Kambon-waa: The Music of the Dagbamba Warrior Tradition and the Individual Negotiation of Metric Orientation

By Karl Haas - Tufts University

Biography

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Abstract

In Ghana's Northern Region members of a Dagbamba warrior lineage of Asante origin known as the *kambonsi* perform a traditional repertoire of drumming and dancing called *Kambon-waa*. Through the performance of Kambon-waa the participants of the event fulfill a religious and civic obligation to drum, dance, and shoot muskets at funerals for the repose of the spirit of the deceased, while providing a means for the outward expression of identity for the kambonsi themselves. These warrior musicians rhythmically and melodically recount the history of the kambonsi, honor the warriors and chiefs of past and present, and challenge those in attendance to "right living" through the recitation of proverbs.

My article is primarily concerned with two main goals: the documentation of a tradition that has thus far remained absent from the written archive; and the exposition of my theory of a "movable 1." This document is based on information gathered in 2006-7 during eight weeks of studying and performing with kambonsi in and around Tamale, Ghana through both formal lessons as well as participation in performances in their traditional contexts.

EDITORS' NOTE:
Due to limitations of browser compatibility with some alphabets, certain letters and diacritics have been modified in the online version of this article. The .pdf version that is available for download contains the original text.

Introduction

In Ghana's Northern Region, members of a Dagbamba warrior lineage perform a traditional repertoire of drumming and dancing called *Kambon-waa* (lit. warrior's dance). The term Kambon-waa refers to the performance events of the *kambonsi* (sing. *kambonga*), or warriors, of the traditional kingdom of Dagbon, located in the present-day nation states of Ghana and Togo. It extends to the music, dancing, and social events performed for the funerals of warriors and members of warrior families, as well as chiefs from non-warrior families. Additionally, Kambon-waa refers to the piece in the repertoire played specifically for dancing. Through the performance of Kambon-waa, the participants of the event fulfill a religious and civic obligation to drum and dance for the repose of the spirit of the deceased, while the musicians rhythmically recount the history of the kambonsi, honor the warriors and chiefs of past and present, and praise individuals in attendance through the musico-linguistic recitation of proverbs, musically rendered in both Dagbani and Twi languages.[1]

The purpose of this article is twofold: the documentation of a musical tradition that has thus far remained absent from the written archive; and the exposition of my theory of a "movable 1." Throughout this article I discuss the cultural and temporal contexts of these performances as well as the parallels to the usage of this repertoire in times of war.

I will also discuss issues involved in applying African concepts to Western analytic paradigms, especially the practice of subjective orientation within the musical timeline. I argue that the Western musicological notion of "1" is a cross-cultural concept, ultimately based not on a uniquely Western practice of counting beats but on the mutual agreement of a musical, temporal point of reference. It has been my observation, based on many hours of

performing and listening, that this concept is indeed at work in the music of Kambon-waa, and quite possibly throughout Dagbamba music. It is my position that in most Western music the point of reference, the “1,”—written, verbalized, or implicit—is *objective*, whereas in the examples discussed below it is *subjective*. Through the use of standard musical notation in the analysis of Kambon-waa, I argue not only the subjectivity of metric orientation, but that this musical reference point is individually negotiable within the temporal framework of the music, a theory I call "Movable 1."

Many of the most important works in the canon of African drumming have dealt specifically with the interaction of the instruments within an ensemble.2 The analysis presented here differs from many of the well known musicological studies of African rhythm in two rather significant ways. Rather than investigating the topics of polyrhythm, cross-rhythms, or inherent rhythm, the present analysis deals with the issue of the subjective, *personal*, points of reference within musical time of specific performers. Secondly, the musical examples below deal with the metric placement of stylistically informed improvisations, what Ampene has referred to as *recomposition,* rather than the musical text of traditional compositions (2005).

This document is based on information gathered in 2006-7 during eight weeks of studying and performing with kambonsi in and around Tamale, Ghana through both formal lessons as well as performances in their traditional contexts.3 The methodology employed for my fieldwork in Dagbon was participant observation whereby I tried as best as I could in a Dagbamba fashion to adhere to the training outlined by my teachers, in accordance with Hood's classic model of the development of bi-musicality (1982). I lived in the home of a chief and patriarch of a large, traditional family of drummers on the outskirts of Tamale, interviewed drummers and warrior-musicians, and learned about a specific genre of traditional music through prearranged lessons and performances at funerals throughout the traditional districts situated within Tamale as well as in surrounding villages.

In the course of my studies I learned the playing techniques of the two primary instruments of the Kambon-waa ensemble: the aforementioned dawoulei and the tension drum called the *lunga*4 (plural *lunsi*), the Dagbamba traditional “talking drum.”5 At its most basic, the Kambon-waa ensemble consists of a large lunga which is played by the leader of the ensemble, a small lunga, and a dawoulei. This is an arrangement that, according to Agawu, “reflects the standard hierarchy of a West African drum ensemble,” in which the dawoulei functions as the “density referent” in the top layer, the middle layer is the smaller support drum, and the lowest layer is occupied by the deepest pitched drum which is played by the leader of the ensemble (1986:66). The group is, however, typically augmented with multiple dawoulei players, one or more long, single headed drums called *dalega*, a traditional transverse flute called kalimbo, and any number of other traditional instruments (see below for a description of these and other instruments).

