



The role and place of music in Dipo Ceremony amongst the Krabo people of Ghana: A cultural exploration

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Abstract

Dipo, like all puberty or initiation rites, is an initiation ceremony performed for young girls who are of puberty age among the people of Krobo in the Eastern Region of Ghana. The Dipo rite ushers girls of puberty age into womanhood. It is one important event, during which they perform different types of indigenous music. At such cultural event, Ghanaian indigenous music is consummately performed in its context playing vital roles in the ceremony. A Guide for the Preparation of Primary School African Music Teaching Manual (1999); propounds that "songs are like books in a culture that is based upon oral traditions. They are means of transmitting culture and knowledge..." (P.16). In Krobo custom, the women in the community provide music during the entire ceremony. According to Nyumuah (1998), the millet beer (ngmada) is prepared on Friday. In the midst of the brewing, the women dance around the fireplace to the tune of klama songs.

Keywords: Dipo ceremony, initiation, Krabo community, music, rites



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1.0 Introduction

The preparation for this annual event usually begins from February where messages are taken to all *Krobo* towns and villages. Hugo Huber (1963, 1993) indicated that usually, they make announcement beginning from February in towns and villages, in markets, etc, the opening of the *dipo* season. Upon this announcement, parents who have puberty age uninitiated daughters begin with their preparations. In the former times, when the day came for the daughters of a particular house to proceed to their hometown on the *Krobo* mountain, their family members accompanied them singing *ha* songs on the way and carrying plantains, root crops and palm-oil with them. Djokpe, (2001) indicated in his long essay that African peoples celebrate life from cradle to grave. Religious rituals, ceremonies and festivals are always characterised with singing, drumming and dancing. Excitement ran high when the women folk of the girls' kin groups joined in the lively singing and dancing to a particular *ha* tune such as:

The <i>dipo</i> ritual of our house	<i>Weku mi dipo</i>
Go on, perform it	<i>Ny[[s[k[k[</i>
Our ladies, dance <i>ha</i>	<i>Wayii, ny[[do ha</i>
A gay and lively <i>ha</i>	<i>Ha he gu mi] !</i>
Daughter of our grandmother	<i>Nana mi bi</i>
Do not fear!	<i>Koye gbe yehe!</i>
Or	
I am not in fear	<i>Iyi gbe yehe</i>
There is still my mother here!	<i>Maa, Maayo n[-oo!</i>
You do not know how to dance <i>ha</i>	<i>Oli ha domi o</i>
And you have given birth to a daughter	<i>n[of] biyo !</i>

(Huber, 1993; P. 168)

2.0 The *dipo* rituals

The ceremony begins under the supervision and direction of the elderly women. Parents present their daughters to the priest or priestess in charge of *dipo* for libation and blessings on the candidates. According to Nyumuah (1998), preparation of the *ngmada* (millet beer) is done on Friday. The millet flour is dissolved in water in the cooking pots, placed on fire and stirred with *kutsie* (a porridge cooking stick). After a long boiling, the flour turns into brownish colour and assumes the taste of the typical ancient *ngmada*. In the period they stay around doing the brewing, the women dance around the fireplace to the tune of *klama* songs.

Huber (1963 and 1993) reported that *Kpa-womi* is the first little ceremony where the string of beads which ladies commonly wear around their waists are replaced by a simple string (made from the pineapple leaves) with only one *l[* tied to it. This is followed by affixing an exceptional

large and shining red lion-cloth to each girl in such a way that it almost reached the ground both in front and in back. This is followed by *yi-si-pomi* where the lower parts of candidates' heads are shaved. The yomoyo spearheads the shaving of candidates' heads with an ordinary knife. This style of shaving has been the characteristic style of the *Klohu* (old *Krobo* fashion). The *yi-si-pomi* ritual is also followed by *s]ni* where a special raffia-like fibre is used to tie around the necks of the candidates. This ritual is referred to as *s]ni mu]mi*. The ritual is performed while the candidate is made to stand or sit on the *b]* three times. Thus the candidate, through her new appearance, is marked as *dipo-yo*; that is, a girl who has entered *dipo*

According to Teye, O. E (2011), *S]ni* is a ritual performed on the candidates to capture both their souls and minds to stability and fortification. Because as soon as the ceremony begins there should not be any misfortune befalling on any of the candidates, be it sickness, accident, or even death. After this ritual, the candidates are confined until the entire ceremony is over.

