populations in the Metropolis. Below is the map of Northern Regions showing Tamale Metropolis with central constituency.

Figure 1: Map of Northern Region showing the Study Area indicated yellow



Source: Ghana Statistical Service [GSS](2010)

Tamale Central and Tamale South are administratively distinct constituencies that are included in the Tamale Metropolis administrative categorization. The Tamale Central constituency is the main focus of this study due to its political division. The Tamale Metropolitan Assembly was established in 2004 as a result of a legislative act (LI 2068) that transformed the former Municipal Assembly into a Metropolis. It is now one of the six Metropolitan Assemblies in the country and the only Metropolis in the three Northern regions (the Upper West, Upper East, and Northern regions) (GSS, 2010). The Tamale Metropolis is bounded to the west and north by the Sagnarigu District, to the east by the Mion District, to the south by East Gonja, and to the south-west by Central Gonja.

The projected total land area of the Metropolis is 646.90180 square kilometers (GSS, 2010). Tamale has access to a market for regional commodities made by the commercial and agricultural sectors of the nearby districts because of its advantageous location in the Northern Region (GSS, 2010). The political head of the Metropolis is the Metropolitan Chief Executive. There are two sub-metros

(Tamale South and Central) and two constituencies (Tamale South and Tamale Central) in Tamale Metropolis. The Metropolis has a total of 205 members of committees and 59 Assembly members, including 18 appointed and 41 elected members (GSS, 2010). The Sub-Committee members of the Assembly are very active and work very hard to accomplish the goals and objectives of the Assembly.

Study Design and Sample Size

We employed a case study design for this study. An in-depth and comprehensive examination of a particular instance or phenomena in its actual setting is what a case study design entails (Yin, 2009; Creswell, 2018). The case study design thus allows for the in-depth analysis of the phenomenon through interviews. In other words, case studies provide the chance to gather multi-source, rich, and varied data (Stake, 1995; Creswell, 2018; Saunders et al., 2019). This is mainly important for a study like this one, where data basically comes from individual participants in the four constituencies as shown in the table below. In the study, twenty participants were purposively sampled and their views sought on whether the defeat of the NDC party and its presidential

candidate (John Dramani Mahama) in the 2016 and 2020 general elections was greatly influenced by the impressions made by the then opposition party NPP that, the ruling NDC party and its presidential candidate have no respect for the Ghanaian voters and would do whatever they wished, hence, President John Dramani Mahama's dead goat syndrome. These impressions were advanced when President John Dramani Mahama was publicly seen with the Asantehene in the Manhyia Palace dancing to the lyrics of "*Ye Nea Woho Beto Wo*" popularly referred to as "*Yentie Obiaa*". These expressions, literally translated as "we won't listen to anyone" in the Akan language were the causal factors.

Data Analysis

The qualitative study saturation principle of data collection was applied in this study as the views of the twenty (20) participants from the four constituencies appeared to be repetitive (Stake, 1995; Creswell, 2018; Saunders et al., 2019). Generally, the study revealed that the loss of the NDC party and its presidential candidate in the 2016 and 2020 general elections was greatly influenced by the lyrics of "*Yentie Obiaa*". Below were the views of the respondents from the field.

"...in view of the 'wobbling' economy of Ghana as at then, coupled with the government's insensitivity to the needs of Ghanaians, the *Yentie Obiaa* song suggested that the government was insensitive to the needs of Ghanaians..." (Participant; Tamale South constituency, January 12, 2024).

".....I think it was unfortunate for President John Dramani Mahama to dance to the tune of *Yentie Obiaa* at the time Ghanaians complained bitterly about the hash economic policies of the country. Viewing the President in a video openly dancing with the Asantehene to the tune of *Yentie Obiaa* was a clear indication that the President and his party would not actually

respect the views of Ghanaians...." (Participant; Tamale South constituency, January 12, 2024).

A leading member of the NDC party in the Tamale South has this to say;

".... *Yentie Obiaa* was a teaser for the opposition parties, particularly, the NPP party to condemn the ruling NDC party to the Ghanaian electorate... "you know, music and dance are the media that easily can sell message, when I heard the NPP party condemn the President dancing to the tune of *Yentie Obiaa*, I concluded even before the 2016 elections that the NDC party will lose the election. You know, if you understand the Akan language very well and interpret the lyrics of the song, it will suggest to you that the President and the NDC party would suffer the wounds of this song. So, I was not surprised that the song had an influence in both the 2016 and 2020 general elections...." (Participant; Tamale South constituency, January 14, 2024).