Following the assassination of Yaa Naa Yakubu Andani II in 2002, the government instituted a ban on Dagbamba drumming, as it was believed to be inciting violence. When the late Yaa Naa was finally buried in March 2006, the ban was lifted, allowing, after four years, drumming once again to accompany funeral celebrations. Many of those who had died during the ban were buried without final funeral celebrations, thus creating a backlog of events that could finally take place with the requisite drumming and dancing. This resulted in a busier than usual funeral season for drummers, allowing many opportunities for me to participate. When I returned to Tamale in late December of 2006 it was during the peak of the dry season in Northern Ghana, which corresponds to the time when most Dagbambas make funerals for their relatives.

As a result of this situation my teachers, Buaru Alhassan Tia and Inusa Alhassan, had less time to spend with me in lessons, but there were ample occasions to perform with them and other Kambon-waa groups during the three weeks I was there. While I was explicitly given more rhythms in lessons during the rainy season than the dry season, the funeral performances allowed me greater opportunities to see and experience Kambon-waa in its intended contexts. As a result I was able to arrive at a deeper, more phenomenologically-based understanding of what these events are about than private lessons and interviews could ever allow.6

The Kambonsi

The institution of the kambonsi is said to have come to the Dagbamba from the Asante, most likely at the time of the forging of diplomatic relations between the two kingdoms around the middle of the 18th century (see Oppong 1966; Wilks 1975). In fact, “kambonsi” is the Dagbani word for “Asante” as well as the term used to describe the Dagbamba warriors.

The kambonsi, like many groups in Dagbon such as drummers, blacksmiths, butchers, and barbers, are a family lineage that traces their ancestors back many generations to a single individual named Tonboggu. Tonboggu was a Dagbamba hunter and warrior credited by my teachers as having introduced Kambon-waa to Dagbon. There is an Asante influence evident in the music through the instrumentation of the ensemble which includes an iron double-bell called *dawoulei*, the *atumpan*, large side-by-side drums referred to locally as "talking drums," and the usage of Asante proverbs and praise names played by the various drums and bells of the ensemble.[7]

The performance event of the kambonsi involves five groups of people: the chiefs, sub-chiefs, and their attendants; the musicians; the gunmen, or musketeers; the *kpalinda* (sing. *kpalin*), the women that follow alongside the procession and shout encouragement during the *Gun-gon* (see below); and what I will refer to as typical kambonsi – those members of kambonsi lineage who are not part of any chief's contingent but who make up the majority of the dancers, and along with the musketeers sing songs and, through exuberant and often raucous behavior, contribute to the general revelry of the event.

The Gun-gon is the stage of the daytime performance commonly referred to as "the shooting of guns," and is the principal purpose of the kambonsi's participation in most funeral proceedings. In fact, in conversations regarding the performances of Kambon-waa at daytime events, Fatawu, my assistant and guide in Tamale, would frequently say that we were going to such-and-such-a-place "for the shooting of guns." Conversely, when discussing kambonsi involvement in wake-keepings, all-night funeral celebrations involving drumming and dancing, he would say we were going "to dance Kambon-waa." People dance before, during, and after the Gun-gon, and they shoot guns during the wake-keeping, but the distinction between the two events seems important, and speaks to the centrality of these actions in their respective rituals. I will briefly describe the order of events associated with both of these performance contexts below.

Whenever the group is on the move, whether to or from a performance, the musicians will be playing, usually Sochendi. From the time that they head out, through the performance of the Gun-gon, the music will rarely stop. While on foot the group moves in a procession. The chiefs and sub-chiefs are at the front of the procession and are lined up in hierarchical order, with the lowest ranking chief in front and the highest in back, generally the top warrior chief, or *Kambon-naa*. Each chief is usually accompanied by his *wulana*, or sub-chief, and occasionally an attendant who will hold his umbrella. Directly behind Kambon-naa is the lead kambonlunga, followed in order by the support lunsi, and behind them the dawoulei players. The lead dawoulei player, playing the *paranbo* role, is often a man that also serves as an *akarima* to a warrior chief, a functionary whose position is to musically praise the chief and send messages on the chief's behalf. The musicians are then followed by the kambonsi gunmen who may cheer, dance, or sing as they walk.

The length of the procession is often lined on both sides by *kpalinda*, whom I took to be the wives and female family members of the men in the procession. The women dance as they move with the group, adding to the soundscape with ululations, called *kpalinga*.

The typical kambonsi are made up of those that have traveled along with the group as well as members of kambonsi families that are in attendance along with the other members of their community. Along with the musketeers and the occasional chief, it is this mostly male group that dances Kambon-waa after the performance of the Gun-gon and during the all night wake-keeping.

