WOMEN, WORK AND THE PERFORMING ARTS IN GHANA

A Thesis

by

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ABSTRACT

My thesis addresses women and work with a focus on the performing arts. Placing my discussion under W.E.B. DuBois's theoretical framework of "double consciousness", I address the attitudes that exist in Ghanaian society about the arts in general and about women in the arts, especially in dance. I explore the dance profession and implications for women who work in that profession in post-independent Ghana. I highlight directions in the area of concert dance and work opportunities for dancers.

The thesis has five Chapters: the introductory chapter (Chapter I) gives a background to the thesis, indicates the objectives, method, and maps out the chapters.
The thesis develops its argument in three chapters after the introduction and ends in a conclusion (Chapter V) with the main points of the thesis.

Chapter II serves as a foundation-laying chapter for Chapters II, III and IV. It explains that Ghanaian women negotiate a strife between their desire, need, and opportunity to work in a constant financially unforgiving economy and, on the other hand, sociocultural expectations that they would *also* be solely responsible for the care of their homes and children. A context for this strife is gender-related labor transformation: women's increasing presence in the work force in Ghana and elsewhere in Africa, Middle East, Asia, South America and United States.

Chapter III identifies the strife as something embedded in the tension between a universal humanism that emphasizes common needs, and (oftentimes, patriarchy masquerading as) cultural nationalism—a tension that arises from a core feature of the postcolonial condition in Ghana.

Chapter IV explores the traditional and modern contexts of attitudes about dance/arts, including the "triple burden" that Ghanaian women dancers face. I detail the rise of concert

dance in Ghana—which laid the foundation for women to take careers in dance—and show that whereas traditional Ghanaian society valued performing arts/artists, modern Ghanaian society has exhibited degrees of disdain to the artist. I add that this disdain is more intense for working dancers and more so for women. Ending on an uplifting note, I detail growing employment opportunities in dance for women in Ghana.

DEDICATION

To God almighty for giving me the strength and the hope to be able to pursue this program. To Iddrisu Kanazoe who presented me with the flyer for this program, because he thought enough of my skills and talents to follow my dreams. To Abdul Karim Hakib for supporting me from afar. To Martha Asiedu who has been my support in many ways both spiritual and physical. To Mr. & Mrs. Sai for their love and care through this journey. To David Amugee a father pillar in my life. To Benedictus Mattison for being more than a brother. Ehi Idoko for being a supporting sister. To Robert Akuamoah Mensah for constantly encouraging me to keep going. With love, Benedicta.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background

I have worked as a professional dancer for the past six years. Before then I had done a variety of jobs—selling in the market, managing a store, and teaching kindergarten. In High School I had excelled in business courses—I could have studied Economics or Business and pursued a related career. However, I wanted something different than that— a career based around my passion, dance. I did not know exactly how or where but wanted to be able to dance on stage and to make my living doing so. I enrolled as an undergraduate dance student in the School of Performing Arts, at the University of Ghana, hoping that the training would help me realize my professional dance aspiration.

As a student I got selected to represent the School of Performing Arts at a two-week Glomus International Arts Conference in Natal, Brazil where artists from over 100 countries performed music, dance, and drama. I performed in a special "Performance Night" as part of a team of four women representing different nations: I, Ghana, and the others Denmark, Ukraine, and the United States of America. I recall my elation when, after the performance, people lined up to take photos with me and ask for my autograph. The biggest spotlight at this event was on us, four women! The sense of respect I felt was unlike anything I had experienced before as a dancer, and as a woman in dance.

Back in Ghana realities were different. I started thinking carefully about how I might achieve my aspiration to be a professional dancer and whether I might experience a modicum of the sense of value I enjoyed at the Brazil festival. What kind of work were women in our dance

program pursuing after graduation? What happened to the women who graduated before me in the program. Were they still involved in dance, and where?

I realized, for instance, that although we had many women among dance students at the School of Performing Arts, women were poorly represented on the dance faculty. I realized also that on the whole most of the graduating dance students, including women, quickly pursued careers outside dance—working in the banks and insurance companies, for example. Where would my training lead me? Would I fulfill my dreams of a professional dance career? The most opportunities I saw for a woman to pursue dance work were with the nine or so professional dance companies in Ghana. It was refreshing to see that they nearly always had more women than men. I was fortunate to live in Accra, Ghana's capital city, where they are based. So, as a student, I got chances to perform with companies like Ghana Dance Ensemble (resident at the University), and private professional companies like Noryam, Artistic Vision and Tifali Dance Consult.

Objective

In the broadest sense, this thesis is about women and work with a focus on the performing arts. I address attitudes that exist in Ghanaian society about arts in general and about women in the arts. In parts of this address, I focus on the dance profession and the implication for women who work in that profession in post independent Ghana. I show at the end that the directions in the area of concert dance show promise of work opportunities for dancers and perhaps increased social value for dance as a professional.

Method

This thesis is mainly based on archival research as well as my observations/interaction of and in the Ghanaian dance scene during a two-week research trip to Ghana in January 2020.

Road Map

The thesis is divided into three Chapters. Chapter II is a foundation-laying chapter for Chapter III and IV. In Chapter II, I explain that Ghanaian women often face a quandary. In this quandary, they must negotiate a tension between their desire, need, and opportunity to work in an increasingly financially unforgiving economy on one hand and, on the other hand, social-cultural expectations that they would *also* be mainly or even solely responsible for taking care of their homes and their children—that they would own “the kitchen” as one Ghanaian man put it. A context for this tension is the fact of gender-related labor transformation: increasing presence of women in the labor force in Ghana, but also elsewhere in Africa, the Middle East, Asia, South America and United States. However, a fuller context is a collision/confluence of this transformation with social-cultural ideas in Ghana and also around the world.

In Chapter III I will show that this quandary in which Ghanaian women have to navigate work-life and home-care, is embedded in a more profound tension between a universal humanism that emphasizes common needs, and (oftentimes patriarchy masquerading as) cultural nationalism, and that the tension arises from a core feature of the postcolonial condition in Ghana, what—appropriating W.E.B. DuBois’s famous concept—I call a “double consciousness.”

Chapter IV explores the traditional and modern contexts of attitudes about dance/arts, including the “triple burden” that Ghanaian women who take up dance face. . I show that whereas traditional Ghanaian society valued performing arts/artist, modern Ghanaian society has

exhibited degrees of disdain to the artist. I suggest that this disdain is more intense for those who work as dancers and more so for women among such workers. After detailing the rise and growth of concert dance in Ghana—which laid the foundation for women or anyone for that matter to take careers in dance—I conclude the chapter with a case study of one Ghanaian professional dance company that has carved a safe, accommodating and creative space for women dancers. I end on the uplifting note, detailing the growing opportunities of employment in dance for both men and women in Ghana and the small but promising steps of one dance institution to make it easier for women to take advantage of these emerging employment opportunities.

CHAPTER II

"HER KITCHEN, NOT MINE": THE QUANDARY OF WOMEN'S LABOR PARTICIPATION

Overview

In late January 2018, a renowned male Ghanaian lawyer decided to offer marriage tips on Face book. He declared that "A woman, even when she works … she is in charge of everything that has to do with the home." "Yes," he continued,

> It is her kitchen, not mine … My only space in the house is my basement. … I expect dinner…and meals when I'm home. Just make sure the system I provided for produces and delivers the food. In the same vein, I don't wash, clean, sweep, vacuum, dust or do any house work. I am 'DADDY'. That is why I live in Ghana and not in the US.

Several Ghanaian women challenged his "advice." One of them, a young Ghanaian student based in the United States, wrote:

> You grew up in a patriarchal society. The system is designed to favor you. You had no education on gender equality when growing up. But … that can be changed. I know you are smart enough to see that your wife doesn't use her vagina to cook or order food. And when it comes to strength, you even have more. So, if anyone should work *and* cook, it should be you. Those who improve the world understand change is one of the factors of progress."

In this exchange between the renowned lawyer and the young Ghanaian student one can observe a quandary that women, in particular, face as they have made progress in participation in

the workplace. This quandary is the tension that Ghanaian women have to negotiate between their desire, need and opportunity to work in an increasingly financially unforgiving economy on one hand, and the cultural expectation that they would be responsible for taking care of their homes—that they would own "the kitchen" as the lawyer put it. This chapter discusses this quandary as both a local Ghanaian but also a global phenomenon. Towards this I have organized this chapter into two sections. The first section describes the rising presence of women in Ghana's labor force and locates it trend in broader trends found globally: in Africa, as well as in Middle East, Asia, South America and the United States. I seek, by this global positioning, to offer a broad context for the unique tension between work life and home life that women face when they enter the workforce. I show in the second section, that this context is not just gender-related labor transformations per se, but also the collision and confluence of these labor transformations with social-cultural ideas in Ghana and around the world.