3.0 The Principal Ceremonies

The ceremonies on Saturday start with the *dipo* girls going to the stream. They are dressed only in their red lion-cloth, carrying a new calabash and some dirty clothes. Anybody in the family may give them some dirty linen to be washed for them. Upon their return from the washing activities, the women folk may receive them with singing and dancing such as:

First-born maiden! She has gone	<i>Maa Dedeyo, eya</i>
To bath and has returned	<i>du ehe ne eba</i>
Odo's child has gone to the stream	<i>Odo bi ya pa</i>
And she said that she found no water	<i>ne ek[: en[nyu</i>

(Huber, 1993, p. 171)

Teye, O. E (2011) contended that some of the items given to them to wash in the olden days may include men's cloth, white bed sheets, white towels, and the likes. This activity is known as *ni bimi* (a test to examine if the *dipo* girl knows how to wash before going into marriage.) It is also a self-cleansing ritual because they are bathed in the river after the washing activities. Nyumuah (1998) postulates that on their return from their washing activities and ritual bath from the stream, they were received home amidst jubilation, singing, dancing to *klama* tunes. This reception of the girls from their washing and bathing activities by the people calls for community participation. This goes to support Djokpe's (2001) contention in his long essay that music is a powerful means of communication in the traditional African life and it gives outlet to the emotional expression of their religious life. Music helps to unite the people to express their fellowship and participation in all socio-cultural activities in the community.

The old woman, places grains of roasted maize and groundnuts, small pieces of sugar cane and sliced dried coconut on the lips of the candidates, repeating it three times. This is to indicate to them that after this, they are entering the real phase of their initiation, during which all these foods (non-Krobo original diets) will be forbidden to them. Occasional singing and dancing add colour to this gay Saturday celebration. They continue singing *ha* songs such as:

Pound the Saturday's fufu	Ny[[gbee H]-fufui
That you may eat!	ny[[ke n[ny[ye!
Prepare the Sunday's porridge	Ny[[tʃi H]gba-ku
That you may eat!	ny[[ke n[ny[ye!

(Huber, 1993 P. 171)

Late in the afternoon, towards the evening, the shaved part of every candidate's head is blackened with dissolved charcoal. They give each candidate a long walking stick, which they hold in the hand. They march throughout the neighbourhoods in the company of girls and women singing and jubilating. They announce in loud voices "tomorrow come and light the fire for us". This is an invitation to all people to take part in the day's celebration, which will be the climax of the whole initiation rite (Huber, (1963 and 1993) and (Nyumuah, 1998). About one hour before sunset, the preparations for the most important ritual, which is the climbing of the sacred stone, begins. Relatives who have been arriving since Saturday fill the compound. Excitement runs high when singing starts and the candidates' bodies shining from the ointments, dressed in a tiny loin-cloth only, are led to stand on the antelope skin three times. Nyumuah (1998) stated that, as they are ready to go, they are given walking sticks and are forbidden to talk to anybody on their way to and from. To ensure this, *tslana* (a leaf) is stuck between their lips. They walk to the sacred stone in the company of some elderly women of their homes while singing and dancing to *ha* songs.

While a section of the women folk keeps on singing and dancing to *ha* songs around, the others are busy tying heavy strings to valuable beads, especially, *hunua* (the reddish-bluish beads) around the girls' waists, and decorated with dots of white clay. Finally, they are given their walking sticks and as a sign that they are strictly forbidden to talk on the way, a leaf is put between their lips. Together with some adult women in the community who sing and dance on the way, while a section of the group awaits other groups who are late in coming, they sing *ha* songs of ridicule such as the one below to tease the late comers:

The <i>dipo</i> girls' mothers	<i>Dipo-yi any[m[</i>
Did not watch the sun	<i>ahi[w[pu !</i>
What kind of meat did you cook?	<i>M[ni lo ny[hoo?</i>
Vulture meat!	<i>Okpoku lo!</i>

What kind of fire did you light? *M[ni la ny[sr[?*
 Fire of palm-branches *takani la*
 (Huber, 1993; P. 177) and (Nyumuah, 1998; P.36)