At this point it is worth noting the image and reputation that the kambonsi have within Dagbamba society. As Fatawu once said to me, "There is nowhere you can go and see kambonsi behaving normally." The kambonsi often exhibit loud and brash behavior while together, a trait that is exaggerated during Kambon-waa amidst the loud music, shouting, cheering, and ever present, extremely loud report from the muskets. This behavior is exacerbated by the copious and public consumption of alcohol, an activity which few typical Dagbambas would dare without expecting public scorn. They regularly wear ripped hats, tattered *gbingmaas* (traditional smocks), and other articles of clothing considered outlandish by the general society. The movements of their dancing, too, are considered wild and unorthodox.

Kambon-waa is played by both skilled musical specialists, such as my teachers, as well as any "typical" kambonsi who feels inclined to participate. In the course of the performances of which I was a part, many people came and went throughout the duration of the performances. At no point did I see anyone turned away or excluded from participation in any way, and any kambonga who wishes to add to the performance and celebration is free to do so, if not explicitly encouraged. Whether non-kambonsi are excluded or if it would simply be deemed inappropriate behavior on the actor's part is unclear, and I did not ask. I, of course, was not born into the kambonsi lineage, but I

was told on a number of occasions by warrior chief Kakpag Kambon-naa Sheru, that through some combination of my dedication to their tradition and the respect that this dedication showed to them, I was one of them and I should consider him my father.

It was my observation that the kambonsi musicians can be demarcated into three categories roughly analogous to our conception of professionals, enthusiasts, and hobbyists: those who are serious musicians who have been diligent in their training and perform frequently during the funeral season; an intermediate category of musicians that have acquired substantial knowledge of the music but lack either the dedication to the tradition or may not have the time to dedicate because of employment or some other reason; and those that may perform on occasion, perhaps for a few minutes at a funeral that they would otherwise attend. While I suspect that my teachers would agree with these classifications, they are my own construction for the purpose of showing the range of musicians and musicianship in these performances.

The Musical Instruments

The Kambon-waa ensemble can have more than two dozen performers or as few as three, and in my time in Tamale in 2006-7 I saw at least ten different musical instruments featured:

Large lunga - Lead kambonlunsi played drums that were larger than even the large drums used by lead drummers in the lunsi ensembles, if only by 6 or 7 cm. Their construction was otherwise the same as typical lunsi (See Locke, 1990:29-32).
Small lunga - These drums were the size of the smallest lunsi used by adult drummers. My own drum is typical of small lunsi played by kambonlunsi and measures about 47cm. long with heads of about 22cm. in diameter. I did not see lunsi of what might be considered a medium size – the lead drummer played a large lunga, and support drummers played small lunsi.
Dawoulei – A side-by-side iron double bell, called a *gongon* by the Akan in the South. One bell is pitched lower than the other, generally by about a major third. It is played with a tip of a bull's horn, usually about 15 cm. long.



[1]

Plate 1. Dawoulei and lunsi in Zugbeng, Ghana, 1/8/07. Buaru Alhassan Tia is in foreground, with the author farthest left.

Kalimbo (side blown piccolo flute) - Approximately 20-25 cm. in length, the kalimbo is a transverse flute with four

notched finger holes. It can be made of bamboo, wood, or, just as often, plastic piping. The kalimbo was the instrument that accompanied the core battery instrumentation most frequently in my experience, and was featured playing in many other ensembles including performances of the group dances Baamaaya and Jera, as well as with lunsi praise-drumming groups.

Dalega - A log drum of about 150 cm. employing tuning pegs and a cowskin head, it is played with two sticks whose shapes have been compared to the numeral 7 and is not entirely unlike the atumpan (see below). Sticks that have naturally occurring angles are chosen, unlike lunga or gung gong sticks, which are boiled and subsequently bent into shape. The male (*daleloggu*) and female (*daleneng*) drums are essentially the same, with the male having a lower pitch and (usually) playing the support part, and the femalehaving a higher pitch and playing the *paranbo* role.8



[2]

Plate 2. Dalega on stands.



[3]

Plate 3. Dalega being carried.

Atumpan - Asante "talking drums," they are played as a pair with one drum pitched higher than the other. In Dagbon they are typically associated with chieftancy, played by an *akarima* who plays praises to the chief and may send messages from the chief to the community.
Wua - This is a wooden end blown flute, 15-20 cm. in length, typically with two holes on the front side and one at the base.
Gbeggu - These are trumpets made from the horns of a particular type of antelope that was once abundant in northern Ghana, but it is protected and/or has migrated away from the region. They are played in a large chorus, utilizing a hocket technique.
Sabaani9 - Sabaani are metal clappers analogous to Moroccan qaraqeb or Tunisian shqashiq. They are made by blacksmiths and are typically used in the ensembles of the blacksmith's dances Dikala and Machele-waa.



[4]

Plate 4. Blacksmith in Tamale making sabaani.

Gung gong[10] - Large side-strung bass drum used in lunsi ensembles, played with a single curved stick.[11]

There may be as many as a dozen or more musicians playing at any given time, but there must be at least three for the music to be “proper” Kambon-waa: large lunga, small lunga, and dawoulei. In a lesson with my two primary teachers, Buaru and Inusa, Alhaji Lun-naa Abubakari explained that it was these instruments that carried “the full talk” (Interview, 7/05/06).