"Women in the Labor Force": Trends/Challenges in Ghana and Beyond

A commonly held view is that women in West Africa generally, and in Ghana particularly, enjoy a greater degree of economic and personal autonomy than many women elsewhere in Sub-Saharan Africa. Indeed, Ghanaian women have made gains in government, business, education, literature, entertainment and other areas, contributing greatly to Ghana's economy and the development of the Ghanaian state as a whole. One area of such gains has been the participation of women in the workforce. The increased participation of Ghanaian women in the workforce is significant because, as Ntuli (2007) points out about labor force participation of women, it improves women's relative economic position by giving them "direct access to wage income" and "more bargaining power" in the household "compared to those who do not

contribute directly to a household's total income" (p.4). Where women do not contribute substantially to the household income the distribution of resources is likely to be skewed against them, reducing their welfare and possibly that of their children. The United Nations noted in 2018 that closing the gender gap in labor participation is an important means of achieving gender equality.

In Ghana, women are "seen in active participation in the labor market…in all geographic locations", as "female labor force participation… tends to show an overall increasing trend in recent times" (Sackey, 2005). Between 1960 and 2010, the gap in labor participation rate narrowed between men and women (Baah-Boateng et al, 2013). Steel and Campbell (1982) describe the increases in female labor participation and in employment in Ghana in the period between 1960-1970 as "dramatic" (p.226). Data shows that the "share of women in the total labor force" in the country rose from 39% in 1960 to 51% in 1984 (Baden et al., 1994, p.20). Other data, focused on a latter period, between 1987-1991, also show Ghana women's participation in the labor market increasing at a rate that is "more impressive" that that of males—from 53% to 65% for women compared to 58%-65% for men (Canagarajah and Thomas, 1997, p.12).

Ghana's record of increased labor force participation by women occurs in the global context of major changes in women's roles in society women in the past century (Harville and Rienzi, 145, Metcalf, 85), and particularly the context of what Misra and Panigrahi (1995) call "a change in gender-role attitudes in a feminist direction" (p.15). In most countries around the world the share of women in the labor force is higher today than half a century ago (Tzvetkova and Ortiz-Ospina, 2017). Indeed, by 1996, the research showed a two-decade long "trend of increasing liberalism and the acceptance of more egalitarian role definitions" in many

places of the world (Abdallah 29, Mostafa 253). In US, one of the increasing areas of change particularly for women is workforce participation. While 39% of all US women participated in 1965, 59% of all women did so in 1995 (Harville and Rienz, 2000). Women accounted for 60% of increase in total employment in America from 1960-1992 ((Misra and Panigrahi, 1995). In 1991 US Bureau of Labor Statistics projected the percentage of women in America's workforce to hit 47% by 2005 (2). Historically, by 1996 it had already hit that percentage.

Ghana's increased participation reflects an "increasing feminization of the labor force in both developed and developing countries around the world" (Casale and Posel 158-159) In Africa, Botswana has seen this labor market participation rising over the past decade (Khanie, 2019). In Namibia, post-independence policies emphasizing gender equality has helped increase the number of women in the labor force (Mufune, 2013). In South Africa, where in 1960 women accounted for 23 % of the labor force, by 1985 this percentage had risen to 36% and by 1991, 41% (158-159). In fact, significant revolution in South Africa's labor supply has been "phenomenal expansion" in labor force participation by women (Ntuli, 2007, p.1). The Middle East saw "remarkable changes for women" for "decades" (Elamin and Omair, 746). In 1960 women in the Arab world were 12% of the labor force but, by 1995, 30% (Mostafa, 2003). In India changing attitudes "encouraged women to pervade institutions, offices and factories for jobs" (Akhtar et al., p. 93). In Japan "the number of employed women" has "steadily increased since 1960" at a growth rate higher than that of men (Ogasawara,1998, p.17). In Taiwan, it rose from 33%-46% between 1965-1988 (Chuang and Lee, 2003). In Latin America, the "participation increased dramatically": the "male economically active" population grew by only 0.84% between 1980-2000 and was expected to steady to 2010 that of females grew by 32.5% and was expected grow through 2010 (Hite and Viterna 50-51).

Like many places elsewhere, Ghanaian woman's increasing participation in the labor force is attributable to (among other things) global campaigns and advocacy for policies and institutional setups that promote women's involvement in all aspects of national life (Baah-Boateng et al, 2003). The "remarkable advancement" in women's workforce participation result from discourses on equality, empowerment, participation and human rights, taken on and internationalized by both governments and women's organizations around the world (Metcalf 92). In Ghana, local voices have joined with global ones in the advocacy. For example, Ghanaian women with formal education are more likely to participate in the labor force than those with none (Baah-Boateng et al. 2003). Therefore, improvements in female education since independence has helped to increase participation of women in the labor market as the gender gap in education has decreased for primary/junior secondary between 1975-1996 (Sackey, 10, Baah-Boateng et al 125). Among other things, positive spillovers from educated mothers to daughters have helped with more female participation in the labor market (Sackey, 2005).

A Practical Dilemma: Work and Socio-Cultural Expectations

As noted above, in Ghana the gap between men and women's participation in the labor force has seen consistent decline due to the increased participation of women. This notwithstanding, Ghanaian women continues to face labor force constraints. Women are more than half of the working age population in the country and, according to a 2014 Demographic and Health Survey—head about a third (33.8%) of all households in the country with higher proportions in the urban than the rural areas (Anyidoho, 2016). Yet they "have trailed behind" males in labor participation since 1960 (Baah-Boateng et al. 120). A 2010 Population and Housing Census showed that unemployment declined for both men and women in the country

between 2000-2010, but was higher for women: women continued to fare worse than men on the labor market (Owusu et al. 2). In Ghana, as one finds elsewhere, working women tended to earn significantly less than men in equivalent occupations, and frequently found barriers to high level promotions and the availability of mentors (Mostafa, 2003). Also, in Ghana as elsewhere, a reluctance to hire women in key managerial positions, results in female leaders given "job assignments with lower visibility and fewer chances to make important contacts" (Ohlot et al 49).

It almost goes without saying that, lower pay, reluctance to have women in the managerial ranks and their difficulty in finding mentors at work, are not because women lack ability but has to do with gendered misconceptions. Despite increasing participation of women in the workforce globally, "women of all ages remain under-represented in skilled career fields due to misconception regarding gender-specific abilities and preferences and under valuation of women's skills" (Mostafa, 26). What I am emphasizing here, is the sociocultural element of the barriers to women's participation in the workforce, in Ghana and around the world. Gender roles (including work related ones) are intimately related to broader cultural and social structures; around the world the attitudes towards women involve social/cultural expectations about women (Mostafa 254). Attitudes usually dwell on "negative stereotypes and broad assumptions" about women's characteristics and roles in society. Some of the stereotypes/assumptions discourage women's employment outside the home, especially in non-traditional jobs in "current iterations of a century-old tendency to mark women as suited for the home and men as suited for the workplace" (Barnett, 2004. p.667). I shall return to address some of the ways socio-cultural stereotypes and assumptions impact Ghanaian working women but for now, I want to establish the globally pervasive character of what pertains in Ghana.

Writing about Arab societies Mostafa notes that “increases in urbanization, education, and women’s involvement in the workforce” and “exposure to new ideas through media and community contacts,” had led to lesser gaps between roles of men and women “and hence a favorable attitude towards women” at work (254, 260). “Modernity” he observes, encourages the societies to “reconsider traditional gender roles, family responsibilities, marriage customs, and women’s access to education and labor market participation” (254) He observes, for instance, based on his own study, that despite their greater participation in the labor force women in Egypt, like in other Arab societies “have lagged behind men in salary and status” (253), even though “attitudes towards women who work are…in general, changing towards a less traditional stance,” moderately from “expected restrictive traditional attitudes…to a more liberal view (260). The changes notwithstanding the Egyptian people continued to express attitudes such as “women are not suited for work outside the home,” “traditional husband- wife roles are the best,” women are happier in traditional roles,” a “woman’s place is in the home,” “women with families do not have time for other employment,” and “an employed wife leads to juvenile delinquency,” among others (266).

Mostafa presents Arab culture as very patriarchal (patriarchy, by his definition, is when men have structural control over political, legal, economic, religious institutions) and that in Egypt, for example, “the patriarchal family is the strongest state institution” (254). Mostafa observes, therefore, that the Arab societies are “reluctant to abandon their traditional viewpoint of women primarily committed to the house and children.” Mostafa gives the example that most Arab men regard household/domestic activities suitable for women and that “most Arab families educate their sons rather than their daughters on the assumption that boys are a greater economic asset than girls” (253). Men, he explains, are the “dominant sex” and a husband is “culturally

accepted" as "the formal authority to whom the wife and children must respond" (262). The wife's role is "taking care of her family structure." Essentially, he says, traditional Egyptian culture show role preferences with a patriarchal skepticism of women's employment. Metcalf affirms this, writing that a woman's "most important role, in to the society, is homemaker and mother"—legally, financially and socially dependent on men—while the man's responsibility "is to support and protect the wife and the family (90).