Teye, O. E (2011) called it *T[gb[t[*; (the stage that is the most vital in the *dipo* ceremony.) Here, the candidates are taken to the sacred stone where they are made to climb it in turns. The sacred stone by its powers reveals any of the *dipo* candidates carrying pregnancy. This is called "*e je dipo*". When it happens this way, the victim is banned from home and a ritual is performed to purify the sacred stone. The successful climbing of the sacred stone is like a hellish situation they have passed through and have won the victory. This calls for jubilation, dancing and singing of *klama* songs. For each girl to be seated on the sacred stone, a tax is to be paid to the priest or priestess in charge. In the dull hidden grove, in the presence of women only, each of the adolescent girls is three times seated upon the sacred stone and then remains on it for some short time. The following song is usually sung when going to or coming from the sacred stone:

<i>Dzanma</i> said: let us go!	<i>Dzanma k[</i> : waaya!
We have gone and we have returned	<i>W'aya n[waba</i> :
No trouble was on the way	<i>N]ko be bl] he</i>
The old lady	<i>Yomo]</i>
Stands on the grass field	<i>da na n]</i>
(and see) the grass bows down	<i>n[na hu] si-oo</i>

(Huber, 1993; P. 178-179)

Nyumuah (1998) put forward that while a section of the women folk dress the girls (candidates) for their journey to climb the sacred stone, the rest sing, dance and jubilate to *ha* tunes. On the arrival at the place of the sacred stone, a libation is poured to *Nene Klow[ki* (the deity of *dipo*) and ancestors to bless all the girls who will sit on the stone. After the libation, the priestess guides the initiates to sit on the sacred stone three times. The priestess then quotes an ancient song to the hearing of the *dipo* girls as follows:

I am <i>Totloku Ayiman]</i>	<i>I mi ji Totloku Ayiman]</i>
A girl climbs me	<i>Yoku]] mi</i>
Before she marries a husband	<i>Loko e gbaa e huno</i>

With this song, the girls are always reminded and frightened with expulsion from the society should the exercise reveal a previous pregnancy or abortion (Nyumuah, 1998; P. 36-37). Arriving in their home compounds, excitement and jubilation continues. While the carriers of the initiates get

bathed in perspiration, they place the girls down upon the antelope skin, the whole women folk dance around them with wild gestures and suggestive pantomimes. Their melodious *ha* songs triumphantly echo in the darkness of the night. The song below is normally sung:

Ayen] Mate

I have seen something (great)
Our (ritual) which we spoke about
Today the time has reached for it
Where *Siak]* stands
Dome people fight
The *Adamo* fruit is ripe in the grove
Adamo pluckers, come
(Huber, 1993 P. 179)

Ayen] Mate

lhi[n]ko
Wan] n[wade
Wan] su n] !
Hene Siak] da
Dome ta!
Adamo fu n[b] he
Adamo hlali-]m[ny[[ba

Nyumuah(1998; P. 37) also reported that after they have finished with the stone climbing ceremony all the people return home in procession singing *klama* songs rejoicing and jubilating to a popular song as follows:

Jangma said we must go

We have gone and returned
No trouble was on the way

Jangma k[waaya !

Waya waba
N]ko be bl] he

The initiates are made to sit down on the antelope skin three times. Now some young men with ordinary knives begin to shave the girls' heads. During this time, the women around change the tune of their songs into the war-like and somewhat mysterious *wlue* melodies, which like *ha* are considered characteristic of the *dipo* rite:

My father loves me most tenderly
My father anoints my body with oil
Ahee !, aa-yeye !
Maiden, sit down
They mark you with priestly beads
Ahee ! aa-yeye!
I have seen something, my friend
So I am happy
Ahee ! aa-yeye !
(Huber, 1993; P. 179-180)

l ts[pua mu ts]ts]
l ts[wo ihe nu !
Ahee !, aa-yeye !
Maa-yo, mo hisi
n[amu] mo la !
Ahee ! aa-yeye !
l na n]ko, ihu[!
Kpaako ibua ba !
ahee ! aa-yeye !