The views of the participants from the other three constituencies were not totally different from the Tamale South constituency. A participant in the Tamale North constituency had to say:

".... even though Ghanaians in 2015 were already fed-up with the NDC party, *Yentie Obiaa* song lyrics worsened the situation. The song which is interpreted as "we won't listen to anyone" justified some policies of the ruling government..." (Participant; Tamale Central constituency, December 20, 2023).

The participant noted that when majority of Ghanaians complained of no money in their pockets, the President and his party told Ghanaians that they should sacrifice their pockets with infrastructural development. A policy that justified the lyrics of *Yentie Obiaa* in the Akan language.

A female participant also has this to say;

“...Yentie Obiaa became more popular, particularly among we the women when the Ghanaian economy was very bad. We the women could hardly sell in the market nor buy foodstuff for the house. When the President was critiqued with associating himself and the NDC party to the song, majority of women supported the NPP party with the song lyrics...” (Participant; Tamale North constituency, December 20, 2023).

Another female participant contended that songs such as *Yentie Obiaa* are meant for rivaling. She has this to say;

“...we the women use songs to tease fellow contestants for men of our hearts. If your opponent chooses a song which lyrics are very derogatory on you, she is likely to win the man. The lyrics of *Yentie Obiaa* was such a classical example for teasing the NDC party and its presidential candidate for their uncompromising attitude...” (Participant, Sagnarigu constituency, December 21, 2023).

A youth leader in the Sagnarigu constituency however, disclaimed that *Yentie Obiaa* lyrics were not responsible for the defeat of the NDC party in the 2016 and 2020 elections. He noted that Ghanaians needed a change of government. Therefore, to say that the NDC party lost power because the President and his government disrespected the views of Ghanaians as the song suggested is a hasty conclusion.

The theories of hypodermic needle theory of Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) and the agenda setting theory of McCombs and Donald Shaw supported this discussion. According to the hypodermic needle, often known as the magic bullet idea, mass media has an instantaneous, strong, and direct impact on its audiences—in this case, the Ghanaian voter. The theory proposes that the mass media could influence the masses directly and homogeneously by infusing in them messages designed to instigate a desired response. The phrases "a bullet and a

needle" were used by Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) to characterize a strong and straightforward information flow from the sender to the recipient. The bullet theory according to Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955), explicitly advocates that the message, and for this discussion, *Yentie Obiaa* was a bullet, fired from the "media gun" (the Ghanaian highlife musician Charles Kwadwo Fosu (a.k.a Daddy Lumba) into the viewer's "head" who in this discussion are the electorate (Nyonator, 2020, p. 18). The hypodermic needle model proposes that media messages are so powerful in sending messages to the passive audience. The proponents of this theory view the media as a daring outlet for disseminating information louder to the audience, who in this regard are unable to withstand the message's impact. According to Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955), referenced in Nyonator (2020, p. 18), the audience is viewed as a passive duck that is being "shot" with a lot of media content.

This theory expatiates the amount of influence the lyrics of the song *Yentie Obiaa* had on the Ghanaian voter. The essence of using the *Yentie Obiaa* song text was also to set an agenda by the NPP party to win the elections. Therefore, the agenda setting theory by McCombs and Donald Shaw was also relevant for this study. According to the hypothesis, the mass media indirectly affects the grassroots. According to the hypothesis, the public's view is greatly influenced by the agenda of topics that the media presents. This theory therefore, supported the NPP party's agenda of damaging the chances of the NDC through the lyrics of the *Yentie Obiaa* song and to influence public opinion.

Conclusion

Political campaigns are beneficial. They are able to offer the drama and electioneering atmosphere typical of election seasons. Campaigns, in whatever form, have the power to give the electorate a sense of who wants to lead them. Political campaign songs have

become necessary for political parties for advertising their messages. Due to the context of the songs, and their melodic structure, voters perceive them to be more enjoyable than instructive on politics. The songs typically concentrate on criticizing and casting opponents in a negative way rather than advancing the political agendas of their opponents.

In summary, our research showed that *Yentie Obiaa's* lyrics, which literally translate to "we won't listen to anyone" in Akan, significantly impacted the NDC's candidacy in the 2016 and the 2020 general elections of Ghana. Even though President John Dramani Mahama and his NDC party lost for a variety of reasons, many people who had not previously planned to vote for the NPP candidate in the 2016 and 2020 elections were swayed by the lyrics of "Yentie Obiaa." According to the report, Ghanaian politicians should use campaign songs to communicate with the public.

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