Raza observes similar socio-cultural factors impinging on women and work in Pakistan, writing that a key reason for the relatively smaller number of working Pakistani women is "the direct disapproval of senior members of the family" based on the "traditional outlook on the household status of women" (101). Akhtar et al. explain that among urban Indian students, that men and women "fully realized the significance of the roles played by women in the home." However, more men viewed (even resented) the working woman as something in conflict with the "long-held traditional notions of women's loyalties to home and family," whereas more women held that women ought to be in the workforce, and so increasingly defied the "value scheme of Indian society and family obligations." He observed in this study that significantly fewer men than women endorsed the idea that women should "think seriously … of having a vocation," that the working woman has "a realistic approach towards life," and that she "generally lead a happy married life" (96-97). More men agreed that the "woman was made by God to be a custodian of home and not a wage earner," that "working women are suspected to have doubtful morality," and that "working women are deprived of the freedom which they have as a housewife." The practical dilemma of working outside home but also meeting the demands of sociocultural assumptions is evident in what Akhtar et al's finding, that more females believed

that “working women who have children feel guilty of neglecting them,” that “working women do not find time to attend to their domestic duties.

Chuang and Lee, looking at Taiwan, found that most Taiwanese women take family responsibilities as their first priority due to the influence of attitudes toward traditional gender roles (456). This, they note, can work against their participation in the workforce. They found that not just education, the length of work experience before a woman’s first birth, or urban residence, *but also* husband’s attitude toward a working wife significantly determine women’s participation in the labor market (440). They saw it as striking that a husband’s negative attitude toward working wives was more likely to discourage his wife from participation in the labor market than even presence of young children in the family (455). The noted, that husbands’ attitudes about traditional gender roles tended to dominate women’s market work decisions (442). Regarding values and attitudes about women in Latin America and, particularly, Argentina, Olivas et al. note that “machismo,” or excessive masculinity associated with patriarchal behavior in men, to the domination and subjugation of women in society” (232). They observe also that traditional “Argentinean working women accept domestic labor as a duty,” that “being a mother and having a strong family, defined life success” and that taking care of their families is more important than working outside the home.

Even the United States, where the society is presumed to be relatively more progressive on gender roles, is not exempt from some of the above assumptions about men and women’s roles regarding domestic duties and working outside the home.
Drawing on data from the National Opinion Research Center “concerned with the roles of wife and mother” (4), Misra and Panigrahi found a change in gender-role attitudes towards a more egalitarian direction among both men and women in the United States from 1970s to 1990s. In

other words, older people were more likely to believe "maternal employment harms children" or a mother-child relationship" (16). They found also that, on the whole, "males were less supportive of women's employment than females." In another US-focused study Harville and Rienzi recognized that religion, alongside other factors like "gender, socioeconomic status, education and personal experience" influenced a person's attitudes towards working women (146). They also observed, that even in the same religion, there were different attitudes about working women: women "overall" had "more positive attitudes towards employed women." For Harville and Rienzi, this suggests that "women, more than men, may be changing their attitudes to coincide with the reality of the changing roles of women."

Conclusion

Ghanaian women face a quandary in which they negotiate a tension between their desire, need, and opportunity to work in an increasingly financially unforgiving economy on one hand and, on the other hand, cultural expectations that they would also be mainly or even solely responsible for taking care of their homes and their children—that they would own "the kitchen" as the lawyer put it in the Facebook fracas I described at the beginning of this chapter. One context for this tension is the fact of gender-related labor transformation: increasing presence of women in the labor force in Ghana, but also elsewhere in Africa, the Middle East, Asia, South America and United States. However, the fuller context is a collision and confluence of this transformation with social-cultural ideas in Ghana and also around the world. In Chapter III I will show that this quandary in which Ghanaian women have to navigate work-life and home-care, is embedded in a more profound tension between a universal humanism that emphasizes common needs, and (oftentimes, patriarchy masquerading as,) cultural nationalism. I explain that

this tension arises from a core feature of the postcolonial condition in Ghana—a condition that, appropriating W.E.B. DuBois's famous concept, I call a "double consciousness."

CHAPTER III

DOUBLE CONSCIOUSNESS: TRADITION, MODERNITY, AND THE (WORKING) GHANAIAN WOMAN

Overview

In the Facebook exchange I described in Chapter II the young Ghanaian woman received got a terribly sharp retort from the lawyer after she criticized him for his patriarchal outlook about women and work. He wrote:

> "it is poorly educated clowns with sawdust for brains like you who give feminism a bad name." When they teach you their experience in America, don't be a clueless sponge of a lapdog to them. Think. Ask how this applies home … Are you stupid or just deranged?... Take your personal frustrations and bitterness with life and get the heck off my page with your angry, rabid and misdirected feminism…

Among the things striking about this exchange between the lawyer and the student is the former's accusation that the latter was a naïve victim of American cultural imperialism. Essentially, he paternalistically cast his critic as woman who has not only subordinated her indigenous-traditional values to a foreign one, like a docile lapdog, but thoughtlessly imbibes alien values ("their experience in America") like a "clueless sponge."

Why this is particularly striking is that it brings to the fore one particular challenge that advocates of gender equality are likely to face in Ghana. This is the idea that the advocate is somehow upsetting the apple-cart of traditional social order and, worse, doing so by prostrating him/herself to foreign values. Gender advocacy in Ghana, to put it shortly, risks the charge of neo-colonial submission to foreign (western) cultural imperialist interests. Partaking in advocacy

for gender equality may involve negotiating between the progressive humanist ethic that makes such advocacy imperative and the nationalism that may cast suspicion on the advocacy as a form of cultural imperialism.

In this chapter I discuss the employment/deployment of tradition in Ghanaian society, especially in relation to ideas about Ghanaian women and work. First, I explain my use of the concept of "double consciousness" to describe the cultural collisions and confluences of tradition and modernity in Ghanaian public discussions about culture and identity. Following that, I discuss the constraints that customary/traditional practices (and the workings of colonialism in Ghana) placed on women's participation in the workforce. But, I also highlight that, in the shadow of double consciousness, Ghanaian women's increased participation in the workforce has brought into relief, the greater acceptance today of women as workers outside the home but also the impingement of traditional expectations on the Ghanaian women even as more and more of them work outside the home. I close the Chapter by looking at how three Ghanaian playwrights captured the postcolonial condition of double consciousness through literary-dramatic expression, indicating that the dynamic coupling of tradition and modernity continues to be part of the Ghanaian cultural landscape

Double Consciousness and the Ghanaian Postcolonial Condition

In 1957, when Ghana gained its independence from British colonial rule people of the country had been colonized for close to a century, not to mention centuries of interaction between Ghanaians, the British, and other Europeans (Dutch, French, Danes, Swedes, and Portuguese among others) dating back to the mid 15th Century. It goes without saying that much of the population after independence where Euro-African cultural (and to some extent, even

linguistic) hybrids. For cultural nationalists like the first president of Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah, colonialism did not produce a truly balanced hybrid of Europe and Africa but rather, a cultural aberration in the Ghanaian—a cultural-psychological alienation in which Ghanaian view him/her self-and-world in colonial terms: with a mindset that privileged what is European over what is African. He wrote

> We [Ghanaians under colonialism] were trained to be inferior copies of Englishmen, caricatures to be laughed at with our pretensions to British bourgeois gentility…We were denied our knowledge of our African past and informed that we had no present…We were taught to regard our culture and traditions as barbarous and primitive. (*Africa must Unite*, 49)

For Nkrumah, Ghana's attainment of independence was an important but merely "primary" stage of decolonization, a stage that does not necessarily result in cultural-psychological emancipation. A "secondary" decolonization—a counter-colonial consciousness was, thus, needed to overcome "colonial mentality" or prostration of the independent Ghanaian to values of the colonizer (Agovi 4; Halm 177-178). Through a pervasive, wide ranging, state-guided ideological efforts in arts and education, Nkrumah and subsequent governments worked at promoting an "African Personality" in the Ghanaian that is emancipated from the colonial mentality. Whether s/he was a benign cultural hybrid or a product of colonial cultural "programming" the Ghanaian operated between two worlds and many people recognized (even celebrated) the fact that valuable as African cultural representations are to the Ghanaian's self-assertion any attempt to return to an African cultural essence untouched by the colonial experience would be a futile one. The idea here was basically that colonialism was an indelible

imprint on the Ghanaian—an imprint that was best to harness for emancipatory purposes rather than deny its indelibility. So, generally, Ghanaians relationship to the west, was ambivalent.

On one hand the west is a profound part of the Ghanaian's life, in dress, in language, and in artistic expression. On the other hand, it is constant reminder of a western cultural-imperialism that, unchecked, might lure its way into Ghanaian hearts and minds. Sometimes Ghanaians located the indelible western element in urbanity and or viewed it interchangeably with modernity. Separately or together, urbanity, modernity and the west were the "other" of tradition. In the pitch of tradition and modernity (or urbanity or the west) tradition was either something old/stale from which a progressive mind ought to move or the authentic African self we must value and seek. Modernity was either dynamic field of progress or the bearer of cultural imperialism.