I was never told that one or another instrument was not suitable to be played in Kambon-waa, nor was I told that one instrument or another (beyond lunsi, dawoulei, and dalega) were typically added to the ensemble. I am inclined to think that almost any instrument would be welcome in the ensemble if it were perceived to be contributing to the sound of the group. The dalega and the kalimbo are the most common additions to the skeleton ensemble of lunsi and dawoulei, but all of the above instruments serve the same purpose of making the group sound better, helping to inspire dancers, and contributing their energy to the event. I believe that this is an important distinction, between the instruments delivering the compositional foundation of the “talk,” and the other instruments which contribute in subordinate, however significant, roles.

Gun-gon

There is an appropriate time for the performance of each piece in the Kambon-waa repertoire in both Gun-gon and wake keeping contexts. The Gun-gon roughly parallels the order of performance during the waging of warfare, and was, in fact, explained to me in those terms.

> FA: When a chief is crying for help, and akarima want to inform, he will begin with Chakowili, so everybody will then gather. When they are going they play Sochendi, and when they reach, they play Chakowili, for the fire, for everybody to fire. To shoot guns. And from Chakowili, if they succeed they will then play Kambon-waa back home. And after Kambon-waa back home, they play Bendewili for drinks. And after drink Namyo, and everybody dismissed. (Interview, 1/10/07)

Before a Kambon-waa group proceeds to a performance site, the musicians, gunmen, sub-chiefs, and any other

parties interested in taking part in the festivities will gather at the chief's house. The meeting times were generally late morning or early afternoon, but varied from event to event. On my first full day back in Dagbon in December 2006 we met around 9:30am, presumably because we had to make a trip to Tarikpaa, about 45-60 minutes drive on dirt roads. There is generally considerable milling about, talking, and shots of alcohol (even at 10am) while participants straggle in and gunmen fill their pouches with gunpowder.

Once it is decided that it is time to go, the lead kambolunga will begin playing praises to the chief, who is seated in his *zong*, or assembly hall, surrounded by his sub-chiefs and the other musicians. If the chief has a praise singer, as does Kakpag Kambon-naa Sheru, he will alternate with the lunga in praising the chief. If a knowledgeable dawoulei player is in attendance he will also interject musical phrases praising the Kambon-naa.

When the praising is completed, the leader plays a musical phrase to call *Sochendi* 12 (lit. "walking on the road") while still inside the chief's assembly hall, and everyone present will file out and take their places in line to travel to the performance destination. The typical instrumentation of an ensemble traveling to perform the Gun-gon is one lead drummer, one or two support drummers, two to four dawoulei players, and occasionally a dalega which is carried on the head while some one walks behind playing it. If the kambonsi are traveling by truck or by tractor, the music continues as everyone climbs onto the vehicle, otherwise they will move out from the Kambon-naa's house on foot, drumming and shouting as they go.

Once the group has arrived at the funeral celebration to perform the Gun-gon, they will proceed to an open area that has been designated for use by the kambonsi, generally a small, unused field, or even a trash dump. If the event is for an important person such as a chief there may be multiple Kambon-waa groups in attendance, in which case the group may have to wait their turn, as we did at Tarikpaa on 12/29/06. For the funeral of the Muntana of Nyeko, a high ranking warrior chief, on 1/11/07 there was a queue of two or three groups at a time for much of the afternoon. While waiting to enter, the group will continue to play Sochendi until it is time to enter the space. For smaller events the group will process directly to the performance area, an event differentiated from the Gun-gon proper by the term Gun-gon *kpebu*, and begin playing Chakowili to commence the Gun-gon.

The group will be configured as previously described, with the chiefs walking in front, followed by musicians, with the gunmen in the rear. Any women, children, and typical kambonsi will join the spectators at this point, although some men will continue to walk with the entourage. As Fatawu and I watched video footage of a Gun-gon performance, he noted that the procession is a boast on the part of the chief and his warriors, as a show of strength in numbers. The procession will circle the performance space three times, and on the third time the gunmen will spread themselves out along the perimeter of the space and the musicians will gather together, along the edge of the crowd of spectators. The procession then stops and the guns begin to fire one by one, in order down the line, often directed by a man that commands them as to when to shoot. If one of the muskets fails to fire, the next man in line will shoot while the issue with the gun is fixed, typically a problem with the powder catching a spark. When the musket is ready the man will be told to fire again. After the last shot is fired the crowd cheers loudly, especially the *kpalinda*, the women who have come with the kambonsi, and the procession begins moving again around the performance space. The scene is repeated twice, with the musicians playing Chakowili all the while.