All these samples express the happiness of the people over the fact that their daughters thereby have become true *Krobo* women in accordance with the ancient rule. During the period of the initiates' confinement, on three consecutive days or only on the last day, the *yo-sami* is performed. While the girls lie in the *dipo* room, a young man of their kin group is anointed and dressed in a white loin-cloth, beads, and hair-dress of silk. Like them, he has to stand on the antelope skin while the women sing and dance around him. They mark him with white clay and place a little piece of wood into his mouth, which should remind him to perform the ceremony with dignity and in strict silence. With a long walking staff in his hand and accompanied by the women he solemnly and slowly marches over the place towards the room of the initiates. The women folk around him dance and sing appropriate *wlue* song as the following:

Like a king, walk slowly!	<i>Ohene koonyi[-oo!</i>
<i>Ahee! aa-yeye!</i>	<i>Ahee! aa-yeye!</i>
<i>K]lete's ankles</i>	<i>K]lete nane si-oo</i>
Are adorned with priestly beads	<i>Amu] l[la</i>
<i>Ahee! aa-yeye!</i>	<i>Ahee! aa-yeye!</i>
Go on gently!	<i>Oh[[l[dz]dz]-oo!</i>
Here is the father's house	<i>Ts[we n[</i>
<i>Ahee! aa-yeye!</i>	<i>Ahee! aa-yeye!</i>
<i>Dzanma</i> went to perform " <i>yo-sami</i> "	<i>Dzanma ya yo-sami</i>
<i>Dzanma</i> ate cooked food	<i>Dzanma ye kataku</i>
<i>Ahee! aa-yeye!</i>	<i>Ahee! aa-yeye!</i>

(Huber, 1993; P. 182)

In likewise manner, Nyumuah (1998) reported that this custom is performed for the girls in the period of confinement. At a particular stage, the girls are made to sleep with their faces down and their heads are covered with cloths. A young man of their kind dressed in a white lion-cloth with beads and silky hair is introduced into the room. He is made to stand on an antelope skin while the women folk sing and dance around him like a chief. The young man is made to walk either on a mat or cloth on the floor three times to and from the *dipo* room. This ceremony is done solemnly amidst the singing of *wlue* songs by the women folk.

4.0 The Closing Celebrations (Yi-f]mi)

The initiates are richly dressed up with heavy and gorgeous clothes, silk-kerchiefs, beads, jewels and red parrot feathers. The women, particularly, mothers of the initiates and close related women tie strings of beads around the girls' necks, wrists, arms, waists and legs. They accompany their

adorning works with lively singing and dancing to the *haye* or *sa-yo* tune. The following is one of the favourite and most appropriate songs for the occasion.

Adorned maiden; thou maiden!	<i>Dzawale saa-yo! Saa-yo lee</i>
Sit here that they dress thee up!	<i>mo hisi n[abu mo bo!</i>
<i>Ozoki</i> , hail unto thee!	<i>Ozoki lee, ohee!</i>

When the initiates are ready in their full decoration, they are led to the open compound where the male members of the house and other representative groups are assembled to watch their first dancing performance. In short steps, gracefully swaying of hands, each of them modestly and prudently moves forward, turns to the right, to the left, move backward, show their charming dancing skills while the singers, men and women, in their *haye* songs celebrate their excellent appearance and the happy end of their initiation. Proudly, mothers spread their cloths on the ground in front of their dancing daughters; and fathers gently embracing them, offering their knees as seats of honour to them. In most houses, the *klama* drums are played and the women clap their hands to the rhythm of *haye* dance which after short interval, is resumed repeatedly on Saturday night and particularly during Sunday or Monday. The following song is repeated three times or more in their customary variation and in their characteristic ensemble of solo and chorus.

I shall bathe the maid	<i>Madu maa he</i>
I shall anoint the maid	<i>Makpa maa he</i>
On the Sunday's play ground	<i>n[H]gba ma n]</i>
(Huber, 1993; P. 184)	

Nyumuah (1998) reckoned that with the *yi fimi* rite coming over, the ban on foreign diets is lifted and the girls can eat any food of their choice. The initiates are then dressed and sent out to thank the people who came to help. On their outing, these successful *dipo* graduates are richly dressed with rich and magnificent cloths, silk head-kerchiefs, precious beads, jewels, feathers of parrot and other ornaments from the treasuries of the ancestors. In addition to these decorations, beads are worn around their wrists, waist, and their knees. As they go along thanking people, they display their prowess in *klama* dancing and singing to the public and receive gifts, and this draws the curtain on *dipo* as a puberty rite of the *Krobo* people.

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