This sense of cultural duality in the daily life of the Ghanaian is what I have termed, double consciousness, borrowing Dubois famous phrase. Dubois conceived the idea of "double consciousness" as a form of oppositional culture and consciousness born out of the "vast veil" of racial prejudice and injustice. The term refers to "two warring ideals in one dark body" (Du Bois, 44-45). It is that striving that one engages as one tries to achieve a "self-conscious" state by allowing one's two-selves to exist as different entities in oneself. Martinez (2002, 1999) posits that double-consciousness can also refer to the notion of appreciating oneself from the lens of others, since it criticizes the issue of race and class in the system and the general oppression of the "African Americans". The life of the African American has been that of struggle: a lifelong fight where s/he would not want to lose his old self or new self. Double consciousness is thus a search for a way to merge the 'warring ideals' so that s/he can be both American and African.

Hechter (1976, 1978) and Mitchell and Feagin (1995), argues that it can also be a stance of resistance against cultural domination: "a coherent set of values, beliefs, and practices that mitigates the effects of oppression and reaffirms that which is distinct from the majority culture" (Mitchell & Feagin 68). This is borne out of their quest to construct alternative identity that offers a critique to the dominant group. Similarly, double consciousness, as I appropriate this term for the Ghanaian cultural context, can represent both the reconciliation of "warring" element of tradition and modernity/urbanity/the west or the setting up of one in opposition to the other. Here, we must note that because the line between what is traditional and what is modern/urban/western is not always clear-cut people sometimes fluidly take positions under the banner of one or the other. "Tradition" for instance, can be the value/idea deployed to sustain patriarchal (or other) power and privilege behind the masque of an anti-imperialist cultural nationalism (as we find in the lawyer's response to the student above).

Traditional (and Colonial) Constraint's on Ghanaian Women's Work

Some historians have noted also that colonialism in Ghana did not interrupt but merely reinforced patriarchal gender inequalities embedded in traditional social/cultural attitudes. Regarding labor, for instance, this argument is that the colonial state largely denied the fact that Ghanaian women largely worked outside the home and therefore tried to "shoehorn" them into exclusively domestic roles (Anyidoho 5). Women were less likely to enter school and when they did, receive a relatively inferior education that "emphasized domestic skills over technical skills that could gain them access to the then modern, burgeoning formal sector of salaried employment (as opposed to farm labor). The few women who made it into salaried employment were required to resign from their work when they got married. Women were forced to resign at

pregnancy, and until 1963 were not eligible for entry to the administrative class in the civil service, regardless of their qualifications. Further, colonial agricultural policies assumed male control over land and labor and therefore made more resource input (e.g. capital) available to men. Also, in a colonial economy in which agriculture and extractive industries like mining were central, the tendency to commercialize land disadvantaged women by limiting their access to something that was their primary livelihood.

Historians have noted that in traditional (customary) context of marriage in most of Ghana's ethnic groups, men were expected to maintain their wife/wives and children. In return women were expected to perform domestic labor and assist the husband in the development of his trade or business but her labor input did not give her any rights over the property thus acquired (Baden et al, 1994). She had a claim to proper care from her parents, her husband and in old age her children, "but was economically dependent in all these relationships" (Klingshirn, 1973.p.289). She was responsible for housekeeping, food production, and rearing her small children while the man provided for her material wellbeing as well as that of her children (290). In this arrangement the man made the relevant decisions, controlled finances, took responsibility for the children's education and represented the family to the outside. In this arrangement he also held an exclusive right to dispose of fixed property or income derived from the family (usually farm) labor. Typically, women could not easily acquire economically relevant property "aside from the sale of surplus food products and small-scale trading" (290). The economic impetus behind the social-cultural endorsement of polygamy allowed a man to marry many wives as possible for cheap farm labor. The main family property passed directly from father to son or in matrilineal clans, to mother's brother or to sister's son. With few exceptions the domain of the woman was home—caring for children—and fieldwork.

To a good extent in recent Ghana, social expectation of the husband to maintain the spouse is fading and continues to do so. Long before it did, even the most traditional of Ghanaian women rarely relied completely on a man's "maintenance" but worked independently to pay for extra wishes and desires she may have. The Ghanaian woman worked to ensure that she has reserve funds for (among other things) circumstances like old age when the husband might be less able to work to maintain the family; divorce, which might cut a divorced woman off from the husband's support; death. when inheritance traditions might adversely affect her economic circumstances; and for her own children's profit (Clark, 2010). Today, even with laws that protect spouses' welfare after divorce or death, Ghanaian women work for many of the same reasons Ghanaian men do: because married or single they need to work to live; because they have passions for and interests in vocation; because to work and earn for one's self gives one a sense of independence; and because in a shifting and uncertain economy it is harder for married couples to rely on one spouse's income. The rising proportion of households reported as female headed in Ghana (I mentioned this earlier) indicates women's increasing primary economic responsibility within the Ghanaian society.

More than ever, women who wish to work in Ghana, are socially able to work, but also *need to* work. Lingering social-cultural factors complicate this development. People in Ghanaian society rarely frown on the woman for working at all. Even the lawyer in the exchange that I described above believed "every woman must work, if she can." However, as the Ghanaian woman has made inroads in labor participation she remains obliged by social expectation to act in a particular cultural role: to be primarily responsible for keeping up the home and for taking care of the children. The Ghanaian women in the labor force, unlike her male counterpart, finds herself socio-culturally strapped with expectations of domestic responsibility that can work

against her participation in the workforce. The public discussion of this constraint can be a fraught one, especially when a discourse of “tradition” embedded in the Ghanaian’s “double consciousness,” is mobilized to cast changes to the status quo of gender relations as a form of cultural imperialism.

Dramatizing Double Consciousness: Three Ghanaian Playwrights

The collision and confluence of tradition and modernity/urbanity, especially regarding gender roles, finds expression in the work of Ghanaian playwrights such as Efua Sutherland, Joe de Graft, and Ama Atta Aidoo. Their portrayal of women is tied primarily to women’s “ideal” roles as wives and mothers. In addition, one finds frequent representations of women as seductresses and sexual commodities and, occasionally, as liberators and advocates for women’s emancipation. “there are basically two traditions of oppositions governing the portrayal of women in the stories that concern us here: women as wholesome whores or victimized or virtuous virgins, and women as nurturing earth mothers or destructive Jezebels” (Anyidoho, 2016). Invariably, “women are always lovers, wives, or the blood relatives of central male characters, and have significance in the texts only insofar as they affect those characters.” By and large, Ghanaian authors present different shades of women: “traditional woman”, uneducated, without any means of earning income, and who is only responsible for her husband and her kids. They also tend to portray women as educated and well established in a career but who have difficulties blending social expectations of the mother and wife with career goals. They expose the struggles of the woman who tries to combine such roles (Anyidoho,2016).

Sutherland’s *Edufa* has three main female characters. With the exception of Ampoma (Edufa’s wife) who is sick for most of the time, the other two, Abena (Edufa’s sister) and

Seguwa (Edufa's "matronly aunt") are all depicted in no more than domestic roles. Ampoma, ostensibly in an act of love, is willing to sacrifice her responsibilities as a mother (to deny her children the privilege of having a mother while growing up) in order to be substitute for Edufa in a spiritually fated death. Traditional society frowns upon her "peculiar" modern view of marriage as only an act of romance rather than of responsibility, evident in the reaction of those around her. Ampoma removes her waist beads in public and places it on her husband. It is both a powerful traditional ritual act (to make him incapable of relations with another woman in the event of her death) but also a defiance of tradition to express love with that ritual act. In *Edufa*, the playwright makes a profound examination of the validity of the social roles traditionally assigned to men and women—the duties of a father, those of a mother, and those expected of a child. The play questions the esteemed position of manliness and examines the subservient role given women in the society. Yet it is Edufa's modernity that makes him careless enough to fall in the snare of a diviner's charm and need Ampomah's self-sacrifice for his sake.

Sutherland's *Marriage of Anansewaa* presents the story of George Kweku Ananse and his daughter, Anansewaa. Ananse craves the modern urban luxuries that accompany the wealthy and people of notoriety in his community, but these are beyond his reach. So, he devises a plot to offer his daughter's hand in marriage to four very wealthy chiefs but to use his wiles to actually offer her to only one of them. Ananse amasses wealth and is able to sufficiently upgrade his lifestyle from the gifts that his daughter's purported suitors offered him. All four suitors would choose the same day to come pay the dowry for their would-be bride. Upon realizing this, Ananse faked his daughter's death and sent word to all four suitors. Only one suitor, 'Chief who is Chief' offers to cater for the costs of the would-be bride Anansewaa's traditional funeral and

burial, a sign of true love. Through cunning, he finds for his daughter a suitable husband and amasses some and esteem to afford the luxuries he so desires

Sutherland's *Marriage of Anansewa* presents a traditional Akan (a Ghanaian ethnolinguistic group) society. The man heads the home and is expected to provide for it. Ananse's mother live with him, and every lady that comes around the man has to impress the mother to gain approval. It appears that women in the depicted society do not have the opportunity to choose their own husband. The father would typically be the one to choose a suitable husband for her. The woman caretaking of the home is done by the woman, the chores, the cooking, keeping the home tidy, and welcoming guests are all assigned duties of the woman. In the play, the daughter, is portrayed as an object for the father to use as he pleases. Ananse promises his daughter's hand in marriage to four suitors in a bid to amass wealth for himself without a consenting response from his daughter. This is a derivative of what used to be a typical real-life scenario in Akan culture, in which the father selects the husband for his daughter.