After the last shot of the third round is fired, the crowd erupts and kambonsi flood the performance space, running, jumping, and shouting. The lead kambonga then calls the piece of the repertoire known as Kambon-waa, a small circle is formed, with the musicians on one side, and people dance for a brief period before moving to the house of the deceased. Once the house is reached the group switches back to Chakowili and enters single file through the *gambei*, the compound wall that is broken upon the landlord's death, and quickly exits through the gate of the compound. The musicians reposition themselves outside the house for more shooting of guns. Each gunman individually then fires a shot into the house's *nappoggu*, a small room used for housing chickens or other small livestock. Fatawu speculated that the reason for this was that the room acted as a sounding chamber, and the nappoggu was the only room in the house suitable for firing a black powder musket. After the last shot is fired, there is more celebrating and the musicians once again take up Kambon-waa.

Wake-keeping

Of the four wake-keepings I attended, three of them began with a pre-performance "jam session" whereby the musicians gathered at a location removed from the performance venue and played through various pieces from the Kambon-waa repertoire, smoked cigarettes, and drank *akpeteshie*. Before the performance on 1/18/07 for the wake-keeping of Guma-naa at Kakpagyili we gathered at 3am about a quarter mile from the performance space, outside a small bar with woven grass walls and only three bottles of liquor.

It is during this time that teenage boys and other novices like myself, if present, can try their hand at playing the music in an environment where they are safe to make mistakes without bringing down the energy of the main event and can receive tutelage from more experienced players. However, I was told that the main purpose of this pre-performance was to inform people in the surrounding area of the impending event of the dancing of Kambon-waa. After about thirty to forty minutes, when it is deemed time to go, the leader will call Sochendi and the group will march to the venue. On the night of my first wake-keeping we met up at the house of the Kambon-naa of Kakpagyili who, unbeknownst to me, was overseeing my training with Buaru and Inusa. On Alhaji's recommendation, I offered him 20,000 cedis as *kola* as well as a bottle of White Horse whiskey for the group.

We played outside of Kambon-naa's house while people arrived, and then moved out en masse, marching single file through the darkness as we played. I played dawoulei while we walked for what seemed like a very long time, as a dalega pounded directly behind me. As we grew closer to the performance venue, an open area just outside a large compound, the marching pace gradually quickened and the excitement level increased, and with it the tempo of the music. By the time we arrived and the musicians took their places for the evening we were playing at what felt like breakneck speed, about 170 b.p.m.

Once everyone is situated in the performance space, the leader will call Kambon-waa and the evening of dancing begins. There is usually no break in the playing - the musicians simply switch from the Sochendi parts to the Kambon-waa parts. Chakowili was played during each of the pre-performance sessions that precede wake-keeping performances, but did not have any apparent function aside from waking the neighbors and alerting them to the impending event. Even in this capacity, Chakowili did not have a special significance beyond that of any of the other pieces played at these gatherings. It was not performed during any of the wake-keepings that I attended.

The "1"

The use of counting to mark musical time is so entrenched in the perception of Western music so as to be considered a distinguishing characteristic of it - "classical," popular, or otherwise. The most important number in counting beats, and crucial to the Western understanding of musical time, is 1. When experiencing music in common time, beats 2, 3, or 4 are just as capable as serving as organizing points in the timeline as 1, but 1 is the point of reference that we in the West use as the anchor, so to speak. 1 is in many ways, for the typical Western musician and listener, the most significant moment of each measure. Even when other beats in the measure are stressed and 1 is not, as in jazz or reggae, 1 remains the point from which these other points derive meaning. It would seem, then, that 1 is an objective point in the musical timeline of most Western music, readily identifiable by both musicians and listeners—often the point at which musical phrases originate and/or resolve.

Throughout African-American musical styles, and other diasporic traditions in the New World, offbeats and backbeats serve important rhythmic functions within the recurring temporal framework, but offbeats take on meaning in relation to downbeats, and backbeats take on meaning in relation to the 1. Although musical phrases will vary widely across and within styles, 1 functions as the anchoring point in the music.

More important than the numeral 1, however, is the significance attached to it. While the practice of counting and the use of barlines are exclusively Western, the deeper meaning of 1 is not. I believe that the conception of a point of reference in musical time which performers as well as listeners use to orient themselves within the larger temporal framework of the music is a cross-cultural one. Significantly, it was my observation that in the case of Kambon-waa this time point of rhythmic orientation can shift in the course of a single performance.

It is helpful to view 1 as an abstract conception to which Westerners are both enculturated and schooled. 1 is the moment of temporal reference in a recurring timeline from which flow the other numbered and counted beats, which are then understood in relation to 1. The African concept of patterns relating to patterns (see Merriam 1981), rather than to an abstraction, allows one to phrase to various points in the measure and the resultant effect is one of rhythmic intricacy arising from off-beat phrasing that is "of particular interest to the African as a means of heightening the rhythmic tensions of a single line of music" (Nketia 1963:108). This is significant because the musician is then free to use any point in the pattern as a potential reference point.