Joseph Coleman de Graft is a Ghanaian playwright and dramatist popularly known as Joe de Graft. Amongst hid plays are *Sons and Daughters*, *Muntu* and *Through A Film Darkly*. Many of his works, while widly popular, do not show woman in very empowering roles but, rather, plays into the hands of a stale old traditional Ghanaian culture instead. In Joseph Coleman de Graft (J.C de Graft)'s *Sons and Daughters*, James Ofosu is a businessman and breadwinner for the Ofosu family. He is father to George, Aaron and Maanan, and husband to Hannah. James has a strong desire to choose a course of study and future career for all of his children. He wants his daughter to become the first female lawyer in Ghana and, in fact, for all his children to become professional men and women. James' oldest son George agrees to his father's terms. However, Aaron and Maanan disagree and with him anddo not accept the dictates of their father.

James Ofosu enlists the assistance of his friend, Lawyer Bonu, to help Maanan apply for law school in London, although Maanan wants to study dance. Bonu is also trying to help Aaron gain acceptance in Manchester to study engineering. However, Aaron wants to study art and unknown to the father, plans to accept admission in engineering, but to change his course of study once he arrives at the Manchester University. Meanwhile, with James' permission Maanan has been working as a secretary for lawyer Bonu, to learn more about the profession before she starts school. Lawyer Bonu inappropriately, makes love advances towards Maanan. Maanan reports Bonu's actions to her father, but James does not believe her. However, Bonu's actions give him out when James catches him in the act, trying forcefully to kiss a struggling Maanan in Ofosu's own living room.

Hannah, James Ofosu's wife is mainly a housewife, who James gives no say about choosing a course for her children even when they have expressed to her their disapproval of that profession. Women tend to have a limited say in the traditional home when it comes to decision making or other matters. Such is the peripheral nature of the woman's social position that James Ofosu does not even believe her own daughter when she complains that Lawyer Bonu has been making love advances on her, until he sees it with his own eyes. In a mode of representation that is rooted in the values of a traditional Ghanaian society the play presents women either as housewives sitting at home, mothers taking care of the house, or aunts and daughters welcoming visitors and running errands.

Ama Atta Aidoo's *Anowa* addresses the conflicts that erupt when a young woman rejects conventions of her traditional society. Anowa reaches marriage age, apparently six years after her adolescence and is deemed ready to marry. Her parents maintain the traditional position that they are better placed to pick her a rightful suitor. On the contrary, independent and self-

determined, Anowa has her own plans and ideas. She finds and marries Kofi Ako. Anowa's parents, especially her mother is disappointed and disapprove of Anowa's choice. Anowa is forced to live with the challenges that comes with that due to her unwillingness to follow tradition. In the play the Chorus is an elderly couple who represent the "wise voices" of a typical traditional Ghanaian society. They give their own views on the events in the play as it unfolds placing themselves at very significant points in the play. Anowa is dissatisfied by her parent's reaction and decides to leave with Kofi Ako. We learn that Anowa loves Kofi Ako so much, but the two of prove such a mismatch in simple things as making certain decision in the household. They seem to figure out their differences and get along well for a time. But, in the end Anowa's "arrogance" in rising above traditional womanhood to be a modern independent woman irritates Kofi Ako who requests that she try to be like other "normal" women.

Anowa and Kofi Ako grow rich. However, Anowa is deemed unable to give birth. This depresses her greatly and leaves her in much sorrow. In a traditional Ghanaian society, bearing a child was considered a state of fulfilment when a woman truly became a woman. Childbearing was thus something that women, in particular, found significant to their identity in the society. On the contrary, a woman's inability to give birth deprived her of full respect from the society and even from her husband. This tended to cause most women to worry and, in some cases, to be quite depressed from the related stigmatization. Kofi Ako, Anowa's rich husband is dissatisfied with her apparent infertility and requests that she leave their home. However, the play takes a turn with the revelation that Kofi—not Anowa—is the one without the capacity to procreate. The truth leads Kofi Ako to put a gun to his head while Anowa drowns herself.

Ama Atta Aidoo uses Anowa's character to critique the tendency for the traditional society to deem as abnormal the woman who seeks be independent of the tradition. The play

presents old traditional values like parents choosing a suitor for their children, the embeddedness of womanhood in marriage and a capacity to bear children. Anowa defies all these traditional expectations. Although she was raised in the traditional context, she has the traits of a city bred in her—a more liberal than rural outlook towards life. Anowa faces the scorn of a traditional society that deems women threats to men if they go beyond societal norms and are seem as too assertive—especially if they take a counter position to that of their husband's. Anowa represents a modern woman who likes to make her own decisions and live her life per her choice. But, in Ghanaian folklore, the motif of the so-called disobedient daughter presents such revolutionary women as outcasts and social misfits. Such is Anowa's predicament. Her life ends tragically as her attitude leads to her destruction. Ama Aidoo thus presents a grim picture of what s women who refuses to act within traditional cultural terms might face—isolation or even death itself.

Conclusion

Tradition (and modernity) have been employed/deployed in Ghanaian society, especially in relation to ideas about women and work. The cultural collisions and confluences of tradition and modernity in Ghanaian public discussions about culture and identity can be suitably described with the concept of "double consciousness." In the shadow of double consciousness, Ghanaian women's increased participation in the workforce has brought, into relief, the greater acceptance today of women as workers outside the home but also the impingement of traditional expectations on the Ghanaian women even as more and more of them work outside the home. Three Ghanaian playwrights captured the postcolonial condition of double consciousness through literary-dramatic expression, indicating that the dynamic and sometimes troublesome coupling of tradition and modernity continues to be part of Ghana's cultural landscape. As is the

case around the world, Ghanaian women's participation in the labor force is defined—and constrained—by social/cultural attitudes. Still, governments have been slow to act on women's issues, and sometimes the public has deemed gender parity activists and their ideas as alien and threatening to Ghanaian traditional "culture."

CHAPTER IV

DOUBLY CONSCIOUS ART FROM GHANA DANCE ENSEMBLE TO TIFALI: MAKING SPACE FOR (WOMEN IN) DANCE WORK

Overview

When I was an undergraduate dance student, there was a student dance production—*Shitstem*—in which I wanted to perform but I found out the production team had in mind an all-male production so I could not be part of it. It is possible for the artistic vision of a production to call for gender-specific dancers. However, what shocked me was learning, privately from one member the team, that their decision to go all-male had nothing to do with the production theme or vision. It was simply because members did not want to deal with "extra burdens" on the production that they believed women represented, such as requests to be excused from rehearsals because of "menstrual cramps and headaches." Also, the team wanted to schedule the start of some rehearsals as early as 6 am and others as late as 10 pm and believed that women would request too many excuses from the rehearsals because of household duties or to avoid an unsafe trek home late at night.

Hearing the team's prejudicial outlook hurt, because I knew I was capable and, what is more, proficient in some of the parts of production work typically reserved for men such as rigging lights and building/painting sets.

In the shadow of double consciousness, longstanding "traditional" ideas of women as caretakers of (and of men as breadwinners for) the home and family, have been the basis of social expectation that the Ghanaian woman working outside home would also bear the main burdens of home and child care in her family. The expectation has relaxed somewhat as

Ghanaian society has grown lesser and lesser tied to tradition especially in urban parts of the country. Still, traditions die hard. So, many of the rising numbers of Ghanaian women who work outside home remain expected to do a balancing act between home/child care and outside work that, generally, men are not expected to do. This is even more complicated for women with careers in performing arts because of the historically negative views in Ghana about professional performers as vagabonds, wanton and of easy virtue. This chapter explores the traditional and modern contexts of attitudes about dance/arts, including the "triple burden" that Ghanaian women who take up dance face. After detailing the rise and growth of concert dance in Ghana—which laid the foundation for women or anyone for that matter to take careers in dance—I conclude the chapter with a case study of one Ghanaian professional dance company that has carved a safe, accommodating and creative space for women dancers.

Dance and Other Arts in Traditional Ghanaian Societies

The late Ghanaian ethnomusicologist J.H. Kwabena Nketia stated in an interview that "undoubtedly, one of the most persistent aspects of *traditional* (my italics) African culture is its creative aspect… in art, music, dance and drama … for it is in these arts that we find the most dynamic expressions of the African way of life." Nketia adds that these traditional artistic creations are at the heart of (and may also depict) everyday situations as well as ceremonies and rites. His point, in short, is that performing arts are central in *traditional* Ghanaian societies. Scholar/dancer/choreographer A.M Opoku echoes Nketia with a focus on dance, stating that in the traditional community "Life is dance…and dance is life" (Schramm, 2000). He explains that it is what embodies all aspects of the culture of traditional life: "ways of living, customs, labor,

aspirations, history, geographical and social backgrounds, economic conditions, religious beliefs, moments of joys and sadness."