As in the Kambon-waa pieces Namyo and Bendewili (analyzed below), and, I believe, many other African musics, musicians and listeners do not anchor themselves to 1 in quite the same way as most Westerners,[13] and can thus choose alternate reference points in the timeline to which they can orient themselves. When I participated in music-making in Dagbon I found my place in the music by relating my part not to what I believed to be the 1, but to

other parts in the music, which was in this case the support dawoulei. The presence or placement of 1 thus becomes less important, although it was my experience that it does seem that it nonetheless retains importance somewhere above the level of the other points in the pattern. In Bendewili, there is a preponderance of musical events that phrase to what I have labeled the 1 and 3, including the lead and support dawoulei, lead and support dalega, and the lead lunga. However, as I will show in the examples below, the musicians may change the position of their own personal point of reference, their individual sense of 1, to alternate points in the timeline in the course of a single performance (see Locke 1982b).

Central to the cross-cultural application of this concept is the acknowledgement that this point of musical orientation is not necessarily related to its place in the Western construction of the meter, but rather to points of rhythmic significance in the topos. Furthermore, as I will show in the pages that follow, this point of reference can be individually negotiated within the temporal framework. Stated more clearly, I believe that the concept of “1” is not only present in the music of Kambon-waa, it is individually negotiable. This time point is not merely a culturally bound indicator of the beginning of a measure, but rather a concept used by Dagbamba musicians to mark their own personal point of reference in a recurring musical timeline.

Notation key **[5]**
(click to see transcriptions)

Namyo

The music of Namyo is notated below in duple binary meter, usually played at about 100 b.p.m, and is characterized by the high degree of syncopation in all of the basic parts, with the exclusion of dalega, and in recordings I made of lead lunga performances. Throughout the examples below there is a frequent stressing of sixteenth note offbeats, as in the Namyo topos shown in example 1.

Example 1. **[6]** Namyo Basic Dawoulei

During my first stay in Tamale, I studied only Sochendi, Chakowili, Kambon-waa, and Bendewili and consequently was never taught any of the dawoulei paranbo rhythms for Namyo. I did, however, identify two specific rhythms that were played frequently in performances, notated in example 2.

Example 2. **[7]** Namyo Dawoulei Paranbo Patterns

Each of the paranbo patterns in the above example feature syncopation in the high bell tones, all of which fall on sixteenth note offbeats. The basic support lunga rhythm in example 3 is similarly syncopated:

Example 3. **[8]** Namyo Small Lunga

Example 4 shows the Namyo dalega support rhythm shown to me. The sixteenth note figures emphasize the backbeat, or 2, rather than the offbeat partials 2 and 4 seen in the previous examples.

Example 4. **[9]** Namyo Basic Dalega Rhythm

My objective here is not to analyze either example measure by measure, but rather to identify common themes as performed in what I believe to be two different metric orientations within the same timeline of Namyo.

Example 5. **[10]** Namyo Lead Lunga (Audio Example 1)
AC_FL_RunContent('type','application/x-shockwave-flash','data','/audio/player.swf','id','audioplayer','height','24','width','290','movie','/audio/player','flashvars','playerID=4&bg=0xf8f8f8&leftbg=0x998D93&lefticon=0xFFFFFF&rightbg=0x705E67&rightbghover=0x999999&righticon=0xFFFFFF&righticonhover=0xffffff&text=0x666666&slider=0x666666&track=0xFFFFFF&border=0x666666&loader=0xE7E0E2&loop=no&autostart=no&soundFile=/audio/Vol13/HAAS01NamyoLeadLunga.mp3','quality','high','menu','false','wmode','transparent'); //end AC code

I chose this example because I consider it to be both typical of Buaru's playing of Namyo and illustrative of the pervasive use of syncopated rhythms in this piece. In mm. 3, 26, and 28-29 he plays figures that emphasize the sixteenth note offbeats, including melodic variation in the latter two figures. Of particular interest to this analysis are the rhythms played in mm. 15, 33, 37, and, to a lesser extent, ms. 32 in which the "e" of 1 is stressed, followed by an onbeat. The sixteenth-eighth-sixteenth-onbeat rhythm found in mm. 6-7, 10, 18, and 30 is also common on all of

my recordings.

The following lunga transcription in example 8 uses the "a" of 1 as the point of reference for the musical phrases, a displacement of three sixteenth notes.14 This reorientation fits with the other parts of the ensemble in what seems to me to be a logical way. Example 8 is short, but I believe it makes a strong case for my argument that Dagbamba musicians can, and do, change their personal point of reference within the same piece of music. As I will show, the rhythms in example 8 represent the conscious shift of the musical point of reference, or “1” from its usual position in the timeline. The improvisations in this alternate orientation produce a multidimensional musical experience for both listener and performer, notable in that it is ephemeral rather than a result of a "permanently displaced structure" (Locke 2005:13).

This temporary displacement represents an objectively simple, deceivingly difficult, performance principle used throughout Dagbamba music: for the performing musician, the point of rhythmic orientation, what we in the West call "1," is negotiable within the framework of musical time. A drummer, or dawoulei player, can reorient his personal sense of 1, *in as much as it acts as a point from which phrases originate or to which they resolve*, to be situated at any one of a number of points on the timeline.

By displacing the 1 to its new location in the timeline both the dawoulei and the small lunga rhythms are experienced in a different way. Example 8 below is played within an alternate metric framework, re-notated below in examples 6 and 7.

Example 6. **[10]** Namyo Dawoulei Pattern - Alternate Downbeat

Example 7. **[11]** Namyo Small Lunga Pattern - Alternate Downbeat

Example 8. **[12]** Lead Lunga - Alternate Downbeat (Audio Example 2)
AC_FL_RunContent('type','application/x-shockwave-flash','data','/audio/player.swf','id','audioplayer2','height','24','width','290','movie','/audio/player','flashvars','playerID=4&bg=0xf8f8f8&leftbg=0x998D93&lefticon=0xFFFFFF&rightbg=0x705E67&rightbghover=0x999999&righticon=0xFFFFFF&righticonhover=0xffffff&text=0x666666&slider=0x666666&track=0xFFFFFF&border=0x666666&loader=0xE7E0E2&loop=no&autostart=no&soundFile=/audio/Vol13/HAAS02NamyoLeadLungaAlternateDownbeat.mp3','quality','high','menu','false','wmode','transparent'); //end AC code

Example 8 shows rhythms played according to the shifted point of reference. In ms. 2 Buaru plays the low tone sixteenth-high tone dotted eighth-onbeat rhythm described above in mm. 15, 33, and 37 of example 5, although beat 2 is played on a high tone here. Mm. 3-6 contain the thematic material of sixteenth-eighth-sixteenth-onbeat discussed above. Furthermore, the rhythms in ex. 8 show musical material that is firmly grounded in a duple meter in which beats 1 and 2 are structurally significant. In fact, the 1 of example 5—the "e" of 2 in example 8—does not appear to be a significant point in the timeline at this point in the performance. In this example Buaru is not just stressing a different point in the timeline, but playing some of the same phrases that he plays throughout my archive of Namyo recordings in a different place, as well as improvising phrases with similar rhythmic features, leading to and away from the new point of reference.

Bendewili

The music of Bendewili is notated below in binary-quadruple meter, notated here in 4/2 rather than 4/4 to avoid the excessive use of flags in the notation. The Bendewili topos is notated in example 9.

Example 9. **[13]**Bendewili Basic Dawoulei

The Bendewili timeline is based on two groups of notes, the first made up of four strokes and the second of three. The second group of notes is syncopated, offset from the main pulse by an eighth note, producing a sense of rhythmic tension and resolution as the pattern cycles. I will show two examples of the Moveable 1 in dawoulei and lunga performances below, but first I would like to present the basic parts for small lunga and dalega. The small lunga basic rhythm is shown below in example 10.

Example 10. **[14]** Bendewili Basic Small Lunga

This rhythm is the same as the basic dawoulei rhythm, with the second and sixth notes of the pattern played with high tones.

Example 11. **[15]** Bendewili Basic Dalega

This rhythm emphasizes beats 1 and 3; the eighth note in parentheses was not always played by all players. This rhythm was often played by the male dalega, so I take it to be the basic pattern. This is the one piece, however, for which I was not shown the dalega rhythm.

The paranbo variation in example 12 is modeled closely on the basic dawoulei rhythm, matching six of the seven notes that form the topos. The variation lies primarily in the melody, the articulation of the eighth note on beat 3, and the anacrusis that begins the rhythm.

Example 12. **[16]**Bendewili Dawoulei Paranbo

While I feel that much of the beauty of this, and other paranbo variations, resides in its placement within the overall timeline, it was in a dawoulei lesson on Bendewili that I first experienced the application of the “Movable 1” concept. In this lesson I began noticing that one of my dawoulei teachers, Adam Baako, was playing the variation in example 12, but instead of playing it as notated in the example he was phrasing to the "+" of 4 rather than my 1, that is to say, his point or reference for this rhythm was offset one half of a beat from the way I was explicitly taught to play it. Example 13 shows Adam's performance of the variation shown in example 12, reoriented to his own point of musical reference but still very much within the basic timeline.

Example 13. **[17]**Bendewili Alternate Orientation of Paranbo

The lead lunga performance from a recording session with my teachers is notated below in example 14. As exhibited in the transcription, the salient aspects of the lead lunga part are the stressing of beats 1 and 3 and the frequent use of consecutive dotted figures.

Example 15 shows an alternative point of reference for the dotted rhythm that makes up phrase A', transcribed from a lesson recording in which Buaru had left the room and Inusa played the lead lunga. In the above example played by Buaru, the performance is based on dividing the bar in half, shown by the half notes in phrase B and in phrase A where the first of the dotted quarter notes falls on beat 3.