The centrality of dance in the traditional Ghanaian society—what Halifu Osumare calls Ghana's "all pervasive dance culture" ("Viewing African Women" 41)—is thus seen in the fact that dance has value as entertainment but, more often than not, "has a specific role in an event or a complex of events organized for a specific occasion" (Kwakwa, "Dance in Communal Life", 43). In A. M. Opoku's words, "the most important events in the community have special dances to infuse fuller meaning into the significance of these events (51). Another Ghanaian scholar, dancer and choreographer, Patience Kwakwa, notes that in traditional life of Ghanaian people, dancers "perform for sociocultural, historical, political and religious purposes" (43). Traditional organizations, cult groups, voluntary associations, and occupational societies, have particular dance forms associated with their practices and usually make it mandatory for new members to learn to perform them, helping to preserve old dance forms and sometimes even propagating new ones (Kwakwa "Dance and African Women" 13).

In fact, many occasions in the traditional life of Ghanaian communities—from the birth of a child and the rites of passage (initiation rites) of emerging adults, to marriage ceremonies and installation of chiefs—present opportunities for dance in general, feasting, drinking and merrymaking. However, there are also dances specialized for honoring, welcoming, and ushering individuals and incorporating them into the community at large—as new members, as adults, as married couples, or as chiefs.

Among Akan (the largest ethnolinguistic group in Ghana) for instance, dance is an indispensable part of state political life. Asante (largest Akan community) kings root and derive their authority and identity from *sika dwa Kofi*, a golden stool legendarily delivered to the first

Asante King in a spectacle of dance. The Asante kings proudly bear the title "*dwom ne Akyerma wura*" meaning patron of the song and drum (and thus dance) forms (Opoku). Dance is a prerequisite for royal office for male and female Asante chiefs—indeed for all Akan kings and chiefs.

Akan kings and chiefs are expected to perform royal dances at their installation. Heralded in public processions by retinue of dancers, Akan kings and chiefs employ deliberate, dignified dance to portray the esteem that they have inherited from ancestors in the royal line and their legitimacy as peerless leaders in their particular Akan state. The Okyeame (chief's spokesperson) of an Akan state is expected to be a good speaker but also "to understand the language of drums and be able to interpret symbolic gestures in the dancing ring" (Nketia 60) Many times during Akan state festivals, royals and subjects alike participate in a circular space defined by placement of dancers (both rulers and ruled) and audiences, transforming the arena into a great dance floor. At such festivals dance may also be a background for other activities or conclude the event by serving as the means through which the community expresses its thanks to its deities and ancestors for blessings bestowed during the year (Kwakwa, "Dance in Communal life," 45).

Dance was central also, in religious rituals of traditional Ghanaian life. Catherine Bell defines rituals as special paradigmatic activities that mediate opposing demands of *communitas* ("spirit" of community") and formalized social order. Rituals affirm communal unity in contrast to the frictions, constrains and competitiveness of social life and organization (Bell, 1992). They are functional/structural mechanisms that socially condition individual perception and behavior and, thereby, bridge the dichotomy between beliefs/values and behavior. Akan recognize the relationship between spiritual traditions and somatic movement practices and thus the dancing body as a "locus of spiritual authority" (Williamson et al, 2014). *Akom* dance, for example, is

concerned with a sacred dimension of the Akan sense of being. *Akomfo* (priests or priestesses) perform akom as entertainment to worshippers and general public but also “to dramatize the gods, prescribe cures, prevent the spread of dangerous diseases, protect worshippers from misfortune” and “honor the gods” (Kwakwa, “Dance and African Women, 12). Would-be akomfo must learn to dance as an essential part of their training.” Initiation of new priests and priestesses thus maintain dance as a central religious practice in the traditional community (13). Performers might dance at funerals and other death ceremonies to honor the dead, celebrate the long and prosperous life of a diseased elder and/or placate ancestral spirits. After a successful hunt, Akan hunters may perform the *abofuor* (hunter) dance to cleanse the hunter who killed the animal and protect them from the animal’s soul (“Dance in Communal Life, 44).

An important function of the dance in traditional Ghanaian society was its reinforcement of roles (including gender roles). Some dances were exclusively associated with specific groups in society: youth, adult males or females, newly initiated men, newly married women, bachelors, farmers, warriors, blacksmiths, hunters, royalty or cultists (45-46). The *mmobome* dance of the Asante for example, was exclusively female. In war, when able-bodied men left to fight, their mothers, wives, sisters and daughters fought a spiritual war on their behalf through that dance. Warrior dances, like the *agbekor* of the Anlo people of Ghana, on the other hand were restricted to men. In some traditional dances, all people, including men and women, could participate but specific roles were open only to a particular group of people depending on gender, occupation, age, sociopolitical status, affiliation with a religious group, or the context/function, distinctive feature, character, or nature of the dance (“Dance in Communal life” 47, “Dance and African” 12). For example, both the Asante King and Queen Mother danced *fontonfrom* royal dance, but she danced to express “motherliness, peace and stability” whereas he danced to express valor.

Patience Kwakwa writes that traditional African dances were linked with an appreciation of the beauty of the physical features of a masculine or feminine body ("Dance and African Women" 10). Dance movements for women tended to exploit features of the female body: "the poise, slanting gaze, elegant tilting of the neck, rhythmic buffeting of the breasts, subtle movement of the torso, relaxed and beautiful sweep of the arms, natural swing of the buttocks and gentle tread of the feet," to "express ideas and values associated with womanhood. In the Asante *adowa* dance, for instance (and the *agbadza* dance of the Anlo), the woman "emphasizes her curvatures or roundness" and moves in curved floor paths for a gliding effect and effortlessness deemed graceful and appreciated in a woman's dance. In *adowa*, it was rarely appropriate for a woman to dance with the strong, angular, sharp staccato body jerks or direct movements deemed typical of males: only if she was in a perplexed state of mind or social condition (say during a funeral dance, in the pain of losing a loved one). Dance thus reinforced traditional roles/associations (men as unrestrained, outbound, figures of valor and the women as homebound, gentle, motherly figures of peace). Thus, especially as a reinforcer of gender roles dance was central to the traditional community. No matter who you were, there was always at least one dance open to your participation without censure ("Dance in Communal life," 45).

Dance and Other Arts in Modern Ghanaian Society

Traditional Ghanaian society reserved movements for men and women, reinforcing gender roles. However, it held no disdain per se for the dancer in general. This was not the case outside the traditional society. In fact, one key distinction that Patience Kwakwa makes between "traditional dances of Africa" and "artistic and contemporary dances of Africa" is the fact that unlike the former, which never occurred in isolation from the community and had what Nketia

calls “a functional approach” (see, Nketia 61) the former is performed largely “for the entertainment of a paying audiences” (Kwakwa, “Dance in Communal,” 43). This distinction is important. The performer and performing arts in general, and the dancer and dance in particular, were highly regarded as central in traditional Ghanaian life. As Anthony Graham-White writes, traditional performers achieved great prestige in society through performance, sharing the esteem in which society was held as “guardians of community values” (34). On the contrary, in Ghana, performing artists who do performance for a living in the modern society, have historically not received the same esteem as performers in traditional society. Rather, they have been regarded with disdain.

Performers in Concert Party, the first major theatrical form to emerge outside the traditional Ghanaian society in the early 20th Century, are classic targets of such disdain. Concert Party troupes were typically itinerant performers whose popular performance routines involved, comedy, music and moralistic melodrama. Performers took advantage of Ghanaian love for singing, dancing and dramatizing to create a popular art form that combined music, dance and (usually comedic) drama. Their techniques of presentation grew out of the folkloric conventions of *Anansesem* Storytelling in the Ghanaian society (*Ananse* literally means spider and *asem* means story or tales) but their influences ranged from British Music Hall, American Vaudeville, Silent Film, and West African popular highlife music. Concert Party performers had a spirit of entrepreneurship. They saw themselves as artists but also frankly admitted that their primary goal was to make money and many of them depended on this income to survive. So, Concert Party was “a commercial enterprise, bringing together crowds of people who mostly did not know each other, but shared a common space only by virtue of being willing to pay for admission” (Barber et al, 1997. p.5).

Concert Party's freewheeling commercial spirit distinguished Concert Party from fully traditional and community immersed Ghanaian performances in which the audience was mainly kinsfolk or ethnic community and formal compensation of the artist/s was not expected (Donkor 115-116). The vagaries of itinerant road life, the financial precariousness of the work, and moral ambivalence of this art, reinforced a general outlook that the Concert Party was an irresponsibly foolish profession and that its performers were rogues and vagabonds. By 1960s many Ghanaians in the modern society had expanded their disdain from the Concert Party in particular to performing artists in general. Performing artists in the "modern" domain were regarded with lesser respect than many other professions even if not specifically as rogues and vagabonds. People would refer to any theatre work as "Concert" thus attaching to such work and its performers, the image of rogues and vagabonds.

In 1962, Ghana's first President, Kwame Nkrumah, established the School of Music and Drama (now the School of Performing Arts) at the University of Ghana for the training of potential career theatre artists, musicians, and dancers. But even at the University, students and professors of performing arts faced similar disdain, and were nicknamed "dondologists" by their peers in other disciplines. Ghanaian playwright Mohammed Ben Abdallah has his characters comment on this disdain in his play *Witch of Mopti*. In the play, performers about to perform say the following

> ABOTSI: Some people think we do concert.
>
> NII SAI: Some think we are just jokers
>
> TOGBI: Dondology? Some say we are dondologists.