Example 14. **[18]** Bendewili Lead Lunga Full Talk (Audio Example 3)
AC_FL_RunContent('type','application/x-shockwave-flash','data','/audio/player.swf','id','audioplayer4','height','24','width','290','movie','/audio/player','flashvars','playerID=4&bg=0xf8f8f8&leftbg=0x998D93&lefticon=0xFFFFFF&rightbg=0x705E67&rightbghover=0x999999&righticon=0xFFFFFF&righticonhover=0xffffff&text=0x666666&slider=0x666666&track=0xFFFFFF&border=0x666666&loader=0xE7E0E2&loop=no&autostart=no&soundFile=/audio/Vol13/HAAS03BendewiliLeadLungaFullTalk.mp3','quality','high','menu','false','wmode','transparent'); //end AC code

Example 15. **[19]** Inusa's Bendewili Lead Lunga (Audio Example 4: 0:11-0:36)
AC_FL_RunContent('type','application/x-shockwave-flash','data','/audio/player.swf','id','audioplayer4','height','24','width','290','movie','/audio/player','flashvars','playerID=4&bg=0xf8f8f8&leftbg=0x998D93&lefticon=0xFFFFFF&rightbg=0x705E67&rightbghover=0x999999&righticon=0xFFFFFF&righticonhover=0xffffff&text=0x666666&slider=0x666666&track=0xFFFFFF&border=0x666666&loader=0xE7E0E2&loop=no&autostart=no&soundFile=/audio/Vol13/HAAS04InusasBendewiliLeadLunga.mp3','quality','high','menu','false','wmode','transparent'); //end AC code

Inusa's performance includes multiple repetitions of B as played in ms. 32 of example 8.6, but rather than placing the first of the two dotted quarter notes on beat 3, it falls on the "+" of 2, a displacement of one half of a beat. This shifted reference point is not a random decision, but rather exhibits the multideterminancy of the topos, lining up with the fourth bell stroke which also falls on the "+" of 2. As shown in mm. 1-2, he is stressing the final notes of the two asymmetrical note groups of the dawoulei pattern, as he does throughout the lesson. However, mm. 9-13 consist of the same material as phrase A, but this time dividing the timeline in half using the "+" of 2 as the point of reference and the "+" of 4 as the midway point. Thus, Inusa chooses a point of reference in the timeline apart from Buaru's orientation for the improvised placement of themes labeled above as A and B.

Conclusion

Throughout this article I have been primarily concerned with the documentation of the performance tradition of

Kambon-waa, and secondarily with promoting the notion of a movable 1. I argued that the concept of “1” exists in Dagbamba music and, as I have shown in the case of Kambon-waa, is individually negotiable within the musical timeline.

I discussed the institution of the kambonsi and outlined the contexts and prescribed performance sequences for Kambon-waa in both the daytime “shooting of guns” called the Gun-gon and the drumming and dancing of the overnight wake-keeping. Through contextualized content analysis of the music, I showed not only the multidimensionality of Dagbamba music15 and the use of metric displacement in the improvisations of the lead drummer, but also presented the theory of a movable 1. I argued that the Western concept of 1 is not only applicable to the music of Kambon-waa, but that it is individually negotiable within the temporal framework.

As shown in my analysis of Namyo and Bendewili, musicians performing Kambon-waa asserted their own sense of “1” apart from other parts of the ensemble by choosing to base their improvisations on points of reference which suggest an alternate interpretation of the timeline. I also demonstrated that these alternate points of reference in musical time were not arbitrary, but were based on structurally significant points in the topos.

top [20]

Notes

1. See Locke (1990: passim) and Chernoff (1979: passim).

2. See, for example, Anku (1997), Agawu (1986), Jones (1959), Kubik (1962), Locke (1978, 1982, 2005), and Merriam (1981).

3. My fieldwork was broken into two separate trips. The first took place in June and July of 2006, and the second in December and January, 2006-07.

4. See Locke (1990) for a detailed description of the drum and more extensive background of its place in Dagbamba culture.

5. As both the lunga and atumpan are colloquially referred to as "talking drums," I will use only the indigenous names for these instruments from this point forward to avoid confusion.

6. See Friedson (1996) and Rice (1994).

7. Reverend Daniel Wumbee, a noted Dagbamba cultural expert, told me that Asante phrases, musically rendered in Twi, were often, if not universally, understood by Dagbamba kambonsi who do not speak Twi.

8. As my training began with dawoulei, then moved to support lunga, it would stand to reason that this is the standard progression for Kambon-waa novices. Other than Buaru, I never saw any individual play both lunga and dawoulei, even at separate events.

9. The wua and sabaani I saw were played by the same man at one event.

10. I once saw a small group of gung gong, dawoulei, and dalega playing in the morning following a wake-keeping. I asked Fatawu what they were playing and he replied that if the dawoulei and dalega are playing, it is Kambon-waa.

11. See Locke 1990:26-9 for a more detailed description.

12. Although the term Sochendi was used most often for this piece, my teachers frequently used the alternate terms *Sochendiba* and *Sochendili*, translated by Fatawu as "people walking on the path," and "one person on the path," respectively.

13. The observer of West African performance will notice general, but not necessarily unanimous, agreement in the relationship between music and movement in music. How a “native” chooses to move to music on their own, which is variable as opposed to choreographed movement, is, I believe, particularly telling.

14. Example 8 is an excerpt of a much longer performance, most of which conforms to the notion of 1 as outlined in examples 1-5.

15. See Locke (2005).

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