"Dondology" (from *dondo*, a Ghanaian drum, and logy, denoting a subject of study) was a parody of the names of academic subjects like anthropology, sociology, etc. Kwame Ampene

explains that it was a derogatory term that university students and professors used to label the curriculum at the School of Performing Arts for introducing music and dance (perceived as non-intellectual) to an "otherwise, serene intellectual campus."

The regard of Concert Party artists as rogues and vagabonds also derived from the Eurocentric legacy of colonial Christian missions. Over their more than 100 years of colonial rule in Ghana, the British tried to impose their beliefs and values on the African society they governed, aiming to mold the lifestyles of African subjects to their own European model. Wherever there was already a strong tradition established, colonizers now preached "ignore your tradition and take mine." Already, Victorian anthropologists had imagined African "native" institutions, customs, and beliefs as the earliest, crudest, primitive, savage form of their own institutions, customs and beliefs. They infantilized African traditional culture, equating it with the mindset of European children (White, 1974). Euro/ethnocentric assumptions about African culture were particularly limiting in the world of the arts where they missed the existence—or misunderstood the complexity—of African artistic expression (9).

European missionaries were usually suspicious of the close connections between performing arts and the traditional African ritual that they viewed as heathenistic and contrary to religion. They were especially suspicious of dances that lasted all night or in which animals were imitated. As such, one of the beliefs that the European missionaries persistently tried to pass on to their African subjects was the notion that dance, as a bodily expression, was immoral and evil. They discouraged African subjects from dancing and pushed dance—and the related performing arts—to the back burner of society (Fabian, 1996). Some of the Africans, themselves, adopted the attitudes of the missionaries as the late Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe observed, and were

sometimes more ardent enemies of their people's arts than even the Europeans. Achebe (1958) wrote,

> I remember the shock felt by Christians of my father's generation in my village in the early forties when for the first time the local girls' school performed Nigerian dances at the anniversary of the coming of the gospel. Hitherto they had always put on something Christian and civilized which I think was called the Maypole dance.

Ghana's first President, Kwame Nkrumah added, around the time of his country's independence, that under British colonialism African subjects "were denied the knowledge of our African past and informed that we had no present. We were taught to regard our culture and traditions as barbarous and primitive" (Nkrumah, 49).

Working in the Arts: The Woman's Triple Burden

In Ghana, women who pursue a career in the arts bear the brunt of the disdain towards the "modern" career performer. Before the 1960s there were a handful of well-known professional female performers in Ghana—mostly singers and dancers in popular bands. Until 1960s, female impersonation was "a standard central part of Concert Party" shows (Cole, 126), practically the reverse of the Takarazuka Revue in Japan, an all-female theatre that employed music, drama and dance in productions and arose partly in response to a bar against women on stage. Concert Party was deemed inappropriate work for a woman: fit only for "a girl without morals" because of its unrooted, freewheeling, near-anarchic itinerancy (Collins, 1994.p.461). Pioneer Concert Party women, Vida Oparebea and Ama Buabeng attest to this. Oparebea's family called her *ashao* (prostitute) for "following a bunch of musicians around" and a chief of her town lectured her to "get married, have children, help their mother at a farm, or trade market" (462-463). Buabeng

was luckier: the playwright Efua Sutherland, a national figure, chose her to work with Brigade Concert Party, founded by President Nkrumah as an organ of government propaganda. Buabeng's mother obliged but Buabeng belonged to a royal family that saw Concert Party performers as "those-who-move-about-in-order-to-eat" (vagabonds and prostitutes) and therefore a blight on the royal line. As a result, they compelled her mother to make offerings every year until she died in 1974 (Plastow, 2002, 72-73). Prejudices about career female performers also created problems for women who wished to marry and Buabeng's own marriage suffered as a result (71).

Disparaging views about the morality of female concert performers continue to linger into present day. The result is that Concert Party women today, more than their male counterparts, are eager to defend themselves against the derogatory view that they "move-about-in-order-to-eat" and to express their financial independence by holding additional jobs. Once Concert Party member, a hairdressing apprentice, explained: "If I don't learn a trade beside theatre work, it will affect me. A woman must her own trade. If you have three [trades] at least one will help you (Donkor, 143). Another, insisted that her interviewer record her at her market stall so that "it doesn't appear as if Concert Party women don't have a real job to do." In a profession still lowly esteemed, women needed to make, and to be seen making, income from another source outside their lowly esteemed theatre work. At the same time, they had to confront the possibility that their financial success would be regarded as threatening or socially inappropriate (as it was regarded during the military regime of the 1970s, especially if they had to deal with balancing their professional lives with the expectation that they would bear the main responsibility for the daily care of their home and children. Therefore, women in Ghana who work as performers face what I call, *a triple burden*: the general disdain about performance

professions, the specific, gendered view of female professional performers as women of easy virtue, and the die-hard traditional social expectations that they would remain the *principal* caregivers of their children and caretakers of home irrespective of the demands of their professional life.

Dance as Work: Tradition/Modernity and the Birth of Concert Dance in Ghana

One line of work in which Ghanaian working women experience a triple burden quite intensely is in professional concert *dance* (not to be confused with the Concert Party). By concert dance, I mean a formal program of dances performed to an audience, frequently but not requisitely in a theatre, and usually choreographed to music. Concert dance is a relatively new phenomenon in Ghana. It did not exist in a traditional context. What existed was what one might call social (meant for general participation) dances, ceremonial dances (tied to milestone events) and ritual dances (tied to religious expression). These, I established earlier, were central to traditional life and gave great esteem to performers/dancers. People considered these dances in traditional life as something everyone (well, at least most people) in the community could do and therefore needless to pursue it as professional endeavor. It is worth of note that concert dance rose in Ghana nevertheless, during the early 1960s. The foundational event in the history of the professional concert dance was the formation of the National Dance Ensemble in October 1962 under the auspices of President Nkrumah. He tasked ethnomusicologist J. H. Nketia and dance scholar/choreographer A. M Opoku to establish a national dance company that would "preserve aspects of 'dying' traditional dances, at the same time using them as models for creative development" (Adinku, 2000. 131).

The Ensemble presented two main types of concert dances: neotraditional (theatre-staged traditional) dances and original choreographed dances in schools, homes, stadia, universities, royal palaces, and theatres. It represented Ghana at events in other parts of Africa as well as in Europe. Nkrumah confronted the low esteem given the arts in general and dance especially, by linking it with University of Ghana. Ofotsu Adinku recounts, “the company was linked to research activities of the Institute of African Studies (IAS) at the University” so that “dance would acquire respect” not just in the general public but also in the “conservative, British-influenced academic atmosphere represented by the University” (131). Women were well represented in the Ensemble and outnumbered men at a ratio of 2:1 in the 18-member the company. Adinku, himself pioneer member, recalls that it “became a model for dance troupes throughout the continent and led to more awareness of how dance can preserve local identity and forge international links” (132). Krista Fabian has noted, the emergence of the Ensemble in Ghana, where the dance is an integral part of the traditional social life, raised questions about dance as a profession—then, a relatively new concept in Ghana (13). Founding artist director A.M. Opoku, noted that dance was a gift of the gods to everyone…no one thought of making it a career” and that professional meant quality, dance at its best, and the best may not make a living by it. Founding member Ampofo Doudu recalls that before he joined the group he never imagined being paid to dance—something he enjoyed doing, but when offered the opportunity, said, “why not?” (14).

A related key development in Ghana’s concert dance tradition was the establishment of the School of Music, Dance and Drama (now School of Performing Arts) at the University. Students studied the neo-traditional dances but also learned to choreograph original ones. Other students and faculty’s derisive naming of courses in the school as “dondology” showed that even

Nkrumah's association of the School and the Ensemble with research did not rid them of the disdain towards performers in general and dancers in particular. Initially, most of those who graduated from the School did not work as professional concert dancers (outside the Ensemble there was almost no other opportunity for this) but as program officers in Centers for National Culture around the country, teachers in elementary and secondary schools, and (for those who pursued further studies) faculty at the University. The tags of civil servant, teacher, or lecturer respectively for them at these sites of work moderated the disdain that they would normally face under the tag of a professional dancer.

In the early 1990s the National Dance Ensemble split into two, with one based at the then newly constructed National Theatre Complex, and the other remaining with the Institute of African Studies at the University of Ghana. For a while, these two publicly funded companies were the only professional concert dance company in Ghana. However, in the past decade or so, the circumstances have changed, with five new non-university affiliated, non-state incorporated professional companies, namely Noryam, Tifali, Artistic Vision, Vivie's Dance Factory, and Yep productions. These companies have provided salaried employment for products of the School of Performing Arts, and gigs for dance students who need practical professional experience and wish to also make a little money on the side. They have become an inspiration to and the source of great expectations from dance students and dance graduates of the School of Performing Arts. They have kindled something the dance community in Ghana call "agbana," an alert nose for a paid gig around the corner—a resourceful ways of finding performance opportunities. Agbana's are more than just what people see on the night of performance, they are part of what helps sustain the livelihood of an active dancer. What qualifies one as agbana is usually how well you

know what you do, your capacity to prove yourself and be better positioned for a gig offer, and your effort to gain more gigs by perfecting your craft and gaining respect from fellow artists.

The new opportunities for concert dancers have arisen against the backdrop of lingering disdain about the arts, dance, and women in dance. According to Nigel Lythgoe, Executive Producer of "So You Think You Can Dance," a popular American television dance production, about 3 percent of people who go into dancing become professional dancers. Lythgoe, himself, began his career as a dancer before becoming a choreographer, director and producer. He admitted that people give up on pursuing their dance path aspirations, but encouraged them not to (Miller 2013). Dancers like Lythgoe created business opportunities in choreography, teaching, directing and dance photography. In Ghana, there are now major opportunities for growth in performing arts. Creating more theater companies is one way to build accepting communities for those in the arts, especially women. If women can lead or play prominent roles in this movement to expand the footprint of the arts, it will go a long way in shifting the prevailing attitudes that currently exist about the arts, and women in the arts, particularly in dance.

All this development/progress notwithstanding, one challenge faced by women who work in dance remains. Emerging work opportunities for women in dance are certainly welcome. However, for many working women in dance, the challenge of balancing professional life with expected responsibilities at home is still a pressing one. It may be easy standing outside the culture to simply say why don't they just reject the social expectation that brings about this challenge. However, for many women, it is not as simple a thing to put aside something that is culturally ingrained. The dilemma here then, is, how do we help the working Ghanaian dancer meet this challenge of balancing their personal life and their home life. My answer is that it is easier to change a single institution than to change the entire culture of a community. Therefore,

while we advocate for putting aside social expectations that burden the working woman, one thing we can do is to also take institutional measures that will help ease the burden. One of the professional Dance Companies in Ghana, Tifali, appears to be doing just that.

Tifali: A short Case Study of an Emergent Space for Women in Dance

January 2020. I sat on the apron of the proscenium stage in the dimly lit Albert Mawere Opoku Dance Hall. Abigail Sena Atsugah, a member of the Dance Faculty of the School of Performing Arts, University of Ghana. and founder and artistic director of the Tifali Dance Company, sat by me as caught up on “old times.” We hadn’t seen each other for a while because I had been away in the United States for my graduate studies. When she heard that I was back in Ghana to do some research she immediately asked if I would like to be part of a SheMotion, a dance production that they were working on. She suggested that even if I couldn’t perform in the main pieces I could offer an opening solo or something. Unfortunately, I had to be back in the U.S before the day of her show. So, we settled on just attending a few of her rehearsals to catch up on old times.

I first met Abigail five years ago when I was an undergraduate dance student at the School. She was then a final year M.F.A. Dance student preparing for her thesis production. Her project sounded interesting and I auditioned and got the opportunity to be part of the dance team. I remember being very delighted at the opportunity. Even as a final year MFA student she was already quite accomplished in dance. After her first degree, majoring in dance, she had worked with a dance company in Burkina Faso called *Compain Ogis Bien Venue* toured with them to perform in Burkina Faso and France, Bourdieu and Yale in the US, among other places. As I sat

and watched her gesture with lean fingers while she talked, the memories of our performance of her thesis production came back to me. She had been studying the techniques of two women professional dancers from Senegal and Burkina Faso, Jemaine Acorny and Irene Asambedo and created a choreographic work for her thesis production that fused her own technique and dance pedagogy with (and built upon) theirs. She titled the piece, Tifali, meaning “our heritage.” After her final year project, we performed the piece at several venues around the city of Accra. In 2016, when requests for more performances kept coming Abigail decided to formalize the group into a dance company, which she gave the name Tifali.

Tifali Dance Company is an all-female dance company. When this Ghanaian professional Dance company got its start, it was composed of eight females from the University of Ghana’s School of Performing Arts. Abigail founded Tifali with a vision of educating society on traditional African culture. Her idea is that modern/contemporary dance forms can be tools to draw influence from indigenous African cultural arts and from institutionalized art forms. The group’s aims are the very embodiment of double consciousness. The foundations of her compositions and choreography gesture towards blending what is considered traditional and what is considered modern/contemporary artistic expressions. The main aim of the Company is to “utilize cultural heritage as a means for infusing indigenous cultural arts and practices as relevant sources for educating modern Ghanaian society” (Facebook, 2017). Further, Tifali subscribes to the notion of “Sankofa Yenkyir” (looking back to history and picking from it is no wrong). Therefore, the company investigates the Ghanaian ancestral heritage, and uses it as inspiration for their concert productions.

As a project-based organization, Tifali uses the arts with the intent to bring about social change. Through collaborative artistic works with other female artist, Tifali purposely works towards progressive ideals, sustainable development, and female youth empowerment. In fact, the company directly impacts the lives of women with formal dance training who have a desire to pursue dance as their field of work. Tifali does this with a full appreciation of the thin line between the cultural values of a respectable Ghanaian woman and her cultural expressive nature as a dancer. Chiefly, the Tifali hopes to safeguard the Ghanaian woman's prospective future in the arts as it relates to dance. Still, Tifali is not without its challenges. It is a one-woman organization that creates choreographies on request from organization and other times, creates pieces that addresses social issues like equality, sexual harassment, woman dancers' careers and the African woman's body. It operates in a "gig economy." Performers get paid based on gigs the company receives, as and when it is awarded. There is no fixed sponsorship tied to the company: it simply solicits for sponsorship whenever it plans a concert.

By around 5pm just about all of the members of the company had arrived for She motion rehearsal. Abigail was using mostly students for this production. They arrived, warmed up and went through various movements. Abigail gave them word prompts upon which they imagined and improvised movements to be incorporated into the show. Although I did not see the final performance I saw Shemotion come together after sitting in a number of production rehearsal sessions. In the production, Tifali explores the journey of womanhood through portals of movements, flows, and progressions. The piece is a story of becoming and understanding self while relating to multiple consciousness of a women in the arts in modern Ghanaian society. It takes on stories of various women riddled with limitations on their bodies, minds, and dreams. The piece travels with the women through various stages of resilience, resistance, and release as

the woman seeks to discover motion in a doubly conscious society. It is, in a nutshell, an exploration of movements and storytelling through a women-centered lens.

One of the things that struck me years ago about Abigail and which continued to impress me is her irrepressible commitment to making her rehearsal accommodating of the balancing act that Ghanaian women often have to make between work outside home and taking care of their homes and families. I recall that at several of the first few rehearsals I had with her, she had to bring her then one-year old child to work. She would lay a blanket on the rehearsal floor for the child to sleep and would carry food or snacks for the child. Sometimes, she carried the kid in less vigorous dances.

Perhaps because of her own experience, Abigail has tried to make Tifali rehearsal space an accommodating space for women, including those who have to take care of their children but who still want to be able to work as dancers. "It's an African thing," she would usually say, evoking the child-accommodating context of traditional African dance spaces. In fact, Tifali Dance Company is one dance institution that is leading the way in that direction. It is the only one of the seven professional dance companies that has taken institutional measures to help accommodate the burden of balancing the working woman's professional life with the demand at homes. The company allows working mothers to bring their children to work. It has been able to work out flexibility in its schedule to allow for the working women to leave earlier if they need to do so. Thirdly, the company has incorporated intervals in its rehearsal processes for women who need to bring their children to work to be able to tend to them. These are three small steps for one company but certainly a worthy leap in the right direction.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

In this thesis I explained that Ghanaian women often face a quandary: in which they must negotiate a tension between their desire, need, and opportunity to work in an increasingly financially unforgiving economy on one hand and, on the other hand, social-cultural expectations that they would *also* be mainly or even solely responsible for taking care of their homes and their children. A context for this tension is the gender-related labor transformation all around the world. By this, I meant specifically, the increasing presence of women in the labor force in Ghana, but also elsewhere in Africa, the Middle East, Asia, South America and United States. The fuller context of this tension, I showed, is the collision and confluence of this labor transformation with "traditional" social-cultural ideas in Ghana and also around the world.

I showed that the quandary in which Ghanaian women have to navigate work-life and home-care, is embedded in a more profound tension between a universal humanism that emphasizes common needs, and cultural nationalism. I added, that the tension arises from a core feature of the postcolonial condition in Ghana, what—appropriating W.E.B. DuBois's famous concept—I called a "double consciousness." I explored the traditional and modern contexts of attitudes about dance/arts, including the "triple burden" that Ghanaian women who take up dance face. Additionally, I show that whereas traditional Ghanaian society valued performing arts/artist, modern Ghanaian society has exhibited degrees of disdain to the artist. I suggested that this disdain is more intense for those who work as dancers and more so for women among such workers. After detailing the rise and growth of concert dance in Ghana, I concluded the previous chapter with a case study of a Ghanaian professional dance company that has carved a

safe, accommodating and creative space for women dancers. I detailed growing opportunities of employment in dance for both men and women in Ghana and the small but promising steps of one dance institution to make it easier for women to take advantage of these emerging employment opportunities in the dance.

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